Quality of Life and its Interrelationship with the Professional Community

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Качество на живот и неговата взаимосвързаност с професионалната общност

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Abstract

The present article examines the quality of life, its characteristics, and conditions of manifestation. Quality of life indicates the degree of well-being and satisfaction in individual and social terms. It relates to a set of factors representing well-being, physical condition, and health; material success and income; the social environment and contacts; emotional satisfaction; personal development. The article studies the professional community as one of the important prerequisites for quality of life because the profession and its related income, career, environment, and development opportunities a conditions for unfolding the objective and subjective dimensions of the quality of life in a personal and community plan. The professional community is also related to creating contacts and social capital, contributing to well-being. The analysis traces various types of inequalities that can reveal themselves in professional and social relationships and impact the quality of life. The article shows the activity environment as significant for the life characteristics of individuals and for their subjective evaluations and states, as well as for the perception of the quality of life as a complex variable measuring the status of individuals.

Keywords: quality of life, profession, profession community, well-being

Резюме

Настоящата статия изследва качеството на живот, неговите характеристики и условия на изява. Качеството на живот показва степента на благополучие и удовлетвореност в индивидуален и социален план. То е свързано с набор от фактори, които представят благополучието, отразявайки физическото състояние и здраве; материалния успех и доходи; социалната среда и контакти; емоционалната удовлетвореност; личностното развитие. Статията изследва професионалната общност, като една от важните предпоставки за качеството на живот, защото професията и свързаните с нея доходи, кариера, среда, възможности за развитие е условие за разгръщане на обективните и субективни дименсии на качеството на живот в личностен и общностен план. Професионалната общност е свързана и със създаването на контакти и социален капитал, които също допринасят за благополучието. В анализа се проследяват различни видове неравенства и неравнопоставеност, които могат да се проявят в професионалните и социални взаимоотношения и които оказват влияние върху качеството на живот. Статията показва дейностната среда като значима за жизнените характеристики на индивидите и за

субективните им оценки и състояния, както и за възприемането на качеството на живот като комплексна величина, измерваща статуса на индивидите.

Ключови думи: качество на живот, професия, професионална общност, благополучие

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Quality of life and its interrelationship with the professional community

The present article is focused on quality of life and its characteristics and conditions of manifestation. Quality of life indicates the degree of well-being and satisfaction in individual and social terms. (Quality of life, 2021). It is related to a set of factors that represent well-being, both material and emotional, and reflect:

- physical condition and health;
- material well-being and income;
- social environment and contacts;
- emotional satisfaction;
- personal development.

We can divide the listed factors into objective and subjective. Objective factors are measurable with real concrete characteristics such as income, level of consumption, career, and mobility. The personal factors of the quality of life are associated with various emotional states, such as - the subjective feeling of satisfaction and happiness that a person has in relation to individual details and as a generalized assessment of his life or stages. The present article examines the professional community as one of the essential things related to the quality of life because it is the profession and its related: income, career, environment, and mobility opportunities, which is a prerequisite for unfolding the objective and subjective dimensions of the quality of life. The professional community also represents that necessary condition for creating contacts and social capital. The article also traces various types of inequalities that can manifest themselves in professional and social relationships and impact the quality of life.

The overall pathos of the article is aimed at showing the activity environment as significant for the life characteristics of individuals and their subjective evaluations and states, as well as for the perception of the quality of life as a complex measuring the status of individuals.

Professional community

The professional community is a set of people performing a certain activity, a consequence of the social division of labor. It is closely related to the nature of the profession, which determines it in technological, symbolic, and social terms, and has the following main characteristics that format it:

- a diploma certifying the preparation and qualification of the individuals for the performance of the activity, as the diploma has been acquired at a university or higher school;

- recognition by the professional community, indicating the receiving of an evaluation by colleagues or organizations on the level of performance of professional activities;

- assessment by the users of the activity, this is the feedback that is received for the quality of the work performed and results obtained. This feedback can be carried out through end users or intermediaries who continue to the next stage of the activity.

For the performance of the relevant professional activity, the individual receives remuneration, which is the basis of the material aspects of the quality of life and consumption, indicating the level of qualification, skills, and inclusion in the organizational hierarchy. A professional community implies following certain technological rules, observing relevant norms, and sharing common values that construct the profession's identity. The professional community enjoys a certain prestige in society, which the profession and the people who perform it have. One of the indicators of the symbolic capital of the professional community is the number of those wishing to study the relevant specialty at a higher school and acquire a professional qualification.

A specific feature of the professional community is that its creation and maintenance depend on the national conditions for developing and establishing a profession. The conditions and possibilities for institutionalization, the opened jobs, and the correspondence between education and the labor market are of essential importance (Milenkova, Kovacheva, 2020), as well as the opportunities for the mobility of the members of the professional community, the amount of income received and their growth over time as a function of the demonstrated professionalism (Kyosev, 2007).

In the Middle Ages, three basic professions were established: medicine, law, and theology. The University of Paris, founded in the 13th century, had in its structure three faculties: theology, law, and medicine, and for a long time, these were the main professions. There is also another Faculty of Liberal Arts, which gave general training and was the basis for passing into any of the other three faculties to acquire a profession; subsequently, the lycées in France were created from the Faculty of Liberal Arts (Durkheim, 1969). The professions required extensive training, upon completion of which an oath (the Hippocratic Oath of physicians) was taken to uphold the principles that made up the code of ethics, which were strictly observed. In the Middle Ages, in parallel with the three established professions, there were also craft guilds, in which the permission to perform the occupation was evaluated according to strict rules (Durkheim, 1969).

Thus, historically, professions and the inclusion of individuals in vocational communities were strictly observed, and selection was seen as a matter of responsibility.

In the modern world, there are thousands of professions and nomenclature of professions characteristic of each particular country. In addition, the formation of professional communities also has a personal side, containing several elements:

- selection and orientation to a certain profession and community, for which the following are important: the nature and type of activities performed, opportunities for realization and growth, income, and type of employment;

- adaptation to the profession, which is related to gradual entry into the activities and working conditions, adaptation to the requirements, and assimilation of the traditions, norms, and rules creating socialization in the organizational and professional culture. Adaptation to the professional community is important for personal self-confidence and self-esteem, it is related to professional identity;

- career in the profession refers to the changes in the statuses of the members of the profession in terms of the activities and responsibilities performed, including the acquisition of a higher qualification or holding a higher position. A professional career is closely related to mobility, which can be horizontal when within the same place and vertical when an individual's job status changes;

- satisfaction with the profession and the professional community - this is a personal-psychological state that shows the individual assessment and perception of the vocational activities performed, the quality of work and the remuneration received, the opportunities for mobility, and the environment in which the individual works.

The professional community has objective characteristics, such as the nature of the activities carried out, the structure of the economy and non-economic sectors, politics, labor legislation, the institutionalization of the profession itself, and educational training, creating the framework in which the professional community develops. The subjective factors related to the individuals performing the professional activities, the degree of upholding ethical norms, and the profession's attractiveness are also important. All shown aspects of the professional community are directly related to the quality of life of individuals.

The online community is a specific type of community that is a consequence of the development of digital technologies, and that is relevant to the profession and professional

communities, but also to the quality of life. It is part of the virtual space, can complement the profession when it is closed, and includes only members of an organization, sector, or vocational group or is open, and there are no restrictions on communication. Using different platforms provides a selection of virtual community members designated to participate in chat rooms or forums based on social networks. Thanks to digital technologies, communication is facilitated through the Internet and activities of various natures. Online community dynamics are excellent because they can start other online groups that bring together some users with specific interests.

The types of online communities are differentiated based on different criteria. The typology can be made from the point of view of the individuals themselves - members of the community, as well as the model of behavior and publications they post: with what intensity, on what occasion, with what kind of orientation - positive or negative, critical or supportive. Another possible typology is related to the technical characteristics of online communities, which can be differentiated based on the possibilities for publishing and uploading various materials and opinions. The other typology is the division of communities based on profession and work or online communities based on leisure and entertainment, directly related to the quality of life. Online communities are an important part of working in an organization and in terms of people's daily lives and free time.

When the online community has a professional character, the leader is its creator, usually the head of the relevant team or department; there, people gather on specific tasks to discuss solving things related to the implementation of activities. They communicate in working order, prepare in advance for conference meetings, each member participates and makes the presentation, participates in discussions, etc. The formal nature of the professional online community also determines the nature of its existence, the type of meetings held, etc.

In informal online communities, the way of functioning is different. In them, the dynamics of meetings and publications, participation in discussions, and posting of information are determined by the members' desire, interest, free time, and attitude. Informal online communities differ in the information shared, the type of specialization, and the ability of their members to remain anonymous, allowing them to share opinions and evaluations freely. They also form leaders who informally manage the discussion because their opinion and position are considered prestigious.

Online communities are a virtual form of bringing people together, a way of supplementing personal communication, a means of expanding contacts between people, and a way of sharing opinions. In this sense, they are essential for both the objective and the subjective characteristics of the quality of life because they allow the conducting of the activity aspects and the social capital of individuals.

Social inequalities

Different forms of inequality are developing within professional communities, affecting the quality of life. Inequality is manifested by one or several indicators: income, education, participation in power, autonomy in decision-making, the standard of living, career, and prestige. Conditions of inequality are referred to as social inequalities. Each social inequality forms a scale in which the dimensions of the corresponding feature are arranged hierarchically: from the lowest to the highest degree. For example, the education scale combines the following degrees: no education, elementary, primary, secondary, bachelors, and masters, scientific degree: doctor.

Social inequalities affect all interactions and relationships in society and are interconnected. Inequalities are manifested through stratification and polarization, indicating the existence of hierarchies and vertical ordering of individuals and groups.

A key role is played by economic inequalities related to the individual's place in the professional structure and work, the amount of income and the various assets owned, their participation in management, and the division of activities. Economic inequalities affect the quality of life, attitudes, and relationships in individual and social contexts because economic inequalities and interests lead to and largely determine the overall social condition. Social disparities are related to each person's life, achievements, and results: this includes inequalities in income, education, profession, participation in power, etc. Social inequalities have different performances and are directly related to the quality of life, so that they will be briefly presented.

Gender inequalities

The essence of gender inequalities is expressed in the fact that the treatment of women and men is often different, and this is manifested in the division of labor, the performance and even attachment to specific roles and responsibilities, preferences in employment, creating unequal ways and opportunities for career, growth, and quality of life. In this sense, gender inequalities are mostly connected with certain prejudices. Linking the division of labor to gender

is one of the first historically emerged forms, which deepened with the development of industrialization. Today, gender inequalities are tied to work and:

- differential pay for men and women doing the same job is common;
- the fact that women work in lower-paid professions, as a result of which their insurance income is lower;
- the fact that women with small children are absent from work more often, and therefore employers prefer to hire men.

Ethnic inequalities

They result from the creation of hierarchical differences between ethnic communities and are reflected in unequal access to services, activities, resources, and different quality of life. Ethnic inequalities are socially constructed, culminating in the underestimation and limitation of opportunities for specific communities and groups, leading to poverty and marginalization. The indicators that identify the presence of inequality concerning ethnic communities are the following:

- employment status, income, and educational status;
- ratio/share of economically inactive and unemployed persons by ethnicity;
- degree of qualification and professional skills;
- conditions and quality of life in ethnic neighborhoods/ghettos;
- state of health status by ethnicity.

Age inequalities

Age inequalities are expressed in unequal treatment of people in terms of careers or resources of individuals or communities because of their age. Age inequalities are based on beliefs and ideas that different ages are not in identical positions and should be treated differently in specific situations.

Age discrimination occurs primarily when age is used as an unfair societal criterion. For example, to introduce age restrictions for employment or training in companies. Age inequalities are dictated by employers' attitudes toward the capabilities and competencies of different generations. The most visible is the risk of an unequal position for the youngest workers due to lack of work experience and experience, as well as for community workers aged 60+ due to outdated technological competencies, insufficient command of foreign languages, etc. Thus, in

modern societies, there is a tendency for both the young and the old to be placed in a relatively disadvantaged position, affecting their quality of life.

Empirical dimensions of quality of life

This paragraph presents empirical results from a nationally representative survey[1] with 3600 respondents aged 18+ (Manov, Milenkova, 2021).

We present job satisfaction and perceptions of one's income as one of the basic subjective indicators of quality of life.

The majority of interviewees are satisfied with their work - nearly 60% answer with "extremely satisfied" and "satisfied," while 13% are "extremely dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied."

In addition:

- 25.4% of respondents have ever worked overtime for which they were not paid;

- 19.5% have ever performed unpaid work;

- 23.5 percent worked without a contract with an employer.

Among the unemployed, over 92% were employed by an employer in their last job and were mainly employed in the following industries:

manufacturing industry (23%)

agriculture, hunting, and forestry (13.5%)

other activities serving society and the individual (12.3%)

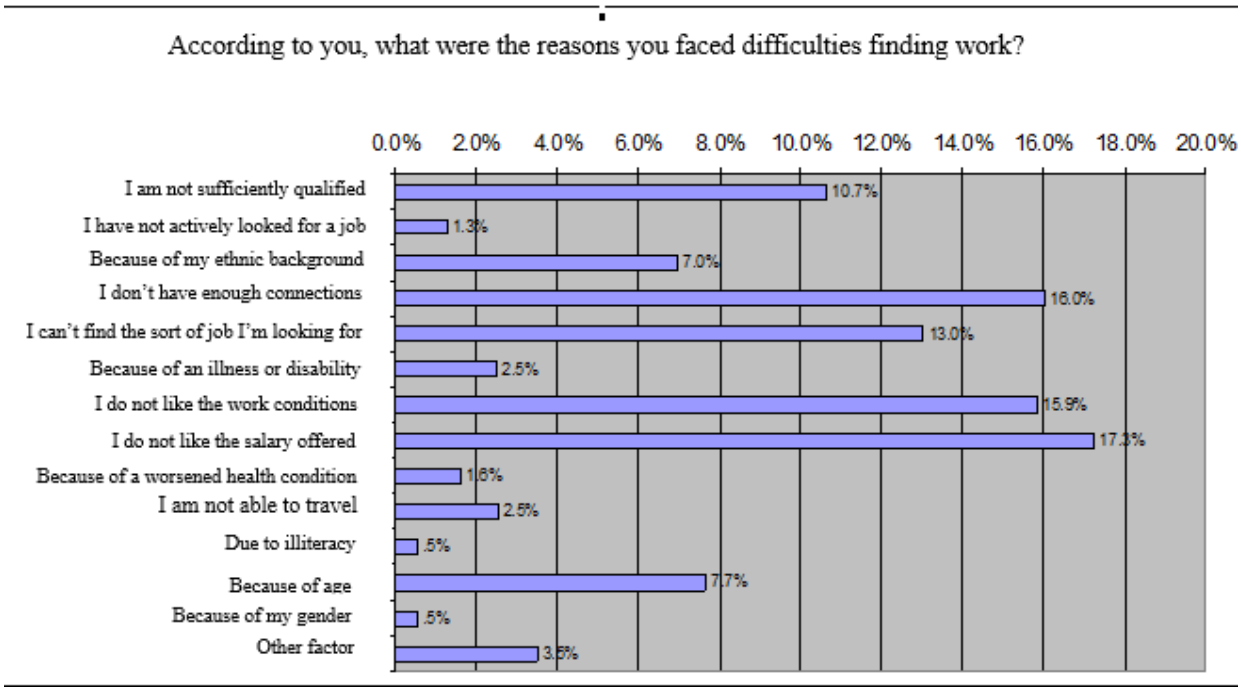
trade (9.4%) and others.

35.2% of respondents shared that they experienced difficulties in finding work. The factors are presented in Figure 1. The most common responses are: "I do not like the pay they offer," "I do not like the working conditions," and "I do not have enough connections." As well as the following responses: "There is a financial crisis, it is hard to find work," "lack of experience," "lack of job offers in the area," "lack of work opportunities in the company," "lack of work experience." Another important factor is raising young children: "Employers do not want women with young children." Some responses also show that there exist heavily discriminatory conditions: "for political reasons" or "do not speak Turkish!".

[1] A national representative survey “Identifying and making profiles of groups and communities most affected by the risk of discrimination" (2017) in the implementation of Action 1 of the project "Prevention of discrimination and creating equal opportunities" BG05M9OP0013.003-0001-C001 " with team leader prof. Valentina Milenkova was conducted.

Figure 1

Reasons for difficulties finding work



The analysis focuses on work because it is at the core of the quality of life as it creates people's material well-being and consumption. The most common reasons for difficulties in finding a job are related to working conditions and wages.

The obtained results in terms of income are a severe indicator of the material side of the quality of life and consumption. The low incomes of Bulgarian society are an indicator of the low quality of life of the people. When asked how they position themselves on a ten-point scale, nearly 62% of respondents place themselves in the poorer part of the income scale (between positions "poor," 1, 2, 3, and 4). Presenting the sources of their income, the respondents indicate that the primary source of income for households at:

- 58% of the cases are wages, labor remuneration;

- 29.6% are pensions,

- 2.7% indicate "other sources" (e.g., income through "relatives working abroad").

Furthermore:

- 27.2% of individuals share that they experience severe difficulties with the income they receive;

- 39.9% experience specific difficulties;

- only 1/3 of the respondents (30.7%) claim that they manage with the income they receive.

Based on the aggregated data, it can be said that significant shares of the respondents believe that:

People of different ethnic origins are less likely to find work and be promoted than the rest (50.6%).

People with non-standard sexual orientation are less likely to find a job and/or be promoted than the rest (48.7%).

People with a physical or mental disability are less likely to find work and/or be promoted than the rest (85%).

People over 55 are less likely to find a job and/or be promoted than the rest (76.1%).

Another method within the conducted research was focus groups. In the 12 focus groups held in the six economic regions of the country, various characteristics by gender, age, and ethnicity are tracked, which show the quality of life in different contexts: workplace, working conditions, and social inclusion.

The analysis of the conducted focus groups shows that in almost all regions of the country, clearly expressed inequalities are manifested, which are based on several characteristics - age, gender, disabilities, and ethnicity and are evidence of the low quality of life. According to the results of the group discussions, the most vulnerable are single mothers, women with no or low education, and Roma women.

At the workplace:

- there is unequal pay between men and women under the same working conditions and job characteristics to the detriment of women.

- men more often grow in a career than women.

- there is a refusal to hire young girls because they are potential mothers.

- pregnant women in some regions have problems using vacation or sick leave, which is not preferred for employment.

- there are problems with employment in the 55+ age group.

- there are difficulties in the professional development of women with children and women who reintegrate into the labor market immediately after maternity leave.

Conclusion

The overall analysis and the presented results show the existence of inequalities in various signs, but they are also an indicator of differences in the quality of life of individuals. Thus, the profession, workplace, working conditions, and income become the starting point of people's quality of life. In addition to the objective dimensions of the quality of life, the subjective aspect shows individual perceptions and how different parts of the actual situation of individuals are evaluated. It turns out that people with the same status can self-assess differently. For this, the starting position from which self-assessment is made and the cultural capital, confidence, and attitudes of people are important.

In general, the results of various studies show a relatively low index of generalized assessment of the quality of life among Bulgarians, characterized by little optimism and low expectations. This is not only a consequence of Bulgarian folk psychology, distinguished by pessimism and criticism. To a large extent, this assessment stems from the real state of the economy, politics, unemployment, the low standard of the population, and the comparison with other European countries and life there. In this context, we can also talk about the serious stratifications and social contradictions in Bulgarian society and how society develops and prospers.

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