SOLDIERS’ QUALITY OF LIFE

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Abstract:
It its theoretical part the article describes the basic psychological determinants of quality of and satisfaction with life. The empirical part of the article presents the results of the survey conducted among the Polish army soldiers using the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Scale of satisfaction with individual areas and aspects of life. The results are compared with a nationwide sample.

Keywords:
quality of life, satisfaction with life, soldiers

INTRODUCTION

The notion of quality of life has been present in social sciences for a long time and currently it has been gaining in importance along with the development of the so-called positive psychology trend, initiated by Martin Seligman. He postulates that positive psychology, owing to the development of a person’s strengths, will contribute significantly to the prevention of depression and mental disorders, which often result from the disintegration of community. In its positive trend, psychology makes an attempt at answering the question what determines the quality of life and how it can be achieved. At present, in the research on quality of life three main trends are dominant: econom-

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ic, statistical and psychological\(^2\). In the economic approach, the measurement is based on the metrics called indicators, and the acquisition and consumption of goods represent the basis for economic well-being. The statistical approach is based mainly on economic and socioeconomic development indicators. Finally, the psychological approach focuses on the subjective perception of quality of life in its entirety or with regard to its respective dimensions. Therefore, in psychology the quality of life is understood as “the emotional balance, where the domination of positive emotions signifies a high quality of life”\(^3\). The precursor of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, uses the terms *happiness* and *quality of life* interchangeably\(^4\).

1. **DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY OF LIFE**

The quality of life was initially reduced to objective and easily identifiable factors such as the level of income, health condition or family situation. The escalation of individualistic trends in societies and the development of increasingly advanced tools, characterised by better psychometric parameters, have led to increased research on quality of life and determinants of this quality\(^5\). As a result of conducted research a number of interesting interrelationships have been disclosed. The relation between the level of prosperity and the quality of life correlates from 0.03 to 0.3 and is curvilinear, which means that from a certain level an increase in income does not translate into an increment in quality of life\(^6\). After the income close to the national average has been reached, an increase in quality of life is disproportionately small in comparison with the incremental growth in available resources. Along with a rise in the level of income, its impact on quality of life decreases. Obviously, higher income translates into a better living standard as well as the possibilities of satisfying not only fundamental needs. According to Ruut Veenhoven, the level of satisfying needs serves as an indicator of quality of life\(^8\). The greater the extent to which our needs are satisfied, the happier we are. Naturally, needs, once satisfied, may lead to subsequent needs that will also require fulfilment. Higher income opens up a potentially bigger number of more attrac-

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tive alternatives for pastime\(^9\) and facilitates access to non-public healthcare\(^10\). A good health condition is very often identified with a high quality of life\(^11\). Income translates also into housing conditions, which are undoubtedly significant for quality of life\(^12\). The research conducted on the Polish population shows that income is attributable to as little as 5% of quality of life variance and this result does not differ significantly from the data obtained in other countries\(^13\). Michael Arygle, having made a review of research findings, concludes that the level of education correlates to a small extent with measures of happiness, most often at the level of 0.1\(^14\). The study presented by Michael Arygle confirms that education influences quality of life to the greatest extent in the countries where income per inhabitant is lower. Probably, the higher level of education involves not only better living standards, but also growing aspirations, and when these are not realised, the subjective level of quality of life may decrease. Marriage or – in a broader sense – a satisfactory relationship is a crucial determinant of quality of life. Michael Arygle, quoted hereinabove, claims that happiness depends to the greatest extent on the quality of family and marital life. Married people are less prone to suffer from depression\(^15\) and their general health condition is better in comparison with people living alone\(^16\). In the case of people living alone the life expectancy is also definitely shorter in comparison with those functioning in satisfactory relationships. A significant influence on quality of life is exerted by the satisfaction derived from work\(^17\). A satisfactory occupation, opening up the possibilities for development and self-realisation, fair remuneration and appropriate interpersonal relationships contribute significantly to a rise in the subjective level of quality of life. This level decreases

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considerably when there is a lack of balance between professional and personal life. Satisfaction with life and satisfaction with service are interrelated. Because of the current labour market requirements, employees are expected to have higher levels of engagement in terms of their energy and time devoted to work. Unfortunately, it may lead to work-family conflicts. Work, which in the case of soldiers takes the form of service, “involves more than just an occupational choice; it is the selection of lifestyle that permeates almost every aspect of a person’s life.” Therefore, it would be of interest to determine how service affects soldiers’ quality of life.

2. SOLDIERS’ QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The vast majority of Western studies on soldiers’ quality of life focus on veterans or people experiencing acute or chronic traumatic stress. Only few studies concentrate on soldiers performing their service during peacetime. A study conducted by Bin-hui Wang on air force soldiers demonstrated that their quality of life was influenced by education, occupied position and professional status before recruitment. In Poland similar research has been conducted by Wojskowe Biuro Badań Społecznych (Polish military centre for social research) for many years. Research representative of the Polish population has been conducted by Janusz Czapiński and Tadeusz Panek since 2000. With regard to a rise in quality of life soldiers moved up in the ranking from the 16th to the 11th place when surveys conducted in 2011 and 2013, respectively, were compared (56 professional groups were included in the analysis). A very interesting observation was made that from among all occupational groups professional soldiers

20. A. Piotrowski, Satysfakcja z pracy a satysfakcja z życia oraz jakość relacji małżeńskich kobiet-żołnierzy, Wydawnictwo Akademii Obrony Narodowej. Warszawa (w druku).
represented the most modest one with regard to pay expectations, as they anticipated the smallest increase in income in the nearest future.

The survey conducted by Sławomir Teclaw and Waldemar Nowosielski among the formations responsible for internal security (municipal police, fire brigade, army, police), which contained, among others, a question: “Are you a happy person?”, showed that over 5% of officers were always happy, almost 69% were mostly happy, 21% were sometimes happy, and only 5% of them were rarely happy. In the same survey respondents were also asked about their current health condition. More than 22% of them defined their health condition as very good, over 54% as good, almost 20% as good enough, and as few as 4% defined it as bad.

The study of Robert Masten et al. disclosed that the level of satisfaction with life is higher among non-commissioned officers than among the commissioned ones. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that satisfaction with life is linked to the motivation to develop sport skills.

An interesting survey was conducted among soldiers during operations performed within LIC (Low Intensity Conflict) areas. It was found out that the difference in the level of satisfaction with life between soldiers stationed in areas affected by conflicts and soldiers stationed at places where such conflicts were absent was not statistically significant. Interestingly, soldiers stationed in conflict areas had higher depression rates, more problems with alcohol and a lower level of mental health.

In another study, Suprakash Chaudhury and his team analysed the differences between soldiers who sustained multiple bodily injuries and a control group. In the group of soldiers lower satisfaction with life was recorded as well as lower results concerning health condition and the level of depression was higher.

A small number of studies on soldiers’ quality of life as well as the earlier findings concerning female soldiers from the Navy have given the incentive to conduct research the results of which are presented hereinbelow.

3. METHODOLOGICAL BASES FOR OWN RESEARCH


Objective of research

The first objective of the research was to determine the level of soldiers’ satisfaction with respective aspects of life in comparison with a nationwide sample. The second objective was to establish the level of soldiers’ satisfaction with life.

Subjects of research

The research was conducted in two military units within the territory of województwo pomorskie (Pomeranian Province), after all necessary permits were obtained, in June and July 2014. Because of the arrangements made with the commanders of these units it is impossible to indicate the precise location where the research was conducted and the description of the studied group has to be limited to a minimum. Eighty-five soldiers took part in the study. The average age was $M = 30.3$ years, $SD = 4.6$. Almost 60% of the soldiers were married. Fifty percent of the soldiers did not have any children, 24.4% had one child, 23.2% had two children and 2.4% had three or more children.

Research tools

Satisfaction with respective domains and aspects of life scale, commonly used in research on quality of life, was the first research tool. The scale consists of 20 items and subjects assess their level of satisfaction with respective domains of life using the scale from 1 to 6, where 1 stands for highly satisfied, and 6 for highly dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with Life Scale, developed by Ed Diener, Robert Emmons, Randy Larsen and Sharon Griffin, adapted to the Polish conditions by Zygfryd Juczyński, was the second employed tool. The scale consists of 5 items and measures general life satisfaction. It is characterised by a high reliability and aptitude.

4. RESULTS

The first step in conducting statistical analyses was to determine the soldiers’ level of satisfaction with respective aspects of life in comparison with a nationwide sample. The data thus obtained are presented in Table 1.

The results of the survey correspond with the study prepared by Grzegorz Predel, who analysed the social and occupational situation in respective corps of professional soldiers in the Polish Armed Forces.

Unfortunately, the impossibility of comparing the parameters of soldier’s quality of life with a nationwide sample as well as a different methodology limited the possibilities of interpreting the data obtained by him. The analyses of own research showed that the studied group of soldiers in comparison with the nationwide sample is satisfied to a significantly greater extent with the regard to: the possibility of satisfying food needs,

32 R. Derbis, A. Bańka, Poczucie jakości życia a swoboda działania i odpowiedzialność, SPA, Poznań 1998.
financial situation of one’s own family, current family income, work, one’s own health condition and sexual life.

Table 1. Average level of satisfaction with respective areas and aspects of life in a nationwide sample and among soldiers, using the scale: “1 – highly satisfied”, “6 – highly dissatisfied”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with:</th>
<th>Nationwide sample</th>
<th>Soldiers</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with the closest family members</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with colleagues (group of friends)</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual life</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security at the place of residence</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing conditions</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of available goods and services</td>
<td>2.84*</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of satisfying food needs</td>
<td>2.86*</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way of spending leisure time</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s own life achievement s</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s own level of education</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s own health condition</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral standards prevailing in one’s immediate environment</td>
<td>3.18*</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial situation of one’s own family</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current family income</td>
<td>3.49*</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospects for the future</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation in the country</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The lower the result, the higher is the level of satisfaction with a given aspect of life.

* Data from 2009.


The fact of having permanent employment is a factor conditioning a higher level of satisfaction with own financial situation among soldiers. The stability of employment represents one of the key factors affecting the choice of occupation in military service. The fact that soldiers are more satisfied with their health condition and sexual life is
not surprising, either. A good health, which is verified periodically, is one of the conditions for performing service. The average age in the studied group of soldiers was 30 years, and age is strongly correlated with health status.

In comparison with the nationwide sample, the studied group of soldiers had significantly lower assessments regarding their levels of satisfaction with marriage, children, place of residence, security at the place of residence and prospects for the future. It may result from the necessity of living at “two homes”, the reduced possibility of taking care of children because of the nature of service and periods of separation during deployments, which have an unfavourable influence on quality of family life. Waldemar Nowosielski drew similar conclusions when he analysed for the first time the impact exerted by profession on family life and children’s upbringing. According to his research, every fourth soldier’s assessment of the influence of military service on family life was negative. According to almost 32% of soldiers military service has an adverse impact on children’s upbringing. However, own research conducted among professional soldiers has revealed that their parental attitudes do not differ from the attitudes demonstrated by parents performing civilian jobs.

In comparison with subjects from the nationwide sample soldiers’ assessment of their prospects for the future is lower, which may be conditioned by the limited possibilities of professional promotion and a resulting remuneration increase.

The subsequent statistical analysis consisted in the determination of the soldiers’ level of satisfaction with life and the obtained data are presented in Table 2.

The soldiers’ level of satisfaction with life is not out of the ordinary. The obtained results show that the average level of satisfaction with life in the studied group of soldiers was 21.14, which translates to a lower limit of sten 6. Thus, it is minimally higher than the result obtained for the nationwide male population, which served as a reference to determine the level of reliability of Satisfaction with Life Scale. The level of satisfaction with life in the studied group of soldiers is only slightly lower when compared to Prison Service officers, whose result totalled 21.60.

These data are interesting as they confirm multiple times the relation between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with work\textsuperscript{40}.

| Table 2. Average results in Satisfaction with Life Scale in the studied group of soldiers |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Satisfaction with Life Scale     | M         | SD        | skewness  | kurtosis  |
|                                  | 21.14     | 4.81      | -0.14     | 0.51      |

*Source: own work*

Satisfaction with work translates into numerous employee behaviours that are beneficial to an organisation such as productivity, attachment to an organisation or commitment to work\textsuperscript{41}. The soldiers’ level of satisfaction with life does not differ from the research results recorded in other professional groups ($M = 21.30$), and therefore, it can be stated that the fact of performing military service per se is not related to the level of satisfaction with life\textsuperscript{42}.

**CONCLUSION**

By comparing the obtained results it can be observed that in several domains soldiers assess their level of satisfaction with respective parameters of life in a way different from the nationwide sample. Soldiers are satisfied with marriage and children to a significantly lesser extent. It may result from the nature of their duties, life shared between two homes and a considerable higher level of flexibility, which entails reduced contact with family as compared to civilian professions. However, soldiers’ scores on satisfaction with work and health condition were higher. A higher level of health should not be surprising as the average age was about 30 years, whereas the nationwide sample included also the elderly and the disabled. Moreover, a good health is a precondition for military service. A higher level of satisfaction with work shows that the Armed Forces represent an attractive employment option for young people. The soldiers’ level of satisfaction with life is comparable to the nationwide sample, and therefore, it seems that the performance of military service does not have a significant impact on the level of satisfaction with life.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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