

THE MEANING OF LIFE FOR UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE

MEANING OF LIFE

The social worker dictionary defines the meaning of life as a regulative term that modifies and explains social norms by which a person should guide themselves. A person's value system, along with their confrontation with social norms, helps to define the secret of an individual's existence, also known as the meaning of life (Strieženec 1996). Understanding the meaning of life means understanding ourselves. When we consider the meaning of life it does not have to mean only one thing; therefore we can discuss the so-called plurality of meanings. We assign different meanings to each of our spheres of life. We can deliberate the pathology of the purpose of our existence, as such meanings can strengthen each other (when we reach one meaning we can proceed to reach another one) or contradict each other (Šulavíková, Sejčová 2008).

Philosophy regards questions on meaning of life as the basic ones. The everlasting questions that are part of a person's life are: *Who am I?*, *Where does my life lead to?*, *What is my purpose?*, and *What is the value of my life?* (Balogová 2009).

PATHS TO LIFE-MEANING

According to V. E. Frankl, searching for the meaning of life is a primary force. Every person must discover the meaning and accomplish it on their own. A meaning must be found, not created. We need to ask what life expects from us, not what we expect from life. As a result of the everyday requirements of life the meaning is not precisely defined. According to V. E. Frankl, the meaning can be found in three different ways: when we are creating some product, in the service of love, or in real life situations where a person's fate cannot be changed. A meaning can be found despite suffering (Šulavíková, Sejčová 2008). These paths (values), as stated by Frankl, can be the source of the meaning of life. They are:

Experience Values

We can define our lives as meaningful when we can embrace the variety and colourfulness of it. We can feel experience values and beauty through the observation of nature or other human-made things such as art, sports, science, and technology. Meeting other people and contact with other people in general can be defined as one of the important experience values. This can occur during many activities, but it especially happens when expressing love to someone. These experiences acquire meaning when they are beautiful themselves, and when the person who perceives them is also personally participating in them. By participating in them, the person brings something valuable to this world. We discover the true beauty of life through such experience values and with their assistance; we can meaningfully build up our life in various aspects (Längle 2002).

Creative Values

A person perceives their life as meaningful, when they creatively affect this world. The main aspect of creative values is for a person to receive something valuable in exchange for giving and enriching the world with something equally as valuable. Giving and receiving are the main principles of growth and evolution. These principles apply to all spheres of life: the biological sphere, the psychological sphere, and also the sphere of decision-making and responsibility. To summarise the creative values of life, their main attribute is to create something or accomplish some deed. A person's interest in such an accomplishment is much more important than the accomplishment itself. In addition, the nature of this accomplishment is determined by their skills and abilities. Only commitment and devotion give true value to a person's actions. However, the biggest opus is a person's unending work in handling their life (Längle 2002).

Attitude Values

People are not equipped to handle hopeless situations in life very well. We all know how hard it is to deal with the death of a loved one, or with a terminal disease. Sometimes a person cannot find anything positive that would help them handle such situations. An existential analysis of V. E. Frankl tries to show people that there are such positive things, no matter what you may believe. According to one proverb, fate often bars the door, but leaves an open window. A person must not be afraid to use this window. A person has to be themselves while they suffer. When the freedom of choice was taken from the outside world, we have to use our inner freedom to face

fate (Längle 2002). Suffering brought along questions about the meaning of life, since any attempt to find such meaning was blocked by this suffering. On the other hand, not having an answer to the meaning of life was also considered as a specific form of suffering. Every person wanted to avoid such a situation in their life (Palenčár 2011).

COMPONENTS OF THE MEANING OF LIFE

In literature, the most widespread three-component model of the meaning of life was revered the most. Reker and Wong, who understand the meaning of life as a multidimensional construction composed of three parts that affect each other, are also the creators of this model. The three parts are cognitive, motivational, and affective.

Cognitive Part

This part is connected with cognitive setting, which is made from a system of beliefs, importance, and expectations that are centred on you, the world, and your own life. It is also centred on how a person assigns meaning to their life, how they can deal with life situations, and it also centred on questions about coping with the final meaning. This part gives meaning to a person's life. Another purpose of this part is also the fact that it allows an understanding of the meaning of various life situations, and to coherently sort them out. The high criterion of the meaning of life, awareness of organisation in life, and also our purpose or the final goal, all depends on the development of the cognitive part. Undeveloped cognitive part can be the cause of confusion in life and existential anxiety (Halama 2007).

Motivational Part

With this part, it is all about fulfilling different goals, activities, and values that a person considers to be important in their life. A person spends a great amount of time and strength on activities that contribute to the fulfilment of their goal. A person with a developed motivational part has different values, goals and is keen to fulfil these goals, even when a failure occurs. A deficit in activities, life goals, and also boredom and disinterest are usual companions to an undeveloped motivational part (Halama 2007).

Affective Part

A person's feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment comes from accomplishing their goals through experiences that they encounter and from a positive

outlook on life. A person with a developed affective part is happy and satisfied with their life. On the contrary, a person with an undeveloped affective part is unhappy, sad and feels depressed (Halama 2007).

MEANING OF LIFE OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE

When we discuss satisfaction from working, it is a situation for an unemployed person when the rewarding system of society does not apply to them. Unemployment is an issue of career advancement and negative changes in the rewarding codex. A career is much more than the act of finding a job; it is also a compilation of behavioural models and ways of thinking. Losing a job means much. It raises questions about the job in which they were employed and the meaning of life (Hvozdík, Rosíková 2004).

As Frankl discovered, when an unemployed person gets a job (it may be paid or not), they are happier. They speak about a state of mind, when a person does not have anything to live for, when any meaning of life is absent (Halama 2007). When a person tries to accomplish something and do not to give up on their values, they perceive their life as more perspective. All of this was discovered during past research on the subject of the meaning of life. This research also showed that a person with precisely defined goals has it easier in life than a person who does not know what they want. (Žiaková, Ščensná 2009).

Social Work and Unemployed People

Social work is one the tools used for cooperating with unemployed people. Nowadays, when the number of unemployed people increases, there will soon be more people who will need some sort of social assistance (Žilová 2003). The general theory of social work provides guidelines for social workers when working with unemployed people, but the social worker has to consider the specific attributes of this group of people and make of use of specific stages of social work. A social worker working with the unemployed has to know basic information about the issue, mainly its reasons, consequences, and solutions for it. They should be motivated to work with this specific group of people. It is necessary that a social worker always behaves correctly and follows the ethical code of a social worker. A social worker's main task is to develop the potential of their client and their family. Social work is mostly conducted solely with the unemployed person and working together with his family is not much often seen. The most common working methods are social consultation and socio-legal protection (Balogová 2003).

Social work services try to accomplish two main roles for unemployed people:

- They are necessary in order to provide mental support for the long-term unemployed, because long-lasting unemployment causes stress, uncertainty and hurts family relationships.
- They are necessary in order to help people again become employed.

There are many subjective and objective reasons for being removed from the job market. These reasons can be: low qualification, low self-esteem, low competence, or losing interest in working. This exclusion from the job market goes hand in hand with social exclusion and may lead to confusion on whether the main problem is of a social character or due to unemployment (Kodymová, Kolářková 2005).

Social Consultation for the Unemployed

There is ongoing successful development of consulting services for unemployed people. It should be comprised of three levels. The primary level should contain consulting and information services, which will be available at the Labour Office. The secondary level will also be available at the Labour Office and carried out by qualified employees. They will focus on consulting services in the areas of professional orientation, development of business activities, and both psychological and legal advice. The highest level will be focused on specialised consultation for people who suffered trauma after losing their job and have problems with finding new employment. Mass and group counselling for unemployed people will mainly be in job clubs. Social skills training will be conducted in group counselling and these skills should lead to future employment. Other special activities for the long-term unemployed, unemployed people under 18 years of age, and mentally or physically disabled unemployed people, are available (Schavel 2004). *The goal of consulting services for unemployed people is to provide information, help, and professional advice when choosing a new job, and to help with the right choice of requalification, while considering the specific needs, requirements, health and the situation on the job market* (Schavel, Oláh 2010: 90). Labour Offices are the providers of these services. A social worker is irreplaceable when it comes to securing the rights and duties of people, analysing the client's social situation, and they can provide an overview of the social reality. They also have knowledge on specific problems, availabilities, arrangements, and solutions (Schavel, Oláh 2010).

One of the basic principles of this consultation is that it is free of charge, the client decides if they wish to use these services and the consultant must

remember that their client has the right to make decisions for themselves and to take responsibility for these decisions (Žilová 2003).

We can define the purpose of Labour Office activities from two points of view.

The purpose of consulting services from an individual point of view: effective use of free time; the social and psychological stability of the unemployed person; gaining knowledge and experience about the job market.

The purpose of consulting services from the social point of view: protection from the social pressures of society; prevention of deterioration in working potential; a promising investment into a quality labour force (Žilová 1998).

Consulting services provide an important role of preventing long-term unemployment and eliminating social pressure in society.

RESEARCH

The goal of the research was to determine how unemployment affects the meaning of life for current and long-term unemployed people. Our questions were based on our goal and specification of the problem:

What is the difference in perception of the meaning of life between the currently unemployed and the long-term unemployed?

What is the difference in perception of the meaning of life between men and women?

What is the difference in perception of the meaning of life between the unemployed who live in urban areas versus those living in rural areas?

What is the difference in perception of job importance in the meaning of life between people with a higher education versus those with a lower education?

Are drugs and alcohol a solution for both current and long-term unemployed people when searching for the meaning of life?

What is the difference in perception of death between the currently unemployed and the long-term unemployed?

HYPOTHESIS

HH1: We assumed that the currently unemployed find a greater meaning of life than the long-term unemployed do.

HH2: We assumed that more unemployed women versus unemployed men, consider family to be their meaning of life.

HH3: We assumed that unemployed people living in villages have a better opportunity to find the meaning of life as opposed to those living in a city.

HH4: We assumed that psychosomatic disabilities will occur more in long-term unemployed people than in the currently unemployed.

HH5: We assumed that unemployed people with a higher degree of education would consider having a job more important as opposed to those with a lower education.

HH6: We assumed that long-term unemployed people are more susceptible to drugs and alcohol than the currently unemployed, when searching for the meaning of life.

HH7: We assumed that long-term unemployed people have a more negative approach to death than the currently unemployed.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

We used a quantitative method and the PIL (Purpose in Life Test) questionnaire when conducting our research. J.C.Crumbaugh and L.T.Maholick are the authors of the PIL questionnaire and they published it in 1964. The questionnaire focuses on the issue of the meaning of life, the fear of death, and questions about responsibility and freedom.

The PIL questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part is composed of 20 subparts which address the issue of life goals. These 20 subparts are rated on a 7 points scale. Higher numbers mean that a person has a positive outlook on life and its meaning. We get the results of the first part by totaling the points from all 20 subparts. The total amount can vary from 20 to 140 points. As was already mentioned, a higher number represents a more positive outlook on life and its meaning. The content of the first part is composed of questions concerning an affirmation of life, self-acceptance, freedom, perceived goals, and future, and opinions about death. The second part is composed of 13 unfinished sentences. The third part involves writing down their personal goals and plans for the future (Křivohlavý 2006). We also used a questionnaire about psychosomatic disabilities.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

130 unemployed people participated in the research. 72 of them were currently unemployed (less than 24 months) and 58 of them were long-term unemployed (more than 24 months). The respondents had to be unem-

ployed. The research was conducted via internet. The anticipated participation was 200 respondents, but in the end only 130 of them were willing to participate. The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 55 years. 45 of them were men while 85 of them were women. There were 75 participants living who lived in a city and 55 participants who lived in a village. 11 of the respondents had only a basic education, 66 had secondary school education, 52 had a university diploma, and 1 respondent had a doctorate.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The statistics programme SPSS was used to evaluate the research results. Specifically, a t-test was used for 2 independent samples and a chi-quadrade test was used for two independent criteria.

HH1: We assumed that the currently unemployed find a greater meaning of life than the long-term unemployed do.

The first part of the PIL questionnaire was used to evaluate this hypothesis. We used a t-test for 2 independent samples during the evaluation. Currently unemployed people achieved an average score of 101, 32 and long-term unemployed people achieved an average score of 79, 47, which was less than the currently unemployed. The value $p = 0.000$ proves that our assumption was correct. We can say that currently unemployed people find a greater meaning of life.

HH2: We assumed that more unemployed women versus unemployed men, consider family to be their meaning of life.

Questions from the third part of the PIL questionnaire were used to prove this hypothesis. These questions were: question 3- *The most important thing in my life is....*, and question 8- *I spend most of my energy....* We used chi-quadrade test for 2 independent criteria. We discovered that 15 out of 45 men (33%) consider family as their meaning of life, and 44 out of 85 women (51, 8%) consider family as their meaning of life. Since the value $p < 0.05$, specifically $p = 0.045$, we can state that our hypothesis was confirmed. We can affirm that unemployed women consider family as their meaning of life in a higher degree than unemployed men.

HH3: We assumed that unemployed people living in villages have a better opportunity to find the meaning of life as opposed to those living in a city.

The first part of the PIL questionnaire was used to evaluate this hypothesis. We used a t-test for 2 independent samples during the evaluation. The average score for people living in cities was 95, 6667, and the average score

for people living in villages was 85, 9818. According to these results we can state that people living in cities have a more positive outlook on life and its meaning since $p < 0.05$, in this case specifically $p = 0.039$. This means that there are significant differences between people living in a village to those living in a city when it comes to the outlook on the meaning of life.

HH4: We assumed that psychosomatic disabilities would occur more in long-term unemployed people than in the currently unemployed.

We used the results of the psychosomatic disabilities questionnaire to evaluate this hypothesis. We used a chi-square test for 2 independent criteria. We found that only 5 of the currently unemployed individuals had psychosomatic disabilities, which is 6.9% of the currently unemployed. 9 of the long-term unemployed showed cases of psychosomatic disabilities, which is 15.5%. Our hypothesis proved to be correct, since $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.043$).

HH5: We assumed that unemployed people with a higher degree of education would consider having a job more important as opposed to those with a lower education.

Questions from the third part of the PIL questionnaire were used to prove this hypothesis. These questions were: question 3- *The most important thing in my life is....*, and question 8- *I spend most of my energy....* We used a chi-square test for 2 independent criteria. Our research showed that 7 out of 11 (63.6%) persons with a basic education consider having a job to be important. 39 out of 66 (59.1%) persons with a secondary school education consider employment to be important. 25 out of 52 (48.1%) persons with a university diploma consider employment to be important, and the one person with a doctorate considers family to be more important than a job. This means that $p=0.392$ which is greater than 0.05, and therefore making our hypothesis incorrect.

HH6: We assumed that long-term unemployed people are more susceptible to drugs and alcohol than the currently unemployed, when searching for the meaning of life.

To evaluate this hypothesis, we used answers to a question from the second part of the PIL questionnaire, specifically question 10: Finding a solution to alcohol and drug consumption is... We used a chi-square test for 2 independent criteria. The results showed that 15.5 % of the long-term unemployed had a positive opinion on consuming drugs and alcohol while only 7% of the currently unemployed had a positive opinion on consuming drugs and alcohol. In this case $p=0.256$, which is greater than 0.05 and this revealed that our hypothesis was false, that there are no significant differences in

opinion between the current and the long-term unemployed when it concerns alcohol and drugs.

HH7: We assumed that long-term unemployed people have a more negative approach to death than the currently unemployed.

We used the sum of two questions from the first part of the PIL questionnaire to evaluate this hypothesis. These questions were: Q 15: My opinion on death is.... Moreover, Q 16: My opinion on suicide is... We used a t-test for 2 independent samples during the evaluation. We discovered that currently unemployed people scored 8.93 and long-term unemployed people scored 8.21. The maximum score possible was 14 while the minimum was 2. A higher score means that respondents have a more positive outlook on death. Although the currently unemployed had a more positive outlook on death, with $p=0.189$, meaning that there are no significant differences between currently unemployed people and long-term unemployed people. Our hypothesis was incorrect.

CONCLUSION

We attempted to compare our results with the results of other similar research. Similar research was conducted in 2009 (Žiaková, Ščensná 2009). One of the goals of this research was to discover what kind of impact long-term unemployment has on an unemployed person's meaning of life. The research also used the PIL questionnaire, but had only 30 participants who were unemployed for more than 12 months. Our research considered a person to be long-term unemployed when they did not have a job for more than 24 months. The age of respondents was similar in both studies. We tried to compare the hypothesis regarding the negative opinion of death for long-term unemployed people, but none of this research proved this hypothesis. In this particular study, the majority of respondents considered death to be a natural part of life and had a positive opinion about it. In our research, we discovered that unemployed people do not have a strictly negative opinion of death, since their average score was 8 out of 14 possible points. When it comes to an affirmation of life, 53% had an above-average affirmation. Our research showed that long-term unemployed people had an average affirmation of life.

The empirical sociological research of unemployment was conducted from October 2005 to January 2006 with respondents from the records of the Labour Office in Košice. This research was conducted through a direct interview with 600 participants. The goal of this research was to study the satisfac-

tion with their personal life, and a 4-point scale was used. 75% of respondents expressed that they are dissatisfied with their life. The longer the person was unemployed, the less satisfied they were with their life. This result regarding their dissatisfaction with life contradicts the results of our research. Such high dissatisfaction was not recorded in our research (Paukovič 2007). Based on these results, we can confirm that the longer a person remains unemployed, the more their meaning of life diminishes. Long-term unemployed people have a lower self-acceptance in comparison to the currently unemployed. When it comes to comparing the element of freedom, long-term unemployed people say that their life is more influenced by their environment and heritage, and that they are more likely to feel that they do not have their life fully in control. Those, who were unemployed for less than 24 months showed a more positive outlook on future and life goals. It is necessary to give more attention to this issue, even when the results did not show a strictly negative outlook on life and its meaning. We should focus on long-term unemployed people, so they will be both willing and able to work again. We should also pay attention to the currently unemployed, since they can also reach the stage of long-term unemployment. One of the first steps should be allowing young people to be successful in the job market. It is important to focus on those who are less qualified. Prevention and sufficient awareness are necessary. One preventative action should be preparing people for employment, beginning in elementary school and continuing all the way to the training of adults and seniors. However, education is solely not enough for being successful in the job market. This has been proved through our research sample, where 40% of unemployed people had a university diploma and 51% had a secondary school education. If a person wants to be successful, they have to be assertive and communicative. For this reason, the importance of social consultation should be highlighted. Group consultation can work as training, where the client can learn new skills, gain new experience, and learn how to work in groups. Therefore, we recommend increasing subsidies on active market policy and the requalification of unemployed people.

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Summary

The article deals with research on the meaning of life for unemployed people. Our goal was to answer questions about how short-term and long-term unemployment affects the meaning of life for unemployed people, and how social work can help. Unemployment endangers society as a whole and has a negative influence on unemployed people and their families. The article is about researching the meaning of life for people, who are unemployed for a short or a long period of time. Within our research, we used a quantitative method, specifically the PIL questionnaire

(Purpose in Life Test) and the Life goals (Crumbaugh, Maholick 1964) questionnaire. The target group was comprised of 130 unemployed respondents, specifically 72 of them who were currently unemployed and 58 of them who were long-term unemployed. The choice was not accidental. The results of this research will be thoroughly analysed. The conclusion will be about recommendations for the practice of social work and the fact that we need to give more attention to the long-term unemployed in order to encourage them to again become employed.

Key words: meaning of life, the path to gain life-meaning, components to the life meaning, short-term, long-term unemployed