

ON THE QUESTION OF CHARACTERIZING SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

NAIRA HAKOBYAN

International Scientific Educational Centre of the National Academy of Sciences,
Doctor of Sciences in Psychology, Professor
naira.hakobyan@isec.am

ANNA KHACHATRYAN

International Scientific Educational Centre of the National Academy of Sciences,
Ph.D. in Psychology, Associate Professor
anna.khachatryan@isec.am

ELEN GASPARYAN

Russian-Armenian University
elen.gasparyan02@gmail.com

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Abstract

In recent decades, the problem of the subjective well-being of a person has become a subject of study in various scientific disciplines. This trend is justified by the rapid development of societies, and socio-economic and psychological, cultural, and value system transformations, which lead to certain transformations in well-being. At the same time, it should be noted that the problem of personal well-being is not new; it was discussed in the ancient world and the Middle Ages and analyzed from different perspectives in the works of philosophers and scientists. In other words, “human well-being” has interested philosophers, thinkers, and scientists of all times and peoples.

In the psychological discipline, the perception of well-being is associated with the peculiarities of a person’s inner world, which determine his experience and behaviour, the subjective feeling of meaning in life, which is accompanied by a subjective assessment of the person’s current state of mind, relationships with others, with personal growth, a sense of happiness, etc. In other words, subjective well-being is directly related to the subjective feeling of satisfaction with oneself and life.

This article presents the main theoretical approaches to the study of well-being, emphasizing the interdisciplinary foundations of the problem. The psychological phenomenon of well-being is considered in the context of two theoretical approaches: hedonic and eudaimonic, and the terminological features of subjective and psychological well-being are presented.

Keywords and phrases: Subjective well-being, personal growth, sense of satisfaction, meaning of life, inner world.

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ՆԱԻՐԱ ՀԱԿՈԲՅԱՆ

ՀՀ Գիտությունների ազգային ակադեմիայի
գիտակրթական միջազգային կենտրոն,
հոգեբանական գիտությունների դոկտոր, պրոֆեսոր
naira.hakobyan@isec.am

ԱՆՆԱ ԽԱՉԱՏՐՅԱՆ

ՀՀ Գիտությունների ազգային ակադեմիայի
գիտակրթական միջազգային կենտրոն,
հոգեբանական գիտությունների թեկնածու, դոցենտ
anna.khachatryan@isec.am

ԷԼԵՆ ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ

Հայ-ռուսական համալսարան
elen.gasparyan02@gmail.com

Համառոտագիր

Վերջին տասնամյակների ընթացքում անձի սուբյեկտիվ բարեկեցության խնդիրը դարձել է տարբեր գիտակարգերի ուսումնասիրության առարկա: Այդ միտումը հիմնավորվում է հասարակությունների արագ զարգացող տեմպերով, սոցիալ-տնտեսական և հոգեբանական, մշակութային և արժեհամակարգային փոխակերպումներով, որոնք հանգեցնում են բարեկեցության մասին պատկերացումների որոշակի տրանսֆորմացիաների: Դրա հետ մեկտեղ նկատենք, որ անձի բարեկեցության խնդիրը նոր չէ, այն քննարկվել է դեռևս հին աշխարհում և միջնադարում, տարբեր տեսանկյուններից վերլուծվել փիլիսոփաների և գիտնականների աշխատություններում: Այլ խոսքերով, «մարդկային բարեկեցության» երևույթը հետաքրքրել է բոլոր ժամանակների և ժողովուրդների փիլիսոփաներին, մտածողներին և գիտնականներին:

Հոգեբանական գիտակարգում բարեկեցության ընկալումը կապվում է անձի ներաշխարհի առանձնահատկությունների հետ, որոնք որոշում են նրա փորձառությունն ու վարքը, կյանքի իմաստավորման սուբյեկտիվ զգացումը, ինչն ուղեկցվում է անձի ներկա հոգեվիճակի սուբյեկտիվ գնահատմամբ, ուրիշների հետ փոխհարաբերություններով, անձնական աճով, երջանկության զգացումով և այլն: Այլ կերպ ասած, սուբյեկտիվ բարեկեցությունն ուղղակիորեն կապված է սեփական անձից և կյանքից բավարարվածության սուբյեկտիվ զգացողության հետ:

Այս հոդվածում ներկայացվում են բարեկեցության ուսումնասիրման հիմնական տեսական մոտեցումները, շեշտադրվում են հիմնախնդրի միջառարկայական հիմքերը: Բարեկեցության հոգեբանական ֆենոմենը դիտարկվում է երկու՝ հեղոնիստական և էվդեմոնիկ տեսական մոտեցումների համատեքստում, ներկայացվում են սուբյեկտիվ և հոգեբանական բարեկեցության տերմինաբանական առանձնահատկությունները:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝ սուբյեկտիվ բարեկեցություն, անձնական աճ, բավարարվածության զգացում, կյանքի իմաստ, ներաշխարհ:

К ВОПРОСУ О ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКЕ СУБЪЕКТИВНОГО БЛАГОПОЛУЧИЯ

НАИРА АКОПЯН

Зав. кафедрой психологии
Международного научно-образовательного центра
Национальной академии наук Республики Армения,
доктор психологических наук, профессор
naira.hakobyan@isec.am

АННА ХАЧАТРЯН

Преподаватель кафедры психологии
Международного научно-образовательного центра
Национальной академии наук Республики Армения,
кандидат психологических наук, доцент
anna.khachatryan@isec.am

ЭЛЕН ГАСПАРЯН

Российско-армянский университет
elen.gasparyan02@gmail.com

Аннотация

В последние десятилетия проблема субъективного благополучия личности стала предметом изучения различных научных дисциплин. Эта тенденция обусловлена быстрым развитием обществ, социально-экономическими и психологическими, культурными и ценностными трансформациями, которые приводят к определенным изменениям в концепциях благополучия. В то же время следует отметить, что проблема благополучия не нова, она обсуждалась еще в Древнем мире и Средних веках, анализировалась с разных позиций в трудах философов и ученых. Иными словами, феномен «благополучия личности» интересовал философов, мыслителей и ученых всех времен и народов.

В психологической науке восприятие благополучия связывают с особенностями внутреннего мира человека, определяющими его переживания и поведение, с субъективным ощущением смысла жизни, которое сопровождается субъективной оценкой человеком своего текущего психического состояния, отношений с окружающими, личностного роста, ощущения счастья и т. д. Иными словами, субъективное благополучие напрямую связано с субъективным чувством удовлетворенности собой и жизнью.

В статье представлены основные теоретические подходы к изучению благополучия, подчеркивающие междисциплинарные основы проблемы. Психологический феномен благополучия рассматривается в контексте двух теоретических подходов: гедонистического и эвдемонического, а также представлены терминологические особенности субъективного и психологического благополучия.

Ключевые слова: субъективное благополучие, личностный рост, чувство удовлетворенности, смысл жизни, внутренний мир.

Introduction

The phenomenon of “well-being”, which depends on many factors, is actively discussed in philosophy, medicine, physiology, pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and other sciences. Therefore, the concept of “well-being” is constantly enriched with new meanings and characteristics. There are many types of well-being: spiritual, material, social, personal, family, professional, etc. Each type of well-being has external (objective) and internal (subjective) bases of manifestation.

External well-being is determined by the objective conditions of human life and the development of a person. External factors for achieving social well-being include the institutional environment, which includes:

- economic institutions that ensure a sufficient level of material needs,
- legal institutions that guarantee the rights of the individual,
- labour and employment institutions that enable a person to achieve the desired level of social well-being, including institutions of social protection and support and open and working institutions of social mobility.

The well-being of the individual and, in general, society largely depends on the level of development of these institutions and their structures. Among external factors, indicators of social well-being are of great importance. A. Jarden and A. Roache distinguish four groups of such indicators:

- 1) socio-economic,
- 2) legal,
- 3) socio-political,
- 4) socio-cultural [8].

The most important indicators of social well-being are socio-economic regulators, which are associated with generating income for the working-age population, as well as improving the well-being of society as a whole. The social well-being of the active part of the population is largely determined by the situation on the labour market and the level of employment. Therefore, the effective regulation of the labour market and employment by the state and society is one of the main socio-economic indicators of social well-being. The existence of socio-political indicators is because in the modern world, the axis of the social well-being of a person lies in the efforts invested by the state, based on the mechanism for ensuring social guarantees and the joint responsibility of the individual, society, and the state for their implementation. Achieving social well-being from the moment the idea of a social state arose, which is responsible not only for the protection of internal order and its borders but, first of all, for the well-being of its citizens, becomes possible through social mechanisms. Social policy in a broad sense is understood as a set of measures to improve the social well-being of individuals, individual social groups, and society as a whole. It is an essential element in improving the quality of life of the population in modern welfare states [6, 13].

Inner well-being is formed in the psychological space of the individual and is determined by the subjective attitude towards the above-mentioned objective conditions. The experience of the processes and events occurring in a person's life forms the psychological basis of subjective well-being. These experiences can be positive or negative, and sometimes they may not be, if the events occurring do not affect the person's feelings, thoughts and relationships [2].

Subjective well-being depends not only on the developments in the person's inner world, but also on external relationships, the environment, social systems, and social experience. The formation of the perception of subjective well-being is especially important in preschool and school age, when children begin to establish new relationships, communicate, and understand their environment, social values and norms. As a result, a healthy social environment and the right social support can greatly contribute to the development of a child's subjective well-being. Thus, subjective well-being is defined not only by personal but also by social criteria [1].

Subjective well-being is largely related to the perception of physical and psychological health. Some authors have spoken about the complex perception of the concepts of "well-being" and "health". A. Maslow wrote that psychological health fills a person with an objective sense of well-being. He drew attention to two components of the perception of health: First, people desire to be "all that they can be," to find their true role and place in the social environment, and to develop their potential through self-actualization. The second component of psychological health is the desire to embrace humanistic values, the possession of such qualities as acceptance of others, autonomy, sensitivity to beauty, a sense of humour, altruism, and a desire to improve humanity [5].

Theoretical and Methodological Bases

Theoretical developments in modern psychology in the field of studying the nature and structure of personal well-being have led to the development of two main concepts:

- "subjective well-being" and
- "psychological well-being"

These two concepts were formed on the basis of different approaches: hedonic and eudaimonic. At the same time, it should be emphasized that in both cases, we are talking about internal, psychological processes that cannot be considered objective, and the established names of the approaches differ only in the content of the concept of well-being and reflect the peculiarities of its understanding and interpretation by the authors.

According to the hedonic approach, the theoretical foundation for the study of subjective well-being was laid by N. Bradburn and E. Diener [4]. As A. Stone and C. Mackie noted, the hedonic approach has developed three components of subjective well-being:

- the presence of positive affect,
- the absence of negative affect, and
- life satisfaction [15].

The first two components are the dynamic and emotional components of subjective well-being, while life satisfaction is its generalized and static cognitive assessment. In general, supporters of the hedonic approach consider the experience of happiness, life satisfaction, positive thinking, and positive social behaviour to be the most general indicators of well-being [3, 16].

Empirical studies have identified such indicators of subjective well-being as temperament characteristics, satisfaction of basic needs, and material well-being. Subjective well-being is associated with good health and longevity, supportive social

relationships and professional achievements, leisure time satisfaction, creativity, and social quality of life [12].

The most significant developments in the issue of human well-being within the framework of the eudaimonic approach include the theories of eudaimonic well-being, developed by A.S. Waterman and C. Ryff as a definition of psychological well-being, by E. Deci and R. Ryan as a definition of a person's self-determination and self-esteem. If subjective well-being is aimed at getting away from problems, then eudaimonic well-being, on the contrary, is associated with tension and efforts to resolve it. Eudaimonic well-being refers to the concepts of personal growth and self-actualization. C. Ryff, the founder of the concept of psychological well-being, defines it as a basic subjective construct that reflects the perception and assessment of a person's activities from the point of view of realizing his potential capabilities [15].

Within the framework of these two approaches, researchers try to determine the criteria for positive human activity and, ultimately, happiness. However, studies of subjective and psychological well-being have been carried out on different theoretical bases and reflect different areas of a person's inner world [8, 10, 11]. The eudaimonic view of well-being generally does not include the factor of emotionality. Thus, C. Ryff's structure of psychological well-being is considered by many authors to be cognitive since it does not include the emotional context [15].

The existential understanding of well-being is implemented through systems of meanings of existence and the relationship of a person to the world and himself and also does not pay attention to emotionality. Subjective well-being, on the contrary, focuses on the affective component of well-being. C. Ryff and his colleagues emphasize that subjective well-being characterizes the current state of a person, while psychological well-being is dynamic and intense. Such existential components as "life goals" and "personal growth" distinguish it from subjective well-being, focusing on the future [15].

At the same time, a tendency has arisen in modern research to study the relationship between subjective and psychological well-being. Although it is clear that there is a conceptual difference between the phenomena of subjective and psychological well-being, modern psychologists recognize the advantages and value of both approaches and consider them as important aspects of the overall picture of well-being [2]. C. Ryff notes that psychological well-being should lead to inner balance, a sense of fullness of life, and ultimately, happiness; that is, according to C. Ryff, psychological well-being should be correlated with a positive mood, a sense of happiness, and life satisfaction [15].

Many studies have shown that psychological well-being leads to subjective well-being, while subjective well-being does not always imply psychological well-being. Various empirical studies show that subjective and psychological types of well-being complement each other to different degrees. Empirical studies of subjective well-being have revealed its high dependence on internal factors. E. Diener found that personality traits explain 40–50% of the variability in subjective well-being. In this regard, he suggested that happiness can be considered to some extent a personality trait, and it can be considered as a certain level of positive and negative emotions of predisposition to experience. Many studies have shown the relative relationship between emotional and cognitive components of subjective well-being.

Thus, positive emotions affect psychological flexibility, which, in turn, has a positive effect on life satisfaction [1, 4, 9, 15].

Methods

The method of studying the issue of characterizing subjective well-being is the method of comparison and thematic analysis of theoretical approaches. The purpose of the thematic analysis was to identify the main trends in the theoretical justification of subjective well-being. Through the comparison method, a theoretical review of the definitions of subjective well-being was conducted.

Results

The structure of psycho-emotional or subjective well-being that we are considering allows us to maximally characterize a person's internal well-being through three relatively independent blocks of dynamic relationships.

- personal (including the main integrative components of psychological well-being proposed by C. Ryff, with an expanded role for focusing on self-development and personal growth);

- cognitive evaluation (including various indicators of life satisfaction and perception of the current life situation).

- emotional-affective (including stable emotional states, affective balance, and the experience of happiness).

The individual block of subjective well-being is most consistent with the ideas of the well-being of the eudaimonic approach and includes various indicators identified in the concepts corresponding to this approach [14]. Many of these theories also serve as the basis for the development of ideas about personal maturity in psychology, which is not accidental, since here we are talking about relatively stable personality traits or patterns of behaviour [15, 16]. Empirical studies have shown that subjective well-being is determined by personal characteristics: optimism, stable self-esteem, lack of neuroticism, openness to experience, goodwill, and conscientiousness. Coping strategies also affect subjective well-being [1, 7, 16]. Thus, the main characteristic that reflects the essence of views on subjective well-being is the potential of the person and personal development or personal growth. In some cases, personal growth is considered a result or significant aspect of self-development, or even identified with it, since it is assumed that self-development is associated with a progressive process that is positive for both the individual and society. Some works emphasize the importance of self-development for physical, social and spiritual achievements and the psychological well-being of a person [2, 3, 15, 17].

The emotional-affective block of subjective well-being combines feelings that arise as a result of the successful or unsuccessful functioning of all spheres of the personality. It can be considered a key feature of subjective well-being, as it performs regulatory and adaptive functions. The emotional-affective component includes experiences of joy, sadness, anger, emotional states and moods, which allow us to perceive life as pleasant or unpleasant. Such emotional states are characteristic not so much of a specific moment in time, depending on the characteristics of a particular situation, but of the current period of a person's life in general. They are determined to a lesser extent by the real, current situation, which has a clearly

defined period, and to a greater extent by the long-term situation and personal factors. That is, over time, dominant emotional states prevail. Against the background of dominant emotions, actual emotional states are formed and exist. Thus, a person with the background of a dominant state of fear and anxiety may not lose the ability to switch to a state of concentration or experience enthusiasm and inspiration. In everyday life, a person, as a rule, strives to be in a “good” state of mind. Achieving such a state is associated with the use of self-regulation methods “accumulated” throughout life. Regulation is aimed at prolonging the intensity of positive emotions, overcoming negative emotions and states, or reducing the frequency, duration and intensity of experiences, leading to a relatively balanced state, which is characterized by a longer duration – stability [6, 13].

The cognitive-evaluative block of subjective well-being includes various parameters of satisfaction and assessment of the current life situation. Most authors emphasize the cognitive-evaluative component of well-being, one way or another. Life satisfaction, which is considered a leading indicator of subjective well-being, includes a global assessment of a person’s real life through the prism of personal standards of a “good life”. The cognitive component of subjective well-being can also be understood as a general assessment, which consists of assessments of various aspects of life and the dominant emotional coloring of the attitude towards them. G. Walters, also dividing subjective well-being into emotional and cognitive components, writes about the reflective axis and emotional background. According to the author, the reflective core consists of cognitive processes: a person’s thoughts about his or her own life and value judgments [17].

Conclusion

Researchers express different views on the relationship between subjective well-being and its determinants. Thus, many authors proceed from the fact that socio-economic conditions and the level of material wealth cannot ensure a sense of subjective well-being, but the influence of these objective conditions is mediated by personal characteristics, coping strategies, individual attitudes, and values, such as the ability to self-regulate, internal locus of control, optimism, self-efficacy, etc. These views are consistent with studies that have revealed a significant contribution of personality traits to the characterization of subjective well-being.

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