

Psychological conditions for improving the subjective quality of life in an extreme region

Condiciones psicológicas para mejorar la calidad de vida subjetiva en una región extrema

Anastasiya Andreevna Kulik 

Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8736-5464>

Julia Yurievna Neyaskina 

Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3223-6512>

Valentina Aleksandrovna Naumova 

Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9643-1048>

Marina Aleksandrovna Frizen 

Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7706-6812>

Olga Sergeevna Shiryeva 

Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8126-7142>

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*Correspondence

Email: Anastasija81@yandex.ru

Summary

The article presents summarized results of theoretical and empirical research on the problem of achieving and improving the subjective quality of life in an extreme region. One of the crucial factors influencing the assessments of the quality of life in various groups of respondents is found to be the principle of personal activity; the internal and external factors contributing to the “subject-environment” harmony are identified and a targeted model for achieving a high level of quality of life involving a combination of lifestyle parameters, personal resources, and external opportunities is proposed; the strategies of interaction within the “subject-environment” system in an extreme region at different levels of quality of life are described. The obtained results can give a start to new theoretical and empirical research on the specifics of the quality of life in different social groups and allow specifying the goals, objectives, directions, and the main ways of helping and assisting different segments of the population to ensure a high quality of life depending on both the nature of external influences and the subjective assessment of the environment.

Key Words: quality of life, subjective quality of life, living environment, extreme region, “subject-environment” system, subject-environmental approach, environmental psychology.

Resumen

El artículo presenta resultados resumidos de investigaciones teóricas y empíricas sobre el problema de lograr y mejorar la calidad de vida subjetiva en una región extrema. Uno de los factores cruciales que influyen en las evaluaciones de la calidad de vida en varios grupos de encuestados es el principio de actividad personal; se identifican los factores internos y externos que contribuyen a la armonía “sujeto-ambiente” y se propone un modelo focalizado para lograr un alto nivel de calidad de vida que involucre una combinación de parámetros de estilo de vida, recursos personales y oportunidades externas; Se describen las estrategias de interacción dentro del sistema “sujeto-ambiente” en una región extrema en diferentes niveles de calidad de vida. Los resultados obtenidos pueden dar inicio a nuevas investigaciones teóricas y empíricas sobre las especificidades de la calidad de vida en diferentes grupos sociales y permitir precisar las metas, objetivos, direcciones y las principales formas de ayudar y asistir a los diferentes segmentos de la población para asegurar una alta calidad de vida dependiendo tanto de la naturaleza de las influencias externas como de la evaluación subjetiva del medio ambiente.

Palabras clave: calidad de vida, calidad de vida subjetiva, ambiente de vida, región extrema, sistema “sujeto-ambiente”, enfoque sujeto-ambiente, psicología ambiental.

Introducción

Although modern science covers the issue of searching for the ways of achieving the optimal level of the quality of life under all conditions of life and activity quite broadly and from a variety of standpoints, the question of the mechanisms for evaluating the subjective quality of life remains open. Modern theoretical research presents the quality of life as a complex dynamic system including social, economic, ecological, and psychological characteristics and reflecting both objective life conditions as processes and individuals’ subjective assessments of themselves, the world, and themselves in the world (Morozova, 2018; Semakina, 2012; Riff & Zarakovskii, 2009; Almakhaeva, 2007; Bazhenov & Malikov, 2002; Liga, 2006; Beliaeva, 2009; Zaitsev, 2001; Nekhoda et. al., 2018; Subetto, 2003; Davydov & Davydova, 1993). In this context, it is worth noting that the influence of said factors is complex and their close interplay, interaction, and intersection allow maintaining sufficient opportunities to preserve equilibrium in the “subject-environment” system. In this view of the quality of life, both the environment and separate individuals (or a group as an integral formation) act as equivalent components of a single system based on the feedback principle. Therefore, one of the most important factors in ensuring the quality of life is the factor of personal activity manifesting in an individual’s choice of the strategy

of interaction with the environment and, consequently, the formation of a way of life within the scope of implementation of the possibilities of the environment and the individual. In particular, this assumption is supported by the fact that, as demonstrated by many extremology and extreme psychology studies, if an individual has a positive attitude towards the environment based on adequate evaluation of the external conditions and their own internal resources, the possibility of them functioning optimally and achieving subjective satisfaction with the quality of life remains (Berkut, Skandakov, 2013; Bogomaz, Bokhan, Semke, 2012; Bychkov, 2008; Kondrashenkova, 2012; Lebedev, 1989; Leontiev, 2000; Frisch, 2006).

Methods

From the point of the integrative approach, the concept of “the quality of life” is viewed as a result of the interaction of the objective living environment characteristics and a person’s subjective capabilities in the “subject-environment” system expressed in the level of correspondence of the environmental parameters and characteristics of life processes to the needs, interests, values, and goals of a person (Zarakovskii, 2009; Aivazian, 2000; Ivanov, 2007; Spiridonov et. al., 2010; Savchenko, 2007; Serkin, 2009).

It is necessary to consider the parameters of the environment and personality allowing us to judge on the harmony/disharmony in the “subject-environment” system.

The objective environmental characteristics relevant to the realization of significant individual needs (biological, spiritual, social, etc.) include the level of environmental stress, orientation and mobility of the environment, and the saturation of the environment (Fakhrutdinova, 2010; Shiriaeva et. al., 2013).

The fundamental factor determining the nature of functioning of the “subject-environment” system is the level of environmental stress which can be examined in the context of studying the natural, economic, professional, urban, informational, socio-political, and socio-demographic conditions.

What is recognized as the main subjective criterion (personality factors) of reaching psychological well-being and, therefore, high quality of life in the living environment is a general feeling, mood that the living environment evokes. Thus, the main fundamental subjective factor shaping the form of functioning of the “subject-environment” system is the positive evaluation of the living environment (Neretina et. al., 2004, Surikova, 2012; Rossoshanskii A.I., Chekmareva 2016; Simakina, 2012; Farkhutdinova, 2010).

Based on the assumption that a person and the environment form a certain dynamic equilibrium and resource deficit in one subsystem can be compensated at the expense of the resource potential of the other subsystem, various types of interaction in the “subject-environment” are proposed: 1) a person with an insufficient resource potential in a deficient living environment; 2) a person with an insufficient resource potential in a comfortable living environment; 3) a person with a high resource potential in a deficient living environment; 4) a person with a high resource potential in a comfortable living environment. Various characteristics of the quality of life in the presence of different types of interaction between a person and the environment are also described.

Thus, the specifics of ensuring the quality of life in the context of extreme climatic and geographic and special socio-cultural conditions of life can be determined by the type of interaction strategy in the “subject-environment” system, namely by the combination of the resource content of the environment and the resource potential of a person, the nature of the system harmonization.

To identify the mechanisms of ensuring the quality of life depending on the strategy of interaction in the “subject-environment” system, in 2012-2020, we carried out clarifying empirical studies on the quality of life of persons living in an extreme region (Kamchatka Krai) focusing on several parameters: objective (environmental, age, gender, professional, economic, somatic, ethnocultural, sociocultural, stratum, etc.) and subjective (assessment of the living environment, individual psychological characteristics, personal resources, life satisfaction, etc.). The study sample consisted of more than 800 people living in the Kamchatka Territory mainly in the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

The methods used in empirical data collection are: the Life-Meaning Orientation Test (LSS) by J. Crumbaugh as adapted by D.A. Leontiev (2000); the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory as adapted by A. Syrtsova, E.V. Sokolova, and O.V. Mitina (2008); S. Maddi's Vitality test as adapted by D.A. Leontiev and E.I. Rasskazova (2006); Method for assessing the quality of life and satisfaction as adapted by E.I. Rasskazova (2012); the Quality of Life Inventory by M. Frisch translated by E.I. Rasskazova (2012).

Results

As a result of the study, it was determined that:

- What can be viewed as the variables determining the optimal experience of the subjective quality of life in depriving conditions are such personal characteristics as high tolerance of uncertainty, high meaningfulness of life, balanced time perspective, high vitality level; positive assessment of the living environment from the point of the presence of resources for personal growth and development; the assessment of the professional environment from the point of its meaningfulness, opportunities for achieving financial well-being, self-development, manifestations of activity, and creating harmonious relationships with others, as well as the experience of family well-being.

- The presence of a relationship between the meaningfulness of life, the assessment of its manageability, risk-taking, and personal activity both in terms of building interpersonal relationships, a career, and regarding the search for resources for the realization of significant values determines the optimal level of the quality of life.

- In the presence of a wide range of unfavorable environmental factors including the conditions of professional activity, the characteristics of the place of residence, and the development of recreational infrastructure and social support, the leading role in the subjective evaluation of the quality of life is played by the meaningful content of the activity, specifically the subjective assessment of the relationship between external activity and the degree of realization of important values and meanings. Establishing the positive nature of this relationship in the context of the personal time perspective (the past, present, and future) allows to somewhat “soften”, compensate the negative environmental factors which, in turn, affects the overall assessment of satisfaction with life. The higher subjective assessments of the quality of life are associated with a high level of worldview and social activity, a combination of tendencies focusing on self-assertion, establishing and supporting social contacts, and the importance of a sense of autonomy, independence, and “subjectivity” regarding one's life.

- Objective factors (age, place of residence, professional activity, income level) have a significant impact on the quality of life as they determine its substantive originality and general integrative assessment. The general “target of influence” (and, at the same time, the most probable “point of possible breakdown” in case of a destructive resolution of the situation) in this case is the problem of control, positive self-attitude, the possibility of self-affirmation and self-realization, the purposefulness and meaningfulness of the time perspective, the balance of emotional experiences.

- The content and dynamics of influence/change of objective factors (constant or situational impact, continuous nature of impact or episodic with increasing/stable/ emitting effects, sudden or expected change, etc.) shape the changes in the ratio of hedonistic and pragmatic orientations in assessing the quality of one's life; dependence on the social environment and autonomy primarily manifesting in the attitude towards social support and using the resources of interpersonal relations; the assessment of the quality of life as external or internal (and/or mixed) to an individual; the attitude towards situations of uncertainty, risk-taking; the ratio of assessments of the past, present, and future.

- The most destructive changes are found when a person perceives the situation as violating their freedom of will and realization of important goals, values, and meanings in the presence of low general assessment of the ability to control and manage one's life.

Discussion

As a result of the study, we have revealed the specifics of the "subject-environment" system in the context of different levels of the quality of life in extreme climatic and geographic and special socio-cultural conditions of life, identified the mechanisms and ways of coping with negative life phenomena characteristic of certain ways of perceiving the environment and oneself in it. The following strategies of interaction (general personal orientation) in the "subject-environment" system can be conditionally distinguished at different levels of the quality of life. Although the names of the strategies are arbitrary, they help to present their content quite comprehensively.

1. Activity strategy ("Let's talk about nice things", "Life as a new experience", etc.). Conscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("objective" assessment) – is not recognized as extreme; Subconscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("subjective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme. Mechanisms and ways of coping: external resources – emotionally rich but shallow interpersonal relationships; internal resources – denial, repression, suppression. Dissatisfaction/satisfaction zones: money, children.

2. Active strategy ("We need to think about it", "My home is my fortress", "Life is a struggle, overcoming!", etc.). Conscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("objective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme; Subconscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("subjective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme. Mechanisms and ways of coping: external resources – selectivity of contacts, family; internal resources – control. Dissatisfaction/satisfaction zones: children.

3. Adaptive strategy ("What can you do, you have to take what you can from life and it will take what it wants, this is how the world works and there is nothing special about it"; "At least we have volcanoes"). Conscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("objective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme; Subconscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("subjective" assessment) – is not recognized as extreme. Mechanisms and ways of coping: external resources – family, relatives, friends; internal resources – taking extreme things for granted, involvement. Dissatisfaction/satisfaction zones: emotional experiences.

4. Reactive strategy ("Life is hard but "fun", "Save yourself if you can"). Conscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("objective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme; Subconscious assessment of the environment as extreme ("subjective" assessment) – is recognized as extreme. Mechanisms and ways of coping: external resources – work, money; internal resources – vitality and awareness and balance in the time perspective (these resources are assessed as unavailable). Dissatisfaction/satisfaction zones: money, work, emotional experiences, the sphere of communication.

5. Self-protection strategy ("We will live, we will not die", "Be thankful for staying alive", "Be thankful for that there has not been a catastrophic earthquake yet"). Conscious assessment of

the environment as extreme (“objective” assessment) – is recognized as extreme; Subconscious assessment of the environment as extreme (“subjective” assessment) – is recognized as extreme. Mechanisms and ways of coping: external resources – rejection of productive forms of activity; internal resources – positive self-attitude, “anesthesia” of feelings, fatalism, risk-taking. Dissatisfaction/satisfaction zones: work, money, education, health, goals and values, play, creativity, children, emotional experiences, activity in free time, the sphere of communication.

Conclusion

Achieving the optimal level of quality of life in extreme living conditions calls for a harmonious combination of internal resources and environmental capabilities. The level of the quality of life can serve as a criterion of harmony in the “subject-environment” system in depriving living conditions.

The respondents with a low level of quality of life are characterized by a shortage of internal resources, “tunnel vision”, ignoring even those few positive conditions of the environment they live in. Consequently, when a person is aware of external possibilities, the forecast for achieving the optimal quality of life provided that certain social and psychological measures are carried out is favorable.

The main environmental resources of achieving the optimal quality of life in extreme living conditions are communication, the possibility of cooperation, i.e. the availability of social contacts, social support; the leading personal resources are positive emotional experiences, positive assessment of one’s past, the meaningfulness of life, and shifting the focus from perceiving oneself as an object affected by negative environmental conditions to viewing oneself as an active subject of one’s life path.

The obtained results can give a start to new theoretical and empirical research on the specifics of the quality of life in different social groups and allow specifying the goals, objectives, directions, and the main ways of helping and assisting different segments of the population to ensure a high quality of life depending on both the nature of external influences and the subjective assessment of the environment.

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