Changing Concept of Quality of Life across Generations

Funded by

University Grants Commission

New Delhi

By

Dr. Anagha Lavalekar

(Principal Investigator)

Dr. Sanhitta Karmalkar

(Research Assistant)

Jnana Prabodhini's Institute of Psychology,

510, Sadashiv Peth, Pune

2019

Duration : 2017-2019

Executive summary

The concept of QOL, though appears to be highly relevant, it poses new challenges in front of the researchers due to its complexity and subjectivity. QOL can be as state of – states, person, and social indicators (objective and subjective). The most influential definition has been given by Cummins (1997) as *'QOL is both subjective and objective, each axis being the aggregate of seven domains: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community and emotional well-being. Objective domains comprise culturally measures of objective well-being. Subjective domains comprise domain satisfaction weighted by their importance to the individual.'* Many concepts like well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, meaning in life are related to quality of life in a broader sense of term. Indian culture/ literature present this concept in a verity of other ways which at times seem contradictory to each other. The Vedic and Upanishad sages emphasized on understanding that which is permanent and eternal, rather than going after anything that is liable to decay or destruction or that is impermanent while psychologists like Abraham Maslow put forth the 'Hierarchy of needs' saying 'self-actualization' leads to highest quality of life. There have been studies exploring QOL across age groups, personality types, religious groups, gender and nations at large. Time has a lot of impact on such concepts. Hence, this study tries to explore how different generations perceive quality of life and how far they feel that they enjoy it as per their expectations. It also tries to explore the gender differences across gender and educational levels of the respondents as both these factors may have a considerable influence on the perceptions and experiences of QOL in one's life.

Thus the objectives of this project were:
- To explore differences on all the dimensions of Quality of Life, My Idea of Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being in age groups namely 20-29,30-39,40-59,60-60+
- To study gender differences on all the dimensions of Quality of Life, My Idea of Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being
- To study differences across three educational levels namely undergraduates, graduates and post-graduates on all the dimensions of Quality of Life, My Idea of Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being
- To study correlations between Quality of Life, My Idea of Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being

The tools used for this purpose were:

- Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale by Robert Cummins (objective indicators)
- My idea of QOL

Both these tools cover the aspects namely- material wellbeing, health, intimacy, productivity, safety, place in community, and emotional wellbeing.

- Carol Ryff's scale on Psychological wellbeing covering aspects: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relations with others.

Sample: The sample covered for the study was 330 (M= 167, F= 163). There were different age groups (ranging from 20 to 60+), different educational levels, and different occupations to ascertain the representative nature of the sample.

Data was collected from different socio-economic strata of the population (lower middle, middle and upper middle). Along with the principal investigator and the co-investigator, around 10 field workers collected the data from various areas. Field workers were instructed to establish contacts with various organizations and take permission for data collection. They were also trained in test administration and supervision. Testing was conducted in groups of 20-30 maximum and one test administrator and one supervisor were present throughout. They gave standardized and uniform instructions and clarified all the doubts of the participants.In order to study the aforementioned objectives, following statistical analyses were decided to be used.

- Descriptive statistics (Mean, Median, Mode, Standard Deviation)
- t-test
- One way ANOVA
- Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

Qualitative

Content analysis

Semi-structured interviews of highest and lowest scorers on Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale were conducted.

Results:

- Significant differences were found on material well-being, health, productivity, safety and total factual quality of life across four age groups namely 20-29, 30-39, 40-59,60-60+. The age group 40-59 was lowest in almost all areas of QOL.

- No significant differences were found on the importance and satisfaction domain of Quality of Life as measured by Cummins QOL scale.

- On My Idea of Quality of Life, which covers the ideas/priorities sought under Quality of Life, significant differences were seen on factors like material well-being, health and productivity.

- Also on Ryff's scale of Psychological Well-being, inter group differences were obtained on positive relations with others, environmental mastery, personal growth and total psychological well-being.

- It was also explored whether people belonging to different educational backgrounds, differed on these aspects. Significant differences were found on the dimension of productivity, health and place in community of quality of life (factual). Undergraduates were highest on health, graduates on place in community and post-graduates on productivity.

- Gender differences were observed on productivity (factual) of quality of life and no significant differences with respect to gender were seen on importance and satisfaction domain of quality of life.

- On Ryff's scale of psychological well-being, males and females differed on the following dimensions namely, autonomy, purpose in life and total psychological well-being.

Qualitative Analysis

Eleven semi structured interviews (of both, high and low scorers on perceived QOL) were conducted along with the psychological tests to collect qualitative data. The method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for this analysis through which following themes emerged.

➢ **Life journey:** Here, people have mostly spoken about the important phases in their life. These phases have contributed to their perspective about life.

➢ **Significant life experiences:** Here people mentioned both- positive and negative experiences, though negative experiences were most extensively talked about.

➢ **Priorities:** People were given a list of factors and they were told to arrange them in terms of the importance they give to each. The factors were as follows- Material well-being, health, emotional well-being, safety, place in community, productivity and intimacy. Most people have considered physical and mental health as the most important priority.

- ➢ **Material well-being:** In almost all the interviews conducted, there was an overall consensus regarding material well-being as the least important priority. People felt that the satisfaction from this domain is also dependent on satisfaction from other domains.

- ➢ **Discrepancy between the real and ideal life:** When asked about how people see themselves three years down the line, most interviewees generally saw a positive picture and hoped that their life would be better on all the levels.

- ➢ **Work life and its overall contribution to various spheres of life:** Gender differences were clearly seen in the way men and women look at satisfaction from work in their own ways.

- ➢ **Perceived definition of quality of life:** There seems to be an overall consensus that people consider happiness and mental satisfaction as the most important indicators of a meaningful and 'high-quality' life. People's idea of a happy, content and satisfied life is not only limited to their own individual happiness. It also includes the happiness of significant others around them.

- ➢ **Coping with emotional disturbances:** People mentioned various strategies to cope up with emotional disturbances. People mostly tried to look forward to future rather than getting stuck in past.

- ➢ **Role of relationships and strategies to maintain them:** High and low scorers on QOL could be differentiated distinctly on the basis of their outlook on human relationships and also strategies used by them to maintain close relationships. High scorers seemed to believe in the goodness of human beings and also thought that people usually have good intentions when it comes to any relationship.

- ➢ **Social belongingness:** Many people also expressed a desire to do something for society. Participants considered humanity and altruism as important human values. They mentioned- To lead a happy and meaningful life, it was required that they looked beyond themselves.

Implications: This study will help in understanding how different age groups perceive the quality of their life and their own psychological well-being. Needs of the specific age groups can be understood by studying in depth the discrepancy between factual-importance-satisfaction aspects of quality of life? The unique feature of the study is that it has attempted to investigate quality of life, idea of quality of life and psychological well-being across diverse age groups and in normal population. So, the findings are relevant in a collectivist culture like India.

Paper Published :

1. Lavalekar A., Karmalkar S. (2017) ,From Youth to elderly: A study of quality of life and psychological wellbeing, Indian Journal of Health and wellbeing,8(9), 1083-86.