Review

The role of personal adjustment to developmental crises in improving quality of life

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The paper discusses the issue of quality of life with the special focus on its developmental aspects. Conceptualisation of the notion of quality of life was based on the views proposed by Tomaszewski and Kowalik. An interesting complement to these approaches is provided by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Although Erikson did not undertake an empirical study on the issue of quality of life, the developmental crises distinguished by him can be related to the process of improvement of quality of life. Successful solving of the crises and developmental achievements were analysed in eight developmental stages. In the final part of the paper the relationship between the quality of life and the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow is presented. Moreover, the practical implications of the presented issues are raised.

Key words: Quality of life, quality of life in the context of development, developmental crises.

INTRODUCTION

Many problems discussed in the contemporary psychology include the issue of quality of life. These problems are important for many reasons. They are treated as part of the criteria for mental health and they also have many significant implications in the area of developmental psychology.

The subject of my analyses is the presentation of the relationship between the quality of life and positive crisis-solving. The paper is based on the psychosocial idea of solving crises, created by Erikson (1963, 1964, 1968). However, the author does not use the notion quality of life because it was coined later, but his works, devoted to human development, might be interpreted in the light of this category.

The primary aim of the article is not to present the detailed analysis of developmental stages, suggested by Erikson, as these issues have already been thoroughly discussed in psychological literature (Brzezińska, 2000; Szczukiewicz, 1998; Sękowska, 2000). The main stress however, will be placed on the possibility of achieving an increase in the quality of life through solving crises creatively in particular periods of human life.

Attention will be focused on the role of the concept of quality of life in various scientific disciplines, especially in psychology. Then analyse Erikson's idea of psychosocial development of man, situated among the issues concerning the quality of life.

QUALITY OF LIFE AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCEPT

The studies of quality of life are interdisciplinary and their popularity is growing in many domains of human cognition. Despite the fact that this notion is used in many scientific disciplines such as economics, medicine and psychology, it is difficult to define the analysed phenomenon explicitly. Although it may seem intuitively understandable, a common opinion reveals that the subject labelled with this term is heterogenous. A great number of definitions and variety of indicators of quality of life make it difficult to organise and arrange the body of knowledge about this aspect of human existence (Kowalik, 2000).

In economics, the term “quality of life” is regarded as a global indicator of the living standards of individuals or social groups. It is defined with the use of objective partial indices: costs, referring to the basic spheres of life (Zandecki, 1999). Sociological sciences employ this concept to define a higher level of using consumer goods
as a conscious perception of the achieved living standards (Zandecki, 1999). In medicine, the quality of life is analysed in the context of the state of patient's health and refers to the course of treatment (Gill and Feinstein, 1994; Wilson and Cleary, 1995). However, in psychology the category under discussion is most frequently identified with the feelings of satisfaction, mental well-being, contentedness and fulfilment in one's life (Czapiński, 1992).

THE NOTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN PSYCHOLOGY

In psychology the main stress is put on the analyses of everyday experiences of man and their influence on general satisfaction and feeling of fulfilment in one's life. New ideas about the quality of life, forming theoretical bases for psychological studies conducted in this domain are constantly being created. The research activity revealed the complexity of the term and its significance to human life. The representatives of particular psychological schools worked out their own, specific interpretations of the quality of life. The diversity of approaches is connected with the fact that this notion acts as a multidimensional construct and refers to many aspects of human life.

In most general terms, psychology defines the quality of life by means of interpreting an individual's own existential situation. This interpretation is filtered through their own perception, needs and desires, recognised values, assumed philosophy of life and feeling of social support (Gill and Feinstein, 1994; Kowalik, 1995). The quality of life is connected with positive evaluation, that is, satisfaction and acceptance of one's life, family, work, health, as well as other cultural and spiritual factors (Cf. McGregor et al., 2009).

Another way of grasping the issues of the quality of life is to describe them with the use of notions from the domain of emotional psychology, such as intensity of emotional experiences, diversity of emotions, concentrating on emotions of specific kind, superficiality of emotions (Kowalik, 1994).

Maciuszek (1994) emphasises the significance of suffering in building quality of life. He maintains that unpleasant feelings of positive moral qualification, like sympathy or pity, are indispensable to achieve one's own goals, respecting the true ego and one's own system of values, thus conditioning quality of life.

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT

The problems of quality of life can also be analysed in the context of development, since in this aspect changes in the quality of life are noticeable. Tomaszewski (1984) studies are examples of such an approach. He discusses quality of life in the perspective of improving it. Intending to evaluate quality of human life, Tomaszewski formulated five basic criteria, which are irrespective of changing conditions. Some of the conditions he mentions are: variety of experiences, level of consciousness, level of activity, creativity and participating in social life. Tomaszewski confirms a commonly known opinion that life, which is full of impressions and emotional experiences, is thought to be of better quality than a dull and monotonous life.

In his view, a constant flow of stimuli is necessary for normal functioning of an organism. Not only do positive emotions or experiences reveal a high quality of life but also their various arrangements. According to Tomaszewski, man's physical and mental activities are also discriminants of quality of life. Undertaking physical and intellectual ventures is a sign of good health and development, without which there is a possibility of regression. Moreover, creativity, viewed in perspective of quality of life, is connected with transformation of reality and with inventing something unique. It does not have to be an innovative work of art, as the author understands the concept of creativity also as giving rise to a new life.

According to the above mentioned author, man's symbiosis with other people is also a manifestation of quality of life. Man is a social being and it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible for him to act outside the community.

Tomaszewski draws attention to complementariness of the presented criteria of quality of life. If we isolate any of them and make it the sole determinant of quality of life, this will lead to its deterioration, even if the isolated aspect achieves the peak level of development. Only if they are considered jointly and in the developmental perspective, may the presented parameters constitute a factor for improving quality of life.

The developmental perspective employed for the evaluation of quality of life, can also be noticed in the views of Kowalik (2000). He relates quality of life to the notion of mental experience. This concept is understood as an internal process which involves enriching an individual's perception of reality: detecting elements of external world which cannot be identified by the senses, associating the elements of experience with perception of reality which influences us at the moment, personalising information about the recognised environment.

Kowalik regards quality of life as the sum of emotions experienced by a person in specific time. These experiences can be more or less differentiated in the same individuals in particular periods of their lives. We also have to bear in mind that individuals can radically differ in the scope of emotions they experience. These dissimilarities may result from certain living conditions, situations and events in which particular people take part. Kowalik assumes that the more incoming information engage mental processes, such as memory, imagination, thinking, perceiving, in activating its emotional sphere, the higher quality of mental life. The author analyses three hypothetical ways of achieving relatively valuable mental life. The first one concerns the existential situation of a person, who finds themselves in an environment contain-
ing plenty of information, stimuli and events. Then, the individual can receive these signals and include them in their own experiences. They create a wealth of emotions and make the quality of their lives seem valuable.

In the second case, the researcher presents an initial situation parallel to the one discussed previously, however, this time the experiences of an individual are fundamentally different. Knowledge does not integrate with experience, which leads to losing an opportunity to create a varied inner life – a valuable quality of mental life. Next, the author presents a situation in which an individual lives in an environment of moderately diversified stimuli which are 'accurately perceived by the individual' (Kowalik, 2000 p. 29). Such a person is equipped with rich perceptive material, which they do not integrate with their own experience. Consequently, this leads to inferior quality of their mental life.

The last situation under discussion is when an individual maximises their change to achieve a high quality of mental life. This person finds themselves in conditions where they deal with poorly differentiated stimuli. They are actively obtaining all possible information about the environment, which are integrated with their own experience. This gives rise to a variety of emotions and therefore to a valuable quality of their mental life. Such a situation is the most profitable for creating a high quality of mental life.

The presented research strategies referring to quality of life do not show all possible approaches. Nevertheless, they can be helpful in a more thorough analysis of the phenomenon under discussion.

The problems of quality of life can also be viewed with respect to solving crises of a particular developmental stage. Such a formulation makes it possible to reveal changes in the course of human life, allows a more adequate characterisation of mutual connections of quality of life and the factors conditioning it. The transformations experienced by an individual throughout their whole life are actually the normative developmental changes described by psychology. These changes, occurring in the whole life-cycle of an individual are contained in Erikson (1963, 1964, 1968) idea of psychosocial development of man, which constitutes a basis for the presented analyses. To analyse their mutual relationships referring quality of life to both the developmental stages distinguished by Erikson and to changes that take place in these periods.

DEVELOPMENTAL CRISSES IN THE LIGHT OF QUALITY OF LIFE

As it was said earlier, Erikson did not use the concept of quality of life. We can assume, nevertheless that this dimension coexists with the methods chosen to solve a crisis. Depending on which of the alternative ways out of crisis, one decides to chose, a creative solution versus regression, quality of life can be estimated as more or less valuable. In the undertaken analyses, examining the positive alternative of solving a crisis, as it evokes a higher quality of life.

Erikson used the concept of crisis in a different sense than the one commonly accepted in psychology. A positive valuation of the term crisis is a characteristic feature of his approach. For Erikson, crises are developmental tasks which determine becoming and being a human. It is a mistake to put the term crisis in the same semantic field as expressions like: catastrophe, tragedy and calamity. Critical situations should rather be interpreted as the necessary turning points in a person's development.

According to Erikson (1963, 1968), human life consists of eight developmental stages (Figure 1). Each of them involves a specific developmental crisis, influencing the growth of ego. At particular stages, a crisis occurs between two challenges. Creative solutions to the crises are not those of a yes/no nature. Here, we can only refer to a certain path which guides in coming out of a conflict. Quality of life manifests itself in achieving a dominant value, force of life, virtue at a given developmental stage.

In the subsequent part of my study, I will present general characteristics of developmental crises, focusing on those considering the influence of positive solutions of crises on building quality of life. As Erikson pointed out, positive solutions of crises are essential for the increase in quality of life. That is why this variant will be discussed in further discussions.

Within the first stage, the predominant crisis, lasting until about the first year of life, manifests itself through a conflict between the basic trust and the basic mistrust. A child is born with a potential to take up a dialogue with the world around it. Mother plays a significant role in the communication which becomes the foundation of trust or mistrust. She provides the child with sensual pleasure by satisfying its basic needs, and therefore ensures the feeling of safety. The child is cared for, looked after and treated with tenderness and affection by its mother and thanks to all this, builds a primary ability to perceive the sense and value of the world and their own self. In principle, it is the mother who is responsible for positive solution to the crisis at this stage. The creative solution manifests itself in quality of life, first, of a child, then of a grownup. The characteristic features of quality of life in this phase include trust, sense of self-respect, affirmation of existence and perceiving the world as a friendly place (Cf. Erikson, 1964; Sękowska, 2000).

In the second stage, at about 2 to 3 years of age, a conflict of autonomy vs. shame and doubt. Thanks to their motor development, the child comes into contact with the outside world and puts more and more attention to it. They start to make efforts to maintain self-control, especially as far as toilet-training is concerned and, thus, they try to work out the basic sense of independence. If such types of the child's behaviour are reinforced by their
environment, they can gradually achieve autonomy and not be afraid of losing trust, gained at the first stage. When the child goes beyond the limits in achieving autonomy, they are ashamed of it and learn that certain types of behaviour can be harmful. The dynamic balance between autonomy and shame with despondency, seems to be necessary. However, it is better when the child experiences proportionally more situations in which they can make free choices.

Another characteristic of this stage: strength of will is formed on the grounds of the autonomy experienced by the child. Erikson (1968) understands it as permanent ability to make free choices and postpone or restrain violent emotions. Thanks to the development of their will, the child acquires the ability to tell good from evil. Will, understood in this way, is a quality of human identity.

If the crisis is solved creatively at this stage, the following factors, among others, become the determinants of quality of life: the sense of autonomy and one’s own causativeness, self-respect, ability to make decisions (Cf. Erikson, 1964; Szczukiewicz, 1998; Sękowska, 2000).

At the third stage: 4 to 5 years of age the crisis is manifested through the conflict between initiative and guilt. The child becomes more active than before (the degree of locomotor and speaking skills increases) and play becomes the prevailing activity. When their activity increases, the child starts to focus on others. Their ability to identify with other people grows. Their energy concentrates on competing for their parents’ favours thus the child tries to isolate their own space, in which they could feel privileged in their actions.

Erikson, partially relying on a Freudian idea, pays special attention to the child’s attraction to the parent of the opposite sex. However, he does not see any erotic under-currents in this relationship, but refers to the feeling of being in love. The child’s imaginative initiative gives rise to their feelings of fear and guilt which make them inflict a punishment on themselves. In this way the foundations of conscience are formed.

At this stage of solving the crisis, quality of life is enriched by not only initiative, ability to plan things and make up tasks, but also with the child’s activity in their environment. Thanks to this, the child begins to identify with others by means of imagining themselves in specific roles, which, among others, are reflected in games and plays (Cf. Erikson, 1964; Sękowska, 2000).

At the fourth stage: 6-11/12 years of age a conflict between industry and inferiority emerges. According to Erikson (1963), being laborious means completing an action with the use of tools which lead to a certain purpose and deriving pleasure from the performed activity. Due to the fact that the ability to concentrate on a task is formed at this stage, it is possible to achieve what was unattainable earlier. It is a period when the child develops their cognitive hobbies, interests and new ways of arranging their free time. It is also the time when the child’s preferences as to their future job are being defined. The child begins to acquire skills, mainly at school, by means

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**Figure 1. Developmental stages in human life.**

- **First Stage: Infancy and Childhood**
  1. Basic trust vs. basic mistrust; Solution: hope
  2. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt; Solution: will
  3. Initiative vs. guilt; Solution: purpose
  4. Industry vs. inferiority; Solution: competence

- **Second Stage: Adolescence**
  1. Identity vs. role confusion; Solution: fidelity

- **Third Stage: Adulthood**
  1. Intimacy vs. isolation; Solution: love
  2. Generativity vs. self absorption; Solution: care
  3. Integrity vs. despair; Solution: wisdom
of imitating people they perceive as competent.

The creative solution of the school age crisis is manifested by enriching life with new qualities. Some of them constitute a significant development of person's abilities, which are mainly intellectual. They also arouse cognitive passions and curiosity. Fulfilling duties diligently improves a person's character and is a chance to acquire new competences (Erikson, 1964; Sękowska, 2000).

The fifth, 11/12-18/20 years of age, crisis is revealed in the conflict between identity and role confusion: the identity crisis. At this stage, fast physical growth and puberty processes enhance entering the world of adults. The young person starts to wonder about their role in the society. Childish behaviour is manifested less and less frequently and it is replaced by adult approach: change of roles. All the transformations experienced by an individual at this developmental stage, for instance biological storm, mood swings, initiate forming of identity through a crisis. It exceeds in its depth and scope all other crises experienced by a person throughout their life.

The sense of identity gives a young person the awareness of being exceptional and unique, someone who exists in this world to fulfill a certain role. Erikson (1968) defines identity through referring to biological factors, environment and a set of personal experiences. According to him, identity is an integrated mental structure which enables us to become aware of our separateness from the external world. It consists of several dimensions: (1) a conscious sense of being a separate and unique individual; (2) the suppression of unconscious aspirations; (3) a sense of deep harmony (internal solidarity) with one's own self.

The identity crisis which is positively solved alters quality of life significantly and becomes its foundation. Quality of life is enriched with a strong sense of one's own ego which manifests itself in a coherent, integrated personality. It is also enhanced by commitment to one's ideals and with permanent disposition to undertake responsible tasks (Cf. Erikson, 1964; Brzezińska, 2000).

At the subsequent stage in Erikson's approach to human development, a crisis emerges in the period of the early adulthood, 20-40 years of age, when establishing proportion between intimacy and isolation becomes the central conflict. In this period, an individual makes significant decisions concerning their life that is, career, type of relationships with the environment, lifestyle. At this developmental stage, an important task is to meet the conflicting needs of intimacy, rivalry and distance. A person with established identity, a precondition for creating a proper intimate relationship, tries to approach someone with whom they could build a relationship of intimacy. The conflict solved at this stage results in a dynamic balance between intimacy and isolation. At this point, love occurs and develops.

We can assume that quality of life is enriched by the desire to form bonds with others, the ability to be committed to relationships or communities, readiness to devote one-self to other people with whom one remains close. The increasing love is a consequence of such kinds of behaviour. It is a mutual commitment, constantly soothing the antagonisms which are inherently present in common activities (Cf. Erikson, 1964; Sękowska, 2000; Gomez et al., 2009).

At the seventh stage, 40-65 years of age, a crisis manifests itself in the conflict between generativity and self absorption. In the literal sense, generativity means reproduction and bringing up offsprings. However, in the metaphorical sense, it amounts to productivity and creative activity. Generativity involves upbringing young generation and going beyond one's own ego. Such care concerns both the biological and the spiritual aspect of guiding the young. Therefore, it involves sharing one's own competence and love which were built in the earlier phases. The aim of this specific "autotranscendence" is passing on values, improving social activities and, consequently, enriching personality. Positive solution to conflict at this age is expressed in establishing balance between generativity and stagnation, which leads to the development of care for others. An individual generally goes beyond their egocentric interests, as a result of which new qualities of their life are created, such as passing on values, being involved in other people's development, teaching, guiding, protectiveness. Erikson understands the latter as "the expanding care for what has been created by love, necessity or chance; such care overcomes the ambivalence connected with a permanently assumed duty" (Erikson, 1964 p.13).

The last of the crises distinguished by Erikson, takes place in late adulthood, 65+ years of age. The relationship between the integrity of ego and despair is established at this stage. This conflict is connected with the desire to finally justify the sense of one's own life. It is also the synthesis of each previous crisis. It brings the person's life together into a harmonious whole and gives them the sense of order in the world. The integrated individual experiences a spiritual union with people from the past, who cooperated to create the heritage of human dignity and love.

If a person solves their last crisis creatively, they build up a certain kind of wisdom in themselves, which leads them to self-acceptance, as well as to tolerating life and people who are important for them. On the level of integrity, quality of life is expressed in the categories of fulfilment, accomplishment, feeling of unity with the whole world and a more positive attitude towards death (Erikson, 1963, 1964; Sękowska, 2000; Walker and Lowenstein, 2009).

**DISCUSSION**

The complex issue of quality of life can be linked to various factors depending on the pursued discipline. In psychology, it was analysed with respect to the sense of
This paper is an interpretation of the problems of quality of life in the light of solving the crises. Believe that the problems under discussion should be dealt with in the perspective of Erikson’s idea of the psychosocial development. According to this American neo-psychoanalyst, the developmental crises involve clashing of dimensions in phasic course of human existence. Such an approach enables us to see the conflicts in terms of their influence on quality of life. Special care to the concept of quality of life should be taken by parents, guardians and educators. Proper education should also contribute to an increase in quality of life. In connection with the hierarchical idea of development, failure to solve a crisis at a certain stage hinders an individual’s further development and thus diminishes quality of their life.

We should also pay attention to individual differences in the methods of solving crises. For some people, proceeding from one developmental stage to another is almost unnoticed, while for others it is connected with bearing personal costs. The way in which one copes with a crisis depends on individual personality traits and on one’s social background.

In referring to the discussed issues of the hierarchy of needs proposed by Maslow and in searching for a reply to the question: “Do people who concentrate on meeting their need for safety feel greater satisfaction from life than those people who strive for self-actualisation?” – this question still remains open. On the basis of research carried out by Sheldon et al. (2001), it is stated that meeting the need for safety does not introduce a particularly essential significance in the field of feeling satisfaction from life. However, it is more important to meet this need for safety in situations where one feels discontentment.

Searching for relationships between the level of achieved needs and reaching a designated level of personal maturity seems interesting. In relation to this, the question arises: do more mature persons feel greater satisfaction from life? If so, then what kind of satisfaction is this? The reply can be the following statement: “If we tie quality of life with the accomplishment of hedonistic values (pleasure, luxuries, comfort) and the elimination of sensory suffering, full, true and lasting satisfaction will not be reached. In turn, achieving higher values brings a higher quality of life demands sacrifice, meaning that it implies suffering as a result of the strength of lower values” (Maciuszek, 1994 p. 65), which was already mentioned previously.

In searching for a reply to the set question by referring to the results of empirical research, two tendencies can be observed. The first points to the fact that people who are psychically mature and achieve higher needs according to Maslow (1978) are happier (Alker and Gawin, 1978), the second, however, does not confirm this result (McCrae and Costa, 1983). In turn, Maslow himself, in

Quality of life – practical conclusions

The presented analysis, shows the role of developmental crises in forming quality of life and allows me to formulate the following practical conclusions:

1. As Bronfenbrenner said: ‘There is nothing more practical than good theory’ it ought to be stated that a good description and explanation of the reality of quality of life is the basis for its effective formation. This refers to parents, educators, politicians and every person, who undertakes self-discipline.
2. Interpretations, not facts concerning quality of life have the strongest regulating force. This phenomenon should be taken into account when educating, counselling and psychotherapy. This does not concern living more pleasantly and easily, in order to eliminate difficulties and suffering, but obtaining a higher level of quality of life.
3. Pragmatic indicators of the level of quality of life are:

   • The level of consumption of material goods (this concerns quality or quantity indicators);
   • The conscious perception of the obtained level of quality of life (auto-reflection and meta-meta reflection, meaning the consciousness of the individual concerning the awareness of other people, verbally expressed, by signs and gestures as to the level of quality of life).

4. Knowing quality of a given person allows for an insight into many other fields. A higher level of quality of life implies satisfaction and acceptance of themselves, their life, family, friends, work and many other internal and external components of existence.
5. Education and self-discipline requires knowing (how-to knowledge) of basis aspects (dimensions) of quality of life (or even: human life).
6. The level of quality of life can be a unique characteristic of the processes during a given period of life, developmental factors and ways of organising one’s own life.

Although the positive solving of the crises is stressed in this paper, one must not forget that negative experiences, like breakdowns, frustration and pain are crucial in the improvement of quality of life. These, seemingly serious problems, are actually considered to be positive forces, which enhance the development of man (Dąbrowski et al., 1996; Daniels and Piechowski, 2009).
REFERENCES


