



Life Goals and Sense of Meaning or Meaninglessness of Life in Young People with Disabilities

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Abstract

The future, life aspirations and goals are of special value for everyone. In times of dynamic civilization changes and transformations, adolescents want to feel happy and fulfilled. Therefore, they plan their future life, set perspective goals to achieve satisfaction with their decisions and choices. While planning future structured life, youth with disabilities may encounter numerous barriers and limitations. They concern education, getting work and especially the sphere of setting up own family, despite numerous changes and trends of integration and inclusion. The article illustrates own research on life goals, plans and a sense of meaning or meaninglessness of life in young people with a disabilities

Keywords :young adults, disabilities, problems, barriers, life aims.

Introduction

It ought to be assumed that people who are able to formulate and set their life goals, as well as to implement them in everyday life, are the individuals whose life is satisfying and complete. They not only meet their basic needs, but also aim for positive developmental changes, better quality of life and look for the meaning of life. Every individual strives to be happy attempting their life to be fulfilling having a lot of dreams and plans. While gaining knowledge about oneself and the world, one wants to determine which goals and desires can be achieved, what to strive for, what goals are to be planned in the further adult life.

Chrzanowska (2015) addressed the issue of adulthood in people with disabilities and recognized that "many researchers focusing on adulthood in people with disabilities note that this matter is marginalized in the special education, but also other fields of science, which concern disability issues," (Chrzanowska 2015, p.592). This issue has been addressed recently and is a challenge of our times, thus the options for the adult life still remain an open question for many young people with disabilities. It incorporates self-reliance, independence, making commitments, competences, quality of life, objectives, and plans for life, with a sense of their meaning or meaninglessness of life. Thus, "people who can set both small, close, daily targets and implement them, as well as more distant targets, operate in a more satisfactory way which enables their further development through the acquisition of subsequent competences. This favors task oriented approach to solving problems. In case of impaired efficiency, it reduces or even eliminates focus on deficits, transferring attention and commitment to the task one wants to do"(Brzezińska,,Kaczan, Rycielska, 2010 p.9).

It is worth to point out that since 1991 we have observed in Poland the development of professional activation offers for people with disabilities. A real indicator of this change is the legislation designed to improve the situation of people with disabilities implemented in 1989. These include i.e.: Constitution, the Law on professional rehabilitation of disabled persons, the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, Construction Law, the Law on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, the Bill of Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Law on equal opportunities for people with disabilities (2007) and many others. Also such activities as: Operational Program Human Capital (OPHC) or Priority VI - The labor market open to all, or VII Promotion of social integration can be enumerated. Unfortunately, "people with disabilities are no longer treated exclusively while drafting projects, but are one of the groups at risk of social exclusion" (Wolski, 2010, p. 17).

Review of Literature

Young People with Disabilities and their Search for the Goal and Meaning of Life

Despite numerous integration and inclusion projects, social discriminatory behavior is still an important determinant for young people with disabilities. It poses the most serious barrier that is the psychological discomfort in the form of a conviction of social marginalization, exclusion, social distance, fear and uncertainty about employment opportunities, and performing responsibly social role of the employee in the workplace. Kowalik (1999) indicates in his paper the following types of discrimination against people with disabilities as distancing, or avoiding close social contacts, devaluation, or dissemination of negative beliefs about people with disabilities, delegitimation as sanctioning a negative attitude towards people with disabilities, segregation or isolation from the whole social environment, and extermination as destruction of people who can be classified as a particular social group, which is characterized by lack of concern and interest.

However, young people with disabilities wish to plan their lives, set life goals, plan life with meaning, and strive to obtain even small range of life satisfaction just like others. A young man entering adulthood begins to set life goals and tasks. According to Adler (Adler, 1986, p. 943), "the life goal is a primary objective pursued by an individual to achieve a specific form of superiority (feeling of power), which will allow them to compensate for the original sense of inferiority". Human actions are purposeful and task oriented. In the social and interactive model of disability," it is regarded as the effect of architectural and legal barriers, as well as mentality. A person becomes disabled because the social environment is not able to ensure conditions for them to enter into the role of a full-fledged citizen"(Bedyńska, Rycielski, 2010, p. 8). For a young person with disabilities, such issues as life plan, life goals and a sense of meaning in life are crucial. The plans, goals in life are "the product of the development, maturation, the result of multiple experiences in learning about the world, the result of reflections" (Szewczuk, 1990, p. 210). Such an attitude is conducive to overcoming the problems of everyday life, but also life's problems, and coping with many difficulties. "Excessive focus on the past, and in particular in difficult situations, negative experiences, unsolved or poorly resolved issues are a source of strong, negative tension. For this reason, it is difficult to concentrate fully on what is happening today, not only on implementing one's own plans "(Brzezińska, Kaczan, Rycielska, 2010, p. 19).

Also, the most important need for a man, especially for young people with disabilities is the need for the meaning in life. The questions posed in this field concern positive and negative experiences. In psychology, "sense" occurs frequently together with the notion of existence, or life. In this context, it means a need for a sense and the like. (See: Meissner - Łozińska, 2011, p. 71). According to Popielski (1993, p. 202), "experience of a sense of meaning in life can be described as experience of mental state which is satisfactory and encouraging to life by an individual. This is a subjective state, and as such - objective, but individualized, experienced in the process of engagement in life and mediated by the process of evaluation." Young people with disabilities may also experience feelings of hopelessness with own life, especially in difficult situations, associated with a lower sense of meaning in life, which is combined with a lack of sense, or lack of superior value. A sense of futility is the ground of many mental disorders. They include: a sense of being worthless, anxiety, neurosis, depression (cf. Frankl, 1978). Young people with disabilities often present a negative image of oneself, the world or even their own future, which is not without significance for putting one's own goals, life tasks and building a sense of purpose, and sometimes even a sense of meaninglessness of his own life.

Research

Method

Research was conducted using the method of diagnostic survey and elements of qualitative method. The techniques used included interview developed by the author and Osgood's semantic differential. The author's own research was performed in a group of 120 respondents by means of interview techniques. 60 subjects were young people with disabilities and the control group included 60 able-bodied young people. The study was conducted in province Podkarpacie in Poland at the turn of 2015/2016 as a part of the research into the life problems of people with disabilities, which has not been published yet. In order to accomplish the research procedure, the main problem was formulated in the form of a question: what are life goals, plans and a sense of meaning or meaninglessness of life in young people with disabilities?

Sample

Women dominated in the experimental group (63.3%), while the young men constituted 36.6%. A similar trend was observed in the control group where more than a half of the sample of healthy young people were girls (56.7%) and the young men constituted 43.3%. As for the ages of the young people with disabilities, the vast majority were aged 25 - 30 (70.0%), and the age band 18 - 22 included 30.0%. 73.4% of the subjects in the control group, which is the vast majority of the respondents, was in the age band 25 - 30, and the least number of subjects were aged 18 - 22 (26.7%). Vast majority of young people came from the urban environment, both in the group of young people with disabilities and healthy young people (66.7% in the experimental group and 80.0% in the control group).

The family status of the respondents did not appear too optimistic. In the group of young people with disabilities nearly all respondents (80.0%) live with their parents, and siblings (20.0%). It must be noted that despite adulthood none of the young people with a disability lived on their own. The opposite situation was observed in the control group where 33.3% of the able-bodied young people already set up their own families and lived on their own. When it comes to housing conditions, in a group of healthy young people dominated very good and good housing conditions as 86.6% of the subjects claimed and only 3.3% or one person acknowledged that conditions were not good. In the group of young people with disabilities 40.0% of the respondents admitted that their living conditions were not good, that they are not satisfied with their living conditions and the others were of the opinion that their living conditions were good, and so claimed 60.0% of the respondents of this group.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was also adopted that young people with disabilities have plans, goals in life on their personal lives, education, family, work - the same areas of life that able-bodied young people, however they experience the sense of meaninglessness of life apart from its meaningfulness. It should be observed that the life objectives and plans for young people with disabilities are the possibilities for further education, starting own family, getting the profession, material - existential security, personal happiness. It is worth noting that young people with a disability due to some health limitations, make life plans, decisions about the future always keeping in mind not only their own abilities but also limitations.

Results

Life Goals and Plans Concerning Setting up Own Family

A family is of a particular value for a modern man. For young people with a disability plans on setting up own family are one of the most important goals and aspirations. Despite problems and obstacles resulting from their disability, they want to live in and have their own family. My research showed that among the surveyed young people with disabilities 70.0% of the respondents admitted to have plans and goals in life to start a family. This group included also a significant number of young people who still do not know whether due to their disability they may plan to start their own family. 10.0% of the respondents claimed that they do not plan to start their own family in the future. In the control group that is able bodied young people, however, 96.3% of the respondents admitted to plan to start their own family, and only one person still did not know, that is has no plans, goals, assumptions related to setting own family in the future. In conclusion, it should be stated that young people with disabilities do not know, are not sure whether they meet a life partner to start a family because of the awareness of their own dysfunction, disease, health restrictions. This group also includes some individuals who were sure that everything they do fails, and especially in terms of managing to establish own family.

Desire to Have Children

Another challenge young people with disabilities encounter, but also an important goal in life is the desire to have own children. The study revealed that only 66.7% of the respondents with disability were convinced they want to have their own child or children. While 20.0% said that they are not prepared for the role of a father or a mother, or did not express the desire to have children of their own and the others admitted they did not know whether they want to become parents (13.3%). In the control group, however, all able-bodied respondents admitted that they want to become parents in the future (100.0%). So young people with a disability are often not prepared for the role of a mother or a father, and justify it with a fear of probability to give birth of a child with a disability, who might have similar health problems and limitations.

Financial Independence

The studied young people with disabilities were also asked whether financial independence plays an important role in their lives. According to the respondents, the majority felt that financial independence is important in their life, and so said 70.0% of the respondents, but up to 30.0% of the young people in this group admitted they did not know if it is valid or not. Also, none in this group of respondents stated that financial independence is not important in life. It can be concluded, therefore, that young people with disabilities feel that if there are problems relating to their own health, financial independence is not so important. It is second only to health, however, it can help in the process of treatment, rehabilitation and therapy.

In the group of healthy adolescents, all respondents that is 100.0% admitted that financial independence is important in life and awaited. It plays an important role in better quality of life and life satisfaction, well-being of a man and their satisfaction.

Objectives, Plans of Employment and Profession

In the literature, many authors emphasize the barriers and limitations, and difficulties associated with people with disabilities in the context of seeking to take up work. "Good internships started and effectively carried out in the framework of EU subsidies have brought the expected results. The situation of both disabled people and their environment improved, in

particular in professional activation. Unfortunately, most of these actions have not found its continuation in the form of long-term projects "(Wolski, 2010, p. 17). Unfortunately, this group requires continued funding in the labor market. Many fears and uncertainties associated with the entry into a professional role are also presented by the disabled.

The study confirms that young people with a disability set plans, life goals concerning work and becoming a professional, but not all subjects. Among the respondents, 10.0% admitted that despite their education, professional training, they did not intend to or seek work, and explain this fact by their own health limitations resulting from the disability. In the control group, all able bodied young people claimed to have career plans, and the vast majority of young people from this group already had a job (80.0%). The subjects with a disability admitted that they want to work as a teacher helper, a social worker or a psychologist (50.0%) and an IT specialist (26.7%), a tailor (10.0%) or a shop assistant (10.0%) and in other professions. In the control group that is healthy youth, the preference for professions such as a teachers (30.0%), an IT specialist (40.0%), a social worker (20.0%), a doctor / a vet (10.0%) was indicated. Therefore, it becomes clear that young people with disabilities prefer in their life goals, tasks and professions which are useful, but do not require such a high education as a medical profession, which has been omitted in this group, and was indicated by the healthy youth.

Adulthood, and the Meaning of Life in Young People with Disabilities

The young people with a disability were asked in the study if they reflect over their own lives, its meaning. The studies confirmed that most young people with disabilities perceive their lives as ordinary (40.0%), a minority of the respondents admitted to have "good life" (30.0%), but there were also subjects in this group, who found that their lives were grim as 30.0% of the respondents claimed). Young people with a disability perceived their life not only as ordinary and well arranged, but the notion that life is grim informs about negative feelings towards own life, its meaning, thinking about what they live for. Such statements are full of disappointment and despair.

The studied youth admitted that they often feel dissatisfaction with their own life (80.0% of the young people with disabilities), and only 20.0% said that they are dissatisfied with their own life, although often reflect on its meaning. They treat problems and stereotypes resulting from health directed towards them as barriers or a challenge. In the control group, 60.0% of able bodied individuals perceived their lives as ordinary and fascinating, and admitted that they get along well and feel happy 40.0%). The young people without disabilities did not feel dissatisfied with their own lives, perceived them as interesting and satisfied, very positive and thought very rarely about their lives in the context of dissatisfaction with it (26.7%).

The respondents were also asked how they behave when feeling dissatisfied with their own lives. Studies have confirmed that in the event of dissatisfaction with one's life young people with disabilities are full of despair, reflect on its lack of sense, wonder why they live and isolate from others (60,0%), weep and lament(20,0%) and are upset and shout (20,0%). In the control group, at times of dissatisfaction with one's life, the respondents admitted that they talk to friends, people close to them about their life difficulties (50,0%), and try not to show others that they have serious problems in life (30,0%), or seek some form of relaxation and try to relieve the tension (20,0%).

Factors Influencing the Meaning of Life in Young People with Disabilities

It was assumed in the study that well-being in life, favorable material situation may be important for young people with disabilities, as it has a decisive impact on a better quality of

life and meeting basic and vital needs and the needs arising from illness or disability. Conversely, difficult, unfavorable financial situation of the family and the person with disabilities can have a significant impact not only on the quality of life of people with disabilities, but also on not satisfying basic needs, including the need for treatment, rehabilitation, therapy, instrumentation or prosthesis. For young people with disabilities difficult material situation causes a lot of barriers and restrictions in the pursuit of standardization of functioning, but also in meeting many needs, which in turn can lead to feeling of discomfort, marginalization, exclusion, that is, in a sense, lost not only for life, but in the sense that life has meaning and some reluctance to life.

The data from own research showed that according to young people with a disability, 50.0% of the subjects claimed that their financial situation, usually resulting from the situation of the family is good, this means that it is sufficient to satisfy not only basic needs, but many others that can increase the quality of life, and also feeling that despite the disability, life is meaningful and beautiful. However, 33.3% of the respondents said that their or their families' financial situation is enough to meet only basic needs, and their life, its quality and sense are not optimistic. Other respondents from the group of young people with disabilities (16.7%) admitted that their situation is difficult, and sometimes it is not enough for the family to meet basic needs, and this difficult situation was aggravated by medical expenses, rehabilitation, therapy and other expenses involved in the process of rehabilitation. This group of respondents do not see both good quality of life, the joy and satisfaction with life and the belief that life is beautiful and it has sense despite numerous constraints, obstacles and setbacks.

In the control group, however, significantly more able-bodied respondents (65.0%) claimed that their financial situation and their families' is very good and good and people are both satisfied with the quality of their own lives, as well as fully convinced as to the meaning of life. The rest of the surveyed young respondents believed that their financial situation is not very favorable, it is not enough to meet their basic needs (35.0%). These people are not fully satisfied with their quality of life and not always satisfied as to its meaning. The conclusion is that the financial situation of them and their families significantly affects not only their quality of life and treatment, rehabilitation process, but the affirmative sense of meaning in life.

Difficulties and a Sense of Meaninglessness of Life

Young people with disabilities are experiencing many difficulties resulting not only from a disability, but with a lack of understanding of their needs, barriers and restrictions, and often even social stereotypes and exclusion. In these difficult situations, they may not feel alone, helpless, which is not without significance for their self-esteem and feelings associated not only with the lack of meaning in life, but with a sense of its meaninglessness. Our study confirmed that the group of young people with disabilities frequently had such thoughts, approach and attitudes towards life: up to 45.0% of the respondents admitted that they often think so, and 16.7% believe that they think that way on the every day basis and the rest of them believe that they have such thoughts rarely.

However, in the group of healthy young people that is the control group, the situation is different, up to 80.0% of the respondents believed that this way of thinking is triggered very rarely in them, and 20.0% stated that sometimes they think that way, when they face sudden difficulties, problems of life, which they cannot overcome independently. So tested healthy young people admitted that they rarely feel dissatisfied with their own lives and see a sense of meaninglessness of life.

The studied young people were also asked in what situations they feel particularly a sense of meaninglessness of their lives. The young people with a disability stated that sense of meaninglessness of life appears in crisis, when everything "they do goes wrong," when there is a lot of failures and when they fail, nothing comes out, when they get depressed, and have a breakdown (so says 60.0% of the respondents). The subjects have also such a negative attitude towards life in a situation of social comparison e.g. "When I see that a peer, a friend is always better than me," - 36.7%, and in situations where they feel isolated, a distance towards them or social stereotypes are created.

In the control group, the healthy respondents pointed to other situations. The first option was the situation when something fails, and so said 45.0% of the respondents, but the second situation when such feeling of meaninglessness of life can occur is a situation of very poor school grades - 16.7% of the respondents' answers in this group, and the rest mentioned many other reasons, eg. heartbreak, losing dear ones, death of a loved one or a crises, other traumatic life events.

It was also interesting to investigate in course of the study if young people with disabilities make comparisons of their own situation, problems, failures with their peers. As was hypothesized, the interviewees' responses confirmed that situation, which means that young people with disabilities not only too often make comparisons of oneself with their non-disabled peers' situation (83.3% of the respondents). These comparisons result in a very negative picture of oneself and one's situation that is as someone inferior, unwanted with problems and failures in life, and lack of sense of life, etc. In contrast, only a minority of this group of respondents do not make this kind of negative comparisons (16.7%). So the studied young people with disability not only experience the feeling of discomfort caused by their disabilities, but also the vast majority of them compares their problems with healthy, non-disabled peers. Especially such comparisons make them feel the difference in the situation of networking with the environment, having friends, the loved one, own family, work, the lack of barriers: health, architectural, psychological, mental, high self-esteem of young able-bodied people, ability to accomplish tasks, goals in life, independence and resourcefulness in life and a better quality of life, welfare and satisfying life and a sense of meaning of own life. Therefore, only a few in a group of young people with disabilities did not make comparisons of their own situation and problems in life with a group of healthy young people - their peers.

The study also attempted to determine how the youth with disabilities determines the level of a sense of meaninglessness of life. It was assumed that sense of life is a situation of reflecting on its meaning, and even its nonsense that is figuring out why the fate punished or hurt them, why they are different from their peers, why they have to live with many problems, barriers that surround them including stereotyping, marginalizing and exclusion. Long-term crisis situation, a sense of hopelessness and rejection, a lot of setbacks and life's problems can eventually lead to existential questions including the basic one about the meaning of life, or perhaps lack of its sense. More than half of the respondents from a group of young people with disabilities (65.0%) admitted that they felt a sense of meaninglessness of their lives and often adopted such thinking at the average level, and 25.0% at a low level and the rest of the group assessed the level of their sense of meaninglessness of life at a high level (10.0%). In conclusion, it is clear that young people with disabilities reflect on the meaning of their life and see it not only in terms of its meaning, but also its meaninglessness assessing it on average at a medium level.

This situation was compared with the control group. The healthy young people without problems arising from disability recognized that they mostly think about life, life goals, and believes that they have meaning, and if there are difficult situations, crises and

thinking of the lack of sense in life, it was at a low level, and so said 96.7% of the respondents from this group, and the remaining percentage was the low level (3.3%). It must be concluded that the level of a sense of meaninglessness of life in a group of healthy young people is low in majority of them.

The study also attempted to determine how often young people with disabilities reflect on their own life and its sense. And so it turned out that study hypothesis was confirmed and 73.4% of the respondents from this group reflected on meaning and meaninglessness of their own life. While all the others, as confirmed by studies, very often and often reflected on their life and dimensions of its meaning or meaninglessness (26.6%), especially when they experience difficult or painful situations. The situation was different in the control group. 40.0% of the able-bodied individuals reflected very often on their own life, how to live creatively, what goals and tasks to realize what direction to take for best well-being, a sense of life satisfaction, quality of life and its meaning. Only 36.7% believed that they sometimes reflect and 23.3% were satisfied claiming not to think about their life and its meaning or meaninglessness.

The studied young people were also asked what gives life its true sense (what values). And so, in the opinion of young people with disabilities the highest in the hierarchy of values were the closest family, who provide support, assistance, participate in treatment and rehabilitation, choosing routes and purposes, life tasks and so stated 80.0% of the respondents. In the second place in the hierarchy of values were friends who are important and offer help and support (20.0%). The respondents did not choose other out of many life values. The hierarchy of values indicated by healthy youth was similar. And so, youth indicated in the first place the family they grew up and eventually the one set up by them 70.0%, then friends (20.0%) and in last place was the faith (3.3). None of the able-bodied young people pointed other values.

Finally, the subjects were asked about ways of experiencing satisfaction with their own lives. Studies confirmed that 40.0% of the young people with disabilities admitted that they are satisfied with their life, and 20.0% admitted that they only sometimes tend to be satisfied with their own lives and the other respondents, or 40% are fully convinced that they are not satisfied with their own lives and the problems experienced. In the control group, the answers were slightly different. And so many healthy young people are of the opinion that they are satisfied with their life (63.3%), and sometimes, that means there are times they are really satisfied with their own lives – 36.7%. Situations causing their satisfaction are i.e. good grades at school, group of friends and acquaintances, praise and acceptance from others, success and love, having a partner in life, a marriage, a family and a satisfying, well-paid job.

In the group of young people with a disability, situations causing their satisfaction were i.e. good grades at school, having friends, acceptance of the dear ones, and success in rehabilitation, therapy, treatment.

Conclusions

Analyzes relating to young people with disabilities are not easy, as they concern the young people who are on the threshold of adulthood and have to ask a lot of questions about their lives and goals, life tasks, challenges, simultaneously trying to understand and accept their disability and difference, accept the meaning of life, or live in the belief that it is a difficult challenge, or perhaps it is meaningless. During the period of adolescence in young people there are many goals for future, forecasting challenges of adulthood, but also a lot of existential questions like: Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? What can I achieve in

life? etc. "The key task for the formation of identity is to find the answers. A young man asks this question to oneself and to others, especially to those who are important to them. Looking for information about the I, they take up new tasks for themselves, and wait for feedback on their performance. The disability as a feature has an impact on what answer a teenager will formulate" (Wiliński, 2009, p. 208). They have to become aware of these features of disability, their own limitations, but also opportunities to understand the opinions and others assessments about themselves and realize opportunities to help, support. Finally, it is acceptance of oneself, and own disability and acceptance that despite disability one is a valuable person (Wiliński, 2009, p. 209). Finally, it can be concluded that the "individual approach towards people with disabilities, including their current state, that is not only the needs and skills, but above all, the degree of willingness to change their situation, can increase the efficiency of activation" (Wolski, 2010 p. 8). The problem of meaning or meaninglessness of one's life applies to each person, but in varying degrees of its severity. In relation to young people with a disability it is an issue of great importance, and requires specific, individual multicontext help and support. "The main areas of support should concern among other things: work, family, housing, education, leisure activities, but also participation in social life (ie. Political) culture" (Chrzanowska, 2015, p. 595).

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