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I

MENTAL WELL-BEING – MODELS AND DETERMINANTS

Dobrostan psychiczny – modele i uwarunkowania

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the positive psychology is to find out the possibilities of enhancement of mental well-being of a man and the means of keeping it up at a high level. The paper presents a review and analysis of research works in the field of positive psychology. The effectiveness of different approaches leading to increased level of happiness and permanent mental well-being, proposed in literature, is evaluated. The factors determining the subjective sense of well-being in different contexts of life are identified and analysed.

Key words: positive psychology, well-being, models.

STRESZCZENIE

Głównym celem psychologii pozytywnej jest poznanie możliwości zwiększania dobrostanu psychicznego człowieka oraz utrzymania jego wysokiego poziomu.

Niniejszy artykuł zawiera przegląd i analizę wyników badań prowadzonych w ramach psychologii pozytywnej. Autorki rozpatrują skuteczność różnych działań prezentowanych w literaturze przedmiotu jako prowadzące do podniesienia poziomu poczucia szczęścia człowieka i umożliwiające osiągnięcie trwałego dobrego samopoczucia. Zastanawiają się też nad uwarunkowaniami dobrostanu psychicznego w różnych kontekstach życia ludzkiego.

Słowa kluczowe: psychologia pozytywna, dobrostan, modele.

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INTRODUCTION

Although philosophers have been pondering what “good life” is for centuries (cf. Aristotle, 2007; Becker, 1992; Cottingham, 1998, after: Linley, Joseph 2007), the topic has only recently attracted the attention of psychologists. For over 100 years psychology assumed that a physically and mentally healthy individual should feel a higher level of well-being, since their life was free from hardship, misery and failure. Representatives and proponents of the relatively new approach to problems related to the quality of life and well-being have abandoned these views on health and disease, emphasizing that the category of quality of life and the perception of one’s well-being does not start with the individual’s wealth, beauty and goodness and does not end with the absence of illness and traumatic experiences in the individual’s life (Czapiński, 2008). Recent studies show that healthy people are not much happier from those affected by a disease, such as paraplegics (compare Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulm, 1978). Generally speaking, insights gained by positive psychology provide an empirical foundation to refute the thesis that we can only feel well if we experience positive and do not experience negative events in our lives. Not all rich, beautiful and healthy individuals living in similar circumstances feel a higher level of well-being than those who are poor, unattractive and sick (Czapiński, 1988, 2001), even though naïve concepts of life continue promoting the view that it is better to be beautiful and rich than ugly and poor.

In the light of contribution made by contemporary psychology, an objective psychological analysis of economic circumstances of life, age or health status is not sufficient for drawing any conclusions about an individual’s quality of life. An evaluation performed by the individual, and their subjective perception of life experiences, are of far greater importance (Wojciechowska, 2008).

People are capable of adapting to the changing environment even if their circumstances deteriorate. Even in a tough environment, humans are able to derive satisfaction from life’s little pleasures and everyday activities. Evidence for this thesis can be found in Brickman and Campbell’s *hedonic treadmill* theory (1971) which assumes that humans tend to become accustomed to changes, either positive or negative, very quickly. Consequently, new circumstances can only trigger a temporary change in the perceived quality of life. The influence of new circumstances on a person’s mental well-being decreases when the person becomes habituated to the new situation. A study by Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman (1978, after: Czapiński, 2008) into the quality of life of lottery winners demonstrates that an improvement in their living conditions can increase the subjective level of happiness, however the change is not permanent. In the long run, the level of well-being perceived by lottery winners did not

differ significantly from the control group. The results suggest that because of hedonic adaptation the short-term boost in happiness eventually reverted back to the baseline level.

The claim that people should accept their current status and level of well-being, thus avoiding disappointment caused by the absence of the sense of agency (Gaskins, 1999 after: Sheldon and Lubomirsky, 2007) has been a source of controversy among scientists. This has critical implications especially for positive psychology which, in addition to increasing (or sustaining) the sense of mental well-being, also promotes the idea of finding fulfilment in one's everyday life and living circumstances.

The central assumption of positive psychology is the focus on seeking and supporting so-called personal resources which give people the ability to develop and successfully guide their personal development. The approach is relatively novel in that psychology traditionally examined various disorders in human functioning rather than investigating their well-being. Similarly, management, education and health sciences used to concentrate on negative phenomena and existing problems in an attempt to find *remedies* to processes recognized as factors potentially reducing the perceived level of well-being.

Analyzing definitions of well-being proposed in different psychological frameworks, it emerges that the concept is very broad. In general, well-being refers to the experiencing of positive emotions (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, 2004) and encompasses certain fixed elements including objective, social and subjective factors. In view of contemporary psychological knowledge, the impact of the latter on the achieved perception of quality of life is no longer questionable. Objective factors usually reflect material welfare, while social factors are assessed on the basis of social services and infrastructure. Subjective factors, on the other hand, comprise a number of rather intangible aspects such as individual inner feelings, fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness. "The outcome of life evaluation can be cognitive in nature, in which case the quality of life is measured with the feeling of satisfaction. However, it can also be a category relying more on emotions and experiences, in which case the focus is rather on the level of satisfaction with various spheres of life, and with life seen as a whole. Sometimes the quality of life understood in this sense is regarded as tantamount to the feeling of well-being" (Şek, 2003, p. 45).

The concept of well-being does not have a particularly long tradition in psychology, however the research area which it seeks to explore, the quality of life, has been investigated by scientists for a long time. Results of different studies, conducted by diverse methods, attribute the notion of quality of life with very different meanings, using varying terminology. Quality of life, an ambiguous, multi-faceted and complex notion, is mainly equated with welfare

and well-being. In the light of discussion presented above, well-being should rather be identified with the sense of quality of life, while welfare – with its quality. The observed slight methodological and terminological confusion should not, however, obscure the importance of actions targeted at the promotion of living a *good* life.

MODELS OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The most recent results of studies into the category of *good* life conducted by positive psychologists often contradict naïve concepts of life and popular beliefs of what is required to live *well*. In the majority of cases, the studies are a basis for developing concepts of small and medium range because they refer to very specific problems. Unfortunately, they do not provide a basis for formulating answers of a more general nature: about causes, sources or consequences of well-being. Attempts at proposing theoretical frameworks have, as yet, failed to yield consistent and exhaustive solutions to key problems of positive psychology. They have not determined unambiguously whether the feeling of happiness experienced by an individual contributes to the success in life or, *vice versa*, the success in life is a source of happiness (Czapiński, 2004).

Studies initiated in the 1960s by Bradburn (1969), Andrews and Whithey (1976), and Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) made it possible to account for psychological characteristics and related economic aspects of the quality of life, reflecting a subjective assessment of objective social transitions. Subjective social indicators were a basis for concluding that it is the sum total of daily experiences which, by accumulation, create a global feeling of *well-being* which is sustained on a relatively stable level over a prolonged period (Bańka, 2005).

Bradburn's findings (1969) that positive and negative emotions need to be studied independently because they are influenced by different variables and, consequently, are not binary oppositions, proved fundamental for further research into the quality of life. It appears that efforts made by clinicians to eliminate adverse conditions fail to translate directly into an increase of the level of well-being felt by individuals. Liberation from pain, misery, sorrow or anxiety does not automatically result in an increase of positive emotions and does not make a person happier (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, 2002). The conclusion that a person cannot feel happy and unhappy at the same time also has important implications for studying the phenomenon. The frequency of positive affect is negatively correlated with the frequency of negative affect; however the intensity of both affects demonstrates

a positive correlation (Diener, Sandvik and Larson, 1985, after: Argyle, 2004), which means that people feel happiness as strongly as they feel sorrow.

Happiness occupies a focal position in contemporary psychological concepts because it is a factor determining other indicators of good life such as sense of life, optimism, purposeful action and autonomy. If happiness is an indispensable constituent of good life, is the conclusion that a happy life equals a good life a legitimate one? Is the happy life led by Mother Teresa of Calcutta comparable to the happiness experienced by a drug addict achieving an ecstatic state? If this line of reasoning were to be adopted, a problem arises as to the interpretation of statistical data describing the frequency of negative phenomena (violence, depression, divorce, alcohol addiction, etc.) against results of studies showing that people generally describe themselves as happy.

Positive psychology seeks to find answers to questions about the human emotional and existential conditions, however study results are not conclusive. One of the reasons claimed for the inconclusiveness is the diversity of traditions from which two basic branches of positive psychology, *hedonistic* and *eudaimonistic*, stem out.

Researchers within the hedonistic approach propose the view that people are their own final judges and can best assess what constitutes *pleasurable life*. The majority of hedonistic concepts of happiness are explored within two theoretical frameworks: “*bottom/top*” and “*top/bottom*”. The former approach assumes that life satisfaction is the sum total of all part-satisfactions and emotions experienced by the individual in all significant aspects of life. For example, the more we earn, the more we possess and the better our material status is, the more satisfied we are and the happier we feel. In the “*top/bottom*” model, on the other hand, happiness is a constant determined by genes, upbringing and other factors that make it possible to describe and make a distinction between people. The model assumes that the feeling of well-being is relatively stable regardless of the changing context. Individuals who are happier and more optimistic, who have a cheerful and positive outlook on life, feel more part-satisfactions in different life circumstances and, as a result, do not lose their happiness even under the influence of a negative affect (Czapiński, 2008).

Kahneman’s *objective happiness* theory, consistent with the “*bottom/top*” model, represents an extreme hedonistic view. The feeling of happiness becomes equated with the overall balance of hedonistic experiences and leads to the conclusion that “if an objective measurement of the quality of your life proves that you are a happy person, you are wrong in claiming that you are unhappy and do not have a will to live” (Czapiński, 2008, p. 69). The majority of research frameworks, however, analyze well-being from the perspective of subjective happiness, making human experiences and feelings their study material.

Veenhoven, a proponent of the *need theory*, based his concept of happiness on the satisfaction of needs which is possible given constantly increasing income. Veenhoven sought the support for his thesis (1984, 1994, 1996, after: Czapiński 2008) in comparisons of GDP in different countries, concluding that the higher the GDP *per capita*, the higher the level of life satisfaction. Findings obtained by Diener, Horowitz and Emmons (Czapiński, 2008) in a study of well-being among the wealthiest Americans, however, challenge the need theory, showing that once people satisfy their basic needs, their level of satisfaction with life does not increase in parallel to the increase in income. Money, and needs which can be fulfilled with money, are only capable of giving happiness to those individuals who possess little of them in terms of absolute poverty (non-fulfilment of basic needs) and relative poverty (discrepancy between what an individual experiences and a standard based on a specified criterion such as one's own past, other people, expectations, aspirations, etc.).

The statement that happiness is relative is accommodated within context theories; one of them being Michalos' *quality-of-life model* (1986) also called the goal achievement gap theory. The notion of *gap* refers to the discrepancy between an individual's needs and their actual fulfilment. If the current perception of one's own position involves *gaps*, the experienced level of quality of life decreases. In this approach, life quality represents a heterogeneous set of indicators which are modified in parallel to changes occurring in the life of an individual or entire communities. Quality of life is often seen as synonymous with a sense of contentment with one's life determined by assessment of different life domains (satisfaction with one's job, marriage, children, status, self-development, etc.). In this framework, similarly to Veenhoven's theoretical system, quality of life essentially comes down to the degree of fulfilment of human needs (Kowalik, 2000).

Eudaimonistic concepts of happiness undermine the belief presented above claiming that happiness has its source in the fulfilment of an individual's potential, and it is only through valuable and meaningful activity that human life acquires its full sense.

Seligman's *authentic happiness* theory promotes the ideal of life full of gratification and pleasure. Seligman distinguishes six categories of virtue, including wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence, constituting a foundation for 24 human character strengths to focus on. If an individual lives according to their personal capability profile, they achieve gratification in the form of sense of living. However, the precondition for the latter comes from work performed for others. More important than altruistic life, Seligman points out, is the pursuit of equilibrium between what is pleasurable and what gives people gratification.

Another eudaimonistic concept is Czapiński's (1992, 2000) *onion theory of happiness* which views happiness as a multi-layer structure. Achievement of the sense of life and fulfilment in different domains of existence is possible through purposeful actions undertaken by an individual, referring to permanent dispositions comprising the desire and passion for life and its constant affirmation, called the will to live. The layer of the *will to live* is the deepest and the most stable (i.e. the most immune to external factors) element of the structure which constitutes a potential level of happiness referred to as the "happy" attractor. Similarly to Lykken's concept, the will to live is an objective standard of well-being, independent of human consciousness, which an individual is incapable of surpassing by means other than pharmacology or surgery. The intermediate level of happiness in Czapiński's model is termed general subjective well-being. It represents satisfaction with one's life as a whole and corresponds partially to hedonistic measures of well-being (emotional balance and general satisfaction). The third, and the most superficial, level is constituted by affective experiences (which are equivalent to Kahneman's idea of *objective happiness*) and part-satisfactions, as well as personal assessment of emotions regarding different domains of an individual's life (Czapiński, 2008). Czapiński's concept of happiness is illustrated below.

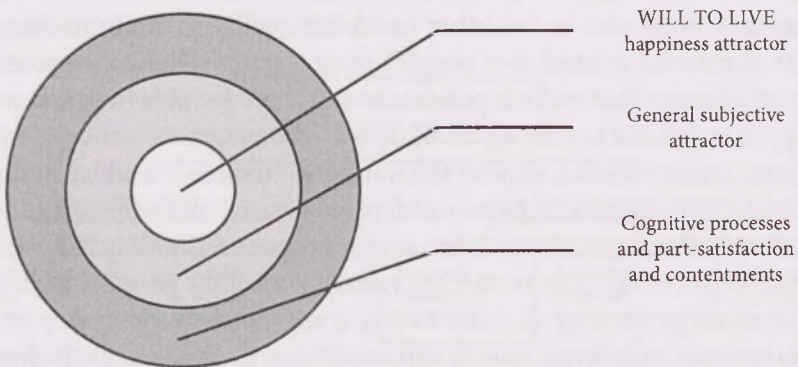


Fig. 1. Onion theory of happiness

Bach and Rioux (1996) propose a very interesting concept which draws attention to the fact that the relationship between life circumstances and degree of life satisfaction is by no means straightforward. The two researchers assert that the quality of life can only be analyzed within a specific social context and oppose the narrowing of studies focused on the quality of life to the analysis of mental structures of individuals. What defines an individual's social quality of life is self-determination depending on available environmental resources,

the degree of democratization of social life and the level of social equality. The stronger the correlation between those, the higher the level of social quality of life (Kowalik, 2000).

Raeburn and Rootman's concept (1996) views well-being differently from the theoretical constructs discussed above. The model is rooted in the metaphorical idea that the quality of life is defined as an expression of how good a person's life is. It is "expressed in feelings of joy relating to the existence itself and the possibility to experience one's life in the physical, mental and spiritual dimension" (Kowalik, 2000, p. 19). They claim the structure of the quality of life to comprise three broad categories: *Being* (physical, mental and spiritual aspects), *Belonging* (local, social and ecological context) and *Becoming* (personal development, leisure and productivity). The quality of life is compromised if limitations occur in any of the categories enumerated above. As a consequence, the individual loses the ability to feel happiness and experience fully their own existence, personal development and approval of people around (Kowalik, 2000).

The assumptions present in the two concepts presented above (Bach and Rioux's, and Raeburn and Rootman's) are *normative* in that they focus on the desirable states of social reality. At the same time, they emphasize that the feeling of well-being is determined by the sense of subjectivity, internal control and possibility of determining one's own fate.

In *pragmatic* accounts, on the other hand, the quality of life is analyzed in the context of external control over people's mental states which is supposed to initiate social changes that make it possible to influence people's lives and make them happy. It is difficult to fully agree either with the pragmatic concept, which views humans instrumentally, or with the normative framework which assumes a certain ideal state of human life based on ideology rather than empirical findings.

Opposition to the pragmatic and normative systems are reflected in Nordenfelt's *well-being concept* (1994). The researcher refers to scientific insights gained in general and social psychology in order to give a real sense to the quality of life, distinguish between its different aspects and conditions. In Nordenfelt's theoretical framework, human well-being is determined by three factors: the environment, human constitution and activity. Well-being is correlated with impressions received from the environment, emotions and moods. Impressions concern the effect of different stimuli which an individual perceives as positive. The impressions arouse emotions leading to the feeling of balance, harmony and peace. Within this meaning, well-being is a construct whose basic component is cognitive in nature: in order to desire something, and strive to achieve it, an individual needs to possess a certain minimum intellectual capacity. Nordenfelt's concept recognizes well-being as a positive human survival state, a complex mental construct comprising impressions, the feeling of happiness and wellness. The author

points to the problem of individual differences in how well-being is felt (Kowalik, 2000).

A new theoretical model of well-being proposed by Sheldon and Lubomirsky (2004) focuses on the changeability of happiness over time and claims that the sense of well-being can be induced and sustained at a level higher than the baseline. Factors which affect the current level of happiness, i.e. the degree of happiness experienced by an individual in a specific period of the individual's life include: innate potential (determining happiness in 50%), contextual factors (10%) and volitional aspects (40%). The level of happiness, researchers claim, is more lasting than fleeting changes in mood. In operational categories, it is regarded as a retrospective judgement made by an individual, summing up a specified period such as the past 2, 6 or 12 months, or as the average of momentary judgements formulated within that period. Happiness is thus defined as an assessment of satisfaction with life, measured by the subjective level of experienced well-being resulting from the balance of positive and negative emotions felt by an individual in a specific period in the individual's life. Authors of the model claim that it is possible to undertake measures increasing a person's level of happiness and believe that, as Sokoloff stated, "like swimming, riding, writing, or playing golf, happiness can be learned" (Linley, Joseph, 2007, p. 87).

The above discussion of sources of contemporary concepts of mental well-being is summarized in Fig. 2 below.

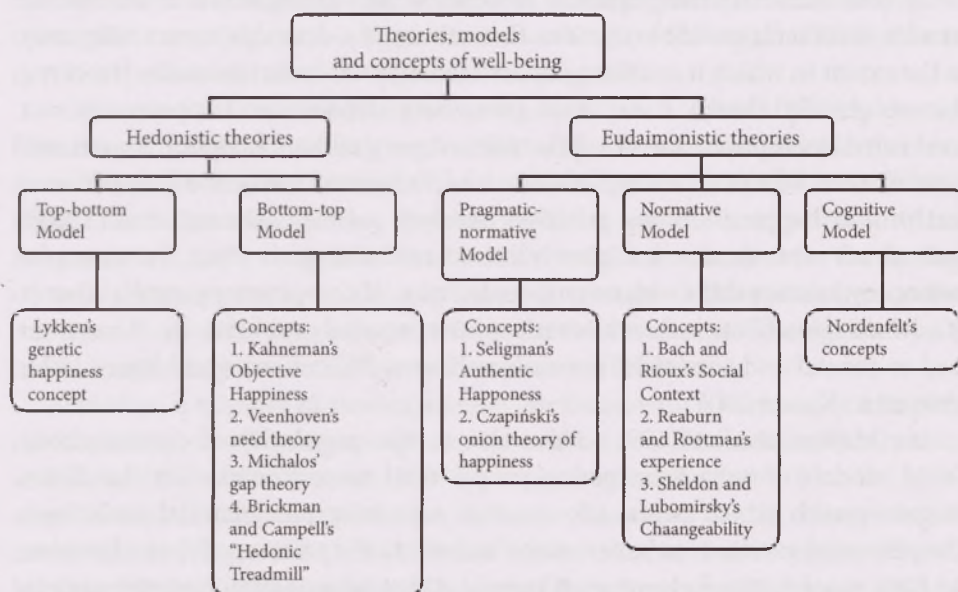


Fig. 2. Schematic presentation of selected theories, models and concepts accounting for the quality of life in contemporary positive psychology.

Years of scientific research into subjective well-being have not brought unambiguous findings, and no models and concepts can be regarded as “recipes for happiness”. Nevertheless their analysis provides guidelines for actions that increase the chance for achieving happiness. It may turn out that the most recent concepts suggesting that the feeling (or state) of happiness is one of the main prerequisites for having a fulfilling life will become an incentive for expanding research, understanding changes in subjective well-being and identifying important factors determining long-lasting improvement of the quality of life or stabilization of a level of happiness which an individual deems satisfying.

CONDITIONS DETERMINING MENTAL WELL-BEING

Positive psychology attempts to pinpoint the actual sources of happiness and reasons why humans are prone to believe in the hedonistic illusion of achievement, even though it does not guarantee well-being in the long run. It questions the validity of studies which seek to account for the feeling of well-being by analyzing relations between subjective feelings experienced by individuals and objective conditions of the individuals' lives.

In a world where the pursuit of material wealth and goods is a widespread trend it is difficult to follow the idea that money is a desirable commodity only to the extent in which it enables people to satisfy their basic life needs. However, the universally shared belief that prosperity determines happiness is not confirmed by empirical studies. In actual fact, very affluent people are not much happier than others (Diener, Horowitz and Emmons, 1985), the link between wealth and happiness being relatively weak ($r = 0.12$; Diener et al. 1993). Individuals who ascribe a higher value to material goals than, for example, autonomy, relationships with other people or social competences, entails a range of adverse side-effects such as alienation, interpersonal problems, etc. It can even lead to mental and somatic illnesses (see Kasser, 2002; Kasser and Ryan, 1993; 1996 after: Kasser 2007).

As Mayers' studies (1992) show, due to the popularity of consumption-based models of behaviour, young people tend to concentrate on the desire to gain wealth which overshadows other especially non-material ambitions. The perennial question “to have or to be” turns into the paradox of choice between “to have more but to feel worse”. It turns out that new possibilities emerging in the life context trigger difficulties with making everyday decisions. Instead of making people's lives easier and improving their well-being, various choices give

rise to chaos, in extreme cases paralyzing all activity. Individuals who attach a greater importance to external than internal goals score worse in different scales of quality of life measurement. What is more, their level of happiness and life satisfaction is lower, and they experience fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions. They display a tendency for higher alcohol and drug consumption, have a more pronounced narcissistic streak and more behavioural disorders (Kasser and Ryan, 1996; 2001; Sheldon and Kasser, 1995; Williams et al., 2000 after: Kasser 2007). Why is it then that some people prioritize external over internal goals?

Opponents believe that aspects such as the standard of living, material status, living conditions, level of material comfort or welfare are of particular importance for high quality of life (Włodarczyk-Śpiwak, 2004). Their studies provide evidence for the thesis that a high level of satisfaction with life is more common in young people working in managerial positions or self-employed, with high income and living in comfortable material conditions. This suggests that another factor determining the perceived quality of life is age.

Leaf Van Boven and Thomas Gilovich investigated whether happiness can be achieved by acquisition of material goods. The scientists compared the spending of money on experiences (trips, concerts, etc.) and goods (clothes, audio equipment) in an attempt to establish which type of purchase made people feel better. The study yielded a number of interesting findings. Buying experiences turned out to be money better spent than buying products, since they gave consumers more joy. In this light, the notion of *good* life signifies a life that is rich in experiences, not objects (Parzuchowski, 2006).

Contrary to claims made by some scholars (see Lykken, 1999), personal features and qualifications such as general intelligence and physical attractiveness show a very low positive correlation with well-being. Mayers and Diener (1995) demonstrate that race, gender, standard of living and the level of income, i.e. factors which in the commonly held belief should have an effect on the feeling of well-being, appear to be of only minor importance. The researchers point out that social skills are more important for the level of well-being felt by an individual, as they determine better interpersonal relations.

Based on a number of studies, mental attributes which have a major impact on the feeling of well-being comprise: high self-esteem (Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice, 1993 after: Rosmus, 2005), sense of internal control (Schulz, 1976 after: Kofta, 2001), orientation on activity (Czapiński 2008), interpersonal competences (Plopa, 2003), low level of neuroticism and extraversion (Costa, McCrae, 1990 in: Zaborowski, 1994), level of consciousness (Wicklund, 1975 in Zaborowski, 1994), as well as the level of integration of individual self-awareness with external and reflexive awareness (Zaborowski, 1994).

An individual's well-being is also affected by the consistent construction of intraindividual evaluation standards in the context of comparing three categories of events: past, present and expected, and the construction of intraindividual evaluation standards on the basis of comparisons of oneself with others. The standards are judgements developed on the basis of comparisons and constitute mental representations of goals and assessment criteria used by an individual to perform a selection and assimilation of information constantly reaching the person. Judgements about life depend on what kind of information a person uses in constructing the assessment standard, what goal the person has in life, and what evaluation standard the person applies (Schwartz and Bless, 1992, after: Bańka, 2005). Faced with an access to multiple sources of information, people tend to fall back on situations which tend to occur consistently or most frequently (Higgins, 1996, after: Bańka, 2005) and information available in a specific sequence. If information flowing in a succession carries an extreme meaning or activates the cognitive system, it is registered in the mind and influences the overall satisfaction with one's life. Evidence for this can be found in empirical studies into general satisfaction with life which is twice higher if the question about well-being is preceded by another question, for example concerning the level of satisfaction with marriage (Schwartz, Strack, Mai, 1991 after: Bańka, 2005).

Unusual and extreme occurrences are not usually taken into account in the overall assessment of an individual's quality of life. Consequently, the quality of life is not simply a reflection of objective circumstances and hedonistic values associated with experiences of an individual, contrary to Campbell et al. (1971). Individual life events can have opposite effects, which means that the links between them and subjective evaluations of life quality are very weak. What today appears to be a catastrophic event, may become a relevant comparison standard in the future. Based on correlations discussed above, it can be concluded that no predictions of subjective well-being are possible without considering processes taking place in the mind, norms and standards (Miller and Prentice, 1996; Kahneman and Miller, 1986 after: Bańka, 2005).

Norms and standards existing in the individual's subconscious play a major role in the individual's assessment of the quality of life. Researchers agree that in evaluating their life, an individual compares and contrasts it with the lives of other people (Schwartz et al., 2002). It seems, however, that the effects of such comparisons are not the same for all the people. Lubomirsky (2001), based on studies into individual differences in response to information enabling social comparisons, concluded that it had a very limited effect on people who were happy by nature. Unhappy people were found to have an increased self-esteem evaluating their skills, and an elevated mood, when they worked next to a person who performed an equivalent task more slowly. In contrast, lower self-esteem

and a deterioration in mood were noted when they worked next to people who completed the task faster. The same information, however, had no effect on the self-esteem and mood in happy individuals (Lubomirsky and Ross, 1997; 1999).

Considering that, it can be concluded that the criterion adopted for the assessment of an individual's own life is based on the individual's knowledge of reality and expectations concerning their life, though always in the context of interpersonal relations. This is evident especially in the initial phase of human development, when the individual gains rudimentary knowledge of the world of values, standards, accepted goals and means of their achievement. Individual factors do not acquire a greater significance until later in life. Based on personal experience, when the capability of making accurate evaluations is sufficiently advanced, an individual programme of action is created which, in the individual's assessment, gives satisfaction with their life (Rosmus, 2005). However, it is relationships with other people, not professional success, that appear in the analysis of beliefs as factors affecting the everyday understanding of *good* life. Results of some studies provide a basis for the claim that probably many people do not perceive work as a source of important personal motivations or, at least, an opportunity to experience a sense of commitment (Okuna et al., 1984; Csikszentmihalyi and Le Ferve, 1991; Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

At this point, the following question arises: if interpersonal relations are really valued more highly than people's jobs, why do people spend an increasing amount of time at work? (compare Schor, 1991, after: King, Eells and Burton). If interpersonal relations are really valued more highly than other things, why are emotional ties becoming weaker nowadays, even among the closest family members? Why are so many people disappointed with marriage and why are there so many divorces?

At the current advanced stage of research into determinants of well-being, one can immediately reject the supposition that they are only a source of declarative knowledge among study subjects and indicate the deficiency of strong and long-lasting interpersonal relationships.

High quality of social relations is also listed as the main source of well-being. 56.3% of respondents taking part in the Polish General Quality of Life Survey believed that successful marriage was a precondition for good life (or happiness). Only health scored higher in the survey (59.6% of respondents) (Czapiński, 1998 after: R. Derbis, 2005).

In general terms, family life and marriage have the greatest impact on subjectively perceived well-being: married people are happier than those who are divorced or separated. The latter group consists of the least happy people of all (Argyle, 1999).

Another attribute determining subjective well-being is the meaning of life associated with the sense of intentionality and fulfilment (e.g. Ryff, 1989; Zika and Chamberlain, 1992). Research by Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001, after: Sheldon, Lubomirsky, 2007) suggests that the achievement of personal goals causes a lasting increase in the level of happiness. Actions which are oriented towards a goal can initially increase well-being and then sustain at a new (higher) level after the goal has been attained. Actions leading to success are likely to become the onset of a successive series of positive experiences in the individual's future life. Adults prefer a life that is easy though rich in meaningful activities. Whenever effort is acknowledged as commitment out of choice, difficult life is evaluated as desirable (Ogińska-Bulik, Juczyński, 2008). Commonly held concepts of good life recognize hard work as a factor contributing to the level of quality of life felt by an individual, on the condition that it entails internal motivation and dedication. Hard work, however, becomes more attractive owing to positive emotions only when it is free from forced and routine effort, it is not prolonged and does not deplete one's energy resources (Scollon, King, 2004.).

Another important source of the feeling of happiness is leisure time and means of using it. How free time is managed depends on an autonomous decision taken by an individual, which gives grounds for reflecting whether the search for correlations between the sense of an individual's autonomy and well-being is justifiable. In a European survey of 8,622 people, a higher correlation was identified between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with activity outside work (0.68) than between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with one's job (0.52) (Near, Rechner, 1993 after: Argyle, 1999). Surveys analyzed by Veenhoven et al. (1994) showed happiness to be correlated with leisure satisfaction and the level of leisure activities at ca. 0.40, however the correlation dropped after controls for employment and social class. The highest correlation was identified for the unemployed and the retired, the elderly, those more affluent or of higher social class, as well as married people without children (Zuma, 1989, after: Argyle, 1999). Longitudinal studies by Glancy, Willits and Farrell (1986, after: Argyle, 1999) are another source of information about the causal effect of leisure on well-being. Studies conducted in high school children showed that leisure activities preferred in early adolescence determined the level of satisfaction in adult life. It should be noted that the researchers controlled a number of different variables. Strong evidence for this thesis can be derived from studies on the effects of participation in sports activities during leisure time. Physical activity is known to be a reliable method of lifting one's mood. For example: a 10-minute brisk walk produces a surge of positive feelings and energy which lasts for up to two hours afterwards (Thayer, 1989, after: Argyle, 1999). It was empirically verified that regular physical exercise (2-4 times a week over 8-10

weeks) increases the feeling of happiness, as well as reducing clinical depression and anxiety (Biddle and Mutrie, 1991 after Argyle, 1999).

Attempts at defining and measuring human capabilities undertaken to date make it possible to pin down the essence of people's strong points and qualify them as indicators of mental well-being. The majority of social scientists exploring aspects of well-being and positive functioning of individuals share the view that human life is a pursuit which requires effort and gives a chance to experience joy that is so often born out of difficult and frustrating commitment, while not being, as Russell (1930) pointed out metaphorically, a journey of ripe fruit falling straight into one's mouth.

Faced with such diverse research output on the quality of life, it is worthwhile to consider what aspects need further exploration to foster better understanding of people's underlying capacity to increase their well-being.

SUMMARY

Insights into the sources and origin of contemporary people's notion of the quality of life, and an answer to the question whether current theories accounting for development, gender, work and family have a predictive value for the changing life context, have not only a cognitive but also a practical dimension (Diener, 2000).

Analysis of the transitional or post-modern dynamics also brings up the problem of predictive value of concepts and contributions made to date in psychology of human development, psychology of the family, psychology of labour or psychology of health.

A review of achievements of positive psychology shows that mental well-being is a broad concept which embraces positive emotions, a low level of negative moods and a high level of contentment with the quality of life.

Theoretical frameworks account for the quality of human life objectively or subjectively. The former approach analyzes the quality of life as such, while the later explores individual perceptions of the quality of life. Consideration should be given to analyzing the normative perspective of determinants of the quality of life and to exploring whether guidelines developed by researchers, on the basis of their general knowledge or experience, for coping with stress, analyzing types and quality of social bonds or external living circumstances, represents a correct model that can be applied for uncritical comparisons and conclusions on the higher or lower quality of life. Objective indicators of well-being are not always reflected in the subjective perception of quality of life. Examining the

problem from this perspective refers to the extent to which a certain standard is fulfilled, disregarding the abundance of experiences gathered by an individual and their own preferences concerning the quality of life.

The human pursuit of well-being is a constant phenomenon which does not cease after needs are satisfied. What is more, continuous setting of personal goals becomes an indicator of a good and fulfilling life. What is primary, then? Does intentionality, and consequently satisfaction of the need for self-fulfilment, have a positive impact on the quality of life or perhaps a high level of well-being is a trigger for the belief in the individual's agency capacity?

Thanks to empirical studies, positive psychology helps people feel happier. Happy people fare better in life and are more successful not only because they feel good most of the time (cf. Diener, Sandvik and Pavot, 1991; Larsen and Ketelaar, 1991), but also because well-being affects many various aspects of life. Happy people build more rewarding relationships with others (Russel and Wells, 1994, after: King, Eells, Burton), have successful careers (Staw, Sutton, Pelled, 1994, after: King, Eells, Burton) and better financial prospects (Czapiński 2004) and even live longer (Danner, Snowdon, Friesen, 2001, after: King, Eells, Burton).

Well-being is the main prerequisite of mental health (Jahoda, 1958; Taylor and Brown, 1988, after: Sheldon and Lubomirsky) and an effect of an individual's evaluation of events occurring in life and personal mental states in reference to the individual's expectations and plans for life. However, a person's concept of themselves is not always compatible with their capabilities at any given time and may also be inconsistent with the current context, which induces a difference between the subjective assessment and objective living conditions, thus potentially lowering the level of subjective well-being (Liberska, 2008).

The descriptive proposal presented above has not, as yet, been verified empirically to a sufficient extent. Some scientists argue that people should themselves decide what determines their subjective well-being and set their own course in life. At this point, however, theoretical doubts emerge because people do not always know how they should behave, while methods developed to cope with external requirements are not always helpful.

To conclude, despite many years of research into well-being, the ultimate goal defined as the most effective means of increasing one's chances for a "happy life" is still elusive. It seems that studies should be launched to come up with actions and programmes which will make it possible to achieve well-being through appropriate efforts suited to each individual's needs.

Could writers be right in saying that "between the cup and the lip there are many things waiting to happen (...), between a desire and its fulfilment, between a decision and its realization, there stretches a realm of the unknown which sometimes dispels illusions, but at other times gives hope" (Rodziewiczówna,

1996, p. 232-233). It may well be that human activity and the pursuit of goals, not their attainment, are the main sources of happiness.

This idea might inspire psychologists and social pedagogists to conduct more research targeted specifically at identifying factors which influence well-being and determining mechanisms that underlie changes in well being which occur throughout people's lives.

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