



ACTA MISSIOLOGICA

Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024 | ISSN 1337-7515 (Print) | ISSN 2453-7160 (On-line)
www.actamissiologicalica.com

*Academic journal of St. John Paul II. Institute of Missiology and Tropical Health
at St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Sciences, Bratislava – Slovakia*

THEMATIC FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE:

**DISCUSSED AND RELEVANT TOPICS IN RELIGION,
PALLIATIVE CARE, SOCIAL WORK AND OTHER
INSPIRING AREAS**

THE VALUE OF ETERNAL LIFE AS A PRECURSOR
TO THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR OF DEATH AND DYING
IN THE CONTEXT OF PALLIATIVE CARE

Ivana Olecká, Jiří Pospíšil

HOMILETIC ACCENTS OF ETHICAL MOMENTS
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SOCIAL-CHARITABLE THINKING AND THEOLOGY
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OF CARTHAGE TO A PANDEMIC IN THE 3RD CENTURY

Miloš Lichner, Józef Kulisz

FORGIVING OFFENDERS AND CHARACTERISTICS
OF EXPERIENCE

Vladimír Dočkal, Iveta Schusterová, Mário Schwarz

ACTA MISSIOLOGICA

Peer-reviewed academic journal

Our mission is to create an international platform for experts engaged in the field of Christian mission and missiology, charity, social and humanitarian development work at the theoretical, research and application levels. The journal has been creating room within this international platform for further specificities covering the aforementioned fields that will produce new relevant findings and interconnections in order to promote the journal more to the widest possible professional community and stimulate a greater interest within it. One such field is international public law with its unique scientific and relevant, direct and close link to international missionary work, and several other relevant aspects from other fields on which the journal focuses. The journal publishes a wide spectrum of articles relevant for education with special focus on assisting professions in the aforementioned areas. This area includes all educational, health, social, legal (especially international humanitarian law, international human rights law, diplomatic law and international treaty law), international organization and spiritual topics connected to the missionary context.

As of Autumn 2020, the journal will be focusing on specialised unique scientific and expert research at the international level, covering all the topics the journal has focused on thus far while also introducing new ones. One such aspect of scientific and expert research that the journal is going to focus on is the support for the family structure and its value in today's society, as well as the promotion of human dignity and value in various essential aspects of life with a view to opening up effective dialogue on various relevant and interesting ideas about non-radicalised Islam, thus also benefiting the Christian environment.

Published twice a year

ISSN: 2453-7160 (online)

ISSN: 1337-7515 (print)

The journal is indexed in the Web of Science database

This issue was published in Bratislava on 29 May 2024

Published by:

St. John Paul II. Institute of Missiology and Tropical Health in Bratislava, Slovakia at St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Science in Bratislava, Slovakia, (Polianky, Pod Brehmi 4/A, 841 01 Bratislava, Slovakia)

Company registration number:

31-821 979

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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Dear Colleagues and Readers of Acta Missiologica,

Stress is a common aspect of our lives. A significant source of stress is experiencing grief and anxiety over the loss of a loved one. As a result, many negative impacts on physical, psychological, and emotional health may manifest. To cope with grief and its processing, it is important to redefine the relationship with the deceased and maintain their symbolic presence on a spiritual level or in memory. Another contemporary source of stress is the modern work environment. Various research studies suggest that religious beliefs and values assist in coping with stress in the workplace, as well as in challenging life situations, including the loss of a loved one. They facilitate the continued bond with the deceased loved one and have a positive impact on work performance, shaping how individuals perceive and respond to challenging life events, thereby helping to reduce the level of experienced stress. Forgiveness can also contribute to coping with grief and stress. It involves letting go of resistance, anger, guilt, and the desire for revenge, providing emotional relief and encouraging the expansion of compassion and understanding towards oneself and others. The experienced stress or grief from the loss of a loved one can lead to tension in relationships or conflicts. Forgiveness can help resolve these issues, restore inner peace, and provide a different, more positive perspective on the situations experienced.

Publication articles in this issue Acta Missiologica in the field of religion and social work also touch upon the formation of human personality and values, as well as the perception of stress and the loss of a loved one. They contribute to the integration of various academic subjects and support the work of both academics and practitioners. They provide them with various perspectives for practical application and further independent research in the respective disciplines.

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THE VALUE OF ETERNAL LIFE AS A PRECURSOR TO THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR OF DEATH AND DYING IN THE CONTEXT OF PALLIATIVE CARE*



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Submitted: 26 October 2023

Accepted for publication: 5 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The aim of the study was to analyse the relationship between the value of eternal life and the experience of fear of death in Czech and Slovak population.

Methods: Questionnaire survey (n=4586, CZ 3032, SK 1554) on the adult population (people over 20 years of age). Two-way ANOVA was used to test the dependence analysis, the dependence was tested at the level of $p \leq 0,05$. The sample is representative by gender and age for both countries.

Results: The level of the fearful feeling is the same in both countries. It is influenced by preferences for the value of eternal life, but no interaction between populations and preferences for the value of eternal life has been shown. Avoidance of thinking about death varies by country. It is also influenced by preferences for the value of eternal life, as well as the interaction of these two factors. The people with high preference for the value of eternal life in the Czech population avoid of thinking about death. It indicates a stronger influence of this value than in the Slovak population. The feeling of uncertainty is the same in both countries. Preferences for the value of eternal life influence it. The interaction of country and value preference alters the perception of feeling insecure when dying. The uncertainty is significantly lower for people with a high preference for the value of eternal life in the Czech population. It indicates a stronger influence of this value than in the SR population.

Conclusion: In palliative care, it is necessary to work intensively with the experience of the fear of death by coming to terms with the value of eternal life. Two paths open up: positive one which leads to a deepening of the preference for value and the expectations associated with it; negative one leads to rejection and liberation.

Keywords: Fear of death – The value of eternal life – Palliative care – Eschatology.

Introduction

The fear of death seems to be universal because the experience of fatality of death is one of significant characteristic of the humankind. Anthropologist Ernest Becker arguing that “the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some

* Acknowledgment

IGA_CMTF_2023_008 Values context of social functioning III.

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way that it is the final destiny for man². In this paper we try to show how the feeling of this fear is influenced by the preferences of the value of eternal life, although this value is itself a complex multifactorial³, and by the cultural differences of Czech and Slovak population, which is both close and distant in many ways. Following Moore and Williamson⁴, we emphasize that cultural differences strongly influence the experiencing of this fear.

In our research we suppose the influence of cultural differences between Czech and Slovak people. These differences were previously discussed by us and other authors⁵. Fundamental differences between mentioned nations were confirmed in religiosity and spirituality, although both countries draw primarily on Christian religious traditions and the eschatological idea is linked on a personal level to the concept of eternal life, which transcends the physical boundaries of the world and continues on the level of the social being of God.⁶

The value of eternal life depends on several variables, of which religious beliefs and attitudes towards faith are the strongest influences. The strength of this value is also influenced by the cultural environment, which differs significantly in terms of religious communities and their beliefs and geographical and ethnographic differences caused by differences in language, customs, and folk traditions. These differences are mostly confined to individual countries and their regions⁷. For this reason, our previous research was focused on comparing attitudes towards the value of eternal life in the Czech and Slovak population⁸ and the level of fear of death in the Czech population⁹.

Current approaches to patient care are often based on the concept of evidence-based care,¹⁰ however, in the case of palliative care, there is increasing debate about the usefulness of a value-based care approach¹¹. Our previous findings¹² show that we can divide Czech and Slovak population into three groups concerning the perception of the value of eternal life. The first distinct group is monotheists, for whom the value of eternal life can be counted as an important tool

in the various stages of preparing for death and dying according to Kübler-Ross¹³. The second group, which includes polytheists, pantheists, deists and non-theists, is at the interface on the issue of eternal life. However, it is an issue which, with a sensitive pedagogical approach, can help them to overcome the initial stages of coping with and accepting death more quickly. The last group, atheists and agnostics, will react more negatively to the subject of eternal life and should be avoided with palliative care and psychological support. Targeting palliative or end-of-life care according to these groups is also appropriate because assessing and correctly diagnosing all patients' needs and problems, including spiritual ones, is essential for improving the quality of palliative care¹⁴.

The task of palliative care is not only to improve the quality of life of the patient until death, to relieve pain and other serious difficulties, but also to integrate the psychological and spiritual aspects of the patient's care and to provide assistance to the patient's relatives and close persons in coping with death¹⁵. The assistance is more needed especially in the case of families with unresolved relationships, e. g. after divorce and starting a new family¹⁶, or in the case of specific situation, like Covid-19 pandemic¹⁷. Fear of death at this stage is natural. The manifestations of the fear of death have intrapersonal (expected consequences for the soul and body), interpersonal (loss of social identity) and transpersonal (ignorance of the nature of death, the judgment and possible reward and punishment after death) components. The opposite of fear and anxiety is hope¹⁸. In spirituality, this hope is the hope of salvation, of eternal life.

Methods

The research was designed as a cross-sectional ex-post-facto study. Data collection was conducted in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic using a questionnaire from September 2020 to January 2022 and distributed online by Social Survey Project¹⁹. Those respondents who could not complete the questionnaire themselves were assisted to complete it. The number of assisted completions was at most 10 %. In both countries, the collection was carried out nationwide. In each country, a stratified sample of respondents was selected by gender and age. Within these stratified groups, the questionnaire was distributed randomly and universally with the help of approximately 200 volunteers. The sample (n=4586, CZ 3032, SK 1554) is representative

- 2 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*. (New York: Free Press, 1997), ix; attempts to overcome death can also be observed e. g. in transhumanism, see Vladimír Thurzo, "Transhumanism, Suffering, Death and the Search for Meaning." *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 1, (2022): 52–65.
- 3 Jiří Pospíšil, Ivana Olecká, "Eschatologický přesah života v kontextu spirituality s implikací pro paliativní péči." *Paliativna medicína a liečba bolesti* 15 no. 1–2e, (2022): 45–47.
- 4 Calvin Conzelus Moore, John B. Williamson, "The Universal Fear of Death and the Cultural Response." in *Handbook of Death and Dying*. ed. Clifton D. Bryant, (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 1:3–13.
- 5 Paul Froese, "Secular Czechs and Devout Slovaks: Explaining Religious Differences." *Review of Religious Research* 46 no. 3, (March 2005): 269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512556>
- 6 Thomas P. Rausch, *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology: Toward Recovering an Eschatological Imagination*. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2012).
- 7 Ruiter, Stijn, De Graaf Nan Dirk. "National Context, Religiosity, and Volunteering: Results from 53 Countries." *American Sociological Review* 71 no. 2, (April 2006): 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100202>
- 8 Pospíšil, Olecká, "Eschatologický přesah života", 45–47.
- 9 Jiří Pospíšil, Ivana Olecká, Helena Pospíšilová, "Fear of Death and Dying in the Czech Population According to Age, Gender and Religious Beliefs in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Acta Missiologica* 15 no. 2, (2021): 93–106.
- 10 Kay Scott, Rob McSherry, "Evidence-Based Nursing: Clarifying the Concepts for Nurses in Practice." *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 18 no. 8, (April 2009): 1085–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2008.02588.x>
- 11 Jill McCarthy, Pat Rose eds. *Values-Based Health and Social Care: Beyond Evidence-Based Practice*. (London: SAGE, 2010) ; Patricia Dobříková, Regina Scheitel, Audrey Roulston, "Challenges and Innovations in Hospice Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Scoping Review." *Journal of Social Work in End-of-Life & Palliative Care* 19 no. 3, (3 July 2023): 252–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15524256.2023.2229036>
- 12 Pospíšil, Olecká, "Eschatologický přesah života", 45–47.

- 13 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. (New York: Macmillan Publ. Co., 1978).
- 14 Hajnová Fukasová, Erika, Radka Bužgová, Feltl, David. "Assessment of the Spiritual Needs of Patients in Palliative Care." *Klinická Onkologie* 28 no. 1, (15 February 2015): 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.14735/amko201513>
- 15 Homolová, Mária. "Dying and Quality of Providing Needs of Dying People." *KONTAKT – Journal of Nursing and Social Sciences related to Health and Illness* 11 no. 2 (2009): 320–27. DOI: 10.32725/kont.2009.051
- 16 Nikola Bariaková, Mário Schwarz, "Forgiveness in Relation to Anxiety and Meaning of Life in Individuals Raised in Foster Care and Divorced Families." *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 1, (2023): 107–21.
- 17 Erika Gergerich et al. "Strengths and Struggles for Families Involved in Hospice Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Social Work in End-of-Life & Palliative Care* 17 no. 2-3, (3 July 2021): 198–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15524256.2020.1845907> ; Simon N. Etkind et al. "The Role and Response of Palliative Care and Hospice Services in Epidemics and Pandemics: A Rapid Review to Inform Practice During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 60 no. 1, (July 2020): 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2020.03.029> ; Patricia Dobříková, Diana Horniaková, Vladimír Thurzo, "Caring for Terminally Ill Clients in Hospices and Social Services Facilities During the Peak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, with a Focus on the Experience of Relatives Regarding This Situation." *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 2, (2022): 20–36.
- 18 Patricia Dobříková, "Psychické problémy nevyliečiteľne chorých a úlohy psychológa v paliatívnej starostlivosti." *Paliativna medicína a liečba bolesti ročník* 1 (2008): 135–38.
- 19 Jiří Pospíšil, *Social Survey Project Online*. Olomouc: ITTS, 2018. <https://www.socialsurvey.eu/leisure2018x/cs#firstpage>

by gender and age for both countries.²⁰ By gender, the sample was distributed as follows: man (2246; 49 %); female (2340; 51 %). Respondents in both countries were over 20 years of age: 20-24 (244; 5.32 %); 25-34 (803; 17.51 %); 35-44 (968; 21.11 %); 45-54 (894; 19.49 %); 55-64 (733; 15.98 %); 65 + (944; 20.58 %).

Two-way ANOVA²¹ was used in the statistical analysis of the dependence of the values on the occurrence of abusive behaviour, with dependencies at the level of $p \leq 0.05$ considered statistically significant. In the analysis the relationships between the fear of death measured using three variables (fearful feeling – H1, avoidance of thinking about death – H2, feeling of uncertainty about own dying – H3), preference of the value of eternal life stratified into four clusters, and nationality were tested.

In the research, the preference of value eternal life and the variables containing the attitudes and feelings consider the death were measured directly on continuous scales. All of these scales were constructed they can be analysed separately in relation to underlying sociodemographic factors or other factor variables. The scales are designed as continuous internally restricted scales from 1 to 10. One meant 'this value/trait does not concern me and is foreign to me' and ten meant 'this value/trait is very important to me and I fully identify with it'. Technically, the measurement was made on a continuous scale with a sensitivity set at 0.1 degree/one step to achieve the effect of continuity while maintaining the respondent's freedom to express their attitude. The value of eternal life was for the purpose of the ANOVA analysis categorized into four categories as follows: very low preference of the value ($x \leq \mu - \sigma$; 1053; 22.96 %), lower preference of the value ($\mu - \sigma < x \leq \mu$; 1313; 28.63 %), higher preference of the value ($\mu < x \leq \mu + \sigma$; 1169; 25.49 %) and very high preference of the value ($x > \mu + \sigma$; 1051; 22.92 %).

Fear of death was measured using 3 questions which constitute three hypotheses, of which each represents specific dimension of the death and dying:

H1 – fearful feeling – measured as the level of agreement with the proposition “The fact that death will mean the end of everything, as I know it, scares me”

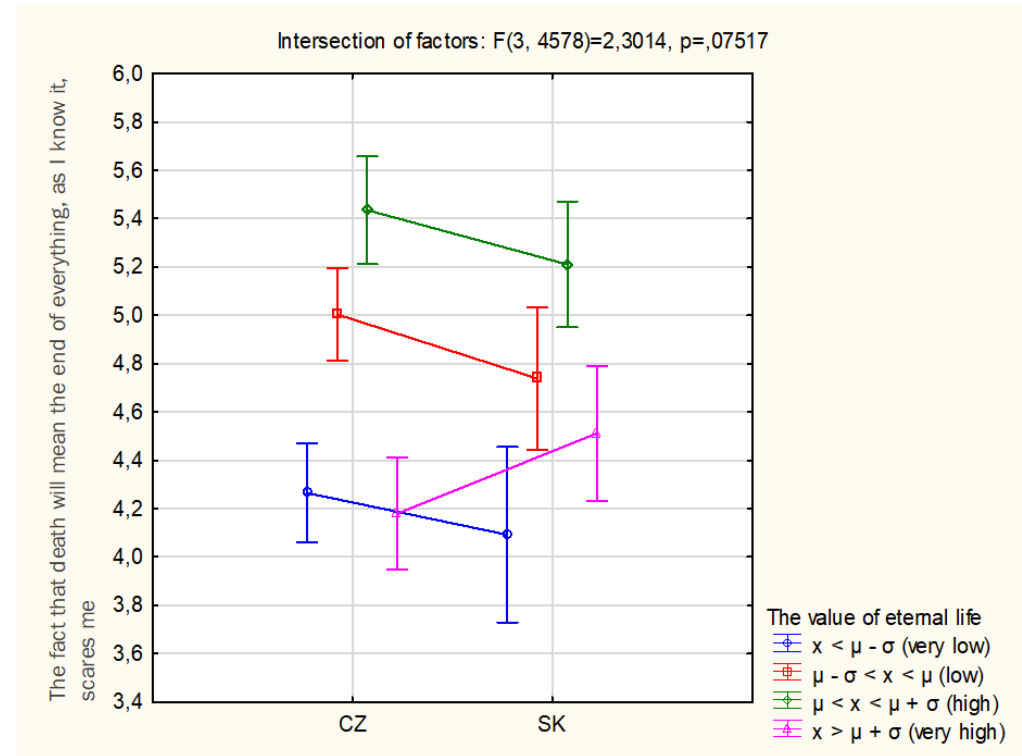
H2 – avoidance of thinking about death – measured as the level of agreement with the proposition “I avoid thinking about death.”

H3 – feeling of uncertainty about own dying – measured as the level of agreement with the proposition “I am troubled by uncertainty about my own experience of death”

Results

At first, we analyzed hypothesis H1 – measured as the level of agreement with the proposition “The fact that death will mean the end of everything, as I know it, scares me”. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Figure 1 H1 - fearful feeling (The fact that death will mean the end of everything, as I know it, scares me)



As we can see from Table 1, the level of the fearful feeling is the same in both countries. On the contrary, the preferences for the value of eternal life influence it strongly. However, no interaction between populations and preferences for the value of eternal life has been proven.

Table 1 H1 - fearful feeling (The fact that death will mean the end of everything, as I know it, scares me)

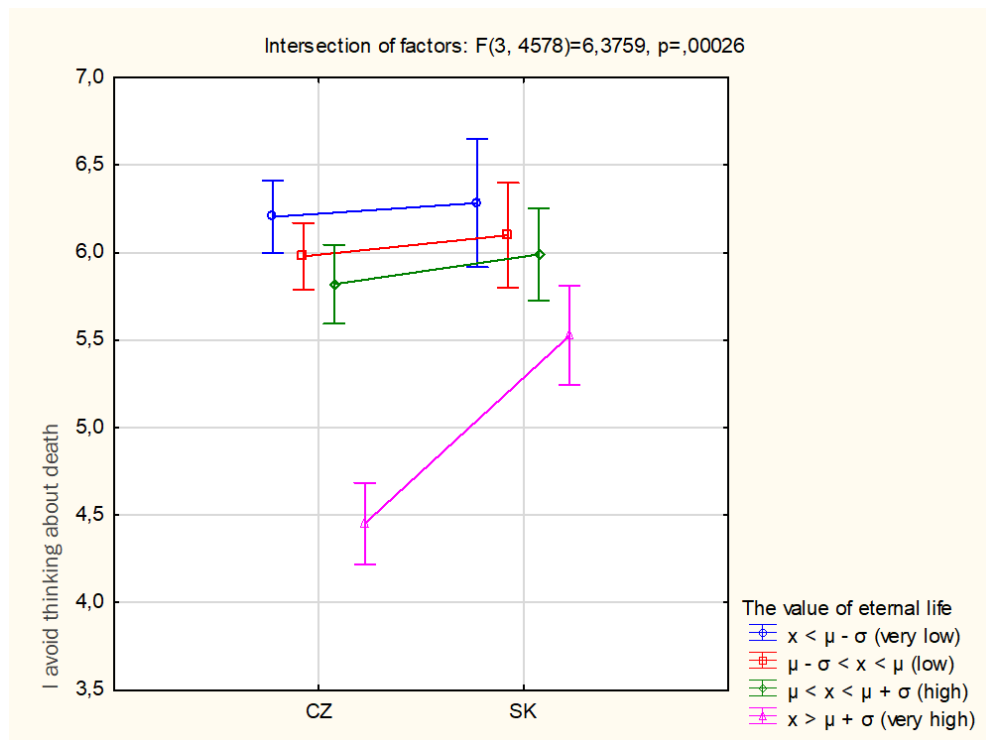
	SS	Degrees of freedom	MS	F	p
Intersection	85779,64	1	85779,64	9885,874	0,000000
Country	6,66	1	6,66	0,767	0,381155
The value of eternal life	805,56	3	268,52	30,946	0,000000
Country * The value of eternal life	59,91	3	19,97	2,301	0,075166

The second hypothesis H2 we analyzed was focused on avoidance of thinking about death and was measured as the level of agreement with the proposition “I avoid thinking about death”. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

20 Český statistický úřad Věkové složení obyvatelstva - 2021. <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/vekove-slozeni-obyvatelstva-2021>; Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky. DATACube, 2021. *Vekové zloženie obyvateľstva SR podľa pohlavia a 5-ročných vekových skupín*. https://datacube.statistics.sk/#/view/sk/VBD_SLOVSTAT/om2023rs/v_om2023rs_00_00_00_sk

21 David Sheskin, *Handbook of Parametric and Nonparametric Statistical Procedures*. Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall/CRC, 2011.

Figure 2 H2 - avoidance of thinking about death (I avoid thinking about death)



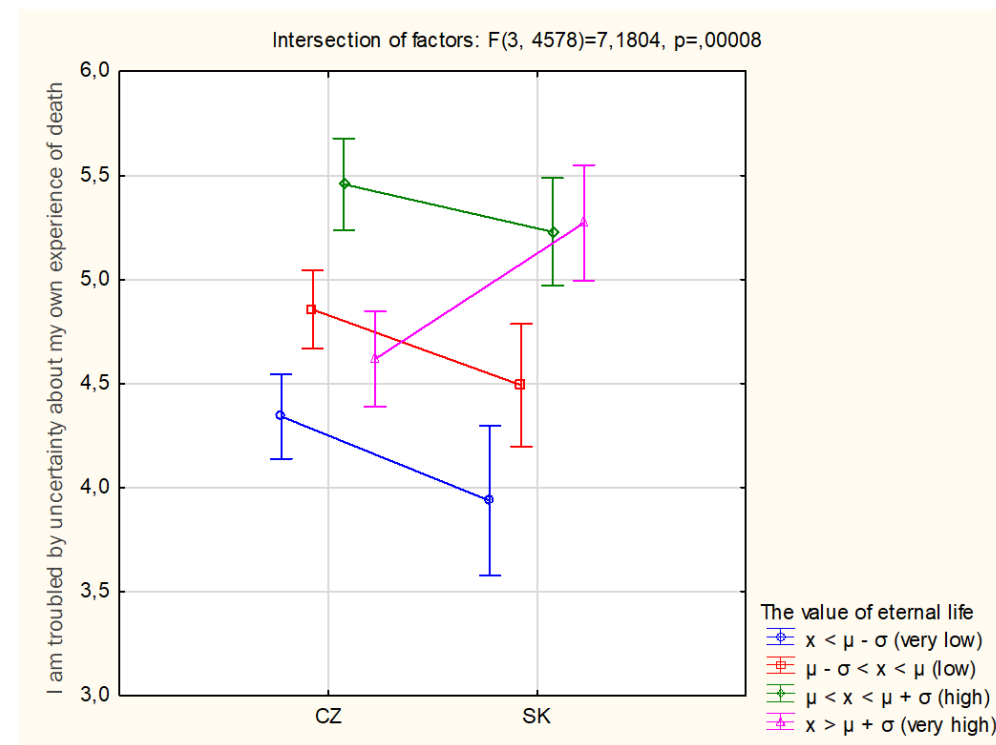
Avoidance of thinking about death varies by country. It is also influenced by preferences for the value of eternal life and the interaction of these two factors. People with a high preference for the value of eternal life in the Czech population avoid thinking about death. It indicates a stronger influence of this value than in the Slovak population.

Table 2 H2 - avoidance of thinking about death (I avoid thinking about death)

	SS	Degrees of freedom	MS	F	p
Intersection	131475,4	1	131475,4	14786,29	0,000000
Country	127,5	1	127,5	14,34	0,000154
The value of eternal life	889,2	3	296,4	33,33	0,000000
Country * The value of eternal life	170,1	3	56,7	6,38	0,000262

Last, we analyzed hypothesis H3, which represented the third dimension of the fear of death, the uncertainty of one's dying. It was measured as the level of agreement with the proposition "I am troubled by uncertainty about my own experience of death".

Figure 3 H3 - uncertainty of own dying (I am troubled by uncertainty about my own experience of death)



The feeling of uncertainty is the same in both countries. Preferences for the value of eternal life influence it. The interaction of country and value preference alters the perception of feeling uncertain when dying. The uncertainty is significantly lower for people with a high preference for the value of eternal life in the Czech population. It indicates a stronger influence of this value than in the Slovak population.

Table 3 H3 - uncertainty of own dying (I am troubled by uncertainty about my own experience of death)

	SS	Degrees of freedom	MS	F	p
Intersection	89303,52	1	89303,52	10409,06	0,000000
Country	7,26	1	7,26	0,85	0,357523
The value of eternal life	709,48	3	236,49	27,57	0,000000
Country * The value of eternal life	184,81	3	61,60	7,18	0,000083

The test of hypothesis H2 also shows that the higher preferences for the value of eternal life (violet line in Figure 2) indicates less avoidance of thinking about death. In the group with the high preference for the value of eternal life, there is less fear of death but no less concern about one's fear of dying. The group with the least prioritized value of eternal life also does not share these fears (do not admit them). Thus, the feelings of fear and uncertainty of death are strongest among those who have not strongly determined their attitude towards the value of eternal life. Several kinds of displacement protect those with a low preference for this value, and those with a high preference have a higher sense of confidence.

The group with a moderate preference for the value of eternal life, which has internalized this value but probably needs to be fully aligned with its consequences (e.g., doubts about eternal life, etc.), seems to be the most threatened by the fear of death. As a result, these people are more sensitive concerning fear of death, worry about the end of life and rather avoid thinking about death.

Discussion

Fear of death and ways of considering the finality of the person in the context of palliative care are almost always associated with religious or spiritual ideas or their rejection in the form of declared atheism. The value of eternal life is thus implicitly linked to hope and belief in the transcendence of one's being and the search for answers that defend this hope and belief. However, the Czechs and Slovaks have differently funded the concept of religious belief.²² Therefore, the relationship between religious belief and the value of eternal life is slightly different. Before we open a discussion concerning the implication of results, it must be noted that the research data represents the whole population and may significantly differ when measured in palliative care clients, as they are at different life cycle stages. Their thinking about death may be different.

All hypotheses confirm that the Slovaks who declare the highest preference for the value of eternal life feel more intensively the fear of death. They avoid thinking about death and are more troubled with the uncertainty of the dying experience. The results, confirmed by three different dimensions – hypotheses, lead us to discuss how deeply the value of eternal life, which has an inner connection to religious belief as has been shown in our previous research²³, influences other beliefs and attitudes in common life, even in the terminal stage. It seems the religious belief of Czechs, who are often declared as less religious²⁴, is much more inner and influences the common life situation, including the situation of dying, stronger than the same belief of Slovaks.

In addition to the previous discussion, hypothesis H2 reveals the differences between Czech and Slovak populations avoidance of thinking about death. Those with the highest preference for the value of eternal life have different strategies for thinking about death. Slovaks avoid this thinking significantly more than Czechs. It confirms the deeper inner connection between the high preference for the value of eternal life and the fear of death in the case of freedom to think and consequently speak about death. Avoiding thinking and speaking about death brings the psychological barriers to acceptance of death.²⁵

22 Pospíšil and Olecká, 'Eschatologický přesah života v kontextu spirituality s implikací pro paliativní péči'.

23 Pospíšil, Olecká, and Pospíšilová, 'Fear of Death and Dying in the Czech Population According to Age, Gender and Religious Beliefs in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic'; Pospíšil and Olecká, 'Eschatologický přesah života v kontextu spirituality s implikací pro paliativní péči'.

24 Froese, "Secular Czechs and Devout Slovaks", 269.

25 Marilyn J. Field, Christine K. Cassel, *Approaching Death: Improving Care at the End of Life*. (Institute of Medicine, 1997).

Especially in a terminal stage of life, the discussion concerning life meaning and transcendence is necessary.²⁶ The difficulty in talking about death is not necessarily in itself, but in identifying the meaning it has for the person and the underlying sufferings.²⁷ Although there are differences in attitudes to death and feelings of fear of death in all three dimensions we measured, all people are threatened by this fear and people at each level of preferences of the value of eternal life have different needs to challenge it. For those with the highest preference for the value of eternal life, thinking about death seems easier, but it does not have to be always true. However, the discussion about self-transcendence and salvation can be helpful and opens many ways to liberation from the fear of death. In the case of those people with the lowest preference for the value of eternal life, the strategy seems to be the opposite. The question of eternal life is mainly closed for these people, and the path to reconciliation of one's own life needs to be found. The only way to omit the fear of death is to reject all transcendence and liberation of the religiously defined expectations. The most problematic are those with a medium preference for the value of eternal life, as the fear of dying is the highest among these people, and they are threatened by end-of-life anxiety. Even in the case of these people, palliative care cannot resign to fulfil spiritual needs and offer the strategies to cope with death and choose the self-transcendent or nihilistic way.

Hypothesis H3 brings the exciting recognition of the attitude to the uncertainty of one's own dying experience, which is significantly lower in a group of people with the lowest preference for the value of eternal life. In compliance with the findings of hypothesis H2, these people avoid thinking about death. Hypothesis H3, in this case, confirms hypothesis H2 and shows that these people refuse to think about death and do not suffer from the uncertainty of dying experience. However, there is the essential question of how these people will face the fatality of death when they are in the terminal stage of life. We suppose they will not be able to answer this question, and the attitude to death will come to be the most actual as it was not asked, responded to, and the response was not interiorized and accepted.

Conclusion

In modern times, death has become increasingly distant from everyday human experience. Today, people have access to a great deal of information about the dying process without having had personal experience with it. Advances in medicine have given hope for delaying death and alleviating the pain and discomfort associated with death. However, the fear of death has not disappeared in society. The idea of death evokes several fears, and fear is one of humans' most commonly expressed responses to death. The social construction of the meaning of death is a fundamental element of any culture and a driving force for progress. In palliative care, it is necessary to work intensively with the experience of the fear of death. The value of eternal life can be used to mediate experiencing this fear. Although this fear is generally more expected in people with negative attitudes to religion, the fear of death can also be felt by those who consider themselves religious and firmly believe in the value of eternal life. However, each patient in palliative care needs to be communicated with differently. Two paths open up: positive one, which leads to a deepening of the preference for value and the associated expectations; negative one, which leads to rejection of this value and liberation from the fear by other methods. The symbolic systems (religion, philosophy,

26 Froma Walsh, "Loss and Resilience in the Time of COVID-19: Meaning Making, Hope, and Transcendence." *Family Process* 59 no. 3, (2020): 898–911.

27 Hoffmann, Leonardo Bohner et al. "Meanings of Life and Death: Reflections of Patients in Palliative Care." *Psicologia USP* 32 (2021): e180037. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-6564e180037>

culture) assign death a place in society that gives meaning to the individual. They can thus guide the possible ways of thinking about death that can be offered to patients.

In further research, we plan to validate the conclusions published in this paper and extend the research to other populations (e.g., Polish, Hungarian, Austrian). More phenomena influencing the experience of fear of death or dying would also be confirmed or declined.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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FORGIVING OFFENDERS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENCE*



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Submitted: 14 September 2023

Accepted for publication: 9 January 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: Forgiveness is not only a central theme in world religions, but is also the subject of psychological research. The study investigates forgiveness as a personality disposition and forgiving a specific offender in the context of life satisfaction, harmony and hope.

Methods: A sample of 1100 respondents was asked to complete a questionnaire containing items on demographic characteristics, levels of dispositional forgiveness and situational forgiveness towards a specific person, and further questionnaires on the characteristics of life satisfaction, life harmony and hope. The data were statistically processed.

Results: There was no relationship between forgiveness and the demographic variables; although there was a partial link with gender (women had higher dispositional forgiveness) and education (level of forgiveness increased with education). A key factor influencing situational forgiveness was the relationship between respondent and offender. Forgiveness was highest in relation to siblings, parents and partner, and lowest to strangers. The observed characteristics of experience were moderately positively correlated with dispositional forgiving; correlations with situational forgiving were lower.

Conclusion: Research on the problem should be focus primarily on the source of injury.

Keywords: Forgiveness – Life satisfaction – Harmony – Hope.

Introduction

Forgiveness is not only a central theme in world religions but is increasingly becoming a generally accepted area in psychological research. Nevertheless, there is still no single accepted definition of forgiveness in the psychological literature.² The existing definitions share common features: a change in attitude towards the perpetrator and the offense motivated by a desire to maintain the relationship despite the injury caused. Forgiveness begins from hostility and bitter-

* **Acknowledgment: This study has been funded by the Vega project "Forgiveness from the point of view of psychology – intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects and the relationship with mental health" (No. 1/0518/20).**

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2 McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., and Thoresen, C. E. (Eds.). *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2000.

ness and ends in friendship. According to Foster et al.³ the ultimate, though not necessarily conscious, goal is the realization of future benefits from continued cooperative responses with the perpetrator. Thus, forgiveness helps the person deal with "second-order adaptation problems" that stem from avoidance and revenge. Forgiving does not mean that the injured person forgets or ignores the wrongdoing, or continues to unconditionally trust and make peace with the wrongdoer. Forgiveness is the act of pitying the offender, who may not deserve mercy or this gift, and has many positive effects for the forgiver such as leading to the cessation of vengeful and evasive thoughts, reducing inner tensions and emotional suffering associated with a preoccupation with negative emotions. Forgiveness can reduce emotional stress and the psychopathological symptoms linked to stressors generated by life crises, as well as feelings of guilt and of being disproportionately responsible. The tendency to forgive can be considered a stable personality trait that is related to various personal and interpersonal adaptive qualities, including emotion regulation, positive relationships and social support.⁴ There are three basic types of forgiveness: forgiving others, forgiving oneself, and forgiving the situation. Enright⁵ notes that the capacity to accept forgiveness is also very important. Not forgiving oneself seems to have a more negative impact on a person's physical health than not forgiving another person.⁶ Forgiveness of situations is not tied to a specific perpetrator but fits the criteria for awareness of wrongdoing and relates to situations such as serious illnesses or natural disasters.⁸

Forgiving others is defined as replacing the negative thoughts, feelings, and motivations that are focused on a person with positive ones.⁹ According to Exline et al. forgiving others is also seen as a human ability that releases anger, hostility or resentment, as well as thoughts of revenge against the person who committed the harm.¹⁰ In the research of Kaleta and Mroz¹¹ negative affect, anxiety, suppression of depression and suppression of anger were negatively correlated with dispositional forgiveness.

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Although anxiety and depression are often experienced during the difficult process of forgiving¹², Akhtar, Dolan, and Barlow¹³ stress that situational forgiveness is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Anithalakshmi¹⁴ states that the process of forgiving and associated interventions have a protective effect against post-traumatic stress disorder.

Kim and Enright¹⁵ recommend that researchers seeking to measure dispositional forgiveness should focus primarily on the situational context, i.e. on situational forgiveness.

Forgiveness has been explored in relation to various psychological constructs. For example, the relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction is fairly well documented. According to Davis et al.¹⁶ these relationships were explored in early forgiveness studies. Life satisfaction represents the cognitive component of subjective well-being. It is an important variable and reflects both the state of the individual's life as well as their psychological state.¹⁷ For Veenhoven¹⁸ life satisfaction is the extent to which individuals positively evaluate the quality of their life as a whole. Svalina and Webb¹⁹ and Akhtar, Dolan and Barlow²⁰ point out that situational self-forgiveness has a stronger positive relationship with life satisfaction than forgiving others.

When forgiving, the individual works towards accepting the current situation and regaining satisfaction with their current life.²¹ Based on their findings, Freedman and Enright point out that forgiveness tends to increase life satisfaction in those coping with a variety of severe situations²². Karremans et al.²³ found that forgiveness was more strongly related to life satisfaction in individuals in more committed relationships who forgave their partner than those in less committed relationships. Life satisfaction is often linked to other concepts such as happiness, mental health, and well-being. Life satisfaction relates to the individual's values and goals, expectations in life and how successful they have been in achieving their expectations. There is a strong correlation

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between life satisfaction and happiness. Those who are satisfied with their lives are usually happier and have better outcomes in various aspects of life, such as work, relationships and health.²⁴ Diener et al. (1985, p. 71) opined that "satisfaction with life includes an underlying positive value of life as a whole, which includes the feeling that life is worth living and enjoyable".²⁵ According to Shin and Johnson²⁶ life satisfaction is a self-evaluation of the quality of an individual's life and is determined in accordance with the person's rules. Life satisfaction is connected with the desire to change one's life or, conversely, satisfaction with one's current life, the past or future, or satisfaction with one's outlook on various aspects of life such as work, family, health, finances, help and the social environment.²⁷ Çelik and Ertürk²⁸ claim that forgiveness can reduce the severity of the negative consequences of conflict and lead to peace and harmony in a person's life.

Diener's concept of life satisfaction integrates diverse indicators. These may exist in harmony, or change dynamically according to external circumstance. In the psychological research, participants associated harmony with balance, satisfaction, inner peace, a positive relationship with oneself, self-acceptance, balance, a sense of balance and evenness, and happiness. Delle Fave et al.²⁹ pointed out that harmony should not be understood only as a good relationship with the family and community. A comparative study by Kjell et al.³⁰ confirmed the differences between life satisfaction and harmony in life. Harmony in life was not only more strongly positively associated with subjective happiness and psychological well-being, but also had stronger negative associations with scales measuring depression, anxiety and stress compared to life satisfaction. Similarly, research comparing affective profiles confirmed that self-fulfilling individuals exhibited a higher degree of harmony and subjective well-being with high positive and low negative affect compared to self-destructive individuals.³¹

Accompanying emotions, attitudes and spirituality are also important in the process of forgiveness, including the hope that I will free myself from the hurtful painful past and find inner peace, maintain a good relationship with the perpetrator. In practice, of course, one cannot be sure that the hope will materialize. Understood thus hope has a transcendental dimension and is characterized by deep trust in achieving a positive outcome in particularly difficult life situations that are outside our control. The author of the concept of experienced hope adds that this approach is identical to the way ordinary people define experienced hope within the framework of human experience. It does not include specific expectations, the fulfilment of clear goals. It is an unwavering implicit faith in future good that leads to the undefined overcoming of negative

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 - 30 Kjell, O. N. E., Daukantaitė, D., Hefferon, K. and Sikström, S. "The Harmony in Life Scale complements the Satisfaction with Life Scale: Expanding the conceptualization of the cognitive component of subjective well-being". *Social Indicators Research* 126, no. 2 (2016): 893-919. doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0903-z
 - 31 García, D., Al Nima, A. and Kjell, O. N. E. "The affective profiles, psychological well-being, and harmony: environmental mastery and self-acceptance predict the sense of a harmonious life." *PeerJ* 2 (2014): 1 – 21.

consequences of life situations.³² Sakiz and Sariçam³³ argue that the nature of self-compassion and forgiveness, characterized by a positive attitude towards oneself, has great benefits as it helps individuals deal with the negative consequences of life situations.

Methods

Research objective and research questions

The research was elaborated based on quantitative research methodology. The goal of the research was to identify the relationship between the extent to which people forgive the person who harmed them, their general tendency to forgive, and the experience of harmony in life, hope and psychological well-being (specifically, satisfaction with life). The relationship between forgiveness and experience is a two-way one – those who are fine are more likely to forgive, and vice versa – those who have forgiven are more likely to have a positive experience. It is of course not possible to determine the causality of these relationships in cross-sectional research, so we focus on the correlations between them instead. Although we expect some degree of overlap between forgiveness and positive experience, we opted for an exploratory research design (with no hypotheses).

Research questions:

1. What is pseudo-forgiveness?
2. Does it matter who is being forgiven (who was the source of the hurt) in forgiveness?
3. What is the relationship between forgiveness (dispositional and situational) on the one hand and harmony, hope and satisfaction on the other?

Measures

Data collection was carried out online in February 2022. Respondents completed a questionnaire containing items relating to demographic data (age, gender, education, residence) and methodologies focused on the following areas:

We capture the tendency to forgive (dispositional forgiveness) using the Forgiving Others scale from the Slovak version of the Heartland Forgiveness Questionnaire (HFS). The questionnaire was created by Laura Y. Thompson and her team (2005).³⁴ The scale has six items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The Slovak version was created by V. Chlebcová and K. Greškovičová (2019).³⁵ The methodology is available on the Internet, but the authors do not provide any information about the psychometric characteristics of the questionnaire. In our previous research (Záhorcová, Dočkal, 2022)³⁶ we found that the internal consistency expressed by coefficient $\alpha = 0.763$. The value of α for the current sample is identical. It can therefore be considered suitable for use in the research.

32 Krafft, A. M., Martin-Krumm, C., and Fenouillet, F. "Adaptation, Further Elaboration, and Validation of a Scale to Measure Hope as Perceived by People: Discriminant Value and Predictive Utility Vis-à-Vis Dispositional Hope." *Assessment* 26, no. 8 (2017): 1594–1609. doi.org/10.1177/1073191117700724

33 Sakiz, H. and Sarikam, H. "Self-compassion and forgiveness: The protective approach against rejection sensitivity." *International Journal of Human and Behavioral Science* 1, no 2 (2015): 10–21. doi.org/10.19148/ijhbs.58217

34 Thompson, L.Y., Snyder, C.R., Hoffman, L., Michael, S.T., Rasmussen, H.N., Billings, L.S., Heinze, L., Neufeld, J.E., Shorey, H.S., Roberts, J.C. and Roberts, D.E. "Dispositional Forgiveness of Self, Others, and Situations." *Journal of Personality* 73, no. 2 (2005): 313–360.

35 Chlebcová, V., and Greškovičová, K. (2019). HFS – Heartlandský dotazník odpúšťania [online]. HFS. Translations. www.heartlandforgiveness.com/translations

36 Záhorcová, L., and Dočkal, V. "Slovak validation of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory-30." *Československá psychologie* 66, no. 6 (2022): 568–587. doi.org/10.51561/cspsych.66.6.568

To determine the extent to which the respondents forgave a specific individual who had hurt them, we used the EFI-30 questionnaire designed by Robert D. Enright and his team (2022).³⁷ We translated, edited, validated and standardized the questionnaire (Záhorcová, Dočkal, 2022).³⁸ The Slovak version showed high internal consistency in standardization research ($\alpha = 0.973$). The value of the Cronbach's coefficient in the current research sample is similar ($\alpha = 0.976$). The questionnaire begins with items focusing on the person who hurt the respondent and the perceived depth of that hurt. This is followed by thirty items divided into three subscales: affective questions (focused on current emotions relating to the person who caused the injury), behavioural questions (behaviour towards the transgressor) and cognitive ones (what the respondent thinks of the transgressor). Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. The subscales correlate highly with each other and exhibit practically the same relationships with the other variables. There was therefore no need to monitor them separately (Záhorcová, Dočkal, 2022).³⁹ We will evaluate only the total EFI-30 score. Enright's questionnaire contains five more items focused on so-called pseudo-forgiveness – this term refers to additional rejection of the feeling of injury, trivializing the harm suffered or culpability on the part of the offending person. Items are rated on a six-point Likert scale. A high pseudo-forgiveness score indicates the unreliability of the obtained forgiveness data, which may not be authentic. It serves for the internal validation of the obtained data – high-scoring individuals should be excluded from the data analysis. In our standardization study the cut-off score indicating excessive pseudo-forgiveness was set at 22 points. The internal consistency of the pseudo-forgiveness scale in the standardization set was expressed by Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha = 0.951$, and value $\alpha = 0.845$ in the current research.

To estimate level of life satisfaction, we used The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Ed Diener et al. (1985).⁴⁰ It contains five items evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale, aimed at determining cognitive subjective well-being. In the original standardization study, the authors demonstrated that the scale had sufficient internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.82$). The Slovak version was translated by L. Záhorcová and V. Dočkal. In a study from 2022 the authors documented its internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.891$). In the sample used in the current study, $\alpha = 0.912$.

We estimated experience of harmony in life using the Harmony in Life Scale, which was created by O. N. L. Kjell et al. (2016)⁴¹ as a supplement to the SWLS. Five items focus on psychological balance and flexibility in harmonizing different aspects of the respondent's life. They are rated on a seven-point Likert scale. According to the authors, this short questionnaire had high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90$) and test-retest variability is expressed by the coefficient $r = 0.77$ (ibid.). In the present research, we used the Slovak translation by I. Schusterová. The value of Cronbach's α for our sample is 0.916.

37 Enright, R., Rique, J., Lustosa, R., Song, J. Y., Komoski, M. C., Batool, I., Bolt, I., Sung, H., Huang, S. T. T., Park, Y., Leer-Salvesen, P. E., Andrade, T., Naeem, A., Viray, J. and Costuna, E. "Validating the Enright Forgiveness Inventory – 30 (EFI-30)." *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 38, no.2 (2022): 1-12. doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759/a000649

38 Záhorcová, L., and Dočkal, V. "Slovak validation of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory-30." *Československá psychologie* 66, no. 6 (2022): 568–587. doi.org/10.51561/cspsych.66.6.568

39 Záhorcová, L., and Dočkal, V. "Slovak validation of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory-30." *Československá psychologie* 66, no. 6 (2022): 568–587. doi.org/10.51561/cspsych.66.6.568

40 Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., and Griffin, S. "The Satisfaction with Life Scale". *Journal of Personality Assessment* 49, no. 1 (1985): 71–75. doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

41 Kjell, O. N. E., Daukantaitė, D., Hefferon, K. and Sikström, S. "The Harmony in Life Scale complements the Satisfaction with Life Scale: Expanding the conceptualization of the cognitive component of subjective well-being". *Social Indicators Research* 126, no. 2 (2016): 893–919. doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0903-z

We estimated perceived hope using the six-item Perceived Hope Scale (PHS) questionnaire by Andreas M. Kraft et al. (2017).⁴² The items were initially rated on a six-point Likert scale. The internal consistency given by the authors is in the range of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87-0.89$. In our version (translation by I. Schuster) we used seven-point Likert scales to ensure the evaluation was consistent with the evaluation in the other questionnaires. The high consistency of the scale was confirmed in the observed Slovak group ($\alpha = 0.930$).

Research sample

The data collection agency created a research pool that was representative by age, region and education, but with a preponderance of women. The research sample was recruited from Slovak population. The data collection agency used method of stratified selection. Data collection was carried out online. The ethical aspects of the research were observed.

In the first step, data was collected from 1,701 (45.8%) men and 2,013 (54.2%) women, but the final selection included only those who answered "yes" to the question about whether someone close to them had hurt them. Recollection of interpersonal injury was more frequent in women ($\chi^2 = 55.53$; $C = 0.138$; $p < 0.001$), leaving 385 (35.0%) men and 715 (65.0%) women in the final pool of 1100 respondents. After excluding 31 persons with high pseudo-forgiveness scores, the final sample contained 1069 respondents, 369 (34.5%) of whom were men and 700 (65.5%) women.

Table 1 shows the age distribution of the group. Women account for the majority of the youngest cohort in the group, whereas men predominate in the young adult cohort. In the forty to fifty-year-old and fifty-plus groups the gender representation is more or less balanced. Although the difference between the number of men and women in the age groups is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 20.65$; $p < 0.001$), the material significance of this difference is very small ($C = 0.138$). All eight regions of the Slovak Republic are proportionately represented corresponding to the demographic composition of the population. Regarding religious faith, 25.4% of respondents declared themselves to be non-believers, 62.2% were members of the Catholic church, 8.8% the Evangelical (or other Protestant) church, and 3.6% joined another denomination.

Table 1 Composition of the research group by gender and age

Age in years	Men		Women		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
18 – 29	83	22,5	212	30,3	295	27,6
30 – 39	125	33,9	151	21,6	276	25,8
40 – 49	72	19,5	156	22,3	228	21,3
50 – 65	89	24,1	181	25,8	270	25,3
Total	369	100,0	700	100,0	1069	100,0

Data processing

The characteristics of the score distribution of the individual variables in the large set were satisfactory for data processing using parametric statistics methods. We evaluated the relationships between the observed variables and demographic indicators using variance

42 Krafft, A. M., Martin-Krumm, C., and Fenouillet, F. "Adaptation, Further Elaboration, and Validation of a Scale to Measure Hope as Perceived by People: Discriminant Value and Predictive Utility Vis-à-Vis Dispositional Hope". *Assessment* 26, no. 8 (2017): 1594–1609. doi.org/10.1177/1073191117700724

analysis. The relationships between the psychological variables were subjected to a correlational analysis; we chose this method over regression analysis because we assumed there was a bidirectional causal relationship between the variables.

Results

a) Pseudo-forgiveness

Pseudo-forgiveness was defined as a raw score of 22 or more on the EFI-30 pseudo-forgiveness scale. This aspect of forgiveness – denial of guilt or trivializing the injury – occurred twice as often in women as in men, with 16 men (i.e. 4.2% of the original sample of 385 men) and 15 women (i.e. 2.1% of the original sample of 715 women) achieving this score. After removing those with high pseudo-forgiveness scores from the sample, there was still a statistically significant gender difference in the scores on this scale ($AMM = 10.60$; $SDM = 4.34$; $AMW = 9.81$; $SDW = 4.07$; $t = 2.892$; $p = 0.004$), but the effect size was small ($d = 0.188$). The median distribution was the same for women and men – 10 points of the total score – and the mode was the same at 5 points, which is the lowest possible score. The vast majority of the men and women did not therefore exhibit pseudo-forgiveness. Considering the small number of pseudo-forgiving persons ($N = 31$), there is no need to evaluate the relationship between pseudo-forgiveness and other demographic factors.

b) Sources of injury

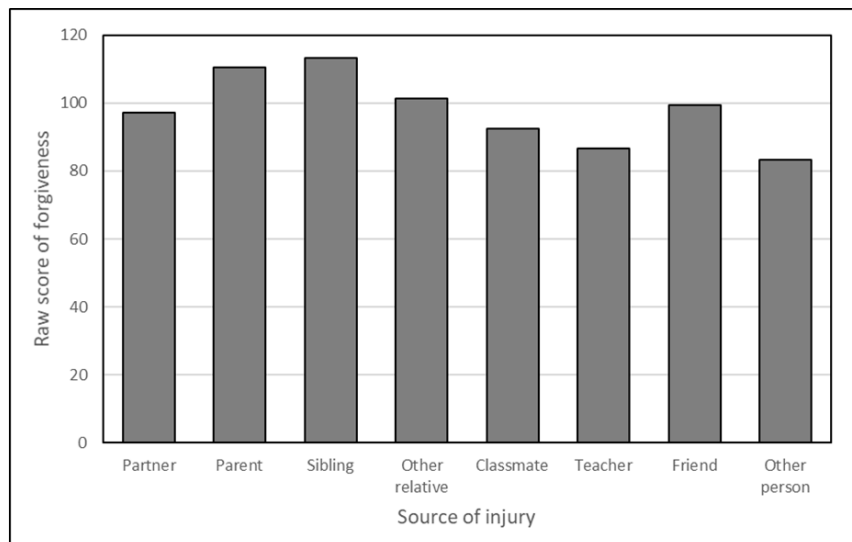
We grouped the information about who had hurt the respondent and who the forgiveness was aimed at (source of injury) into eight categories (the number of respondents forgiving the person is given in brackets): partner (83), parent (332), sibling (50), other relative (76), classmate (172), teacher (73), friend (264) and none of the groups listed above (19).

Table 2 Relationship between Selected Demographic Variables and Offender-Specific Forgiveness Score (ANOVA)

Source of variance	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	p	η^2
gender	1	909,63	0,791	,374	,001
age	3	1012,79	0,881	,450	,002
education	2	12262,86	10,669	,000	,015
Source of injury	7	5404,31	4,702	,000	,033

For dispositional forgiveness, which does not relate to a specific person and was determined by the HFS questionnaire, we noted a significant difference between men and women ($AMm = 26.53$, $SDm = 6.95$; $AMf = 27.64$, $SDf = 6.75$; $F = 9.754$; $p = .002$) with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .009$). We performed a variance analysis on situational forgiveness to a specific offender (according to the EFI-30) and included selected demographic variables. The results are shown in Table 2. In this comparison, there is no significant difference between men ($AM = 101.72$; $SD = 34.86$) and women ($AM = 102.62$; $SD = 35.40$). Age had no effect on the variance scores, highly significant ($p < .001$), although there was a small effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.015$) and nor did education ($AM1 = 96.49$, $SD1 = 35.77$; $AM2 = 98.85$, $SD2 = 34.94$; $AM3 = 106.05$, $SD3 = 34.21$) or source of injury (with a small to medium effect size $\eta^2 = 0.033$). Differences in the forgiveness rate for different categories of person are shown in Figure 1 and the statistical evaluation using Tuckey's post-hoc tests is given in Table 3.

Fig. 1. Average rate of forgiveness for different types of offender according to EFI-30



We note that rates of forgiveness were highest for siblings and parents, and lowest for strangers, teachers and classmates. The material significance for these differences was medium to high; but we were unable to confirm the forgiveness rate for strangers at the required level of statistical significance due to the small number of respondents forgiving a stranger. Interestingly the forgiveness rate for a parent was significantly higher ($p = .030$) than for a partner, but the effect size was small. Lastly, the forgiveness rate was more significantly related to the person being forgiven than to the observed demographic factors.

Table 3
Significance of differences in forgiveness rates between groups of respondents indicating different sources of injury (Tuckey's post-hoc test, Cohen's d)

	Partner	Parent	Sibling	Other relative	Classmate	Teacher	Friend	Another person
Partner		,391	,470	,117	,142	,313	,060	,261
Parent	,030		,079	,273	,533	,704	,331	,652
Sibling	,142	,999		,312	,612	,783	,410	,731
Other relative	,996	375	,518		,259	,430	,058	,378
Classmate	,963	,000	,003	,553		,171	,202	,119
Teacher	,507	,000	,001	,141	,922		,373	,052
Friend	,999	,001	,131	,999	,432	,087		,321
Another person	,969	,101	,115	,815	,999	,999	,875	

Note: Data below the diagonal are statistically significant (p-value).
Data above the diagonal are materially significant – strength of effect (Cohen's d).

Statistically significant differences are marked in bold, corresponding d values are given in italics.

c) Relationships between forgiveness and characteristics of experience

In Table 4, we present the linear correlations between the tendency to forgive, as measured by the HFS, and the three monitored characteristics of experience, both in the whole sample and in the subsets divided by gender. Correlation coefficients were low to medium, with forgiveness correlating weakly with life satisfaction and more strongly with experienced hope. The correlation coefficients were compared using Fisher's r to z transformation, which showed that the relationships between the monitored variables do not differ between men and women.

Table 4
Correlations between forgiveness tendency (HFS) and characteristics of experience

Group	Life satisfaction	Harmony in life	Experienced hope
Total set (N=1069)	,228***	,256***	,285***
Men (N=369)	,205***	,234***	,226***
Women (N=700)	,237***	,260***	,313***

Note: *** – $p \leq 0,001$

Table 5
Correlations between situational forgiveness tendency (EFI-30) and characteristics of experience

Group	Life satisfaction	Harmony in life	Experienced hope
Total set (N=1069)	,111***	,093**	,127***
Men (N=369)	,113*	,076	,092
Women (N=700)	,107**	,093*	,133***

Note: * – $p \leq 0,05$; ** – $p \leq 0,01$; *** – $p \leq 0,001$

In Table 5, we present the linear correlations between the experience variables and situational forgiveness, as measured by the EFI-30. The coefficients are significantly lower than in the previous case; even the values for the statistically significant ones are low. The Fischer transformation of r indicates that there are no significant differences between the correlation coefficients, which means that gender does not moderate the relationship between experience and forgiveness for a specific person.

Table 6
Correlations between situational forgiveness (EFI-30) and experience characteristics in groups forgiving different offenders

Source of injury	Life satisfaction	Harmony in life	Experienced hope
Partner (N=83)	,217*	,235*	,252*
Parent (N = 332)	,164**	,076	,101
Sibling (N=50)	,077	,211	,278
Other relative (N=76)	,087	-,105	-,010
Classmate (N=172)	,169*	,227**	,283***
Teacher (B=73)	,199	,229	,292*
Friend (N=264)	,026	,105	,107
Another person (N=19)	,348	,412	,409

Note: * – p ≤ 0.05; ** – p ≤ 0.01; *** – p ≤ 0.001

Given the importance of whom is being forgiven, we also analysed the relationships between forgiveness and experience in groups by source of injury. We present the results in Table 6. It is evident that the relationships differ by group. We found the greatest correlation between satisfaction, harmony and hope on the one hand and situational forgiveness on the other when a stranger is being forgiven; however, due to the small number of respondents who mentioned this source of injury, we could not confirm the statistical significance of the differences between the correlation coefficients in this and the other groups. The lowest (practically zero) relationship between forgiveness and experience was found in relation to forgiving an 'other relative'. The Fischer transformation *r* to *z* indicates that the relationship between harmony in life and forgiving another relative is significantly lower than the relationship between harmony and forgiving one's partner (*z* = 2.13; *p* = .033), classmate (*z* = 2.40 ; *p* = .016) or teacher (*z* = 2.02; *p* = .043). Similarly, the relationship between experienced hope and forgiveness for another relative is significantly lower than the relationship between hope and forgiveness for one's partner (*z* = 2.27; *p* = .023), sibling (*z* = 2.12; *p* = .034), classmate (*z* = 2.87; *p* = .004) or teacher (*z* = 2.46; *p* = .014). It is evident that the person being forgiven had a significant effect not only on level of forgiveness but also on the relationship between forgiveness and the experienced variables.

Discussion

The results of several studies show that women score higher in forgiveness compared to men (e.g. Flanagan et al.,⁴³; Shourie and Kaur⁴⁴). These differences can be caused by different social behaviour, experienced emotions or attitudes. In most cultures men are encouraged to suppress their emotions and women are expected to show compassion and understanding. According to Kirmani⁴⁵ gender-based socialization affects the level of forgiveness in men and women. In our research we noted gender differences in dispositional forgiveness, but not in situational forgiveness of the person who harmed the respondent as tested by the EFI-30. In a study conducted on

43 Flanagan, K., Hoek, K., Ranter, J. and Reich, H. "The potential of forgiveness as a response for coping with negative peer experiences." *Journal of Adolescence* 35, no. 5 (2012): 1215-1223.
 44 Shourie, S. and Kaur, H. "Gratitude and forgiveness as correlates of well-being among adolescents." *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing* 7, no. 8 (2016): 827-833.
 45 Kirmani, M. "Gratitude, Forgiveness and Subjective well-being among college going students." *International Journal Of Public Mental Health And Neurosciences* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1-10.

a different sample and with a different instrument (TRIM-17), the slightly higher rate of situational forgiveness in women was explained by their lower tendency to take revenge on the culprit.⁴⁶

In the current research the relationship with gender in situational forgiveness was manifest in significantly more frequent references to the offending person among women; there was also a preponderance of women in the research group. Our data do not allow us to assess whether women are more frequently subjected to victimization, or whether greater sensitivity to hurtful situations among women explains the more frequent mention of the offender. However, we did not find a difference in the level of forgiveness between men and women indicating that someone has hurt them. Interestingly, men report less hurt and are more likely to use pseudo-forgiveness as a strategy. However, most men and women do not exhibit pseudo-forgiveness as measured by the scale.

Age was not shown to have an effect in the current research. A previous study⁴⁷ indicated that the rate of situational forgiveness, as indicated by the TRIM-17, among 18 to 50 years old. Education is a significant factor affecting level of forgiveness – with more educated people forgiving more. This was confirmed both by this study and the previous research (ibid.), and the finding corresponds to data obtained by other scholars (e.g. Orathinkal et al.)⁴⁸. We did not confirm any findings regarding the other demographic variables in this article. We can at least state that place of residence (region, size of town or village) does not affect forgiveness. The result is similar to a finding obtained from another sample containing 1200 Slovaks (Dočkal, Záhorcová)⁴⁹.

Also, the present and previous (ibid.) research show that religious faith is not related to level of forgiveness. This finding can be explained by the likely insufficient internalization of religious norms in our research sample – we did not examine the depth of religious belief. Reza, Sudirman and Mubarak⁵⁰ found that being raised in a society where religion is practiced is not enough on its own; because a higher tendency to forgive presupposes an internalized religious belief. Only when the individual actively follows a religious life can one speak of a higher level of forgiveness.

The most important factor moderating the situational forgiveness score was the person being forgiven (that is, the source of the individual's hurt). We recorded the highest forgiveness score among those forgiving siblings and parents, followed by other relatives, friends and partners. We recorded the lowest rate of forgiveness for teachers and strangers. Previous research (Dočkal, Záhorcová)⁵¹ obtained similar results: the highest level of forgiveness was shown to members of the primary family, then the person's partner and friend, and the least forgiveness was shown in relation to strangers. The results of the present research indicate that respondents find it difficult to forgive their teachers, who are probably perceived as strangers. According to Křivohlavý⁵² situational forgiveness is most associated with long-term relationships among people living together, especially as a family, married or as partners, and that is despite the greater number of

46 Dočkal, V., and Záhorcová, L. "Niektoré demografické súvislosti odpúšťania". In *Sociálne procesy a osobnosť* 2022. edited by Adamus, M., Šrol, J., and Uhrecký, B. Bratislava: ÚEP SAV, 2023.
 47 Dočkal, V., and Záhorcová, L. "Niektoré demografické súvislosti odpúšťania". In *Sociálne procesy a osobnosť* 2022. edited by Adamus, M., Šrol, J., and Uhrecký, B. Bratislava: ÚEP SAV, 2023.
 48 Orathinkal, J., Vansteenwegen, A., and Burggraave, R. "Are Demographics Important for Forgiveness?" *The Family Journal* 16, no. 1 (2008): 20-27. doi.org/10.1177/1066480707309542
 49 Dočkal, V., and Záhorcová, L. "Niektoré demografické súvislosti odpúšťania". In *Sociálne procesy a osobnosť* 2022. edited by Adamus, M., Šrol, J., and Uhrecký, B. Bratislava: ÚEP SAV, 2023.
 50 Reza, F. A., Sudirman, S. A. and Mubarak, M. "Marriage Harmony: The Role Of Empathy And Forgiveness." *Jurnal Studia Insania* 9, no. 1 (2021). 32-50.
 51 Dočkal, V., and Záhorcová, L. "Niektoré demografické súvislosti odpúšťania". In *Sociálne procesy a osobnosť* 2022. edited by Adamus, M., Šrol, J., and Uhrecký, B. Bratislava: ÚEP SAV, 2023.
 52 Křivohlavý, J. *Jak přežít vztek, zlost a agresi*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2004.

disagreements. Similarly, McCullough et al.⁵³ found that forgiveness is more frequent in a satisfying, close and committed relationship between two people. Forgiveness also fosters relational closeness, as has been confirmed by Reza, Sudirman and Mubarak.⁵⁴

Most of the research on situational forgiveness has focused on forgiveness towards specific groups of offenders, especially life partners. However, the findings of such research cannot be generalized. Forgiveness should be studied in relation to different sources of injury. The creation of general norms of forgiveness, such as those by R. Enright and J. Rique⁵⁵ for the older version of the EFI, do not appear to be relevant in the light of our findings.

Our goal was to examine the relationship between forgiveness and experience characteristics. Research on forgiveness intervention techniques based on the conception that forgiveness is a personality characteristic has confirmed that negative experiences (depressive feelings, feelings of guilt, anxiety states, fear, anger) decrease in adolescents and adults who forgive⁵⁶. Positive effects were found in both physical health and mental health, with both sexes experiencing greater self-esteem, self-concept and self-confidence. We examined forgiveness as a dispositional characteristic (tendency to forgive) and as situational forgiveness for a particular offender. Dispositional forgiveness has low to moderate correlations with all three experience characteristics in our current research (Table 4). It is our belief that despite being designed to measure experience of the current state, questionnaires focusing on satisfaction, harmony and hope do not sufficiently distinguish between the state and the characteristics as a personality trait. That means they are closer to dispositional forgiveness (as a personality tendency). The correlation obtained was higher for hope, but was non-significant.

The relationship between situational forgiveness and experience (Table 5) was low, although the correlation coefficients are by and large at the required level of statistical significance. In the group of men, we noted a minimal relationship between forgiveness on the one hand and harmony and hope on the other.

We found moderate but insignificant relationships between forgiveness and positive experience when forgiving another person (Table 6). These relationships were low but significant when the person being forgiven was a partner, classmate, or, to some degree, a teacher. In the group that forgave parents, there was a significant relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction. It therefore seems that positive characteristics may partially influence the extent to which we forgive certain individuals, and conversely, forgiving a wrongdoer may partially enhance positive experiences. However, this does not apply if we feel wronged by a friend or a person from the extended family (another relative).

Limitations and future research

A limitation of our research was the uneven representation of gender among the respondents. Based on our findings, we recommend that future research focus on forgiveness towards different kinds of offenders.

53 McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., and Thoresen, C. E. (Eds.). *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press. (2000).

54 Reza, F. A., Sudirman, S. A. and Mubarak, M. "Marriage Harmony: The Role Of Empathy And Forgiveness." *Jurnal Studia Insania* 9, no. 1 (2021): 32-50.

55 Enright, R. D., and Rique, J. *The Enright Forgiveness Inventory user's manual*. Menlo Park, CA: Mind Garden, 2004.

56 Choe, E., Srisarajivakul, E. and Davis, D. E. "Protecting Victims of Bullying: The Protective Roles Self-Esteem and Self-Forgiveness Play between past Victimization and Current Depressive Symptoms" *Journal of School Violence* 20, no. 4 (2021): 417-429, DOI:10.1080/15388220.2021.1930015

Conclusion

Forgiveness is a very broad issue. It is necessary to distinguish pseudo-forgiveness from forgiveness, in which the individual downplays the harm suffered or the guilt of the offending person. The results show that rate of forgiveness is not related to region, the place of living or the age or religion of the forgiver. It increases in line with the forgiver's level of education. There is a clear link with the person being forgiven – the source of the injury. We recorded the highest rate of forgiveness when members of the primary family were being forgiven (siblings and parents), then the person's partner. Individuals were least forgiving towards strangers, including teachers. In relation to harmony, hope and satisfaction on the one hand and forgiveness (dispositional and situational) on the other hand, we found that the characteristics of positive experience are related to dispositional forgiveness; the correlation coefficients were low to medium and slightly higher for experienced hope. Situational forgiveness for the offender was related to experiencing less than dispositional forgiveness.

Looking at forgiveness for specific persons, it is clear that the result may depend on who is being forgiven. This is a crucial finding of the research. Obtaining answers to generally posed questions (without considering the source of the injury) can produce interesting and statistically confirmed findings, but these may not reflect the lived reality. To delve deeper into the issue of forgiveness will require carefully planned research that focuses on how people forgive specific offenders.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS OF NARCISSISM*

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Submitted: 16 August 2023

Accepted for publication: 22 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: Narcissism is currently on the rise. Extreme preoccupation with oneself creates unwanted psychological-sociological phenomena that have deep philosophical roots in the individual's personality. The increase in human psychological problems and the atomization of society, together with the openness to bizarre conspiracies, are just some of the characteristics of the current narcissistic culture, which tends towards the disintegration of the family as the basic cell of civilization. This study provides theological reflections on the key building blocks of the still obscure phenomenon of narcissism.

Conclusion: Narcissism represents the subject's anthropocentric perception of the world, when deified freedom and absolute existential desires drive the individual into pathological manifestations of his interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The absolutizing of man's freedom and desires collides with the basic framework of the Biblical story of creation. With its dialectic of freedom and its limitation in the teleological mission determined by God, the story of creation brings fundamental inspirations for understanding the essence of narcissism and at the same time carries important application stimuli necessary for the prevention of pathological manifestations of narcissism.

Keywords: Creation – Freedom – Boredom – Expectation – Dissatisfaction.

Introduction

Narcissism is a multi-layered concept describing extreme forms of anthropocentric thinking and individual behaviour that creates socio-pathological relationships destroying social entities at all levels of existence. Narcissism comes from the metaphor of the ancient Greek Narcissus, who was self-absorbed to such an extent that he stopped perceiving the reality around him and it cost him his own life. In general, it is less well known that he was a shy person by nature rather

* **Acknowledgment**

The paper was supported by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency (KEGA) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic based on the project: "Social work based on moral values – innovation of the study program" Number 011KU-4/2023.

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than assertive. That he preferred wandering through the forest in solitude rather than the company of pretty women and nymphs, in which he would dominate, as if he were a predator and a socially successful man standing at the epicentre of the attention of those present. It is possible to find more food for thought in his story. For example, the question of whether his complacency was the reason why he kept looking at his own image on the water surface, or the result, is valid and goes to the heart of the problem.

Narcissism has been discussed among psychologists and psychiatrists for more than two hundred years. Narcissism is an interdisciplinary framework that affects human psychology, social interactions of individuals and groups, and socially undesirable manifestations of human behaviour.¹ This means not only the "normal state" of a person, but especially the extreme form when a narcissistic personality disorder occurs. She is being diagnosed today.² It has two forms. On the one hand, this is a grandiose approach to life, where the person in question perceives other people only as a means to achieve his own. On the other hand, it is a very submissive type of person who, although he has his own desires and ideas, cannot communicate them well and systematically work on their realization. In both mentioned cases, there is internal brokenness, frustration and essential dissatisfaction in the human soul. He then achieves his narcissistic desires in ways that those around him perceive as problematic, conflicting and annoying.

Current research by experts in the fields of pedagogy, sociology, culture and business ethics confirms that we live in a narcissistic society that shows an increase in pathological manifestations.³ Currently, the issue of narcissism at the institutional level and its impact on employees is being investigated. It turns out that in a narcissistic organization lacking moral agency, ethical behaviour will thus hardly develop on the level of individuals.⁴ More and more experts are talking about the need for emotional and social intelligence, without which a person - even a top expert - can hardly manage their private and professional life. In a broader perspective, it turns out that "broken privacy" becomes a key factor in determining whether or not a person can manage his life as a whole. We are experiencing "social Alzheimer's" live, when the whole breaks down into smaller amounts incapable of mutual functionality.

Creation Theology

The search for the philosophical roots of the phenomenon of narcissism leads us to the story of creation, whose theological reflection offers interesting starting points for biblical anthropology. Against its background, it is possible to identify the existentialist coordinates necessary for understanding the inner dynamics of cognitive-behavioural relations in the hidden world of every person.

A theological perspective has the potential to reveal hidden corners of human existence that no other humanities can ever enter. The reason is biblical revelation, which is not a project of human effort, even though it contains an element of human effort and its culture. The authority of the Holy Scriptures here represents an exceptional epistemological source, whose wealth of inspiration and depth of content is relevant to consider when examining narcissism.

1 Bernadette Grubner, "Narcissism in cultural theory: Perspectives on Christopher Lash, Richard Sennett, and Robert Pfaller," *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 3, no. 1, (2017): 50-70.

2 Jozef Hašto, "Narcizmus – diagnostika a psychodynamika," *Psychiatria-Psychoterapia-Psychosomatika* 27, no. 1, (2020): 7-14.

3 Miroslav Tvrdoň et al., "Homelessness as a social problem – socio-pathological phenomenon – qualitative analysis," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 439-448.

4 Silke Schmidt, "Ahead of the curve in the MBA bubble: Institutional narcissism and the narrative reconstruction of moral agency," *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 3, no. 1, (2017): 142-157.

The theology of creation opens up an extremely dynamic framework in which particular and universal values and principles intertwine. The story of creation also frames the paradox of the unity of the eternal and the temporal. In particular, however, it decodes the conflict between the ideal and the real, which has its materialization in the existence of the individual.⁵ The loss of harmony and the desire for it represents an oscillatory mode in a person's life, which becomes the engine of his desires, efforts and direction in time.⁶

Created in His image (cf. Gn 1:27-31)

The first and fundamental factor for the solid anchoring of biblical anthropology is the Biblical message that man is created in the image of God. Man, as a mystical unity of man and woman, also carries within himself the divine dimension of his own existence. He will not be able to silence this transcendent horizon of his being. He will look up to it and gravitate all his efforts to this immanent reality.

The second important moment in the story of creation is the stewardship mandate that the Creator entrusted to man. Stewardship represents a universal formula that has its counterpart in the particular, which are individual areas of human interest. It is about procreation and the question of the stability of society, leadership in relation to living and non-living nature, and at the same time the intellectual effort to develop one's knowledge and personal capacities within the tension between the actual and the potential. The moral and ethical dimension of human existence is thus framed by the teleological vector of managing everything that has been entrusted to man. And that means everything, including himself. He was created by God, not by himself, not by nature, not by chance. Man is accountable to God. And "it was very good". The phrase "it was very good" is a seal of the robustness of the functionality of the created world according to the Creator's intention, which became a reality in space-time.

Treason of freedom (cf. Gn 2:16-17; 3:1-6)

Human freedom represents a great challenge for researchers in all areas of the humanities. If freedom is mastered, it brings progress, beauty, functionality, health and harmonious relations between man and man, but also man and nature. The creation story describes a free man whose freedom was attacked by an external source. Man did not manage this attack, which of course brought irreversible consequences for man's internal life. In connection with the study of narcissism, this part of the narrative is significant and deserves more attention. The external stimulus came by a false question - are you really not allowed to eat from any tree in the garden? The nature of this question is insidious and by its very nature subverts the Creator's intention. It is the intention of the Creator that is the key interpretive key to understanding biblical anthropology and thus also to decoding the essence of narcissism. In the concept of freedom as determined by the Creator, there is an important principle not only of preventive interventions on the part of counsellors, but also of healthy human formation and the organization of the whole society.⁷

5 Martina Pavlíková, Igor Tavilla, "Repetition as a Path to Authentic Existence in Kierkegaard's Work," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 2, (2023): 105-115; Roman Králik, "Kierkegaard and his Influence on Tillich's Philosophy of Religion," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11, no. 3, (2015): 183-189.

6 František Murgaš, František Petrovič, "Quality of Life and Quality of Environment in Czechia in the Period of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Geographical Journal* 72 no. 3, (2020): 261-274; František Petrovič, František Murgaš, "Linking sustainability and happiness. What kind of happiness?," *GeoScape* 14, no. 1, (2020): 70-79.

7 Ivana Tomanová Čergetová, et al., "Spirituality and irrational beliefs of movement activities in Slovaks and Czechs," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 12, no. 2, (2021): 539-549; Patrik Maturkanič, "Man and Machine," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 299-300; Viliam Judák et al., "Reflection of Political and Social Development in the Religious Street Names of the City of Trnava and their Potential in Tourism," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 514-525; Anton Ďatelinka, Viliam Judák, "Saint Hieronymus - Circum-

stances of the Origin of the Legend About the Authorship of the Glagolitic Alphabet," *Constantine's Letters* 16, no. 1, (2023): 34-46; Zlatica Plašienková, "Anthropological-Ethical Problems in the Essays of Teodor Munz Published in the Journal *Filozofia*," *Filozofia* 68, no. 8, (2013): 665-678.

Healthy freedom is not boundless, on the contrary, freedom is a dialectic of what is allowed and what is forbidden.⁸ Where the boundaries are weakened, disorder and dysfunction occur. The issue of demarcation of borders is also very important and represents a major challenge at present. However, the story of creation tells us that such a fine-tuning of what is allowed and what is forbidden is possible and feasible. Respect for intrinsic properties plays an important role in the search for answers to questions related to defining the boundaries of freedom. In this case - if you eat from that tree, you will die. This is an objective fact that a person has no power to change, as it is beyond his stewardship potential.

No less interesting is the mechanism of man's failure in his freedom. He answers the treacherous question "from the outside" correctly, he has the right data in his hands. The situation changes when a person gives space to the false concept "you will not die, but you will be like gods" and deals with it essentially. The core of man's problem was not that "the tree was beautiful and tasty to look at", that is, that he gave space to his emotions and desires for virtual reality. The problem was his loss of self-discipline and obedience to the order postulated by the Creator. So, the dialectical balance of freedom and discipline forms the framework of a healthy life.⁹ The answer to desires, ideas and dreams may not be to stop desiring, not to have ideas and dreams, but obedience. Obedience as a soft skill of a person, the essence of which is not an argumentative conviction on the part of a person "about things" or a consensus of different perspectives, but submission to a higher authority. In this case, the subordination of man (man and woman) to God.

Conceptual crack (cf. Gn 3:16-17)

The harmony and tuning of the internal elements of creation was broken as a result of man's failure to master freedom. There was a process of interpersonal decomposition of human-human, male-female, parent-child, neighbor-neighbor, etc. relationships. The metaphysical level of human failure has affected the entire ecosystem. Also, the intrapersonal dialectic began to show discrepancies and the suffering of man in all dimensions of his existence received its key impulse. The psycho-sociological point of view speaks of a person's alienation from himself and his surroundings. Therein lies the problem of unfulfilled desires and ideas in every person, which correlates with the core of the issue of narcissism. Man's work and any effort he makes is therefore marked by pain, disappointment and a sense of meaninglessness. A person will not always be able to realize his dreams in a good way, because good and evil have created a special existential mix that complicates a person's life and social relations.

Echo from the Garden (cf. Eccl 3:11-12)

The serpent's offer "you will be like gods" launched an absolute project in the inner world of man, which, however, cannot be fulfilled in the broken internal and external world. The absolute desire for perfection, justice, love, collegiality, harmony of relationships at home, in the workplace and in the whole society represents the basic psychological framework in anthropology. The idea of life always exceeds the reality that a person lives and owns.

8 Lucie Rychnová et al., "Hausväterliteratur in the Education and Spirituality of a Nobleman in the Early Modern Era," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 503-514.

9 Peter Kondrla, "Freedom as a means and a goal in Comenius's philosophy of education," *Caritas et Veritas* 11, no. 2, (2021): 34-47.

The philosophical concept of actual and potential has its echo in the story that happened in the biblical Garden of Eden. His teleological interpretation thus explains the desire for meaning in life and a sense of fulfillment in life, to which human activities and efforts relate. Striving for a "better tomorrow" is the core of psychological counselling and the goal of all therapeutic methods. It embraces not only the reality of today and its acceptance, but also the perspective of tomorrow, which has the potential to bring the necessary motivation and determination to change on the side of man. The ecclesiastical concept of "eternity in the heart" thus becomes a theological answer to the fundamental questions that arise in connection with the phenomenon of narcissism.

Contemporary narcissism challenges¹⁰

Interest in narcissism among psychologists and psychiatrists has increased especially in the last 15 years.¹¹ Although NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder) has not been included among the registered clinical diagnoses, the symptoms of this disorder are classified and the casuistic rise of NPD is recorded. Currently, there is no universally accepted medical definition of narcissism or NPD, nor are the causes and mechanisms that cause these symptoms and manifestations known.¹² However, among the most significant symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder according to the DMS-5¹³ are manifestations such as: (1) high sensitivity to self-importance. (2) Belief in one's own excellence and uniqueness. (3) High need for external recognition and admiration. (4) Loss of empathy and recognition of other people's needs. (5) The ability to behave arrogantly towards those he uses for his own projects, and excessive preoccupation with the virtual world of one's own fantasy, in which one's own success, power, influence, excellence or ideal (erotic) love is present.

In the midst of a culture of fun, amazing possibilities and fulfilled dreams, serious psychological problems are emerging more and more, and not only among young people.¹⁴ Some scientists believe that there is a direct connection between boredom and self-centeredness, if a person falls into an instant and comfortable lifestyle, in which creative and hard manual work and the sense of helping others disappear.¹⁵ Other researchers draw attention to the phenomenon of pornography and the sex industry, which reinforces self-centred tendencies in the human psyche and the understanding of love in which I seek fulfillment of my needs from the outside instead of love in which I give myself to the other.¹⁶ Other researchers¹⁷ point to a correlation between digital technologies, virtual reality on the one hand, and excessive fantasizing and the explosion of pornography in our culture, which may reinforce narcissistic

tendencies in the affected population. Virtual reality pornography¹⁸ seems to be a powerful tool to elicit the illusion of intimate sexual experiences and thereby deepens a person's alienation - and the echo with the creation story is obvious here - from a real relationship of love, friendship or collegiality or citizenship, which deepens the narcissistic development of the personality.

The echo with the creation story is obvious here. A special problem is the high level of company organization and the related demands on the quality and scope of human performance. A narcissistic person expects appreciation from the outside, he is dependent on it, therefore he strives to give a perfect performance in order to avoid disappointment in others and consequently his own pain. One of the types of perfectionism, SOP (self-oriented-perfectionism), according to some researches, can therefore under certain circumstances be self-destructive to the extent of suicidal tendencies.¹⁹ The image of perfection has another side. It is connected to the world of celebrities and influencers. These icons are a product of the marketing and media industry, the actual reality behind them is often dramatically different. However, this is indifferent to the media image.²⁰ We create celebrities in our own image. They thus reflect our own ideas about perfection, success and thus give meaning to things in us and around us, they give us in some sense a taste of immortality, a preview of eternity.²¹

Conclusion

Narcissism is a phenomenon typical of today's culture related to excessive preoccupation with oneself. The dominant anthropocentric view of the world exacerbates the problem of narcissism even more. The theological inspirations arising from the story of creation bring the following stimuli and inspirations to contemporary anthropology and a better understanding of narcissism: (1) A person can and should search for a deeper meaning of things in himself and around him, anchored in a metaphysical perception of the world. As a created being, he needs to look up to his Creator. He must not confuse his mandate to manage the earth and the world with ownership - he is a servant, not an owner. (2) Freedom implicitly demands boundaries.²² The search for the limits of human freedom cannot be successfully managed under the guise of strict anthropocentrism.²³ The authenticity of the individual must be balanced by the heteronomous dimension of the "outside". The intrinsic characteristic of true freedom is therefore obedience. (3) The world is broken and so is mankind. Imperfection belongs on the map of a healthy view of life. Even in a successful and meaningful life there is a place for pain and suffering that we must learn to live with and endure. (4) Love, as a life attitude of service and giving, is the answer to the matrix of questions and

10 Craig Detweiler, Barry Taylor, *A matrix of meanings – finding God in pop culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 107-108.

11 Joshua D. Miller et al., "Controversies in Narcissism," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 13, (2017): 291-315.

12 Paroma Mitra, Tyler J., Torrico, Dimy Fluyau, *Narcissistic Personality Disorder*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32310461/>

13 APA, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 72-669.

14 Ľubomír Hlad et al., "At-Risk Youth in the Context of Current Normality – Psychological Aspects," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 285-296.

15 Richard Winter, *Still bored in a culture of entertainment*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 80-101.

16 Elizabeth Cowie, "Pornography and Fantasy," in: *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*. ed. Lynne Segal, Mary McIntosh (London: Virago, 1991), 132-152.

17 Sofia C. Simon, Tobias Greitemeyer, "The impact of immersion on the perception of pornography: A virtual reality study," *Computers in Human Behavior* 93, (2019): 141-148.

18 Arne Dekker et al., "VR Porn as "Empathy Machine"? Perception of Self and Others in Virtual Reality Pornography," *The Journal of Sex Research* 58, no. 3, (2021): 273-278.

19 Richard Winter, *Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 17-74.

20 Andrea Lesková, *Etika rodiny: výchova detí v mediálnej dobe* (Nitra: UKF, 2021), 27-43.

21 František Murgaš et al., "Social Capital as a Predictor of Quality of Life: The Czech Experience," *J Environ Res Public Health* 19, no. 10, (2022): 6185; František Petrovič, František Murgaš, "Holistic and sustainable quality of life. Conceptualization and application," *Folia Geographica* 62, no. 1, (2020): 77-94.

22 Peter Kondrla, Roman Králik, "Authentic being and moral conscience," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 4, (2016): 155-164; Roman Králik, "Søren Kierkegaard's influence on the thinking of Karol Nandrásky," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no. 1, (2017): 25-34; Roman Kralik, Luboš Torok, "Concept of relationship God-man in Kierkegaard's writing what we learn from the lilies in the field and from the birds in the air," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 3, (2016): 65-74.

23 Marie Roubalová et al., "Rabbinic Judaism's perspective on the first crimes against humanity," *Bogoslovni Vestnik* 81, no. 1, (2021): 57-74.

aspects that we observe and investigate in narcissism.²⁴ It is a direction from the inside out in a teleological sense, because man's responsibility before God is embedded in the flow of time. God's grace provides a source of new and new hope and perspective for change for the better. (5) Creativity, imagination, abstract thinking and the ability to fantasize have their place in a person's life. They represent significant attributes of humanity as long as they are anchored in reality and develop legitimate frameworks of responsibility in which a person finds himself in relation to himself, family and society, including nature. (6) The story of creation opens up a healthy dynamic of tension between the present, the past and the future, with the future being decisive for man. Eudaemonist ethics and teleological direction of human efforts *sub specie aeternitatis* must balance the current lifestyle, in which the emphasis on momentary experience "now" and "immediately", "unconditionally" and "perfectly" forms the pillars of the narcissistic culture of society nowadays. (7) The story of creation places the self-perception of own greatness and exceptionality of man in the framework of necessary reality.²⁵ We are created in God's image, but at the same time we have lost God's glory and yet we carry "eternity in our heart". The mentioned theological coordinates offer a basis to handle the hidden ambitions in the soul of a person and the reality of his abilities or limitations so that he can live joyfully, responsibly and meaningfully, while independence and individualism alternate with interdependence and mutuality. Man is a communal being, and that is the basis of his freedom and responsibility.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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24 The example of God who came as a man among us is a strong imperative in this regard: *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:43-45).* In the light of the above, narcissism puts a person in a position that does not belong to him and which is ultimately harmful to himself.

25 "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom 3:10-12; Eccl 7:12; Ps 14:1-3) As a result of the failure in Paradise, man "lost the glory of God", that is, he lost the ability to harmonize the world and fulfill the mandate given to him as a result of the loss of favor from God. Therefore, a person should not fall into the illusion of an autonomous being, which alone has the ability to judge not only good and evil in a moral sense, but also to find ideal solutions in practical life. Ideality remains transcendent in the sphere, not illusory but metaphysically.

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MANIPULATION AS A RISK FACTOR FOR PSYCHO-SOCIAL HEALTH*



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Submitted: 22 October 2023

Accepted for publication: 11 April 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The article focuses on the issue of manipulation in interpersonal relationships and its impact on psycho-social health. The objective is to define psycho-social health, to characterize the signs and forms of manipulative behavior, to clarify the relationship between manipulation and psycho-social health, to describe the unfavorable psychological states caused by long-term exposure to manipulation, to characterize coping strategies for manipulative behavior, and to clarify the importance of spirituality in fostering psycho-social health.

Methods: Abstracting and comparing facts from information sources, redefining the issue under review, generalizing available information and drawing conclusions.

Results: Psychosocial health is an integral part of a holistic view of health. It depends on the quality of interpersonal relationships in the social environment. Manipulative forms of behavior are one of the risk factors for disrupting the balance between the social environment and the human psyche. Long-term manipulation can lead to the onset of undesirable psychological conditions: psycho-reactive disorders, neurotic disorders and psychosomatic diseases. Resistance to manipulation is determined by frustration tolerance, a person's self-concept and the level of social skills mastered. An important aspect for coping with manipulation and enhancing psychosocial health is the spiritual dimension of the person.

Keywords: Psychosocial health – Manipulation – Psycho-reactive disorders – Neurotic disorders – Human spirituality.

* Acknowledgment

The paper was supported by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency (KEGA) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic based on the project: "Social work based on moral values – innovation of the study program" Number 011KU-4/2023.

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Introduction

Health can be considered one of the highest values in human life. Without health, one cannot optimally fulfill what one considers important at any given moment, not only in relation to one's self but also in relation to others. According to the American Psychological Association's psychological dictionary, mental health is „a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, appropriate emotional attunement, the relative absence of anxiety and other negative symptoms, the capacity to form healthy relationships, and the ability to cope with the ordinary demands and stressors of life.“¹ From this definition it is clear that health is determined not only by a person's physical and mental condition, but also by the social environment in which interpersonal relationships of any level occur.² For this reason, the definition of health is currently approached from a holistic perspective. Mental health is „a dynamic state of inner balance that enables individuals to use their skills in accordance with the universal values of society.

Basic cognitive and social skills; the ability to recognise, express and regulate one's own emotions, as well as to be empathetic towards others; flexibility and the ability to cope with different life events and to function in social roles; and a harmonious relationship between body and mind are important parts of mental health that contribute in varying degree to one's inner balance.³ The above mentioned definition emphasizes that a person's state of health is influenced by endogenous and exogenous influences. Endogenous influences are mostly based on inherent predispositions. Exogenous influences stem from the social environment. That is, how an individual is able to adapt effectively to different social conditions, but at the same time manage possible pressure in the form of aggression, manipulation by others. Psychosocial health is nowadays an essential part of the study of human health. It is a state of physical, psychological and social well-being based on a subjective assessment of the nature of social events, people's behavior in interpersonal relationships towards others and the individual's ability to fully participate in social events.⁴ In this article attention will be paid to the issue of the influence of people's behavioral patterns in social interactions on the psyche of their communication partners. But at the same time, it will focus also on the person's possibilities to respond appropriately, in the context of preserving his or her or their psychosocial health, to threatening behavior from others.

There are four types of social behavior in interpersonal relationships. Namely, aggressive, manipulative, passive and assertive behaviors.

Aggressive behavior in social interaction manifests itself in the assertion of one's own needs at the expense of others. The individual does not consider the rights of others and the rules of respectful communication. They use direct offensive means of communication based on shouting, insults, threats, devaluing domineering non-verbal symbols, etc. The aggressive individual expresses an attitude towards his/her communication partner: *I can afford everything, you can't afford anything.*

- 1 American Psychological Association, *Dictionary of Psychology*. <https://dictionary.apa.org/mental-health>
- 2 Viliam Judák et al., „Reflection of Political and Social Development in the Religious Street Names of the City of Trnava and their Potential in Tourism,” *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 514-525; František Murgaš et al., „Social Capital as a Predictor of Quality of Life: The Czech Experience,” *J Environ Res Public Health* 19 no. 10, (2022): 6185; František Petrovič, František Murgaš, „Holistic and sustainable quality of life. Conceptualization and application,” *Folia Geographica* 62 no. 1, (2020): 77-94.
- 3 Silvana Galderisi, in *Psychologie zdraví*. ed. Leona Jochmannová, Tereza Kimplová ed. (Praha: Grada, 2021), 26.
- 4 Dušan Bajan et al., „Developing moral competencies in the training of social workers,” *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 1, (2023): 144-150; Anastasia Peshkovskaya et al., „Suicide-Related Groups and School Shooting Fan Communities on Social Media: A Network Analysis,” *Computers* 13 no. 3, (2024): 61.

Manipulative behavior of a person towards another in social interaction is based on an outwardly expressed politeness and respect. However, expressions of politeness and respect are usually a cover-up maneuver to promote one's own interests at the expense of others. The manipulator is pursuing an idea in his behavior: *I will respect you if you do what I want.* The issue of manipulation will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of this article.

Passive behavior is aimed at conforming to others in order to gain sympathy, avoid interpersonal conflict and social rejection. The individual identifies with the following view: *I can afford nothing, you can afford everything.*

Assertive behavior is based on genuine respect between partners in social interactions. They involve forms of behavior that correspond to the rules of effective communication. Possible exchange of opinion occurs at the level of rational judgment, with an emphasis on self-openness in presenting opinions and expressing one's own emotions. At the same time, respect for others is preserved with the expression of adequate empathy. Assertiveness refers to the following concept: *I respect myself, at the same time I respect others.*⁵

Manipulation in social communication and its impact on human psyche

Manipulation in social communication can be particularly characterized as a set of interpersonal behaviors in which the pursued goal is manifested in a concealed indirect way; where forms of behavior based on accusation of the others, coercion and moralisation are preferred; because of the need to achieve the defined objective in an easier way, to satisfy the feeling of higher self-esteem and the need to strengthen the power position. The basic feature of manipulation is concealed behavior towards communication partners. The manipulator does not communicate his true motives, needs and objectives. He or she encodes the communication content into a set of verbal and non-verbal expressions designed to deceive others and make them behave passively.

Mathematician Richard Bandler and linguist John Grinder, among others, dealt with the problem of encoding and decoding the content of communication content. They were inspired by the ideas of Gregory Bateson, family therapist Virginia Satir and hypnotherapist Milton Erickson. Their theory, called neurolinguistic programming, is based on an analytical-diagnostic approach towards human communication and could be summarized as „People behave in a certain way because they use a certain language to evaluate and judge the world they perceive.“⁶ The authors called attention to the algorithmic sequence of three important determinants of human communication: sensory perception - linguistic processing - behavior. Internal or also sensory maps (neuromaps) precede speech and are predominantly: 1. strongly image-based, visual; 2. sound-based, auditive; 3. process-based, variable, feeling-based. On the basis of the sensory style in which an individual receives information, the individual also thinks (creates cognitive mind models of a visual, auditory, kinesthetic nature) and acts, and expresses himself outwardly.⁷ During manipulative behavior, the actor of communication tries to fine-tune the sensory orientation with his/her communication partner, trying to use the same sensory codes. In ordinary communication, this effort is considered one of the means of effective communication; in the manipulator's behavior, this approach is applied in order to gain influence over his communication partner. In manipulative communication, other forms of behavior appear, which are clarified in the theory of neuro-linguistic programming. These

- 5 José García Martín et al., „The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita,” *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 11 no. 1-2, (2021): 48-57.
- 6 Zbyněk Vybíral, *Psychologie komunikace* (Praha: Portál, 2009), 183.
- 7 Paul Tosey, Jane Mathison, „Neuro-linguistic programming and learning theory: a response,” *The Curriculum Journal* 14 no. 3, (2003): 371-388.

primarily include the application of linguistic patterns: generalization, omission and distortion. Generalization does not allow the receiver of the message to obtain all the detailed information to understand the entire communicative context. Omission of partial information is practiced by the manipulator in the transmission of a message when he believes that it is not important for the recipient or deliberately wants to achieve a certain benefit. The distortion is based on the communicator's belief that the recipient automatically understands the motives, needs and desires being communicated in the message without these attributes being accurately clarified. Manipulation involves the deliberate distortion of information to achieve a personal goal at the expense of the other person. The concept of „reframing“ is also related to the theory of neuro-linguistic programming. It is a change in relational frame, where an individual tries to change the current opinion of a person to a different opinion, i.e., to change the person's point of view. This falls under the principle of effective communication in matters of consensus-seeking, however, the manipulator uses this strategy to assert their own opinions, needs and values in a way that is based on a disregard for others.

Manipulative communication is primarily based on strategies in which communication partners are treated at two levels. Eric Berne's theory of social communication, presented under the name of transactional analysis, is an inspiring tool for understanding this strategy. This theory is based on earlier depth theories, but is also based on current knowledge of the principles of interpersonal relationships. That author has observed that people in different social situations exhibit significant changes in attitude, opinion, voice, vocabulary, and other aspects of their behavior. These changes are often accompanied by a shift in feelings. A set of behavioral patterns for a given individual corresponds to a particular state of mind, while another set of patterns is related to a different mental attitude, which is often at odds with the former. On the basis of these changes and differences, the idea of ego states emerged. In Eric Berne's theory of social communication, the ego state is described as a tightly coupled system of feelings and behavioral patterns that result from a particular system of experiences. Ego states are represented by three categories: (1) the ego state, which reflects the ego states of the parental personality; (2) the ego state, which independently strives for an objective evaluation of reality; (3) the ego state, which represents the relics of the past, the still active self that was fixated in early childhood.⁸ Effective communication is most often based on the independent pursuit of objective reality.⁹ However, due to emotions, unsatisfied needs, the desire to assert their attitudes and desires, etc., individuals are unable to meet this level of effective communication in all situations. For this reason, they often unconsciously express themselves in ways that they have witnessed in their parents or other authority figures, or they style themselves in expressing the behaviors they used in childhood to assert their needs and desires. Precisely these manifestations can take on the form of manipulative communication of the following types: lecturing, moralizing, generalizing criticism, defiant pursuit of one's own interests at the expense of others, etc. The manipulator tries to create the impression of rational objective behavior through verbal expressions, but his socially hidden level of communication contains a set of manipulative expressions. In this case, manipulation is based on paralinguistic aspects of speech and non-verbal expressions. The paralinguistic aspects of speech include volume of speech, pitch, speed and fluency of speech, intonation and the melody of speech, phrasing of speech, etc. Non-verbal expressions are represented in terms of the nature of eye contact, handshake, gestures, facial expressions and overall body position in relation to the

8 Eric Berne, *Games people play* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 176.

9 Hedviga Tkáčová et al. "Online Media Audience During the Covid-19 Pandemic as an Active Amplifier of Disinformation: Motivations of University Students to Share Information on Facebook," *Communication Today* 14 no. 2, (2023): 154-167.

communication partner. A state is created between the manipulator and his/her communication partner that is considered a social communication disorder called double bind. The communicator acts in a way where he or she communicates certain attitudes and values on the basis of verbal communication, but in reality his or her attitudes and values are different from those presented. This means that he or she behaves in a certain way externally but internally holds entirely different beliefs. This difference can be recognised by a detailed analysis of verbal and non-verbal speech, but in some cases this may be difficult to recognise. Often the individual does not want to admit that the thoughts, emotions and attitudes etc. communicated are not real with the manipulator.

It is possible to say that manipulative communication can be caused unknowingly. For some people, this way of communication is internally ingrained as acceptable or even seen as a skill to achieve their objectives in interaction with others.

Common persuasion strategies are also used in manipulation. These strategies include making points, asking questions, and appealing to emotions. These methods of communication are used by the manipulator in a specific and unethical way. Arguments are of an irrational nature. The facts presented are made-up and distorted or untrue in terms of accuracy. The questions asked are intended to induce a feeling of guilt, to make the communication partner take responsibility for matters that do not concern him or her and for which he or she bears no moral responsibility. Emotions are expressed in an inadequate manner. They are unnecessarily exaggerated in order to induce feelings of guilt in the recipient and make him behave in the desired way.

Various divisions of manipulation types are given in professional publications, the essence of which is based on the characteristics described above. Among the most used typologies are those by Everett Leo Shostrom. He describes the following types of manipulative behavior:

- Dictator: makes decisions for others, gives orders and bans, expects obedience.
- Poor, weak person: hides behind his incompetence, emphasizes his shortcomings, but also his/her willingness to submit, to face the task.
- Calculator: his/her actions are calculated, he/she does nothing that does not benefit him/her, he/she knows how to take advantage of situations.
- Ivy: can win others by its helplessness, by demanding support, by expressing gratitude.
- A rough, tough guy: brutal, rude, fear-inducing.
- A nice fellow, self-sacrificing, most kind and gracious: he does everything in the best interests of others without showing their will, convincing with his willingness, his pretended concern.
- Judge, the last just one: he knows best, he has no faults, he is critical towards others.
- Protector, Dad, Mom: shows a desire to protect others from everything, fulfills others' wishes without even asking them.
- Owner, mafioso: grants all wishes, but expects gratitude and submission.¹⁰

Manipulative behavior towards others disrupts a person's harmony with his or her social environment. Social asymmetry occurs, which has an impact on psychological and subsequently physical health. These inappropriate social interactions are perceived as conditions where a person may not have the strength to cope in an adequate way. There are different responses to these psychological conditions. Some reactions are aimed at maintaining mental health. They are generally referred to as effective strategies for coping with challenging life situations.

10 Everett Leo Shostrom, *Man, The Manipulator: The inner journey from manipulation to actualization* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1988), 89.

On the other hand, many reactions are inadequate and arise from disruptions in psychological balance. Prolonged exposure to manipulative behavior by others can cause the victim of manipulation to cope inadequately with situations and to react in a pathological manner or even in a long-term pathological state. Such reactions fall within the scope of psycho-reactive disorders. The following types of pathological reactions are mentioned in the scientific literature:

- The psychosomatic reaction: prolonged and destructive manipulation can be a severe risk factor in the development of certain somatic diseases.
- Inadequate response: the individual can handle manipulation by others, but inadequately, by means of maladaptive mechanisms. The most common forms of inadequate reactions to stressful situations are: direct aggression (directed against the one who provoked it), transferred aggression (to another subject, to an object or against oneself), regression (return to developmentally inferior forms of behavior), pathophilia (flight into illness), tentament suicidia (suicide attempt), protest reaction, aggressive reaction.¹¹

In addition to pathological reactions, pathological reactive states can occur in an individual who is exposed to manipulation by others. Jana Miňhová points out that, unlike pathological reactions, these are more complex and longer-lasting disease manifestations, which also occur under stress, but the disease state has a certain development and usually a longer duration. It is often caused by prolonged psychological stress due to the pathological effects of manipulation on an individual, but it is also often caused by the inability of the individual to adapt to social stress, i.e. on the basis of his or her lower frustration tolerance. In the context of manipulative behavior, the victim may experience the following reactive states:

- Minor reactive affective disorders: manifested by anxiety and depression combined with psychosomatic symptoms.
- Crisis reactions: short-term reactions that last a few hours or days, often referred to as abnormal responses to a stressful social situation.¹²

In some cases, the individual is exposed to manipulative behaviors from his or her social environment for a long period of time. The greatest negative impact on the psyche of the individual is the manipulation that is carried out by those close to the victim. Emotionally strong and intense manipulation can cause the victim to develop neurotic disorders. Pavel Hartl and Helena Hartlova state, „Neurotic disorder is a functional reversible disease without organic findings, induced in a psychogenic way with a retained view of the disease.“¹³The following symptoms of neurotic disorders are listed in the literature: headaches, disturbances in daily lifestyle, tics, psychomotor agitation and lack of concentration, speech disorders, anxiety, phobias, depression.¹⁴ Those symptoms are among the signs of complex neurotic disorders. Neurotic disorders are classified as: phobic-anxiety disorder, neurotic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, dissociative (conversion) disorder, somatoform disorder. All forms of neurotic disorders can manifest themselves in varying degrees in an individual who is exposed to manipulation by others. However, inappropriate social environments can most often cause anxiety and somatoform disorders. In relation to the issue of the effect of manipulation on the human psyche,

11 Guy Besançon ed., *Manuel de psychopathologie* (Paris: Dunod, 1998), 245.

12 Jana Miňhová, Vladimíra Lovasová, *Psychopatologie: pedagogické, právní a sociální aspekty* (Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2018), 106; Feng Zhang et al., „Using Virtual Reality Interventions to Promote Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,“ *Children* 11 no. 1, (2024): 41.

13 Pavel Hartl, Helena Hartlová, *Psychologický slovník* (Praha: Portál, 2004), 353.

14 Carter Kenneth, *Psychopatologie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 428.

the following definition of anxiety is apt: „Anxiety is an emotional state that arises when an individual is unrealistically threatened, as a vague anticipation of danger that the experiencing subject is unable to describe and determine accurately.“¹⁵ The most common initial manifestations of anxiety are: psychomotor restlessness, stuttering in speech, feelings of helplessness, stereotypes in action, narrowed consciousness, impaired evaluation, distorted relationship to the outside world, obsessions, voice trembling, etc. Anxiety states can come on suddenly and go away quickly or be a long-term mental condition of a person. Short-term anxiety states are characterized by episodic panic, which is accompanied by the following features: sudden onset of an anxiety attack, chest pain, feelings of shortness of breath, dizziness, fear of loss of self-control. These symptoms are intense and usually last for several minutes. They may arise when an individual is facing a situation in which he or she will be subjected to manipulative pressure from others. On the other hand, a person who is constantly in a social environment where manipulative forms of behavior are the norm may be at risk of generalized permanent anxiety. Typical symptoms of this disorder are: unrealistic anxious expectations, disturbances in attention concentration, persistent doubts about the correctness of one's decision, sleep disturbances, muscle tension, headaches, motor restlessness, inability to relax, increased fatigue, sweating, increased heart rate, dry mouth, dizziness, feelings of nausea, etc. Those partial signs of anxiety may be a sign of a psychosomatic disorder. Psychosomatic disorders are defined as „deviations from the norm in internal and external behavior or bodily functions and structures that are etiologically rooted in a person's past and current psychosomatic life circumstances and are conveyed by psychological processes and their physical related features.“¹⁶ Classic psychosomatic diseases include: bronchial asthma, increased thyroid function, high blood pressure, atopic eczema, stomach ulcers, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis. In the current concept of psychosomatics, four main groups of psychosomatic disorders of varying severity are distinguished in the most broad sense:

- Disorders of the general body system (non-organic physical symptoms without functional or somatic causes, more or less not considered a disease).
- Functional (somatoform and dissociative) disorders (primarily non-organic disorders considered as illness).
- Psychosomatic disorders in a narrow sense (organic diseases caused or reinforced by psycho-social factors).

Somato-psychological diseases (organic diseases with psychosocial consequences).¹⁷

In addition to the group of somato-psychological diseases, the development of psychosomatic diseases, which relates to the other above-mentioned groups of disorders, is a possible consequence of manipulative influence on an individual in the social environment. It is important to note that the development of psychosomatic diseases is influenced by many endogenous and exogenous factors. Manipulative social environment is only one of the causes of psychophysical disorders – it occurs in interaction with other influences affecting man's personality.

Resilience against manipulation and strengthening of mental health

Resilience towards manipulative influences in the social environment is generally based on frustration tolerance. Any incongruence in communication acts as a barrier to the achievement

15 Kelley Huckaby, *Depression and anxiety* (New York: Independently published, 2022), 34.

16 Johann Caspar Rüegg, *Mozek, duše a tělo: neurobiologie psychosomatiky a psychoterapie* (Praha: Portál, 2022), 42.

17 Wolfgang Tress et al., *Základní psychosomatická péče* (Praha: Portál, 2008), 83.

of social needs.¹⁸ It depends on the level of frustration tolerance, on how a person can cope with such an adverse situation. Frustration tolerance is individual and depends on:

- The individual's personality traits (temperament, character, emotional lability, degree of self-control, etc.).
- The influence of the environment (family and school environment, life experiences, emotional support available, etc.).

One of the important factors in psychological coping with manipulation by others is the level of self-concept of the person. Self-concept is a set of factors that allow an individual to form an adequate relationship with himself as well as with others. Among other things, the spiritual nature of life contributes to achieving this state. Spirituality guides a person towards a transcendental way of perceiving realities, and from this derives the formation of his/her attitudes, values and overall lifestyle.¹⁹ The form of spirituality is influenced by religious faith and religious beliefs. Religious faith is carried by the believer's conviction of the existence of God. In Christianity, Judaism, Islam and some Eastern religions, God is seen as a person.²⁰ On the grounds of one's faith, one accepts his message and certain ideas about him and religiously led life. However, above all, the believer turns to God in times of difficulty with trust and love.²¹ In addition to belief in God there is religious belief. Its essence is in what the religious person believes. From this point of view, religious belief is only one, but each religious faith is different.²² In everyday life, a person may believe in values, principles, rules or laws, which may not have the empirical nature of knowledge, but which he/she believes in and which are his/her life support.²³ Each form of spirituality allows the individual to reflect on the motives of the person who engages in manipulative behavior towards others. Questions are raised such as why the manipulator acts this way, what benefits he/she ultimately derives from such actions, is he/she emotionally enriched or impoverished by social relation-

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- 18 Martina Pavlíková et al., "Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 106-123.
- 19 Patrik Maturkanič et al., "Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Czech Society in the 21st Century," *Constantine's Letters* 15, no. 1, (2022): 161-176; Jozef Krupa et al., "Refining Certain Biblical and Liturgical Terms as an Expression of Continuity in Constantine and Methodius' Translation Activities in Great Moravia," *Constantine's Letters* 16, no. 2, (2023): 199-208; Peter Kondrla, "Sustainability Values in Religious Education," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 19-32.
- 20 Marie Roubalová et al., "Basic Aspects of Sleep from the Perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 168-184; Jozef Krupa, "Epiclesis in the Eucharist as another element of progress in the development of Ecumenical dialogue," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 146-153; Zlatica Plašienková, "Eco-Values as a Platform of Unity of Profane and Sacred in the Context of Ecological Ethics," *Bogoslovska Smotra-Ephemerides Theologicae Zagradienses* 89, no. 5, (2019): 1007-1024.
- 21 Zlatica Plašienková, Silvia Vertanová, "The Meaning of Human Life in the Context of the Evolution of the Universe: V. I. Vernadsky and P. Teilhard De Chardin," *Human Affairs-Postdisciplinary Humanities & Social Sciences Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (2023): 184-196; Patricia Dobříková et al., "Caring for terminally ill clients in hospices and social services facilities during the peak of the covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on the experience of relatives regarding this situation," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 2, (2022): 20-37; Viliam Judák et al., "Transformation of street nomenclature in relation to religion in the example of the city of Banská Štiavnica," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 2, (2023): 85-99; Vladimír Thurzo, "The Moral-Theological View of the End-of-Life Care," in *Proceedings from the 7th International Conference of Hospice and Palliative Care*, ed. Patricia Dobříková, 28-38 (Trnava: Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, 2015); Peter Kondrla et al., "Transformations of Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Contemporary Religiosity," *Constantine's Letters* 15 no. 2, (2022): 160-169.
- 22 Miroslav Vlček, *Nástin religionistiky* (Praha: Oeconomica, 2012), 17; Ján Štvrtina, *Psychologické, etické a mystické symboly v tradičnej rozprávke. Kráľ, ktorý zomrel, aby sa narodil* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, s. r. o., 2023).
- 23 Roman Králik, "The Influence of Family and School in Shaping the Values of Children and Youth in the Theory of Free Time and Pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 249-268.

ships, how does he/she respect others and how do others respect him/her, can he/she form an equal relationship with others, etc. Asking questions and thinking leads to a rational perspective on the situation. People of belief or faith realize that life's trials and overcoming life's obstacles are part of living a meaningful life. They do not see manipulation by others as fate's injustice, but as a challenge to deal with and manage such social interaction. Spiritually inclined people are usually tolerant towards manipulators and do not reject their persona without searching for the deeper root cause. It is based on the premise that everyone can make mistakes in relation to others, but it depends on their motives, life experience and the overall context of the social situation. At the same time, a person with beliefs or religious faith can be a strong emotional support for victims of manipulation. Such support is not only provided simply by listening to the person under manipulation, but also by encouraging them to understand the situation and find a suitable solution. People with true spiritual values without a dogmatic mindset find inner peace in their lives more easily, and this has an impact on dealing with people honestly without seeking to manipulatively or aggressively assert their views and needs.

Coping with manipulation is also possible through the acquisition of appropriate communication skills. Effective communication in unfavorable social settings is based on assertiveness theory. The principles of assertiveness were first comprehensively published by Andrew Salter in the USA in 1950. Its core principle is based on a matter-of-fact and assertive communication style, but also on a supportive relationship with the communication partner and deliberate avoidance of communication attacks.²⁴ In practice, the following assertive techniques are used to deal appropriately with manipulative behavior:

- Assertion of demands/broken record: the individual calmly repeats his demand to which he is actually entitled.
- Rejection of requests / broken record: a manipulator's unreasonable request is rejected through calm repetition.
- Open door method: general arguments of the manipulator are acknowledged, thus admitting that he may be hypothetically right about something. This approach usually reduces the individual's motivation to continue applying manipulative pressure in his/her social circle.
- Inquiry into shortcomings: detailed questions are asked about the content of irrational and unjustified criticism. The manipulator runs out of points and does not continue with the unjustified criticism.
- Selective ignorance: it is based on the confirmation that the content of the manipulative message has been heard, but the victim of manipulation ignores it verbally and non-verbally. The manipulator has no interaction partner and does not pursue the communication further.
- Self-openness: in conversation, the individual admits his/her shortcomings, true motives for actions, etc., so that they cannot be used to exert manipulative pressure.²⁵

The acquisition of an assertive way of communication to cope with manipulation by others is a long-term matter of either spontaneous or managed personal development. Personal development focuses on „the use of personal potential, the progressive development of talents and particular individual abilities.“²⁶ In order to be able to effectively counter manipulation in the communication process, it is essential for a person to acquire the following skills as part of a comprehensive personal development:

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- 24 Zbyněk Vybíral, *Psychologie komunikace* (Praha: Portál, 2009), 199.
- 25 Bo Bennett, *Assertiveness* (La Vergne: eBookIt.com, 2018), 10.
- 26 Bohumíra Lazarová, Dana Knotová, "O čem, jak a s kým v osobnostním rozvoji," in Jan Kolář and Bohumíra Lazarová, *K sobě, k druhým, k profesi*, 38 (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2008).

- Creating an appropriate positive attitude towards yourself and others.
- Finding an inner spiritual balance.
- Assessing yourself and others on the basis of realistic expectations.
- Controlling the expression of one's own emotions.
- Expressing one's own experiences, attitudes, values, opinions and needs.
- Identification of manipulative communication forms.
- Awareness and acknowledgement of manipulation on the part of others.
- Application of assertive techniques in social interactions.

Conclusion

Based on the elaborations presented in this article, it is possible to draw the following conclusions. Manipulation is one of the four basic types of communication styles. Its characteristic features are asserting goals in an indirect manner, insincere way of acting, and maneuvering others into unfavorable positions in order to gain profit at their expense. The most common types of manipulative behavior include: making decisions for others and expecting them to be compliant; exaggerating one's own shortcomings in order to gain benefits through passive behavior; engaging only in matters that are beneficial; requesting help and support with the intention of taking unjustified advantage of the willingness of others; acting in a rude manner in order to induce fear; simulating helpful behavior in order to gain admiration and gratitude; criticizing and lecturing others without justification; and helping others while demanding a quid pro quo. Manipulation can be considered a risk factor in terms of psycho-social health. It represents a state of physical, psychological and social well-being based on a subjective assessment of the nature of social events. Prolonged exposure to manipulative behavior can cause the onset of unfavorable psychological states. These are mainly psycho-reactive disorders, neurotic disorders and psychosomatic illnesses. One important factor in the psychological coping with manipulation by others is the level of frustration tolerance and the self-concept of the individual.²⁷ A person's frustration tolerance and self-concept can be significantly influenced by spiritual aspects of personality. Spirituality encourages a transcendental way of perceiving social realities, and from this forms of behavioral and emotional coping with manipulation by others are derived. Psychological inner spiritual well-being is an important prerequisite for the effective use of communication strategies in unfavorable communication environments. These strategies are based on assertiveness theory, which offers a set of specific techniques for active and non-violent forms of communication. Appropriate responding and coping with manipulative acts by others is the result of long-term personal development.²⁸

27 Aleksander Kobylarek et al., "Holistic Education of Seniors in the Eastern European Model of the U3A," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 2, (2022): 87-99.

28 Peter Kondrla et al., "The Philosophical Context of Curriculum Innovations with a Focus on Competence Development," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 78-92; Martina Pavlíková, Igor Tavilla, "Repetition as a Path to Authentic Existence in Kierkegaard's Work," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 105-115.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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HOMILETIC ACCENTS OF ETHICAL MOMENTS IN THE PROTREPTICUS BY CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA*



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Submitted: 6 September 2023

Accepted for publication: 25 February 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The article deals with the ethical views of Clement of Alexandria, which he presents in his work *Protrepticus*. Ethical positions are tried to be presented in the context of the entire range of Clement's thinking, in which the philosophical and theological aspects are difficult to separate. The paper examines the work of Clement of Alexandria from a homiletic point of view on its ethical aspects presented in his *Protrepticus*. The article is not an attempt to include the entire ethical message of the work of the Alexandrian theologian, but only to find and separate the main ethical message in the book, which is considered to be the first of his major writings. Although the theological level cannot be avoided in the case of early Christian thinkers, we have tried above all to abstract and isolate the views of our author that correspond to philosophical theology. The work examined has a homiletic character that is transformed into a specific kind of homily function and that is the prophylactic aspect that seeks to warn against the traditional Greek religion. We also analyze the recommended virtues as well as the ethical imperatives that Clement of Alexandria considers to be the main principles of ethics. We also touch on negative behavior models. We also outlined the issue of traditional customs, respect for animals, the combination of beauty and ethics. Several philosophical connections could not be avoided, where we also focused attention on Clement's reflection on ancient philosophers.

Conclusion: The identified homiletic elements create a new concept of a view on the creation of the writing, which also by its character and composition identifies the educational and formative concept of the work.

Keywords: Clement of Alexandria – *Protrepticus* – Ethics – Homiletics – Criticism of Greek religion.

Introduction

The perception of Clement of Alexandria's work from the point of view of a function other than purely philosophical – ethical or theological is in the concept of functionality, which at that time filled these works with a conceptual reference. This homiletic, better said, moral-didactic feature

* Acknowledgment

This paper was developed as a part of solution of the project IG-KSV-ET-01-2021/12.

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affects many things such as the content of the work, the means of expression used, the concepts of meaning with which the author speaks to the reader in his work. We humbly dare to say that it was the application of a need that arose during the creation of the work as a professional handle of theoretical, but also practical disciplines, or of a philosophical or theological nature.

This teleological concept makes Clement's work significant in terms of content, because it can also serve as a practical model for contemporaries of theologians, rhetoricians, or philosophers.

The main concept that creates the overall framework of Clement's work is the search for the meaning of justice and defining the term justice. Justice as a concept of the arrangement of relationships on the human, but also supernatural level, that is, the relationship to God.¹ The author tries to explain this concept, if it is mentioned below in the text of the article, in finding the right justice, i.e. in departing from the concept of Greek religion to learn the truth about the true God. He considers this act of finding the truth to be justice both to man and to God, thus becoming true morality (as a practical discipline). This concept is present in biblical works, for example in the preaching of Amos. Biblical justice is different from human justice, but homiletic justice is itself the source of the concept of identification. The work's homiletic ethics is a concept of justice.²

There is no consensus on the definition of justice; this study assumes that Rawls principle of justice represents a modern, intuitive justice that combines distributive justice and procedural justice. In other words, Rawls's "principle of justice" reflects and universal definition of people's common conceptions of justice because it gives the perception that people get what they deserve (distributive justice) and that the process by which things are distributed and rules are enforced is fair and trustworthy (procedural justice).³

The main goal of the activity of the Church, where we can classify Clement as a church father, was to teach with the help of homiletics. This task is based on the mission of the apostles, which we find in Mt 28:10, where Christ sends his apostles to preach the Gospel. In their sermons, the preachers tried to announce their work and draw from sources – "ad fontes" and at the same time adapt to the needs of individual communities. Everything, content, vocabulary, cultural traditions and concepts were adapted to this. In the work of Clement of Alexandria, the search for justice thus acquires a special character of the interpretation of ethics using the values of Christian morality in the cultural and value concept of the community. Given the devaluation of the word, persuasion with words alone is not enough. Clement's message of the ideas described is that he brings certain ethical patterns. These can subsequently serve as desirable models of behavior, suitable as a practical example, worthy of following.

Selected ethical moments of the work *Protrepticus*

Clement of Alexandria is the only one of the representatives of patristic, who is at the same time evaluated as belonging to the stream of fathers, and at the same time he is ranked among the Gnostics. "Many of Clement's works have survived and reveal a wide-ranging mind capable of synthesizing perspectives from the Bible, Greek philosophers, tragedian writings, and post-biblical Christian authors."⁴

His views are not far from the contemporary Christian trend, which can be described as orthodox, apart from some deceits' claims. It prefers the oral tradition to the written one and aims

- 1 Peter Kondrla et al., "The Philosophical Context of Curriculum Innovations with a Focus on Competence Development," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 78-92.
- 2 Dong-ik Jang, "Rawls: Principle of Justice," *Philosophical Ideas* 5, (2005): 12.
- 3 Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas and Setting up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 202-205.
- 4 Judith Kovács, "Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens) of Alexandria," *Expository Times* 120 no. 4, (2009): 261.

to preserve the apostolic tradition.⁵ It combines philosophy and the gospel, which is its most perfect form. Clement's sincere love for Greek culture and philosophy and his vast erudition gave him access, even if only indirectly, to philosophical and literary texts that would otherwise be lost to us, and we would even identify, especially in the sources of the Socratic-Platonic tradition, key passages, which would make it possible to better emphasize certain aspects of texts that are already lost.⁶ Λόγος was also active in ancient philosophy, therefore, according to Clement, its representatives were able to make some statements compatible with Christianity.⁷ Finally, thanks to the Christian idea of Christ as the Logos, Christianity was nothing foreign to the Greeks, nor was Greek culture foreign to Christianity.⁸ The Greek influence was manifested not only in the concept of God as logos, but mainly in the fact that the entire process of salvation is conceived as divine pedagogy, the ultimate goal of which is the acquisition of virtue and knowledge.⁹ Clement opened a new conception of faith, which is cognitive, epistemic in nature, reminds Guile.¹⁰ He saw philosophy as helpful in understanding and accepting the dogmas of faith. *Protrepticus*, *Paidagogos* and *Stromateis* can be identified as the most important works. These three writings are among the most valuable remains of Christian antiquity and the most important, which belong to the early period of patristics. Rizzi questions this trefoil as the works Clement would have thought most important. Rather, he favors the concept that *Protrepticus*, *Paidagogos*, and *Quis dives salvetur* appeal to a large audience, while *Stromateis*, *Eclogae prophetae*, and *Excerpta ex Theodoto* deal with doctrinal issues through intellectual speculation and allegorical hermeneutics and are thus projected for an intellectual elite.¹¹ The prologue of Clement's *Pedagogue* is a project of practical ethics.¹²

Clement as an influential author of patristics also resonates in medieval written monuments, such as in the Athos Lavra codex,¹³ or in the legend collection *Legenda aurea*.¹⁴ We remind you that not all works attributed to Clement are considered his authentic works.¹⁵ The first mentioned work has, in addition to a significant theological contribution, also a certain ethical and philosophical impact. In it, Clement tries with all his heart to prove that Christianity is superior to the religions and philosophies of the Greeks.¹⁶ Even though in early Christian philosophy it is problematic to separate theological and philosophical thinking, our task will be to abstract primarily

- 5 Erna Oliver, Willem Oliver, "An Afric reformation," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 73 no. 3, (2017): 3.
- 6 Constantinos Macris, "Ancient Greek philosophers in a monotheistic cento of Clement of Alexandria," *Revue de la Histoire des Religions* 236 no. 4, (2019): 767-768.
- 7 Peter Kondrla, "Sustainability Values in Religious Education," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 20; Patrik Maturkanič et al., "Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Czech Society in the 21st Century", *Constantine's Letters* 15 no. 1, (2022): 161-176.
- 8 Kazimierz Pawlowski, "The encounter of early christianity with Greek pagan philosophy in the second century CE (In times of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria)," *Collectanea Theologica* 86 no. 2, (2016): 84.
- 9 Lautaro Roig Lanzalotta, "Greek Philosophy and the Problem of Evil in Clement of Alexandria and Origen," *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica* 23 no. 1, (2013): 216.
- 10 Dragoş Guilea, "Apprehending „demonstrations“ from the first principle: Clement of Alexandria's phenomenology of faith," *Journal of Religion* 89 no. 2, (2009): 212.
- 11 Marco Rizzi, "The literary problem in Clement of Alexandria," *Adamantius* 17, (2011).
- 12 Matyáš Havrda, "Two Projects of Christian Ethics: Clement, Paed. I 1 and Strom. II 2, 4-6," *Vigiliae Christianae* 73 no. 3, (2019).
- 13 Vít Hušek, "Excerpts from Clement of Alexandria in codex Athos Lavra B 113: A contribution to textual criticism," *Listy Filologické* 142 no. 1-2, (2019).
- 14 Jana Plátová, "The role of psalms in the works of Clement of Alexandria," *Studia Theologica* 20 no. 3, (2018).
- 15 Vít Hušek, "Scholia of Clement of Alexandria in the coptic catena on the gospel," *Adamantius* 24 (2018).
- 16 Erna Oliver and Willem Oliver, *An Afric reformation* (2017): 5.

the ethical opinions found in the mentioned writing. Secondly, we will also focus attention on the philosophical aspects of this work.

Clement's early work Προτρεπτικός πρὸς ἁγίους is primarily directed against the educated adherents of the Hellenistic religion. "It is an agitation for a change in attitude to life and an emphatic promotion of Christianity, which belongs to the genre of ancient pro-Treptic literature, writings calling for a philosophical conversion of the soul."¹⁷ Protreptic literature in early Christian philosophy followed apologetic writings. The added value compared to apologetics is the effort to present Christianity in a light that invites the abandonment of the Hellenistic religion and leaning towards Christianity. However, there is still much that connects Clement with earlier apologetic early Christian writing. As Havrda points out, the pagan religious service was perceived by educated Christians as service to demons,¹⁸ namely unclean demons. Havrda rejects Wendland's speculation¹⁹ that the ethical views in the aforementioned work are a plagiarism of the unpreserved work of Musonia.²⁰ The very success of Protrepticus "lies in the successful and original combination of different literary models and sources."²¹ The ideological content is relatively simple. Herrero de Jaúregui points out that the model for the Protrepticus was often Plato's Phaedrus. Plato's ideas about the soul and virtue were in sharp contrast to what Aristippus thought about the issue – compare²² (Suvák 2021). Clement used a language and style that was typical of Athens and Attica.²³

In the Protreptic, Clement outlines the principle of the Logos as rationally acting in the history of salvation, interprets various significant events of biblical history, the culmination of which from a Christian point of view is the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus.²⁴ However, the Protrepticus is a multidimensional writing. For example, Raffa emphasizes the musical aspect, manifested in the sense of musical metaphors, which he uses musically to depict the divine Logos – Christ as a "new song" (ἄσμακαινόν).²⁵ Overall, Clement rejects the music of pagan festivals, but on the other hand, he uses musical metaphors and allegories on a theological and philosophical level to clarify the differences in the Trinity and to describe the Christian relationship to God.²⁶

Clement criticizes the view that animals can change their behavior based on listening to music. Connecting this belief with religion is pointless. He warns against Bacchic rites that bring drunkenness. According to him, Amphion of Thebes and Arion of Méthymna were only impostors who "glorified arbitrariness and deified suffering" (ὑβρεῖν ὀργιαζόντες, πένθη εγθειάζοντες).²⁷ He argues by saying that God tamed people similar to animals: reptiles, lions, pigs, etc.

17 Matyáš Havrda, *Úvod*, in Kléméns Alexandrijský, *Pobídka Řekům* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 2001), 17.

18 Havrda, "Úvod", 19.

19 Paul Wendland, *Quaestiones Musonianae de Musonio Stoico Clementis Alexandrini aliorumque auctore* (Berlin, 1886).

20 Havrda, "Úvod", 26.

21 Miguel Herrero de Jaúregui, "Factors of the compositional unity in the Protrepticus by Clement of Alexandria: Movement, polarity and symmetry," *Ilu* 24, (2013): 77.

22 Vladislav Suvák, "Good life and good death in the Socratic literature of the fourth century BCE," *Ethics & Bioethics* 11 no. 1-2, (2021).

23 Morton Enslin, "A Gentleman Among the Fathers," *Harvard Theological Review* 47, no. 4, (1954): 229.

24 Havrda, "Úvod", 24.

25 Massimo Raffa, "Rhetorical artifice or musical knowledge? The tuning of the cosmos in Clemens of Alexandria's Protrepticus, 1, 5, 1-2," *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 59 no. 1, (2017): 47.

26 Patrick Bahl, "The Logos of God and the new song: The theological appropriation of music by Clement of Alexandria," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 115 no. 1, (2018).

27 Kléméns Alexandrijský, *Pobídka Řekům* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 2001), 41.

The message of the true God harmoniously arranged the world. The sea did not flood the earth, nor did the fire burn it because of the air that protected it. The freezing cold is tempered by fire. Here Clement suggests the possibility of an anthropic principle. The true God wants to bring people to the truth and the right path (εἰς δικαιοσύνην χειραγωγῆσαι) through preaching.²⁸ Clement sees Christ as an ally of people against the serpent, which carries people away to death.

In Clement's view, Greek myths are models of vice and instructions for crimes. The world of Hellenistic religion misleads the soul. Havrda points out that Plutarch holds similar ethical principles to Clement, although unlike Clement's, his ethics are compatible with Greek religion.²⁹ For Clement, education has the basic task of purifying the soul, curing it of affects and preparing it for higher knowledge. Knowledge associated with purification from diseases of the soul. The influence of the Alexandrian school was also evident later. As Grečo points out, "Byzantine anthropology emphasized that knowledge cannot precede love."³⁰ Greek myths imprinted images of passion on souls and enslave them. The soul is to get rid of these images. The task of offering Christianity is to change the worldly lifestyle. Havrda further points out that, according to Clement, it is necessary to tame unreasonable movements of the soul, such as frivolity, cunning, impetuosity, self-indulgence, profiteering. Demons instill unnatural desires in the soul. The Christian tradition makes it possible to develop a noble desire. The images of philosophers and poets, which have a certain similarity with Christianity, also lead to it.

God constantly drives man to nobility (τόν μὲν θεόν αἰεὶ προτρέπειν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ ἀρετήν). It happens in different ways of intercession. John the Baptist opens fruitfulness where before there was only barrenness and desolation. Barrenness will remain unbelievers, Clement calls for forgetting pagan ceremonies and turning to virtues such as justice (δικαιοσύνη) and temperance (ἐγκράτεια).

Shrines and oracles represent meaningless glorification, much like pagan mysteries. Clement etymologizes in an interesting way. The cries of the Bacchus Εὐάν call Eve, who was seduced by the serpent. In Hebrew it is Ἔϋα, which is a feminine serpent.³¹ The term orgy, in turn, is etymologically derived from anger (ὀργή). He also mocks various phallic rites in honor of Aphrodite and Zeus. How obviously immoral he describes the various stories full of fornication, violence and murder between the Hellenistic gods. It combines the Eleusinian mysteries and the drinking of the kykeon with obscene practices. Gagné and Herrero analyze Clement's attack on the mysteries.³² He accuses their worshipers of a lack of shame. He characterizes such behavior as the height of stupidity. He does not recognize not only star worship, but also human emotions such as love, fear and the like. He says about the Hellenistic deities that even if there were rumors about them with a real historical core, they would only relate to debauched people who once lived and later their names became famous. He considers the erotic adventures of the gods worthy of condemnation. A negative example is the supreme god Zeus himself, burdened with many incidents. Clement notes that his son Heracles also followed him in his deeds. He also blames God for their bisexuality.

28 Kléméns Alexandrijský, *Pobídka Řekům*, 45.

29 Havrda, "Úvod", 26.

30 Peter Grečo, "The principles of the existential personalism in the context of the Byzantine anthropology," *Constantine's Letters* 10 no. 1, (2017): 88.

31 Kléméns Alexandrijský, *Pobídka Řekům*, 55.

32 Renaud Gagné, Miguel Herrero, "Themis at Eleusis: Clement of Alexandria, Protrepticus 2.22.5," *Classical Quarterly* 59 no. 1, (2009).

He perceives the Isthmian, Nemean, Pythian and Olympic games as original mysteries that were secondarily made available to the public.³³ The Dionysian cult is equally phallic, attributing necrophilia to Dionysius. Clement considers the gods of the aforementioned coinage to be slaves of the passions (βούλοι παθῶν γεγονότες). Hellenistic gods occasionally worked as slaves. Physical work was associated with considerable contempt in ancient culture. Some gods even served people. Clement reminds us that Zeus inadvertently became a cannibal, according to our author, he is “a crook, a patron of injustice, inhumanity and violence, a seducer, an adulterer and a lover.”³⁴ He perceives the ancient gods as promiscuous and lustful beings. As ethical role models, they can have an exclusively negative effect. According to Clement, the Egyptians who worship animals are in a better position. They certainly do not have the mentioned properties. Clement admits the possibility that they are demons who have a consuming and impure nature.³⁵

A characteristic of the demons discussed by Clement is the enjoyment of massacring people. It documents cases of human sacrifice to ancient deities. He considers murder to be the same crime regardless of the circumstances in which it was committed, whether it was sacrificed to a deity or not. He considers man to be a much better creature than ancient deities – demons.

To claim that all statues of deities were created naturally is a fraud. All are the work of sculptors. The worship of these statues is already ridiculed by Heraclitus (B 5). Kratochvíl explains that in ancient times, statues were seen as abodes of divine power.³⁶

Clement perceives beauty as variable due to the purpose with which it is connected. “Beauty is disgusting when it is destroyed by obscenity.”³⁷ Only pure beauty can be beautiful, one’s own beauty should be connected with the purity of the image. Our thinker also opens up the topic of the dignity of animals. He says that some animals have developed only one sense, others more. Some animals do not show any senses, but they live and grow. Animals are living beings and deserve some respect, for example compared to statues. Statues are often the target of theft, vandalism, and natural disasters. They are human creations, with no right to respect.³⁸

Clement, in the spirit of Plato and his followers, who had ontological contempt for λη, condemns the glorification of any substance in the form of statues, gold, ivory, marble. He reminds us that monkeys cannot be fooled by statues and dolls, so they are smarter than many people. According to him, art can confuse, as happened in cases where someone fell in love with a statue or a painting. In this context, Clement recalls an anecdote according to which Demetrios Kataibatos was supposed to have received an offer from the Athenians to marry a statue of Athena, which he refused. O’Sullivan points out that a similar story was preserved in Plutarch and related to Marc Antony.³⁹ He suggests acknowledging the dependence of Clement’s reference on Plutarch.

Clement’s criticism of the ceremonies of the Hellenistic religion also consists in the fact that he negatively evaluates the respective religious ceremonies because they are reminders of fornication and gluttony. He also attacks Homer for glorifying fornication, while holding the opinion that such deeds should not even be talked about.

33 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 75.

34 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 79.

35 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 83.

36 Zdeněk Kratochvíl, *Délský Potápěč k Hérekleitově řeči* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 2006), 323.

37 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 97.

38 Peter Kondrla, Roman Králik, “Authentic being and moral conscience,” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12 no. 4, (2016): 159-160.

39 Neil O’Sullivan, “The authenticity of [Alcidamas] Odysseus: Two new linguistic considerations,” *Classical Quarterly* 58 no. 2, (2008).

According to the Alexandrian philosopher, most people consider immorality to be piety.⁴⁰ The recommendations of the deities in question thus correspond to Zeus’ disorder. It is the rape of a person with the help of paintings, statues and unchaste ceremonies. Clement calls those who sincerely believe in these principles the protagonists of evil, since they chose evil despite the fact that good is also offered in the form of the gospel. Our writer also perceives confusion in the worship of the stars, the Sun, the Moon, they are only created entities made by God and it is not necessary to worship them, but their creator.

Clement begins to search for truth among philosophers and poets, who, according to the Alexandrian theologian, have glimpses of it.⁴¹ Clement looks at the pre-Socratics somewhat through the lens of Aristotle. His analyzes in the *Protrepticus* are worth mentioning. He perceives them in the way that they make idols out of various substances and deity strange demons. The interpretations of the last half century criticize the peripatetic misinterpretation of the pre-Socratics. According to him, Thales praised water, Anaximenes air, just like Diogenes of Apollonia, Parmenides praised fire and earth as gods, Heraclitus and Hippasos the Metapontian fire. Empedocles added love and strife to the elements. This perception of the pre-Socratics is of course greatly distorted by Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Clement connects elemental worshippers from the ranks of the Persians, the Medes, he claims, for example, that the Persians and Sauromatians are the teachers of the Pre-Socratics. In this work, he quotes several philosophers, e.g. Philo’s work *On the Virtues*.⁴² Van Winden points out that Philo’s influence on early Christian thinkers is noticeable in many representatives of patristic.⁴³

He has a higher opinion of other philosophers. He believes that they have transcended the elements and are concerned with something more sublime than the limitless, full and empty. The Stoics argued that the divine permeates all matter. The all-pervading Logos was interpreted by the Stoics in the manner of Plato’s world soul, which pervades the body of the world according to Timaeus (Tim 34b3). Clement considers this to be a disparagement of philosophy. He considers Epicurus’ deism impious. He misinterprets Aristotle’s theology as confusing the soul of the world with the divine. However, it cannot be claimed that Clement ascribes pantheism to Aristotle, as Lord says.⁴⁴ He holds Plato in high esteem, which, according to him, “touched the truth” (ἐπαφάσαι τῆς ἀληθείας).⁴⁵ He appreciates its allusion to monotheism. He claims, as in the *Stromateis*, that his theology is inspired by the Hebrews.

Clement of Alexandria quotes more than 350 authors in his writings.⁴⁶ It does not exclude the controversial writings of the New Law, or New Testament Apocrypha, e.g. Peter’s Apocalypse,⁴⁷ if true, the Selection from the Prophetic Books can be considered an authentic work of Clem-

40 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 109.

41 Alexander Bratukhin, “Clement of Alexandria as a creator of the Christian philosophical prose,” *Philologia Classica* 10 no. 1, (2015): 103.

42 Andrew Dinan, “Another citation of Philo in clement of Alexandria’s *protrepticus* (10,93,1-2),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64, no. 5, (2010).

43 Jacobus C. M. Van Winden, “Quotations from Philo in Clement of Alexandria’s „*Protrepticus*,”” *Vigiliae Christianae* 32 no. 3, (1978): 208.

44 Abraham Bos, “Clement of Alexandria on Aristotle’s (Cosmo)Theology (Clem. *Protrept.* 5. 66. 4),” *The Classical Quarterly* 43 no. 1, (1993): 183.

45 Kléméns Alexandrijský, “Pobídka Řekům”, 119.

46 Jana Plátová, “The role of psalms in the works of Clement of Alexandria,” *Studia Theologica* 20, no. 3, (2018): 25.

47 Veronika Černušková, “References to the Apocalypse of Peter in Clement of Alexandria’s *Eclogae Propheticae*,” *Studia Theologica* 19 no. 3, (2017): 164.

ent. Most contemporary interpreters lean towards authenticity, e.g. Havrda.⁴⁸ His sources in the *Protrepticus* are not entirely typical of patristic literature. Clement uses the Old Testament more than the New Testament and Homer more than Plato. Rankin thinks that he is trying to appeal to a less sophisticated pagan audience.⁴⁹ He also praises Antisthenes and Xenophon for natural theology, who indicated sympathetic positions to Clement in apophatic form. He believes that Xenophon also had inspiration from the Hebrews. For the same reason, he spoke positively about the philosopher Cleanthes of Assos and the Pythagoreans. He considers the stated opinions of philosophers to be inspiring with regard to the acquisition of knowledge. In this he is different, like, for example, Aquinas.⁵⁰

For the same reason, Clement speaks positively about the poets who hinted at monotheism. This is how he expresses himself to Hesiod, Euripides, Sophocles, Orpheus, etc. Let us recall that Clement's work is sometimes key to the lost works of Greek dramatists, e.g. Euripides – compare.⁵¹ On a general level, he claims that the Greeks captured something of knowledge in the sense of *theologia naturalis*, but did not reach the goal. He also presents and comments on doubtful and relativizing quotes from various Greek poets (Antisthenes, Menandros, Homer, Euripides). Finally, the contradictions between the claims and values of the various protagonists of Hellenistic religion, including the supreme gods, contributed to the emergence of classical Greek tragedy as well as sophistry.

The earth, as well as the elements, will disappear, warns Clement. It also deals with the issue of traditional customs in the sense of morality. He claims that not all traditional morality is good. Some moral traditions are evil and ungodly.⁵² Clement does not seem to differentiate between manners and morality. Morality is based on sympathy patterns of behavior in people, while ethics is a theory of morality. Even the morality associated with tradition can be bad; Clement says that fathers are futilely angry at their non-observance. Clement used the term *ἔθος*, which Havrda translates as manners. However, Clement does not use the mentioned difference.

Good people will be rewarded; bad people will receive a retribution that corresponds to the evil, writes Clement. He considers it unethical to worship demons in view of the creation of man by the God of the Bible. He compares some people to pigs because they overfeed themselves with worthless pleasures. Noble deeds contribute to one's reward. Other connections are of a theological nature; let's just remember that it accentuates the call of Scripture for people to be just. He connects reflections on the Good in itself with faith (not in a religious sense) in the sense of a natural inclination towards what is best. Like Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Clement also talks about reason, which chooses for a person what is best for him. You have to think before deciding on a deed and be guided by reason.⁵³ It also applies to the choice of Christianity over the Hellenistic religion. The whole "text is based on the basic idea of conversion as a journey, the

48 Matyáš Havrda, *The So-Called Eight Stromateus by Clement of Alexandria: Early Christian Reception of Greek Scientific Methodology* (Leiden, 2016).

49 David Rankin, "Apologetic or protreptic? Audiences and strategies in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* and *Protrepticus*," *Sacris Erudiri* 44, (2005).

50 Rastislav Nemeč, Andrea Blaščíková, "The Virtue of Religio in Thomas Aquinas: Between Justice and Love," *Religions* 14 no. 5, (2023): 571.

51 Alessio Ruta, "Euripides, Fr. 746a K.: A Fragment from the *Temenos* or the Veiled Hippolytos in Clement of Alexandria?" *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 60 no. 2, (2018).

52 Klémens Alexandrijský, "Pobídka Řekům", 149.

53 Roman Králik, Tibor Máhrik, "Interpersonal relationships as the basis of student moral formation," in *ICERI2019 Proceedings: 12th Annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation* (2019): 8896-8997; Peter Kondrla, Martina Pavlíková, "From Formal Ethics to Existential Ethics," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12 no. 3, (2016): 101-111.

goal of which is a distant point that needs to be reached, or at least oriented."⁵⁴ He points out that the God of the Bible is not unjust like the Hellenistic deities and we can resemble him through justice. Man is the image and imitations of the true God, the Hellenic gods are the creation of man, or demons. One should use the good and turn to the best.

According to Clement, striving for justice does not need wealth or education. The only input capital is the will. Influenced by Aristotle, he says to move towards the ether, towards the sky. The shift he recommends has a model in Plato: "from ignorance to knowledge, from stupidity to wisdom, from incontinence to continence, from injustice to justice, from atheism to God."⁵⁵ For the rational soul, he assigns justice, love, modesty, goodness, temperance to the virtues. He considers wisdom to be a means to true knowledge. He urges them not to pretend that they know the truth that does not have that knowledge. In moral theology, it is based on the Ten Commandments and the highest commandment from Christ, non-opposition to evil and responsibility for bad deeds even with intention, regardless of the state of affairs (later the question of intention and the ethical value of the deed was elaborated by Abelard). "According to Clement, a person who innocently suffers with gratitude towards Christ and with a wish for good towards his enemies resembles Christ in his innocent suffering, which he committed himself to for the lives of people."⁵⁶ These are Clement's ethical recommendations in the sense of connection with moral theology.

According to Clement, the philosophers indicated what the evangelists preached later. Philosophy is long-term questioning, answers can be brought by the gospel. This brings knowledge and removes ignorance. Clement counters that philosophers consider the acknowledgment of Hellenistic deities to be desecration and desecration.⁵⁷ Christians have been made righteous through Christ.

Conclusion

The homiletic prism on the work of Clement shows us the use of all means to achieve theological and pastoral-formation goals. This teleological concept is strongly accentuated, despite the difficult separation of theological and philosophical in patristic thinking, it is possible to see *filosoficum*, that is, ethics, in Clement's work *Protrepticus*. From the above we can see the ethical position that Clement holds. First of all, it can be said that he upholds a certain ethics of virtues, which he defines in the work, as well as comments on negative models of behavior. Unacceptable ethical models are determined by demons and Hellenistic religion in general, this idea is present continuously throughout the writing. From Clement's point of view, unacceptable models of behavior are fornication, drunkenness, gluttony, murder, violence, demon worship, hedonism, usurping, lying. He distinguishes between unnatural and noble desires. In the writing, he emphasizes some virtues that a person should possess. Justice (*δικαιοσύνη*) appears several times, which he attributes to the true God, to Christians, and calls on them to bow to it. However, he does not define this virtue in detail, he expects an implicit understanding of the term. Another virtue that he considers worthy of following is restraint (*ἐγκράτεια*). It also recognizes the virtues of love, modesty, and kindness. He does not consider the whole traditional morality to be good. She claims that there is often no need to follow her despite the opposition of the older genera-

54 Miguel Herrero de Jaúregui, "Factors of the compositional unity in the *Protrepticus* by Clement of Alexandria: Movement, polarity and symmetry," *Illo* 24, (2013): 82.

55 Herrero de Jaúregui, "Factors of the compositional", 84.

56 Veronika Černušková, "Clement of Alexandria on the value of suffering," *Studia Theologica* 18 no. 2, (2016): 71.

57 Klémens Alexandrijský, "Pobídka Řekům", 183.

tion.⁵⁸ In addition to the aforementioned virtues, he considers the Ten Commandments, a new commandment of Christ about love for God and neighbor, not opposing evil, to be an ethical imperative.⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that it emphasizes the meaning of the intention of the deed, which is more important than the ontological status of whether the deed was or was not performed. By following natural reason and making ethical decisions for what is best, man can help himself. Shards of correct ethical recommendations are also found in some poets and philosophers. Avoidance of Hellenistic religion has a prophylactic role. Ethics, salvation and knowledge are closely related in Clement, his soteriology is connected with knowledge and actions or intentions with a positive ethical value.⁶⁰ He perceives beauty as dependent on whether it is associated with cleanliness and moral behavior. It expresses the dignity of animals, which is certainly higher than the dignity of inanimate things. As an argument given by their life and reproduction, it also indicates the importance of the fact that animals generally have senses.

Clement used the potential of his time and the means they had at that time for the multidimensional flight of the spirit. Thus, he enriched his work with applied morality through theology, the pastor through homiletics with the help of anthropocentrically oriented philosophical ethics.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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60 František Murgaš et al., "The Impact of religiosity on quality of life," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 2, (2023): 169-186; Roman Králik, "Key philosophical - theological concepts of Soren Kierkegaard in the work of Paul Tillich," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11 no. 4, (2015): 179-188; José García Martín et al., "The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita," *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 11 no. 1-2, (2021): 48-57.

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SOCIAL-CHARITABLE THINKING AND THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXTUAL RESPONSE OF ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE TO A PANDEMIC IN THE 3RD CENTURY *



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Submitted: 23 July 2023

Accepted for publication: 15 April 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: Connecting the declaration of the faith with social-charitable activity on behalf of the sick and needy is an essential feature of early Christianity. In the presented study, we focus on an analysis of selected aspects of the work *On Mortality (De mortalitate)*, written by the most important early Christian author of the 3rd century, St. Cyprian of Carthage. Although his views influenced the development of sacramental theology in Christianity, *On Mortality* has remained forgotten. We consider it crucial, however, because it is the first known systematic response of Latin Christian social feeling to a pandemic that struck the Roman Empire in this period. We consider an analysis of selected aspects of the development of charitable-social thinking in the early Church and possible applications for the present day as essential also in relation to the recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and various reactions to it. These can thus be enriched by the understanding of Cyprian's contextual reaction to a similar pandemic. The structure of the study begins with a contextual description of the period. We subsequently emphasise the essential aspects of the work from the point of view of its impact on Christian anthropology. This enables us, in the next step, to articulate Cyprian's fundamental influence on the semantic development of the concept of tolerance in the context of defining what it means to be a Christian. We then focus on Cyprian's influence on the development of charitable-social thinking. In the conclusion, we summarise the possibilities that follow from the analyses.

Conclusion: Several contemporary studies focus attention on the substantial influence of Christianity on the development of social-charitable thinking. The study has the potential to clarify the insufficiently analysed aspects of Christian social feeling in dialogue with contemporary secular society.

Keywords: Charity – Cyprian of Carthage – Pandemic – Social issue – Theological anthropology.

* **Foundation/Acknowledgments:**
The study originated as a partial outcome of the project VEGA 1/0293/22 and of the project APVV-17-0001 Komentár ku Knihe žalmov II a III, 2018.

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Introduction

Caecilius Cyprianus Thascius, who lived and wrote in Latin in Carthage, North Africa (in today's Tunisia), is one of the most important theologians of the 3rd century. We have little information about Cyprian's life prior to his conversion to Christianity. Regarding his life after his conversion, including his martyrdom, we have more reliable information from surviving correspondence, personal information mentioned in his works and the panegyric work *Vita Cypriani* ("The Life of Cyprian") written after his death by Pontius the Deacon. Cyprian was born sometime between 200–210 in Carthage. He converted to Christianity around year 246, and some two years later (at the end of 248 or beginning of 249) he was elected Bishop of Carthage. Cyprian was arrested in early September 258 and beheaded in Carthage on 14 September 258.

The situation of the Church in the context of two persecutions

In his short episcopate (c. 250–258) Cyprian faced at least two particularly severe persecutions, those of the Emperor Decius (250)¹ and of Emperor Valerian (257–258), and in between them the whole Roman Empire was stricken with a pandemic. The persecutions themselves caused concern among the faithful, and during this time Cyprian was deeply troubled by the fact that many believers, including several bishops, apostatised during the persecutions.² Many Christians, namely under the pressure of the situation and threats, performed either directly or indirectly the demanded burnt offering (*sacrificati*) or incense offering (*thurificati*), or obtained a written certificate (*libellus*) for a bribe (*libellatici*). Some believers reacted by fleeing and living in hiding in a secret location³. During the first persecution, that of Decius, Cyprian himself hid, and he was harshly reproached by several people and was forced to seriously justify his actions.

The second persecution occurred a few years later, when the Christian community, marked not only by the first persecution, but also by the consequences of the pandemic, faced a new severe persecution by Emperor Valerian⁴ in 257–258.⁵ It was during this second persecution that Bishop Cyprian died a martyr's death. A description of Cyprian's martyrdom is a record of the civil process *Acta proconsularia*.⁶

These two persecutions restricted Cyprian's pastoral and charitable-social activity. We can also add the emergence of schisms in the Carthaginian Church (the Felicissimus schism in 251 and the Novatian schism in Rome, to which some North African priests also joined) to these two

- 1 Yves Duval, Le début de la persécution de Dèce à Rome (Cyprien, ep. 37). *RÉAug* 46 (2000): 157-172.
- 2 From Cyprian's correspondence we also learn the names of some of the bishops who apostatised during the persecution: epistula 65; 1, CSEL 3/1, p. 72; epistula 59,10, CSEL 3/1, p. 678.
- 3 Cf. Maria Veronese, *Introduzione a Cipriano*. (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009), 123 p. (Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 19), p. 10; Hubert Drobner, *Patrologie: úvod do studia starokresťanské literatury*. (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2011), 223; Francois Decret, *Le christianisme en Afrique du Nord ancienne*. (Les éditions du Seuil, 1996), 70 – 71; Charles Saumagne, Saint Cyprien, évêque de Carthage, „Pape“ d'Afrique (248 – 258). in *Contribution à l'étude des „persécutions“ de Dèce et de Valérien*. Préface de Jean Lassus. (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975), 28 -29.
- 4 Publius Licinius Valerianus was emperor in the years 253–260.
- 5 Géza Alföldy, "Der Heilige Cyprian Und Die Krise Des Römischen Reiches." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 22 no. 3, (1973): 479–501.
- 6 Aktá Cypriána. in *Slávne svedectvo mučeníkov. Výber z najstaršej mučeníckej literatúry. Starokresťanská knižnica*, zväzok 4. ed. Helena Panczová, (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2009), 277-281; Charles Saumagne, Saint Cyprien, évêque de Carthage, „Pape“ d'Afrique (248 – 258). in *Contribution à l'étude des „persécutions“ de Dèce et de Valérien*. Préface de Jean Lassus. Paris: (Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975), 149-154.

persecutions.⁷ On 15 May 252⁸, that is, after Easter, a council was held at which the question of apostates (*lapsi*) was discussed and a decision was made that due to the threat of new persecution (under the emperor Gallus⁹), reconciliation was to be granted to all apostates who repented. Cyprian also informed the Roman Bishop Cornelius about this.¹⁰ It was sometime during this period that the entire Roman Empire was stricken with a pandemic.

The pandemic in the 3rd century

This was effectively the second pandemic from the beginning of Christianity that affected Christian Churches. The first, which occurred in years 166–172, is referred to as the "Antonian Pandemic". The second one is also called the "Cyprian Pandemic"¹¹, because Cyprian left us substantial information about it.¹² Aside from his work, it is also mentioned by his biographer Pontius the Deacon, by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria¹³ and then in the apocryphal work *De laude martyrii*, the 13th Sibyl Prophecy¹⁴, as well as by two pagan historians, Dexippus (ca. 210–273) and Philostratus (ca. 170/172–247/250).¹⁵ This pandemic began to spread somewhere in Ethiopia and gradually passed through North Africa to Europe and all the way to Scotland, where it culminated. According to experts, this was either an epidemic disease of measles or smallpox, and the epidemic lasted a little over 15 years.

Cyprian, who simply called the disease *pestis* (disease, pestilence), was the only one from this period to describe this disease in these words, which clearly describe its manifestations:

"Now the bodily powers depart like a stream, the sore throat burned with a painful fire, the bowels quivered with constant vomiting, the eyes burned with blood, some feet or parts of the limbs were amputated due to infection from morbid putrefaction, out of weakness caused by crippling and loss of the body, walking is weakened or hearing hindered or sight dimmed (...)"¹⁶

Among the known victims of the epidemic was Roman emperor Claudius II, who succumbed to it early in the year 270. The *Historia Augusta* documents that in Rome and Achaëa some 5,000

- 7 Epistulae 41 – 43, CSEL 3/1, s. 587 – 597; Quasten Johannes, *Initiation aux pères de l'Eglise I*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1955, p. 405. Epistulae 44–48, CSEL 3/1, p. 597-608.
- 8 Compare Luc Duquenne, *Chronologie des lettres de S. Cyprien: le dossier de la persécution de Dèce*. (Bruxelles, 1972), 33-34; Veronese, "Introduzione a Cipriano", 123 p. (Letteratura Cristiana Antica, 19), 12.
- 9 Gaius Vibius Trebonianus Gallus was emperor from June 251 to August 253.
- 10 Epistula 57, CSEL 3/1, p. 650: „Cyprianus (...) Corneio fratris.“
- 11 Gary Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*. (Baltimore 2009), 115, 118, 121.
- 12 Joseph P. Byrne ed. *Encyclopedia of Pestilence, Pandemics, and Plagues*, Volume 1, A-M. (Greenwood Press, 2008), 536-538.
- 13 Dionysus's two letters are preserved in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, in Book 7. He became a bishop in 247/8 and died in 264/5. The first letter is from 249 and the second from 250.
- 14 This prophecy dates from around the year 253.
- 15 Naoki Kaimura, "North African Way of Approaching to Medical Healing and the 'Plague of Cyprian'". in *12th Annual Conference 'Health, Well-Being, and Old Age in Early Christianity': 13 – 15 September, 2018*. (Okayama University, Okayama, Japan), 3.
- 16 De mortalitate 14. Miloš Lichner, *Zdravá striednosť (Salubris moderatio) v živote a v myslení sv. Cypriána z Kartága*. (Dobrá kniha: Trnava, 2023), 262-263: „Hoc quod nunc corporis uires solutus in fluxum uenter euiscerat, quod in faucium uulnera conceptus medullitus ignis exaestuat, quod adsiduo uomitu intestina quatuntur, quod oculi ui sanguinis inardescunt, quod quorundam uel pedes uel aliquae membrorum partes contagio morbidae putredinis amputantur, quod per iacturas et damna corporum prorumpente languore uel debilitatur incessus uel auditus obstruitur uel caecatur aspectus.“

people died in one day as a result of it.¹⁷ Experts assume that the mortality rate was between 25–33% of the total population. This pandemic weakened the Roman Empire both militarily and materially in the 3rd century, and although pagans initially blamed Christians for disasters and epidemics, in the end the social-charitable activities of Christians helped with conversions to Christianity.¹⁸

It needs to be realised that at this time there was no public care for the sick, and pagans who did not believe in the afterlife preferred to run away from illness to another place, or avoid the stricken and leave them without help.¹⁹ As Rodney Stark demonstrates, a pagan society plagued by disease and fear of death was unable to find answers to the meaning of epidemics, disease and suffering in the teachings of philosophers or the contemporary religious system of the Romans. And it has been documented that in ancient times, during serious disasters, a change in the religious system often occurred.²⁰ We also recall that G. Ferngren clearly showed that on the question of the origin of epidemics the early Christians distinguished between an immediate natural cause and a final cause, which is God.²¹ In his thinking, Cyprian did not address the immediate natural cause, but emphasised that God used this epidemic for His purposes.

Cyprian responded to this pandemic situation with two texts. The first is a homily called *De mortalitate* ("On Mortality").²² The second work is an apologetic public document that Cyprian addressed to the Carthaginian official Demetrius (*Ad Demetrianum*) in which he refuted false accusations that Christians are responsible for wars, epidemics, famine and drought.²³

The meaning of suffering in Christian anthropology

The intention of the work *De mortalitate* was to please and encourage those among believers who, out of insufficient faith, love of this earthly life, weakness of the sex or lack of education in faith, seemed to be crushed before the flood of God's justice.²⁴ Cyprian was aware that Christians had been affected by the latest persecution and that the reality of the pandemic surprised them. Many were able to imagine suffering or death as a result of persecution, but not as a result of disease. In this context, Cyprian first develops the classic argument of theological history on the fulfilment of biblical prophecies, which St. Augustine later takes up²⁵, and according to which Jesus Christ predicted in the Gospels the coming of various disasters and calamities (Luke 21:9-31). These will strike this world, and therefore believers should not be surprised to see them coming, because, just as he predicted calamities, so he also predicted the coming of the kingdom of God:

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- 17 Historiae Augustae III, 5,6, London: William Heineman 1932, p. 26: „Nam et pestilentia tanta exstiterat vel Romae vel in Archaicis urbibus, ut uno die quinque milia hominum pro morbo perirent.“
- 18 cf. George Childs Kohn ed. *Encyklopedia of Plague and Pestilence: From Ancient Times to the Present*. (Facts On File, Inc., 2008), 85; Oleksandr Kashchuk, "The Early Christians in the Face of Epidemics." *Studia Ceranea* 11, (2021), 615 - 620.
- 19 cf. Ferngren, "Medicine and Health Care", 127.
- 20 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity. How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. (Princeton 1996), 76-81.
- 21 Ferngren, "Medicine and Health Care," 41.
- 22 De mortalitate. Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 252-273.
- 23 Ad Demetrianum 2,1; 3,1; 5,1; 10,2, CSEL 3/1, pp. 352.354.358.
- 24 De mortalitate 1, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 252-253.
- 25 For example, in the work *De catechizandis rudibus*, this argument forms the basis of the pedagogical approach to the catechumenate candidate: cat. rud. 10. Miloš Lichner, *Sv. Augustín. O katechizovaní úplných začiatovníkov. Preklad a analýza textu*. (Trnava: Dobrá kniha 2015), 68: „Sane ab huiusmodi miraculorum siue somniorum ad scripturarum solidiorem uiam et oracula certiora transferenda est eius intentio, ut et illa admotio quam misericorditer ei praerogata sit, nouerit, antequam scripturis sanctis inhaereret.“

“Behold, that which was foretold is taking place, and if those things which were foretold in advance are happening, then all those things which the Lord himself has promised will follow”²⁶

He further reminds them that the fear of death is an expression of a lack of faith and hope, because death is the time of departure to Jesus Christ.²⁷ He then reminds us that this world is full of suffering and attacks by the devil; therefore, we should rather rejoice in our possible departure to Christ.²⁸

Not only a martyr's death, but death by succumbing to an epidemic is also a way to heaven.²⁹ He then points out that many people are unreasonably surprised when they see that the epidemic is affecting both Christians and non-Christians and asks rhetorically whether they became believers because they thought that such evils would bypass them:

“As if a Christian became a believer only to be spared from the touch of evil, that he would live this earthly life in happiness, and not so that after death, after suffering all the adversities here on earth, he would enter into eternal joy”³⁰

He subsequently recalls that Christians not only suffer like other people, but even more so, because the devil attacks them more often due to their faith. This is why he quotes from the Book of Sirach 2,1.4.5 in order to show it biblically (“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient.”); we remind you that Cyprian's text is slightly different from the current wording.³¹ He then names the biblical figures of Job³² and Tobias³³, who, despite being good, were affected by diseases and did not grumble against God, like the Jews in the desert.³⁴ Cyprian's attitude is also emphasised by his biographer Pontius.³⁵ From among New Testament figures, Cyprian mentions the apostle Paul, for whom the evils he experienced are more an aid in the preparation for inner purification:

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- 26 De mortalitate 2, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 254-255: „Fiunt ecce quae dicta sunt, et quando fiunt quae ante praedicta sunt sequentur et quaecumque promissa sunt Domino ipso (...)“
- 27 De mortalitate 3, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 254-255.
- 28 De mortalitate 4-6, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 254-257.
- 29 cf. Hans Ulrich Weidemann, "Der Tod als Exzess Gottesrede in Epidemien am Beispiel von Cyprian von Karthago De mortalitate." in *Gottesrede: Gott im Sprechen und Handeln bezeugen Theologie und Kirche in der Epidemie – Theologie und Kirche in der Krise*. ed. Joachim Werz (Münster, Aschendorff Verlag, 2021), 38 – 69.
- 30 De mortalitate 8, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 258-259: „(...) quasi ad hoc crediderit christianus, ut immunis a contactu malorum mundo et saeculo feliciter perfruatur et non hic omnia aduersa perpressus ad futuram laetitiam reseruetur.“
- 31 De mortalitate 9, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 258-259: „(...) sciet plus sibi quam ceteris in saeculo laborandum, cui magis sit cum diaboli inpugnatione luctandum. Docet et praemonet scriptura diuina dicens: „fili, accedens ad seruitutem Dei sta in iustitia et timore, et iterum: in dolore sustine et in humilitate tua parientiam habe, quoniam in igne probatur aurum et argentum.““
- 32 Compare Jób 1,21; 2,10.
- 33 Compare Tob 2,22; 12,7.12 – 15.
- 34 Compare Num 17,10.
- 35 De mortalitate 10 – 11, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 258-261.
- 36 Pontianus, Vita Cypriani 9, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 154-157.

“Just as the apostle Paul, who withstood shipwreck at sea, scourging and many severe and physical torments, says that he does not feel that he is suffering when in adversity, but that he is being purified and can thus better prepare himself the more difficult suffering he will be visited with”³⁷

It is evident from the work that Cyprian had no problem using direct speech aimed at encouraging the faithful:

“Whether you have already lost your property, or whether your body has been afflicted with permanent and painful illnesses, whether your wife, children or beloved friends have died, it must not be a shock to you, but only a struggle; these things are not meant to weaken or break a Christian’s faith, but rather to help testify to his bravery in adversity. Because it is necessary to disdain all the sufferings of present evils in trust in the future good.”³⁸

He reminds the reader that those who have been reborn by water and the Spirit in the sacrament of baptism and who have been marked with the cross should have no fear of death. Mortality is a grievous blow for Jews and Gentiles, but for Christians it is the happy departure to God.³⁹ What’s more, according to Cyprian, this epidemic is also a test of whether Christians have social feelings towards the needy:

“Whether the healthy will help the sick, whether relatives will sincerely love one another, whether masters will have compassion on their suffering servants, whether physicians will not turn their backs on the sick who ask them for help...”⁴⁰

In his biography of Cyprian, Pontius describes the tragic situation of those who are sick with the words:

“Everyone was horrified; they cried, tried to avoid the contagion and mercilessly left their own to fend for themselves, as if by running away from those who were dying of the contagion, they could avoid death itself.”⁴¹

Suffering, diseases and epidemics in the view of Cyprian are thus helpful in preparing a Christian for possible martyrdom in such a way that they teach us that we should not fear death.⁴² The

37 De mortalitate 13, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 262-263: „Si et apostolus Paulus post naufragia, post flagella, post carnis et corporis multa et grauia tormenta non uexari sed emendari se dicit aduersis, ut dum grauis adfligitur uerius probaretur.”

38 De mortalitate 12, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 260-261: „Ad omnia te paratum facere timor Dei et fides debet. Sit licet rei familiaris amissio, sit de infestantibus morbis adsidua membrorum et cruenta uexatio, sit de uxore, de liberis, de excedentibus caris fuuebris et tristis auulsio: Non sint tibi offendicula ista sed proelia, nec debilitent aut frangant cliristiani fidem, sed potius ostendant in conluctatioue uirtutem, cum contemnenda sit omnis iniuria malorum praesentium fiducia futurorum bonorum.”

39 De mortalitate 15, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 262-265.

40 De mortalitate 16, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 264-265: „(...) an infirmis seruiant sani, an propinqui cognatos pie diligant, an misereantur seruorum languentium domini, an deprecantes aegros non deserant medici (...)”

41 Pontianus, Vita Cypriani 9.2, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 154-155: „Horrere omnes, flere, uitare contagium, exponere suos in pie, quasi cum illo peste morituro etiam mortem ipsam posset aliqui excludere.”

42 De mortalitate 17, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 264-267.

possibility of death also forces Christians to ask themselves whether they truly mean that part of the Lord’s prayer (Thy kingdom come) that they pray each day.⁴³ Cyprian thus clearly formulates the positive meaning of suffering as part of Christian existence. It is a part of following Christ (*Christum sequi*)⁴⁴, and a Christian conforms to its model by patiently tolerating suffering, be it in the form of persecution or illness.

Cyprian and the semantic development of the concept of tolerance

In the work “On Mortality”, Cyprian mentions that Christians should show the virtue of tolerance. A semantic analysis of the term shows us that Cyprian inherited the classical tradition of its understanding, which he enhanced with a new semantic shift. The Latin term *tolerantia/ tolerare* means bearing, putting up with weight. This means a certain physical or moral effort with a negative meaning. Classical Latin already knew synonyms of the term, which were used with the aim of enriching speech (for example, *tolerantia, patientia, sustinentia*).⁴⁵ Cicero, for example, offered a Stoic definition of tolerance in his work *De inuentione*, where it is a component of courage as a certain ability to endure “voluntarily and for a long time from a worthy and useful motive, difficult and painful tasks”.⁴⁶

Among Christians, we find the presence of Stoic thinking in Cyprian’s predecessor Tertullian, where we witness an important semantic development. At the end of his work *Apologeticum*, he cites several examples of pagans who patiently tolerated suffering and who ask why it is allowed for the Romans to tolerate “for the sake of the country, for the territory, for the empire, for the sake of friendship”, but it is forbidden to tolerate something for God? One who would act like that would supposedly be considered a “fool” (*pro Deo patiat, insanus est*)⁴⁷.

Therefore, ancient Christians used the heritage of Latin literature, but supplemented it with ideas taken from the first translations of the Holy Scriptures in a sense that represents a certain development of the classical sense of the word. Evidently, they want above all to show that they are practicing the same virtue of tolerance that pagan literature tells about.⁴⁸ By preserving the classical meaning, namely that we tolerantly bear evil, Christian authors emphasise that we are patiently tolerating for the sake of Christ. They justify this by citing several Bible verses that justify Christians practicing this virtue, because the Holy Scriptures encourage them to do so and

43 De mortalitate 18, Lichner, “Zdravá striedmost’ (Salubris moderatio),” 266-267.

44 cf. Simone Deléani, *Christum sequi. Étude d’un thème dans l’oeuvre de saint Cyprien. Études augustiniennes*. (Paris, 1979).

45 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Seconde action contre Verres* III, 87, 201 p. 120: „Quod si hoc munus et hoc uectigal aratio tolerare, hoc est Sicilia ferre ac pati potest, populo Romano ferat potius quam nostris magistratibus”; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Philippiques* 11, 12, pp. 169-170: „Quibus utinam contenti essent! Ferremus, etsi tolerabile non erat; sed quiduis patiendum fuit, ut hoc taeterrimum bellum non haberemus”; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanes* II, 7, 18, p. 87: „Tristis enim res est sine dubio, aspera, amara, inimica naturae, ad patiendum tolerandumque difficilis”; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Lettres à Lucilius*, ep. 120, 10, pp. 70-71: „Alium uidimus aduersus amicos benignum, aduersus inimicos temperatum, et publica et priuata sancte ac religiose administrantem, non deesse ei in is, quae toleranda erant patientiam, in is, quae agenda prudentiam.”

46 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De l’inuention* II, 54, 163, p. 226: „Patientia est honestatis aut utilitatis causa rerum arduarum ac difficilium uoluntaria ac diuturna perperio (...); cf. Michel Spanneut, Patience. In: *DSp* 12/1, col. 438-476.

47 Tertullianus, *Apologetique* 50, 1-11, p. 105-107.

48 Michel Spanneut, L’impact de l’apathie stoïcienne sur la pensée chrétienne jusqu’à saint Augustin. In: *Cristianismo y aculturación en tiempos del Imperio Romano*, pp. 46-48; cf. Michel Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des Pères de l’Église*. Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 1957.

because this virtue comes from God⁴⁹ and finds its image in Christ,⁵⁰ who patiently bore all that was imposed upon him, leaving the *exemplum patientiae* to the Christians; what's more, several biblical characters are cited as examples of tolerance.⁵¹ During persecutions, Christian writers frequently connect the word tolerance with martyrdom. Martyrs follow the example of Christ and tolerantly endure persecution in his name. Tolerance thus becomes the primary virtue of martyrs; it becomes the only true tolerance, which is not the tolerance of the Gentiles.⁵²

Cyprian's encouragement to charitable and social action

During the mentioned epidemic, Cyprian remained in the city to organise material and spiritual assistance and to encourage and help the victims and their families. We do not find the Stoic concept of *apatheia*, indifference to suffering, in Cyprian because this would prevent him from helping those in need. Christian communities belonged to different social strata of society, and Cyprian's letters from the period of persecution demonstrate social-charitable help to imprisoned Christians. A pandemic, much like martyrdom, is a test of the true justice of each person, how he behaves towards the needy. Pontius the Deacon, who wrote his biography of Cyprian shortly after Cyprian's death, describes the tragic situation in the cities, when no one cared for the dying and the dead. According to Pontius, Cyprian encouraged Christians to care not only for Christians but for unbelievers, too. The wealthy contributed financially and materially, and poor Christians helped with their labour. He emphasises that Christians did more than the biblical Tobias, who only buried dead Jews.⁵³ Social-charitable activities were thus transferred from the private sphere to the centre of the community life of the Church.

According to everything in this period he delivered a homily which he later reworked into a separate treatise called *De opere et eleemosynis* ("On Good Deeds and Almsgiving").⁵⁴ He called on Christians not only to help other Christians but also pagans,⁵⁵ emphasising that a Christian intercedes not only for Christians in prison or sick Christians, but for pagans, too.⁵⁶ Later, Cyprian began to liken charitable activity to the so-called "white martyrdom", as opposed to "red", in which blood was spilled. Charitable-social actions, according to Cyprian, are becoming a proper way to obtain the "white crown".⁵⁷

Modern authors document with a detailed analysis that many Christians were engaged in charity and that they helped not only Christians but also non-Christians and that their selfless

49 De bono patientiae 3, CSEL 3/1, p. 398: „Origo et magnitudo patientiae Deo auctore procedit.“

50 Ad Fortunatum 5, CCL 3/1, p. 326: „[...] (Kristus) post omnes iniurias et contumelias passus quoque et crucifixus, ut nos pati et mori exemplo suo doceret, ut nulla sit homini excusatio pro se non patienti, cum passus sit ille pro nobis, et cum ille passus sit pro alienis peccatis, multo magis pro peccatis suis pati unumquemque debere.“

51 Cf. De bono patientiae 10, CSEL 3/1, p. 403-404.

52 Tertullianus, *De la patience* 16, 1, SC 310, p. 112-113: „Haec patientiae ratio, haec disciplina, haec opera caelestis et uerae scilicet: Christiana non, ut illa patientia gentium terrae, falsa probrosa.“ Cyprianus Carthaginiensis, *De bono patientiae* 2, CSEL 3/1 p. 397: „Hanc se sectari philosophi quoque profitentur, sed tam illic patientia falsa est quam et falsa sapientia est.“; cf. Ivano Dionigi points out the difference between the concept of *patientia* as understood by Seneca and the understanding of *patientia* among Christians. (« la *patientia* senecana [...] esclude il futuro [...] la *patientia* christiana [...] anche dell' « attesa » et della « speranza » della dimora futura » ("La 'patientia' Seneca contro i cristiani." *Aevum Antiquum* 13, (2000): 427.)

53 Pontianus, *Vita Cypriani* 9-10, Lichner, "Zdravá striedmost' (Salubris moderatio)," 154-158.

54 We will deal with this work in a separate study.

55 Éric Rébillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*. (Cornell University Press, 2009), 94.

56 Ferngren, "Medicine and Health Care", 114-115.

57 Geoffrey D. Dunn, "The White Crown of Works: Cyprian's Early Pastoral Ministry of Almsgiving in Carthage." *Church History* 73, no. 4 (Dec., 2004): 715-740.

help at the cost of endangering their own lives was an important evangelistic moment in the spread of Christianity.⁵⁸ The experience that the Church gained in these situations contributed to the fact that Christian hospitals began to appear in the 4th century.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Several modern studies have drawn attention to the substantial influence Christianity had on the development of social-charitable thinking. American sociologist Rodney Stark was one of the first researchers to point out the connection between the spread of Christianity in the first centuries and the social and charitable actions of Christians even towards non-Christians.⁶⁰ North African Bishop Cyprian of Carthage was the first Latin author to systematically connect the proclamation of faith with charitable and social acts towards Christians as well as pagans. During the pandemic that devastated the Roman Empire in the 3rd century AD, Christians, at Cyprian's instigation, systematically cared for the sick and thus developed the concept of community solidarity. It has also been shown that the medical profession became one of the most popular of professions in early Christianity,⁶¹ and we assume that this activity also contributed to the spread of Christianity. In the field of Christian anthropology, Cyprian emphasises the eschatological aspect of Christian existence and pays no attention to the topic of developing the quality of earthly life. In this context, Cyprian redefines the classic Latin concept of tolerance and shapes it into the Christian virtue of enduring suffering for the sake of Christ. The recent COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to social-charitable activities of the Church⁶² as an integral part of Christian life. Through our study, we clarified the necessary contribution of this early church author to the development of social and charitable engagement. A path is now open for study of another aspect of social-charitable thinking in the period of the early Church.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

58 J. H. D. Scourfield, "The De Mortalitate of Cyprian: Consolation and Context." *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 no. 1, (1996): 12-41; Maryna Lukashenko, Lidiya Biletska, "How Christians of the First Centuries Experienced Epidemics." *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 41 Iss. 1, Article 5. (2021): 46-57.

59 J. N. Hays, *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 17.

60 Stark, "The Rise of Christianity", 73-94.

61 cf. Ferngren, "Medicine and Health Care", 66-68;74.

62 See for example: Ladislav Csontos, "The meaning of life and death in the holistic formation and nursing practice of the Daughters of charity." *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 2, (2023): 155 -168.

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THE DESIRE TO 'BE REMEMBERED AFTER DEATH' AMONG TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS



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Submitted: 27 August 2023

Accepted for publication: 10 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The desire to be remembered after death is particularly relevant to terminally ill patients. This paper briefly presents findings on the wishes of terminally ill patients to be remembered after their death.

Methods: The survey was conducted in Italy from December 2022 to May 2023 in hospice care facilities, involving 100 respondents who were patients in the terminal stage of illness. The aim of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the value that terminally ill patients attribute to the desire to be remembered after death, as well as the legacy they wish to leave behind. The survey was based on a qualitative research strategy, and the data collection tool was a semi-structured interview.

Results: Most of the respondents expressed a desire to be remembered after their death, wishing to remain in the memories of their family, relatives, and friends. They hope to be recognized as important in the lives of those who remember them.

Conclusion: Similar surveys can play a role in enhancing the quality of medical, psychological, and spiritual support for patients in hospice and palliative care. These surveys can shed light on important but often neglected topics like death and the wish for a lasting legacy.

Keywords: The desire to be remembered – Legacy after death – Terminally ill patients – Hospice and palliative care.

Introduction

Many people often contemplate how they could be remembered after their death and think about something specific that would express this. They may orient their entire lives toward this goal, striving to create and maintain something with the intention of leaving it behind for their

loved ones, friends, or even future generations.² Their efforts can take an intangible form, such as values, a legacy of ideas, social relationships, a good reputation, acts of kindness, or the testimony of a good life. At the same time, it can take a tangible form, such as a beneficial work for others, achieved successes, prestige, or personal property. The endeavour to be remembered after death and to leave something behind can be directed and fulfilled in many ways, both positive and negative.

The desire to be remembered after death is particularly relevant to terminally ill patients. For terminally ill patients who are aware of their situation, it becomes crucial to spend the last moments of their lives as meaningfully as possible. In hospice and palliative care, pain management is particularly important to help them live out their remaining time without suffering. In addition to pain management, medical, psychological, and spiritual care for these patients should also deeply focus on finding the meaning that terminally ill patients attribute to their existence, the consistency of their interpersonal relationships, their death, or their future fate, if they believe in an afterlife.

It still happens all too often that the topic of death is not addressed openly. Many healthcare providers, as well as family members, seem to fear or even feel embarrassed to ask terminally ill patients about their end-of-life wishes. As a result, they fail to understand the patients' desires or how they wish to leave their legacy after death. It is important for patients to be able to "talk openly about sensitive issues, reflect on their lives to make sense of past experiences, and to find meaning in relation to their illness and its life-limiting consequences."³

This paper briefly presents findings on the wishes of terminally ill patients to be remembered after their death.

- 2 Rudolf Dupkala, Marián Ambrozy, "Education Towards "Dialogue of Cultures" in the Context of Axiological Pluralism," *Ad Alta* 12, no. 1, (2022): 17-22.; Elena Fernández-Martínez, et al. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Self-Harm Attempts Observed in a Hospital Emergency Department," *Healthcare* 12, no. 3, (2024): 385; Ľubomír Hlad, et al. "At Risk Youth in the Context of Current Normality – Psychological Aspects," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 285-296.; Áron Hölgyesi, et al. "Validation of the Musculoskeletal Health Questionnaire in a general population sample: a cross-sectional online survey in Hungary," *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders* 13, no. 23(1), (2022): 771; Edward Zygmunt Jarmoch, et al. "Social Work and Socio Pathological Phenomena in the School Environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 130-145; Viliam Judák, et al. "The importance of social and spiritual bridging in relation to post covid society polarization in Slovakia," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 126-137; Peter Kondrla, Repar Primož, "Postmodern aspects of new religious movements," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 13, no. 3, (2017): 67-74; Peter Kondrla et al. "The Philosophical Context of Curriculum Innovations with a Focus on Competence Development," *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 14, no. 2, (2023): 78-92; Roman Králik, "Key philosophical – theological concepts of Soren Kierkegaard in the work of Paul Tillich," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11, no. 4, (2015): 179-188; Roman Králik, "The Influence of Family and School in Shaping the Values of Children and Young People in the Theory of Free Time and Pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 249-268; Roman Králik et al. "Compassion and Solidarity with the poor in Tahakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 154-168; Ângela Leite, et al. "Contribution of Social Media Addiction on Intention to Buy in Social Media Sites," *Digital* 4, no. 1, (2024): 169-181; Martina Pavlíková, et al. "Grief of the bereaved in a social media environment as one of the prominent consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 75-84; Martín, José García et al. "The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita," *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 11, no. 1-2, (2021): 48-57. Patrik Maturkanič, et al. "Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Czech Society in the 21st Century," *Constantine's Letters* 15, no. 1, (2022): 161-176; Patrik Maturkanič, et al. "Perception of the personality of Jesus Christ and its influence on the Central-Europeanman of the 21st century. Comparative studies between the population of the Czech Republic and Slovakia," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 107-125; Roman Králik, Luboš Torok. "The Moment' Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 3, (2016): 45-53.
- 3 Isaac Gibson, et al. "From my perspective': Findings from a feasibility study with outpatients in palliative care who evaluated a personalized immersive audio listening experience." *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 1, (2023): 7.

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Methods

The survey was conducted in Italy (Rome) at the hospice care facilities Hospice Sant'Antonio and Hospice Villa Speranza from December 2022 to May 2023. The aim of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the value that terminally ill patients attribute to the desire to be remembered after death, as well as the legacy they wish to leave behind. The research question guiding this goal was: Is it important for terminally ill patients to be remembered after death, and how would they like to be remembered?

The survey was based on a qualitative research strategy. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, as it is an effective method for collecting qualitative data, including personal and open-ended information. This approach aims to explore the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the survey participants on the presented topic. It also allows for delving into personal and sometimes sensitive issues.⁴

Sampling

The survey was conducted with a sample of 100 respondents, all of whom were patients in the terminal stage of illness. The patients were approached personally by the author of the article and volunteer workers in the mentioned hospice care facilities. The survey included 66 women and 34 men, aged between 46 and 78 years. A condition for participation in the survey was the explicit declaration by the patients of their willingness to talk about their final wishes.

Data collection

The semi-structured interview consisted of five questions, designed to accommodate the uncertain health conditions of the respondents, and allowed for the possibility of the patient providing their own responses. These questions were posed to the patients by volunteer workers in the hospice care facilities mentioned, who were well-trained in providing psychological support to the dying (counselling). Prior to the survey, the patients were accompanied for approximately a week through daily conversations.

The following questions were posed to the patients, the respondents:

1. Would you like to be remembered after your death?
2. Specifically, who would you like to remember you after your death?
3. What does it mean to you to be forgotten after death?
4. What would you like to leave behind after your death?
5. How would you like others to remember you after your death?

Ethical Issue

The patients who participated in the survey consented to their voluntary participation and expressed a desire to speak with the volunteer workers during the survey about their final wishes and the desire for someone to remember them after their death.

Results

The survey results revealed that the majority of respondents expressed a desire to be remembered after their death and longed to remain in the memories of those they love and who love them, particularly in the memories of their family, relatives, and friends. They wish to be perceived as individuals who were loved by others, to be recognized as important in the lives

4 Daniele Nigris, "Epistemologia delle narrazioni di malattia: un frame concettuale per l'analisi della illness." in *Metodi qualitativi quantitativi per la ricerca sociale in sanità*. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2008): 130-153. ed. Clemente Lanzetti, Linda Lombi, Michele Marzulli.

of those who remember them, and to leave behind cherished memories as people who were capable of loving others. Additionally, they aspire to be regarded as good people who lived their lives with kindness, generosity, and honesty for the sake of others, setting a positive example of life and leaving a legacy of kindness in the hearts of people. The legacy they wish to leave behind primarily includes good behaviour in life, passing on teachings to their children, as well as intangible, moral, and spiritual values, life experiences, and even economic achievements attained during their lifetime. What they fear and do not wish for is to be considered as bad, selfish individuals incapable of loving others.

Discussion

As life nears its end, it seems natural for people to contemplate how they will be remembered by others when they are no longer present. This is confirmed by other research studies⁵, which, together with the results of the current survey, indicate that for terminally ill patients, relationships with their family, relatives, or friends are important. They wish to experience their presence and cherish their time with them during their final moments. It is also important for them how those they love will remember them. They would like to talk with their loved ones about the reality of their impending death, their fear of the dying process, or how their loved ones will continue their lives without them.⁶

Dignity Therapy which addresses the emotional and existential needs of terminally ill patients, can help them strengthen their desire to be remembered after their death and allow them to leave a legacy for their loved ones.⁷ Patients participating in Dignity Therapy create a formalised document in which they record, for example, their most treasured memories, life experiences, or their hopes and dreams for the continued lives of their loved ones.⁸ Dignity Therapy has proven to be one of the effective methods for increasing well-being and reducing depression among terminally ill patients.⁹ When identifying the final wishes of terminally ill patients, a highly person-centered approach from doctors, other healthcare professionals, psychologists, spiritual caregivers, or volunteer workers can also be significantly helpful. It is through this approach that valuable insights can be gained into what patients consider most important in their current condition and what they most desire.¹⁰

5 See also: David Kuhl et al. "What people want at the end of life." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 182 no. 16, (2010): 1707. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.101201> ; Sidsel Ellingsen et al. "The pendulum time of life: the experience of time, when living with severe incurable disease – a phenomenological and philosophical study." *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 18 (2015): 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-014-9590-9>

6 Kuhl et al. "What people want", 1707.

7 Lori P. Montross-Thomas, et al. "Enhancing legacy in palliative care: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial of Dignity Therapy focused on positive outcomes." *BMC Palliative Care* 14 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-015-0041-z> ; Marina Martínez, et al. " 'Dignity therapy', a promising intervention in palliative care: a comprehensive systematic literature review." *Palliative Medicine* 31 no 6, (2017): 492–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216316665562>

8 Lori P. Montross-Thomas, et al. "Enhancing legacy in palliative care: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial of Dignity Therapy focused on positive outcomes." *BMC Palliative Care* 14 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-015-0041-z>

9 Michaela Hesse et al. "Patients' priorities in a reminiscence and legacy intervention in palliative care." *Palliative Care and Social Practice* 13 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2632352419892629>

10 Helen von Post et al. "What is important to patients in palliative care? A scoping review of the patient's perspective." *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 26 no. 1, (2019): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2017.1378715>

Conclusion

Conducting similar surveys can indeed contribute to the improvement of medical, psychological, and spiritual care for patients in hospice and palliative care. They can help emphasize sensitive and often overlooked topics, such as death and the desire to be remembered after death. As the survey results demonstrate, in the face of death, terminally ill patients count on the certainty that it is possible to be important to someone, that it is possible to love someone, and to feel loved by others. They perceive these as aspects that will allow them to be remembered after their death.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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SELECTED ATTACHMENTS AND VULNERABILITIES OF BOTH THE ATTENDANT AND THE ATTENDED IN PALLIATIVE CARE



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Submitted: 5 November 2023

Accepted for publication: 17 April 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: In the terminal phase of life, psychological dynamics and spiritual bonds come to the fore in addition to the somatic plane. This phenomenon also occurs in other emotionally exposed situations of life. This study of a theoretical nature brings to light selected links in accompaniment, the notion of authenticity, trust, truthfulness and spiritual pain, in the context of nursing care and a comprehensive palliative approach. It highlights the trichotomous relationships: soul-body-spirit. The context of spiritual pain goes back to medieval mysticism and some of the paradigms found in the Bible. The psychological correlativity of this phenomenon is made clear by the notion of creative depression, conflicting opposites and the dark night of the soul.
Conclusion: The results of similar studies may lead to improvements in the quality of counselling for patients in palliative care.

Keywords: Palliative care - Terminal patient - Spiritual pain - Creative depression - Dark night.

Introduction

We often witness a lack of truthfulness and authenticity in the environment of the severely cancer-stricken. The different perspectives (as well as my own experience of more than twenty years as an accompanying priest (2001-2023), and the time-lapse experience of a cancer patient (2003-2006)), in a study of a theoretical nature, will give us insight into some of the mistakes made by doctors, the attending staff and the focus of the patient. In the field of palliative care, although we state „only“ our terminal accompaniment, at the end of which is the physical end, the platform on which a new life is „born“ is a very important stage in which the old person gives way to a new, reconciled self. And although as accompanist (because the accompanied person is leaving) we cease to be allies of the instinct of life on the somatic plane, on the psychic, social and spiritual plane we assist him in his new definitive maturation; similarly, we are also nearby in his personal Pentecost: the important moment and the moment when he surrenders his soul into the hands of his Creator. On a relational level, too, a new life comes into being: in his hospice or hospital room, relatives forgive each other, relatives or acquaintances who were previously enemies shake the hand of reconciliation. At the same time, a new life comes in this form as well.

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Polypragmatism and persistent therapy instead of consciousness of the last stage

Just as we know the stages of coping with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's illness, we can similarly label the stages of a person's life. The last of these is the consciousness of dying: the last few hours and days of a person's life. However, he does not always know about them and is aware of them. Indeed, the truthfulness and authenticity of the accompaniments make it possible to come to terms with the patient's desire to come to terms with things, to realize that now is the time and space to name and denounce things, to mend disagreements in the family, and to come into contact with all that he has not yet come to terms with. Many clinics and clinics, instead of calmly announcing the start of the palliative phase of care, administer new and costly treatments, activating expensive and economically profitable treatment protocols that are more like palliative therapy. The risk of the patient's sudden departure increases; but the fact that his physical life is in the last stages in this way and approach is not communicated, hinted at or disclosed to him.

The great and very difficult task of the attendant is not to succumb to the temptation to make decisions for the sick person. If we want to protect him, for example, from being told the truth about his illness and that his end is near, let us not be mistaken: even if he asks in any roundabout way, he wants to know the truth and does not want to be deceived by his surroundings.¹ Listening to his quiet, timid and sometimes very uncomfortable questions is very important in these moments. Nothing should be hidden and his questions should be answered truthfully and without evasive answers. A person who is at the end of life usually suspects this fact very well. If we pretend that this is not true and that he „will be with us for a long time“, we are only plunging him into loneliness.² He will withdraw from further communication and will be left all alone to cope with his approaching death. It is no longer a time to jinx anything for each other, but to truthfully walk together and live out the moments we have left. This dimension applies both to the attendants in the role of doctor or staff, but also to loved ones. A grave mistake is made by medical staff who, instead of freeing the patient for palliative care, concentrated treatment and polypragmasia, follow the path of constant and intensive therapy for the primary disease and the complications of its treatment, in an attempt to avoid confronting the true reality. This often times inhumanly distracts the patient's attention from the affairs of life and the aforementioned time-limited considerations.

In terms of the training and competency of chaperones, in this context, it is important to keep in mind the development of self-confidence so that staff are able to take these steps. In practice, „competence and confidence“ are more a product of higher education, further study and so-called „learning on the job“ Given the increasing number of people with palliative care needs, competence development should at best not only rely on learning on the job but also on further education. Peer networking is also a proven asset in the skills development approach.³

Crying and being moved is a reward

If a seriously ill person cries in our presence and proximity, we are moved to accuse ourselves of having failed. The opposite is true: the sick person has just acknowledged us as worthy of whom he or she can weep in front of, because often he or she is unwilling or unable to in front of those closest to him or her. The formative reward for anyone who is close to the seriously ill and palliative patient is the authentic and media-unfiltered words, expressions, at-

1 Daria Heřmanová, *Co bychom měli vědět, než odejdeme.* (Čerčany, 2015), 16.

2 Martina Špinková, *Jak být nablízku: provázení posledními týdny a dny života.* (Praha: Cesta domů, 2019), 26.

3 Brent Taels et al. "How can social workers be meaningfully involved in palliative care? A scoping review on the prerequisites and how they can be realised in practice." *Palliative Care and Social Practice* 15 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1177/26323524211058895>

titudes, statements and sentences, which we can also encapsulate in the further experience that the dying patient does not talk nonsense'. He is no longer bound by any ties or prejudices and has no reason not to be truthful. This simultaneous honesty and truthfulness of a kind of final understanding of life are authentic⁴ for all parties involved and their value is incalculable.

Trust has three components: ability, forbearance, and integrity. For trust to be established, all three components must be present. Positive interactions in confrontation and acceptance, called role negotiation and information sharing, can strengthen trust. However, if trust is absent, genuine role negotiation and information sharing cannot take place. The reverse is also true between staff and social workers. Even when trust is present, collaboration in palliative care will not take place if the interaction lacks either effective information sharing or effective role negotiation. All three constructs must be in place for collaboration to take place.⁵

Spiritual pain

The Spanish poet, Roman Catholic mystic and Carmelite priest St. John of the Cross, who lived in the 16th century, used the term dark night of the soul. He said: „You cannot find the light until you enter the darkness“. He defines it as the purification of man before he is brought into the full ecstasy of mystical union with God; the leading away of the spirit from the ordinary sense of things, so that he is conscious of his divine senses.

The dark night is the admittance of God into the soul, who then purifies it from its habitual, natural, and spiritual ignorance and imperfections. Mystics call this penetrating contemplation or mystical theology. In view of the loving wisdom of God, it is He who produces remarkable effects in the soul by purifying and enlightening it. God prepares the soul for union in love with His being.⁶ An important parallel to spiritual pain is the moment of the first man in paradise who realizes that he is naked. This triggered the first fall into sin, sin itself. In secular terms, it is a sharp disconnect between a person's conscience and his actions. Such a realization, moreover, under the pressure of the incurability of one's own illness, the non-acceptance of this fact⁷, can be a primary and explicit trigger of spiritual pain. Moreover, according to Kübler-Ross's schema of acceptance, we do not know in which of the five phases the client is.

The spiritual aspect of the dark night, does not have to be a negative event. For one experiences a closer relationship to the things of God. Although by waiting one may feel extremely vulnerable, fearful and temporarily out of control, the original self with its own assumptions eventually dies. For some, the dark night is a long, slow, and repetitive process. For others, on the other hand, it is intense and violent. The length of time depends on the psyche and on all that must be tested and surrendered (to God) in order to change.⁸

Other concepts accompany the issues described: Creative depression - this is the experience of a dying ego that eventually gives way to the idea of birth or procreation. This

4 Michal Slaninka, *Psychoterapia ako výchova k autenticite - Prírodný svet ako psychoterapeutický problém*. (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Pedagogická fakulta, 2011), 205.

5 Janice Firn et al. "Ward social workers' views of what facilitates or hinders collaboration with specialist palliative care team social workers: A grounded theory." *BMC Palliative Care* 17 no. 7, (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-017-0214-z>

6 St Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection by St Teresa of Avila*. trans. Edgar Allison Peers, (Chump Change, 2005), 96.

7 Sheila Payneová, Jane Seymourová, Christine Ingletonová ed. *Principy a praxe paliatívnej péče*. (Brno: Spoločnosť pro odbornou literatúru, 2007), 807.

8 Juraj Sedláček, Vladimír Šišovský, Gabriel Baník, Juraj Jendrejovský, *Bolí duchovná bolesť? Opomenutý rozmer v problematike tíšenia rozsiahlej bolesti v terminálnej a ďalších kritických fázach života. Univerzita – miesto hľadania vzorov a kreovania osobností. Zborník z 5.ročníka vedeckej konferencie. Trnava*. (Bratislava: Kanet, 2012), 198-205.

birth is the basis of the whole experience. The person moves more and more inward and feels traumatized, abandoned by the figures he or she believed in. Finding herself in the midst of these feelings, she finds herself in the grip of an acute episode. At first it seems like an obvious panic attack or nervous breakdown: the ego, as a central aspect of conscious identity, may be convinced that it is dying. Some people have described initial symptoms, a feeling of falling apart, while having difficulty breathing. In reality, this is a breakdown of the ego's defensive walls.

Conflicting opposites - the inner voices accompanying spiritual pain press down on the individual and „whip“ him from the front and behind, each justifying an opposing position. These irreconcilable voices crush the individual. For example, in an acute episode, it becomes apparent that the values of which the individual has been assured were primarily based on the perspective of his or her own ego. The condition that triggers spiritual pain relativizes them. A tremendous hesitation ensues and the Ego flounders in trouble. It brings anxiety and confusion of identification.⁹

Through the prism of psychology, we can state that the dark night of the soul is a profound experience that exposes our false self and brings to awareness deeply buried traumas or developmental failures. These can be integrated towards individuation - it is a mature sense of wholeness. Regardless of whether we consider the dark night to be a religious or psychological experience (or both), if a person is able to stop it, his or her life will radically change toward a newly focused consciousness, and toward an alignment of ego with the essential self. As a consequence, the ego will no longer be the center of its own world, but will be focused on a new center of being, with the confidence that something greater is working within the individual toward achieving things for the greater good. One begins to overflow with gratitude and joy.¹⁰

The most common causes of spiritual pain

In June 2011, the results of a study conducted first in the USA and then in seven hospices in Slovakia were published in the media, asking what most troubles people on their deathbeds (we present the scheme as one of the possible available handles, as knowledge of a certain typology can become a starting orientation before entering into a helping conversation or a therapeutic relationship). A ranking of the four major regrets emerged (we present the schema as one of the possible handles available, since knowledge of a certain typology can become a starting orientation before entering a helping conversation or a therapeutic relationship).

1. „I neglected my family.“ The first and greatest regret expressed by people on their deathbeds is the grief that they have neglected their family and loved ones. „All my life I tried to provide for my family, to make sure they had schools, cars, houses, but I didn't have time for them. I regret it because now they don't have time for me.“ - confessed many. People on their deathbeds regret neglecting their children's upbringing, not being there for their loved ones when they needed it most, disrupting their relationships and not measuring up. They also regret not expressing gratitude to their loved ones and telling them how much they loved them. An extended arm of grief from neglecting loved ones, is regret for

9 David A. Leeming, Kathryn Madden, Marlan Stanton ed. *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*. (New York: Springer, 2010), 998.

10 Juraj Sedláček, *Pomáhať je slastné : (vybrané kapitoly a riziká v pomáhajúcej profesii zdravotníka)*. (Trenčín: Trenčianska univerzita Alexandra Dubčeka Fakulta zdravotníctva, 2016), 82-89.

the loss of old friends; the dying admit that many times the relationship with them died out because they were too caught up in life and maintaining the relationship was not a priority for them.

2. „I worked too much.“ People on their deathbeds admit that they neglected family and friends because they became too absorbed in work. It is their „greatest regret.“ They often state that they had no other choice because of their poor financial situation, yet many dying people reproach themselves that they could have been more frugal and devoted more to their loved ones.
3. „I bet on the wrong life card.“ The dying realize that they put the wrong values on the first rungs of their life ladder and thus wasted their lives. The dying person's hierarchy of values is suddenly turned upside down. The material values that used to be at the top of the list sink lower for these people, and that which had almost no value rises to the top rungs. In this context, a 42-year-old former manager and model was quoted as saying, „If I had been cured of cancer, I would have lived a very different life. Not everything is fame, beauty and money.“, she said on her deathbed.
4. „I didn't fulfill my life plans.“ Recognizing that one has bet on the wrong card will cause disappointment and regret for not fulfilling the dreams and plans one had. Most people have not fulfilled even half of their dreams and have had to die knowing that it was because of the wrong choices they made, or never made such choices.¹¹

For the dying, according to the study, values such as family and interpersonal relationships take precedence; for the faithful, faith in God also takes precedence. Practicing religious faith is related to the choice of adaptive strategies.¹² Maladaptive coping was related to the higher level of experience of pain and sadness, neuroticism, and pessimism.¹³ In the face of death, a person changes: he or she is real, true, sees and understands the essence and perceives what has real value.

What happens next? Stripped of false assumptions and unfounded beliefs about ourselves and others, our life's journey begins to be governed by a series of simultaneous events - simultaneous events with no discernible coincidental connection. These simultaneous events give man a new sense of freedom. The limited insight of the individual's ego is no longer the exclusive guide of his destiny.¹⁴ The true life mission of the individual begins to unravel. Spiraling ever deeper into the labyrinth that encompasses psyche, soul, body and spirit, our consciousness of the individual expands to encompass greater intimacy with that which is transcendent and eternal. This catharsis need not be present only in the terminally ill. It can be part of post-traumatic growth in people who have returned to life in a new quality.

Whatever the angle, the dark night of the soul is a painful and loneliness-inducing process during which one's consciousness is shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty. The tangles of the ego seem to have meaning in their unraveling - revealing a new center. The process in which this untangling happens seems to be a form of depression. And yet this depression is

11 Ján Krempaský, *Štyri veci, ktoré lutujú zomierajúci*. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/5951800/styri-veci-ktore-lutuju-zomierajuci.html>

12 Mária Dědová, Gabriel Baník, „Adaptation to Cancer in the Context of Spirituality.“ *Spirituality Studies* 7 no. 2, (2021): 60-69.

13 Mária Dědová, Gabriel Baník, Lenka Vargová, „Coping with cancer: the role of different sources of psychosocial support and the personality of patients with cancer in (mal)adaptive coping strategies.“ *Support Care Cancer* 31, 27 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-022-07454-z>

14 Philip G. Zimbardo, *Nesmělost*. Praha: Portál, 2021), 215.

insidious in that the psyche fights against the goal of reclaiming the soul (hence our mention of creative depression and other inner conflicts).¹⁵

The search for the meaning of self

The human question that arises when suffering, pain, and loss of personal comfort begin to traumatize a person is first, „Why is my life like this?“ Gradually one can work one's way to the astonishing realization, „My life is not about me.“ This is a kind of great and redemptive revelation, and the individual is never prepared for it. Richard Rohr, reflecting on the suffering of the biblical character Job, states, „If we take suffering joyfully, it also helps other people; when I see people suffer with surrender, even joy, then I feel recharged with tremendous energy.“¹⁶ „It is important to be „emotionally aware“ at least in the middle years. We are all heading towards old age and the day will come when suffering will visit each of us. Our suffering will be an opportunity to pass on life and strength to the world - to our children, friends and everyone around us. The culminating stage is the breakthrough when we begin to care more about others than ourselves, when the difference between me and others will no longer be so pronounced. This transformation is, more than anything else, a re-created sense of self. My life is no longer just about me.“¹⁷

Sense of sacrifice and vulnerability

One cannot evaluate things in terms of good, better, best, but simply let life and dying happen. The key reason to let this happen is that we let love take us to its logical conclusion - love gives itself to the one it loves. The sacrifice of one for the other is simply love at a later stage. We cannot show someone that we love them unless we sacrifice ourselves for them. This choice to suffer and our pain cannot be said to please God, us, or our neighbors. Rather, it is a kind of sanctification of ourselves for the other, an offering of ourselves to the other. In a sense, this is part of human nature. When we go above and beyond the call of duty, when we „lay down our lives“ for our brother or sister, then those for whom we sacrifice ourselves in this way are able to trust our love and believe that they can do the same.¹⁸ The vulnerability factor forces one to go beyond oneself. Whenever we see real pain, most of us abandon preoccupation with other things and want to remove that pain. We want to take the suffering into our own hands. Moreover, in our helping professions, where we are very close to suffering and humiliation, we often come off as those who will help others, but many times we ourselves have felt help and liberation.¹⁹ We are, as it were, rescued by those we go to rescue, and then both parties are rescued. Suffering for and with others seems to be the only way to know that our lives are not about us.

15 Juraj Sedláček, *Pomáhať je slastné : (vybrané kapitoly a riziká v pomáhajúcej profesii zdravotníka)*. (Trenčín: Trenčianska univerzita Alexandra Dubčeka Fakulta zdravotníctva, 2016), 82-89.

16 Richard Rohr, *Job and the mystery of suffering. Spiritual reflections*. (New York: The Cross Road Publishing, 1996).

17 Rohr, „*Job and the mystery of suffering*,“

18 Rohr, „*Job and the mystery of suffering*,“

19 Slaninka. *Psychoterapia ako výchova k autenticite*, 205.

Conclusion

The dimension of authenticity, truthfulness, spiritual pain and our closeness to the sick in palliative care, is an elementary platform for accompanying the seriously ill or dying person.

Our integral endeavour should be to reach the level of the sick person in pain (while respecting the spiritual and bodily integrity and inviolability of the human being, who is a living, thinking and feeling being, called to a special mission in life. To consider whether and what (the mere spoken and ill-spoken word, the insensitively communicated truth, but also half-truths or lies) can have wounding, even morbid, lasting consequences for the human soul and, consequently, for the body, „beaten“ and „nailed“ by its surroundings); this is also true in the issue and area of spiritual pain. In the broader biblical context, it is the grave discovery of the first humans in paradise, the biblical figures of Adam and Eve, along with their sense of shame at being naked after having crossed the boundaries and having their consciences suppressed. Added to this is a certain dismay that man's actions (our actions) can no longer be changed, nor can time be turned back, with the parallel difficulty of forgiving oneself. In addition, the sick person may not only be hurting his or her own true self; these are phases in which the pain, difficulties and wounds experienced „from the outside“ also resonate (e.g. abuse and manipulation by relational figures in childhood, ridicule and belittling in adolescence...). Recognizing these connections within oneself and in one's helping profession, as well as providing quality accompaniment, along with ensuring that the one being accompanied will not be alone in all dimensions of one's pain, can result in effective reconciliation, even (for many) a primary discovery of one's deepest identity, one's Self, and the meaning of one's suffering, which (regardless of the number of days of one's physical life remaining) brings an entirely new and unmistakable dimension to one's noble vocation of being a human being.

The implications of this study can inform empirical monitoring, research, and application to individual palliative care modules.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author hereby declares to be the sole author of this work and has approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that submitted study involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, author declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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WORKLOAD AND STRESS EXPERIENCED BY LAWYERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT. STRESS MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL WORKERS



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Submitted: 23 January 2024

Accepted for publication: 12 May 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The working environment is often difficult for social workers and lawyers. Social workers and lawyers are exposed to a high emotional burden when caring for clients.

Methods: The research was conducted between July 2023 and December 2023 in Slovakia, Poland, and Italy. The aim of the research was to discover the most common stressors experienced in the workplace by social workers working in centres for families and children and in social welfare institutions. Qualitative research strategies were used to conduct the research. Semi-structured interviews were the instrument of data collection. Thirty-five respondents aged between 30 and 60 years participated in the research. The data were analysed through thematic analysis.

Results: The research results showed that social workers consider workload to be the greatest stressor in the workplace. The coping mechanisms they use consist of avoiding stress, focusing on individual tasks, and employing emotion-focused coping mechanisms. Some elements of the Christian coping mechanism such as prayer, Bible readings, and support from fellow believers also emerged in the respondents' answers. In terms of coping with stress and taking care of oneself, the respondents expressed a preference for rest, enough exercise, a healthy lifestyle, and a change of environment.

Conclusion: Conducting similar research may help novice social workers in particular to identify coping mechanisms that would help them cope effectively with stress while promoting self-care.

Keywords: Workload – Stress coping methods – Self-care.

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Introduction: workload and stress experienced by lawyers and social workers in the working environment

Like social workers, professionals in the legal industry are dealing with high levels of stress as well as burnout syndrome. The common factors between legal practice and social work include workload, personal responsibility, the feeling that the client relies on them, believes they know what they are doing and are good at their job, and the desire to do their job well. When caring for clients, social workers and lawyers are exposed to a high emotional burden. They deal with a significant number of difficult cases and often lack sufficient recognition or adequate support from employers or family members.¹ Another similarity in the impact of stress experienced by both lawyers and social workers in the working environment lies, for example, in the work-life imbalance.² According to some lawyers, the difficulties associated with their work do not allow them to lead such a life outside of work as they would like.³ One of the causes of stress in the working environment lies in their working methods; for example, the pressure to generate billable hours⁴, increases in working hours, the need to be available to clients, the pressure to be available and responsive, or the high level of precision in the work they do. In some of the more challenging or specific working environments of legal practice, harsh relationships with colleagues, the incidence of workplace conflicts, or bullying are also causes of stress.⁵ The feeling of pressure and stress in the working environment causes many problems for lawyers, especially of a behavioural and psychological nature.⁶ Some research suggests that psychological problems are more common among lawyers compared to the general population. These problems include depression, anxiety, and a high incidence of addictions.⁷ The heavy workload is the reason why the legal profession is also mentioned in the article. Although the article focuses on stress management of social workers, highly stressful factors can be found – based on the subjective perception of the experienced stress in the workplace – in lawyers, including specific sources of pressure precisely in the legal setting.

Social workers' and lawyers' responses to stressors may also have been exacerbated due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ Some benefited from the assistance provided in the

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- 8 Martina Pavlíková et al., "Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 106-123; Roman Králik et al., "The Relevance of Therapeutic Approaches in Accompaniment for Social Work students with Post-Covid-19 Syndrome," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 1, (2023): 97-106; Edward Zygmunt Jarmoch et al., "Social Work and Socio-Pathological Phenomena in the School Environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 130-145.

fields of psychological, social, and educational counselling, as well as spiritual support.⁹ In the field of social work, the support provided to some social workers in the opportunity to engage in educational and scientific forums has also been important,¹⁰ while emphasizing the importance of proper quality standards in further education.¹¹

Stress Management in Social Workers

When coping with workplace stressors, social workers can employ various coping mechanisms. These may include emotion-focused coping, task-focused coping, or avoidance-focused coping.¹²

Emotion-focused coping is effective when a person is aware of the cause of their stress, such as suppressed emotions, frustrations, and uncertainties. With this coping mechanism, it's necessary to release pent-up anger by changing the environment to one with fewer stressors, engaging in distractions, and developing strategies and activities to manage anger triggers. These are helpful for positively alleviating stress, such as engaging in physical exercise. Another component of this coping mechanism involves working on problem-solving and logical solutions. This requires analysing expectations and adjusting them to attainable goals, which reduces the risk of frustration. Implementing such exercises creates opportunities for effective communication and simultaneously relieves emotional stress. Another coping mechanism for dealing with stress is task-oriented coping. It focuses on identifying the causes of the problem triggering stress and developing strategies, methods, and skills to manage it. With this mechanism, it's essential to remove the cause of stress, take control of one's life, seek solutions to the specific problem, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the problem and the solution found. The goal is to achieve behavioural change that helps eliminate the problem. This mechanism allows individuals to be proactive and develop problem-solving skills. However, it can be destructive in that it leads to increased stress levels. This applies to cases where it's not possible to gain control over the source of the problem, ultimately making problem elimination impossible.

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- 9 Roman Králik et al., "The Relevance of Therapeutic Approaches in Accompaniment for Social Work students with Post-Covid-19 Syndrome," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 1, (2023): 97-106; Elena Cuevas-Caravaca, et al., "Academic Burnout, Personality, and Academic Variables in University Students" *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 14, no. 6, (2024): 1561-1571. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe14060103>; Martina Pavlíková et al., "Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 106-123; José García Martín, et al. "The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita," *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 11, no. 1-2, (2021): 48-57; Edward Zygmunt Jarmoch et al., "Social Work and Socio-Pathological Phenomena in the School Environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 130-145.
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- 12 Richard S. Lazarus, Susan Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. (New York: Springer, 1984); Changiz Mohiyeddini et al. "Neuroticism and Stress: The Role of Displacement Behavior." *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping* 28 no. 4, (2015): 391-407. doi:10.1080/10615806.2014.1000878; Laura Giessing, et al. "Effects of coping-related traits and psychophysiological stress responses on police recruits' shooting behavior in reality-based scenarios." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. (2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01523>; Magdalena Leszko et al. "The Relationship Between Personality Traits and Coping Styles Among First-Time and Recurrent Prisoners in Poland." *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. (2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02969>

Avoidance-focused coping involves activities that allow individuals to avoid stressors in various ways. The most common approach is avoiding factors, triggers, or situations that increase the risk of stress. This is achieved by changing behaviour to prevent activities and memories that could lead to stress, trigger anger, or provoke fear. The consequence may be postponing important life decisions or activities. This mechanism does not offer a final solution; it merely postpones the inevitable.¹³ At the same time, it limits a person's productivity because they are aware that there are tasks, they should complete but are not doing so, which could increase their anxiety levels. Therefore, this mechanism can be dangerous. It can be effective, for example, in situations that require time to develop strategies that may be helpful in overcoming concerns or building self-confidence. It provides time for self-improvement and dealing with challenges.

A specific mechanism for coping with stress is positive religious coping. In religious coping, behaviour is applied in challenging and stressful situations.¹⁴ For example, the Christian mechanism for coping with stress involves seeking help and strength from God, prayer, perceiving work based on faith as meaningful, reading the Bible, Christian meditation, support from the church community or fellow believers, practicing gratitude, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

When experiencing excessive stressors, it's important for coping mechanisms to help regain balance and satisfaction in various areas of life.¹⁵

Methods

To conduct the research, qualitative research strategies were utilized. The research took place from July 2023 and December 2023 in Slovakia, Poland, and Italy. The aim of the research was to identify the most common stress factors experienced by social workers in family and child centres and in social care. The subsequent research question aimed to achieve this goal: What coping mechanisms do social workers use to manage workplace stress?

Sample

Respondents were selected for the research using purposive sampling method. The criteria for participation in the study included completion of a second-level university education in the field of social work and several years of practical experience in the field of social work focused on providing assistance and support to families and children from disadvantaged social backgrounds.

A total of 35 respondents aged 30 to 60 participated in the research. The research included Three family centres and one social welfare office in Slovakia, one center providing assistance to families and their children in Poland, and a similar center in Italy.

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- 13 Lazarus, Folkman, "Stress, Appraisal,"
- 14 Fayez Azez Mahamid, Dana Bdier, "The Association Between Positive Religious Coping, Perceived Stress, and Depressive Symptoms During the Spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Among a Sample of Adults in Palestine: Across Sectional Study." *Journal of Religion and Health* 60 (2021): 34-49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01121-5>; Minsun Lee et al. "Positive and negative religious coping, depressive symptoms, and quality of life in people with HIV." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 37 (2014): 921-930. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-014-9552-y>; Martina Pavlíková et al. "Grief of the bereaved in a social media environment as one of the prominent consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 75-84.
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Data collection

The data collection tool used was semi-structured interviews. The average duration of one interview was 40 minutes. The data collection process commenced by establishing personal contact with potential research participants through pre-selected contacts within the Family and Child Centres and social welfare offices, followed by communication via email and other available online platforms. Subsequently, upon initial contact, selected respondents were presented with an outline of the research objectives through both in-person and online presentations, accompanied by a discussion on its ethical considerations. Subsequent meetings were held to facilitate the actual data collection process.

Data collection took place either in person or online, depending on feasibility, utilizing various online applications.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a frequently employed technique in qualitative research, allowing for a valuable description of overall data with detailed examination of specific aspects within this data.¹⁶

Ethical Consideration

Participation in the research necessitates the voluntary involvement of respondents, and therefore, it is essential to equally respect their willingness to participate in the research as well as any refusal to participate. Research participants were informed in writing about the option to terminate their participation at any time. Throughout the implementation of the research, the anonymity of respondents was maintained without the possibility of identification. Upon providing written consent for their voluntary participation in the research, respondents were presented with a declaration on the protection of personal data - GDPR, and specialized consents were also requested to ensure their legal protection, as well as the legal protection of the research, along with consent for the processing of personal data. All mentioned consents were confirmed by research participants through their signature. Interviews were recorded with the consent of research participants and meticulously transcribed. In order to preserve the anonymity of respondents, the recordings were subsequently deleted in their presence.

Research credibility

In ensuring the credibility of the research, the authors of the article, who comprised the research team, actively participated in the data collection process. During the data collection process, they took field notes and also conducted observations. These steps helped prevent the distortion of the acquired data.¹⁷ The authors of the article also kept in mind the procedures that can be used to assess the credibility of data analysis. These procedures include consistency and reliability checks.¹⁸

Research Limitations

The limitations of the research included the number of respondents and the number of family and child centres in each country, as well as one social welfare office. These limitations can be addressed by continuing further studies conducted in this area.

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17 Malcolm Carey, *Qualitative Research Skills for Social Work. Theory and Practice*. (London: Routledge, 2017).

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Results

The findings can be summarized into the following main themes:

Workload and Lack of Support

According to the respondents' statements, the greatest stress factors in the workplace include the amount of workload, inadequate support from employers, difficulties in maintaining a balance between family and work environment, as well as a lack of support from family members.

"I can't keep up with systematically handling all the files on individual families. There's so much work here that a family file can sit with us for four years before I get to it. I have to attend court hearings, write reports, and I just don't have a chance to keep up. I'm overwhelmed by the number of cases and exhausted, which triggers stress for me. This situation is also caused by the fact that due to dissatisfaction with the work environment or feeling inadequately rewarded financially for the work, employees and colleagues often change. It often takes a long time for a new employee or colleague to familiarize themselves with the case and start handling it. Each of us pays primary attention to matters of the highest priority and postpones the rest, causing further stress and frustration.

Sometimes, the fatigue from the cases at work is so great that it affects me even in my home environment."

Family support plays a crucial role for me in coping with stress. If I perceive it as insufficient or if I'm unable to fully manage the demands of both family and the work environment, I feel pressured and experience stress.

Coping Mechanisms for Stress

The most common coping mechanisms for stress in the work environment among the respondents include avoidance-focused coping, task-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping. Within emotion-focused coping, respondents most frequently associate relaxation and change of environment. In the mechanism focused on avoidance it is not perceived as resignation but as a period during which they gather enough strength to address situations that stress them.

When experiencing stress at work, I focus on avoiding stress. Sometimes, due to work-related stress, I am so overwhelmed that I stay at home for a few days.

When dealing with challenging work situations or cases that cause me concern and I don't have the support from my employer that I need, I prefer to stay home. I try to gather strength, overcome my fears, and only then address what needs to be resolved. Having the option to manage stress and pressure in this way is very helpful for me.

To avoid stress at work, I concentrate on the task at hand.

I prioritize tasks and always try to complete my administrative work ahead of time. This helps me reduce work pressure and stress.

When I have to face a stressful situation at work, I try to focus on eliminating as many of my negative emotional reactions as possible, which I know could occur.

I value good work organization and also strive for appropriate relaxation away from work. A change of environment also helps me, so I don't experience stress at work.

Ten out of the respondents practice the Christian faith, and they prefer religious coping mechanisms when dealing with work-related stress. According to their statements, prayer, reading the Bible, and support from their specific church community and fellow believers are most helpful to them in coping with stress in the work environment. These coping mechanisms give them strength.

Prayer helps me reduce everything that stresses me out at work and in life.

For me, prayer holds the greatest power and helps me cope with stress.

I believe in the efficacy of prayer; when I experience stress at work, prayer greatly assists me.

Prayer has a significant impact on my life and is an essential part of my work when I encounter challenging situations or difficulties.

I believe in the power of prayers and also that their answers depend on God because He knows what is best for me.

Reading the Bible gives me hope and strength. When I experience a situation in which I, for example, don't know how to cope, I turn to the Bible.

The Bible helps me better understand God's ways. This helps me alleviate tension.

God's Word strengthens me; it also helps me at work when I surrender my situation to God's hands and act according to His Word.

The Christian church community, or the support of fellow believers within it, helps me draw closer to God. In the church community to which I belong, there are people with various spiritual gifts, and the awareness that I can share my problems with them, including work-related ones, helps me cope with stress.

The church community represents valuable social support and an opportunity for spiritual growth for me. The sense of belonging with fellow believers, the opportunity to spiritually connect with them in prayers, and their support during difficult times help me greatly. This is true even in situations when I am exposed to stress. For me, such support along with prayer is the most effective form of stress prevention.

Coping with Stress and Self-Care

The respondents perceive various aspects as important in self-care during times of stress, including sufficient rest, relaxation, meditation, adequate exercise, and maintaining a quality diet. During periods of stress, emotion-focused coping, especially involving a change of environment, helps them in self-care. For social workers who practice the Christian faith, this primarily involves faith in God, prayer, gratitude, and a healthy lifestyle.

Self-care, for me, primarily involves rest and sufficient physical activity, along with a change of environment whenever possible. Rest and a change of environment are ways for me to better cope with work-related stress.

Having enough sleep, in particular, is essential for me as part of self-care, as it helps me alleviate stress and pressure experienced at work.

Whenever I have the opportunity to rest during my free time, my stress and fatigue decrease. I consider this a priority in self-care.

I admit that I neglected self-care, leading to excessive work and almost no rest. As a result, I faced health issues, stress, and extreme fatigue. Once I started prioritizing rest, my problems diminished.

Rest is crucial for me; I don't feel stressed or exhausted. In my self-care routine, I focus on physical activity and strive to maintain regular and nutritious eating habits.

Building a healthy relationship with myself helps me manage or prevent stress. I also meditate and, when possible, change my environment to gain perspective.

I engage in self-care because I see it as a responsibility to myself and to God. For instance, I keep a gratitude journal and focus on maintaining a healthy lifestyle in terms of diet, regular exercise, and so on. It's fair to say that my faith in God and prayer help me adhere to self-care practices.

Discussion

The research results showed that the greatest stress factor in the workplace is workload, and the coping mechanisms used include avoidance of stress, task-focused coping, followed by emotion-focused coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms focusing on emotions and tasks were examined in various contexts within the research.¹⁹ In comparison to the mentioned coping mechanisms, the avoidance strategy is considered by some authors to be a considered rather negative,²⁰ However, its positive aspect can be found in allowing a dis-

19 Eric C. Schoenmakers et al. "Problem-focused and emotion-focused coping options and loneliness: how are they related?" *European Journal of Ageing* 12 (2015): 153-161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-015-0336-1>

20 Paula McFadden et al. "The Role of Coping in the Wellbeing and Work-Related Quality of Life of UK Health and Social Care Workers during COVID-19." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 no. 2, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020815>; M Todd Allen, "Explorations of avoidance and approach coping and perceived stress with a computer-based avatar task: detrimental effects of resignation and withdrawal." *PeerJ* 9:e11265 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.11265>

tressed individual to continue living amidst a challenging stressful situation they are facing.²¹ Similarly to the conducted research, some elements of the Christian coping mechanism emerged, such as prayer, reading the Bible, and support from fellow believers. Interesting findings also relate to stress management and self-care. Respondents associate self-care most with rest, followed by sufficient physical activity, a healthy lifestyle, or a change of environment. It's important for the respondents to find coping mechanisms that suit them. Through these mechanisms, they can better cope with work-related stress and fatigue while also maintaining self-care.

Conclusion

The area of experiencing and managing stress in the case of social workers is an important topic and it would be appropriate to focus on deeper examination. Further research could, for example, investigate social workers' reactions to specific stressful events, identifying when they use positive coping mechanisms and when negative ones. It would also be interesting to explore the relationship between stress management and reactions to stressful situations based on the individual personality characteristics of social workers.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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EXAMINING RELIGIOUS LIFE FROM A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE. REFLECTION ON THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE ANNULMENT OF MARRIAGE IN THE EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN POLAND**



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Submitted: 31 January 2024

Accepted for publication: 10 May 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: Religious life is an area of scientific research in different parts of knowledge and requires an appropriate methodological approach. The purpose of this article is to present the results of the research about the social functioning of the annulment of marriage in the Catholic Church. The method conducted using this research was a multidisciplinary one.

Conclusion: The study shows that the faithful in the situation of divorce and seeking the annulment, experience the complexity of their social existence combining the realities of secular and religious reality.

Keywords: Religious life – Divorce – Annulment of marriage – Law – Canon law.

Introduction

In this paper we will present the methodology and results of the research on the social functioning of the annulment of marriage. This research was conducted in Poland in the years 2017-2021 in two projects²³. The first of the projects was carried out in the form of a quantitative survey using the paper questionnaire technique, completed by persons seeking the annulment of their marriage at tribunal of the Catholic Church in the Kraków Archdiocese. The number of respondents participating in this study was 326 people, including 203 women and 123 men. The second project was implemented in the years 2021-2022 in the form of a qualitative survey using the technique of in-depth interview. The sample size in this study was 30 people, including 20 women and 10 men. The participants in the study were people who had initiated the canonical process of annulment earlier and received the judgment of the church tribunal.

* **Acknowledgment:** This paper was produced as part of the project financed by the National Science Centre Poland, in accordance with the contract for the execution and funding of project no: UMO-2019/33/B/HS1/00625. Full information about these projects and the research results obtained is contained in the monograph Kisiel P., Kroczek P., Ulman P., *Diagnoza kondycji współczesnej rodziny poprzez pryzmat procesu orzekania nieważności małżeństwa*, Unum Publishin House, Kraków 2023, <https://doi.org/10.21906/9788376432458>

* **Acknowledgment:** This paper was produced as part of the project financed by the National Science Centre Poland, project no: UMO-2019/33/B/HS1/00625

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In our research, to describe the phenomenon we have used not only theories from the area of theology and canon law, but we used also statistical data, characterizing the scale of the presence of the study and two above mentioned empirical research projects, which are the source of sociological, anthropological knowledge and from the field of cultural and religious sciences as well as family sciences. The scientific project was considered novel due to the intricate methodology utilized in our research. The diverse range of data sources necessitated the use of a detailed approach, ultimately leading to a unique and groundbreaking outcome.

Multidisciplinary perspective of research

Crossing disciplinary divides in scientific research is undoubtedly an important cognitive challenge. The need for interdisciplinary research arises when the problem being addressed is too vast and complex to be dealt with within a single discipline¹. Referring to several disciplines and integrally linking them in the research process makes it possible to combine not only the insights, but also the methodologies of different disciplines and then create a scientific synthesis, to ultimately achieve the integration of the knowledge obtained². Thanks to this, the studied reality does not have to be reduced to a disciplinary specific aspect but can be presented as a panorama of diverse elements, forming a comprehensive, multifaceted, complementary, and holistic narrative³.

At the same time, it is worth noting that knowledge integration can take place at different levels. This is because the creation of integrated knowledge is related only to the mere potential possibility of linking two or more basic subjects of research, assigned to different disciplines. Integrating basic subjects into the formula of complex subjects can be done in three ways. The first is the specialization approach, the second is the interdisciplinary approach and the third is the multidisciplinary approach⁴.

The problem of integrated knowledge can be approached somewhat differently. The key condition for such knowledge is not only the coexistence of interest of different disciplines in the same research area, but the emergence of interaction between these disciplines. However, the scope and nature of this interaction can vary, and as a result, we can specify: multidisciplinary research (in which the integration of the obtained knowledge takes place at the very end of the research process and does not result from the integration of research assumptions and methods), interdisciplinary research (in which the integration of knowledge is grounded in the integration of research methods and assumptions), and transdisciplinary research (in which there is also an integration of academic knowledge with non-academic knowledge)⁵.

Whether academic research is conducted in an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary formula depends primarily on whether the various disciplines used in the inquiry are able to develop integrated research assumptions and methods. The development of such integration usually becomes possible in the case of disciplines that border each other and the effect of this integration is the fusion of these disciplines. In this situation, however, paradoxically, a doubt arises as to whether such research still retains an interdisciplinary character? After all, the effect

- 1 Allen F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*. (Los Angeles & London: Sage, 2008), 5-12
- 2 Willy Østreng, *Science Without Boundaries: Interdisciplinarity in Research, Society and Politics*. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2020), 13-33; Moti Nissani, "Ten cheers for interdisciplinarity: The case for interdisciplinary knowledge and research." *The Social Science Journal* 34 no. 2, (1997): 210.
- 3 Østreng, "Science Without Boundaries", 26.
- 4 MP Satija, "Relationships in Ranganathan's Colon Classification." in *Relationships in the Organization of Knowledge. Information Science and Knowledge Management*. ed. Bean, C.A., Green, R., (vol. 2. Springer, Dordrecht, 2001), 200-203.
- 5 Milena Palczewska, "The essence of interdisciplinary research." *UR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* nr 2(7) (2018): 74-75.

of deep integration in the form of fusion is de facto the creation of a new coherent whole, a new sub-discipline. And consequently, interdisciplinary research in the case of fusion of disciplines becomes monodisciplinary⁶.

In contrast, in the case of a multidisciplinary study, it is not possible to merge disciplines, since their integration occurs only at the level of the results of the study. The clustering of the referenced disciplines takes place based on a common area of interest using bridging concepts and the result of joint inquiry is the ability to see different aspects of the same phenomenon⁷.

Theological starting point for a multidisciplinary study of religious life

Religious life is a very complex and multidimensional phenomenon. In order to grasp its peculiarities and understand the activity of its participants, not only an in-depth study of the phenomena associated with this life is necessary, but also an approach that considers their multi-faceted nature and location in the area of interest of various disciplines of knowledge, that is, a multidisciplinary approach, becomes inevitable. Only such an approach, in effect, will allow the integration of research findings, which should refer to both the religious and social dimensions of religious life, and will make it possible to see the holistic nature of the phenomena under study.

The study of the area of religious life cannot be confined within any one discipline. The multiple contexts, aspects or dimensions of this area of life require recourse to the concept of multidisciplinary research. There are interesting examples in the literature of the benefits of such an appeal⁸. How important it is to be able to conduct inquiries from the perspective of different disciplines can also be illustrated by the analysis of the functioning within the Catholic Church of the institution of recognizing a marriage as non-existent, the insightful description of which requires recourse to several scientific disciplines that are key to this problem.

The starting point for the considerations carried out in this area should undoubtedly be theological reflection. However, one should also be aware that the very institution of recognizing a marriage as non-existent from the beginning in the eyes of the Church, growing out of the theological context, is already a construct of precisely canon law, and it should also be considered in this context.

The very act of entering into a civil and church marriage, followed by a divorce and the course of the process of recognizing a marriage as non-existent from the beginning is not only an activity with a legal dimension (this is secular or state law) and a theological one including canon law, but also contains no less important components related to the broader social life. Thus, this means it is necessary to refer to analyses that consider the research perspectives of several disciplines belonging to three distinct fields of science: social sciences, humanities and family sciences⁹. In order to better illustrate the interaction between these disciplines and the process of integrating the results of research inquiries, we propose to take a closer look at one of the key

- 6 Monika Walczak, "Czy możliwa jest wiedza interdyscyplinarna?" *Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa* no 1 (207) (2016): 125.
- 7 Jan Kozłowski, "Narodziny i rozwój dyscyplin naukowych." *Sprawy Nauki. Biuletyn Komitetu Badań Naukowych*, no 1 (1996): 3-8; Walczak, "Czy możliwa jest wiedza interdyscyplinarna?" 113-126.
- 8 Marilyn R. Tayler, "Jewish Marriage as an Expression of Israel's Conflicted Identity." in *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research*. ed. Allen F. Repko, William H. Newell, Rick Szostak, (London: Sage, 2012), 23-51.
- 9 Here we use the official classification of disciplines in force in Poland as of 2022 (see: Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of October 11, 2022 on scientific fields and disciplines and artistic disciplines (Dz.U. 2022 item 2202). However, it should be noted that in the scientific circulation there is no single classification of disciplines and often in the literature the classification of Allen F. Repko, Rick Szostak were cited, which distinguishes three categories of disciplines (the Natural Science, the Social Science and the Humanities) and within them the individual disciplines. (Allen F. Repko, Rick Szostak, *Interdisciplinary research: process and theory*. (London: Sage, 2020).

moments in the process of recognizing a marriage as null and void - the situation of initiating proceedings before a church tribunal. Of course, it would be most desirable to consider the entire phenomenon multidimensionally and situate it in the necessary contexts. The implementation of such a task is a challenge for further examination in this field.

Reflection on the social functioning of the declaration of nullity of marriage

The subject of the conducted analysis of the results (from a multidisciplinary perspective) is the situation of initiating proceedings before a church tribunal for the recognition of a marriage as never having existed. This situation is related to the first stage of the procedure under the canon law of recognition of marriage as null.

This institution of canon law is rooted in the theological (doctrinal) teaching of the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to establish the truth about the marriage bond. It is a judicial process aimed at giving a clear answer to the question of whether the marriage was invalid.

This process is usually initiated by those directly involved, after the marriage has ceased under secular law, usually, in the form of a divorce. Admittedly, obtaining a divorce is not a formal requirement, however, according to canon law, the judge in a canonical trial should be assured that the marriage has broken down irretrievably (Canon 1675 of the Code of Canon Law 1983), which is most easily established by a civil court decision.

At the same time, it is worth noting clearly that the processes of ruling by civil courts about the divorce and the processes of declaring marriage null by church tribunal are, under Polish law, completely independent of each other. The 1993 Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland¹⁰ states in Article 10 (3) and (4) that „It is within the exclusive competence of ecclesiastical authorities to make a judgement as to the validity of Canon Law marriage, as well as any other grounds laid down by Canon Law” and that “Passing judgements on matrimonial cases within the limits of Polish legislation falls within the exclusive competence of State civil courts”. This issue has also been finally and unequivocally resolved by the Polish Supreme Court, which in its judgment stressed that “the decision of a church tribunal on the validity or termination of a canonical marriage cannot have a preliminary effect on the decision of a civil court on the validity or termination of a secular marriage of the same spouses”¹¹. This is primarily because the prerequisites for divorce and the prerequisites for declaring a marriage null by a church tribunal are different. In the case of divorce, the key premise is the complete breakdown of the marriage of the spouses, expressed in the severance of spiritual, physical and economic ties¹². Meanwhile, in the case of declaring a marriage null and void, the grounds are that the marriage was not properly concluded (Canon 1057 of the Code of Canon Law 1983).

It is also worth noting that obtaining a divorce does not obligate anyone to initiate the process of recognizing a concluded marriage as null. This means that this type of action is completely voluntary, and that it is initiated or participated in only by those for whom the decision of the church tribunal is of significant importance.

At the same time, it can be thought that the decision to initiate the process of declaring a marriage invalid is usually made by those who are truly deeply attached to the Catholic Church or attached to religious values. This is confirmed by the results of the quantitative survey, which indicate that among those initiating the process of declaring a marriage null and void there were no non-believers and 73.9% declared faith in God and frequent (at least once a week) attendance

10 The Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland, 1993, Dz.U. z 1998 r. Nr 51 poz. 318.

11 Judgment of the Supreme Court - Civil Chamber of November 17, 2000, V CKN 1364/00, Legalis nr 49616.

12 Janusz Gajda, *Art. 56, [w:] Kodeks rodzinny i opiekuńczy. Komentarz* ed. Krzysztof Pietrzykowski, Warszawa, Legalis, Marek Andrzejewski, (2018) *Prawo rodzinne i opiekuńcze*, (in:) *Prawna ochrona rodziny*, red. Marek Andrzejewski, Warszawa, 2015 p. 63.

at Mass and other religious services. The remaining applicants declared themselves believers, albeit less frequent participants in religious practices. Significantly, at the same time, the assessment of the religiosity of former spouses is much more critical - only 17.3% of respondents considered former spouses to be religious at least as much as themselves.

The initiation of the process of declaring a concluded marriage as non-existent is a very important and traumatic, event in the life of a believer. Therefore, it can be thought that this is a deeply considered decision, especially since obtaining a declaration of nullity of marriage does not bring with it any pragmatic benefits beyond the regularization of one's own canonical position in terms of marriage. In this situation, the researchers should pay particular attention to the observed systematic increase, in recent decades, in the number of people initiating this process - in 1989, the application initiating the canonical process was filed by 1,250 people and in 2017 there were 3875 such applications. This increase is also evident in comparison with the number of divorces. In 1989, the ratio of the number of applications for annulment of marriage to the number of total divorces was 2.9%, while in 2017 it was already 5.9%¹³. These statistics clearly prove that the procedural path provided for in canon law, is becoming an increasingly important mechanism that supports the modern institution of sacramental marriage, and it can be assumed that its social importance will continue to grow.

The reasons for the increased interest in the possibility of verifying the validity of a marriage are, of course, many. Undoubtedly important is, observed not only in Poland, the growing trend of the breakup of both civil and canonical (sacramental) marriages. However, this trend overlaps with the process of transformation of the family model from the traditional model to the modern one. In families functioning on the basis of the traditional model, can also broke up, however, as a result of this, no divorce proceedings or annulment proceedings are initiated. On the other hand, in the case of families operating on the basis of the modern model, the formalization of the breakdown of marriage by obtaining a divorce is a much more frequent phenomenon. And this makes doubts about the validity of a church marriage and the making of related efforts much more common - albeit only for those genuinely affiliated with the Catholic Church.

In addition, it is worth noting that we are currently observing a transformation of the model of religiosity in Poland, which involves the transformation or replacement of forms of traditional folk religiosity by forms of hybrid or modern religiosity. This is important because, according to the rules of folk religiosity, the sacrament of marriage cannot be undermined in any way. The marriage concluded must therefore continue, even if situations have arisen that constitute, according to Church law, grounds for declaring it invalid. In the case of modern religiosity, on the other hand, there is no longer a fundamental rejection of the possibility of obtaining a ruling declaring a marriage invalid from the beginning. Thus, the validity of a marriage is not decided by family and neighborhood circles, but by a church tribunal, and its verdict is fully accepted by others¹⁴.

A proper understanding of the meaning of the act of initiating the procedure of declaring a marriage non-existent requires not only a multidisciplinary approach, but also a processual one. For the act of initiation itself, carried out by one of the spouses, is not an action that can be viewed in isolation from previous events, but is the end result of the entire process. This process begins at the moment of acquaintance between the future spouses and ends with the actual dissolution of the marriage bond. In order to reliably describe the social and religious context of this process, it is therefore necessary to look at the marriage relationship through

13 Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Kościół Katolicki w Polsce 1991–2011*. (Warszawa 2014), 175; data of 2017 – Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego, *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia AD 2019*. (Warszawa 2019), 25.

14 Marcin Lisak, “Transformacje religijności Polaków : wybrane aspekty religijnej zmiany.” *Symposium* 19, nr 2 (29) (2015): 29–50.

the prism of a time frame that extends beyond the duration of the marriage. In doing so, it is necessary to pay attention first and foremost to what happened before the marriage took place. A key and conclusive argument in favor of applying such a perspective is undoubtedly the very legal construction of the institution of annulment of marriage, as presented in canon law, which not only requires noticing the importance of the premarital period, but even makes this period crucial in the adjudicatory proceedings. This is, of course, due to the fact that a marriage can be declared null and void only if it was invalidly concluded.

The Code of Canon Law from 1983 distinguishes three categories of causes of nullity of the marriage: 1) diriment impediments (Canons 1073-1094), 2) deficiencies and defects in matrimonial consent (Canons 1095-1107), and 3) lack of the required form of the celebration of marriage (Canons 1108-1123). The first category indicates circumstances that prevent a valid marriage, such as the spouses being too young too closely related¹⁵. The second category consists of incapacity of contracting marriage as, for example, lack of evaluative discernment as to the essential rights and obligations of marriage¹⁶. The third category includes formal legal defects, which make it so that the form of marriage has not been observed and thus cannot be considered as valid¹⁷.

By far the most common reason for declaring a marriage invalid are reasons related to deficiencies and defects in the marriage consent - they were the basis for declaring a marriage invalid in as many as 99% of proceedings in 2017¹⁸. This means that the most common reasons for the breakdown of the marital relationship are to be found in the improper conduct of the bride and groom period and mistakes made during the marriage preparation period. Therefore, it is precisely the premarital period that should be at the center of research interest.

There is not the slightest doubt that the premarital period is crucial from the point of view of the future sustainability of the marital relationship, since it is during this time that the spouses should get to know each other and the vision of the future marital relationship should crystallize. At the same time, it is very rich in all sorts of challenges and dangers that future spouses must face. The empirical material obtained in the qualitative study made it possible to identify the basic dangers that directly and definitely negatively affect the subsequent relationship in marriage.

The main dangers in this period for future spouses arise, on the one hand, from the presence of deficits in their social cognitive competence, which prevent them from properly recognizing the person of the future spouse, his or her personality traits and also the nature of the relationships he or she forms with other people important to him or her. On the other hand, a very significant threat to mutual cognition can be various types of manipulation, lies and even falsification of the future spouse or those around them, aimed at concealing important facts from the past or personal qualities that affect the mutual evaluation of the future spouses and their decisions to marry.

As a result of both the lack of adequate social cognitive competence and in the case of manipulation, misrecognition in terms of:

- assessing the maturity of the other person to take on the responsibilities of starting a family, as a result of which it may turn out that the spouse is not sufficiently prepared to enter new social roles in marriage or parenthood,

- assessing the maturity of the other person to maintain marital fidelity. As a result of the misjudgment, the ability to see that fidelity in the relationship may not be maintained did not appear,
- assessing the other person's level of awareness of the importance of the decision to marry and the consequences associated with it,
- assessing the level of addiction to stimulants (e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling) that prevents normal married life,
- to assess the level of dependence on or third parties (e.g., parents, family, friends) whose excessive presence in the spouses' lives prevents the proper formation of relationships in marriage,
- the proper identification of the intentions to marry or the inability to recognize the incompatibility of the spouses' goals (e.g., to have children). As a result of the discrepancies that arise, the normal functioning of the family becomes impossible,
- the proper interpretation of the declaration of intent to marry, since the lack of a clear declaration of intent often prevents consensual marital life,
- the possibility of inducing a transformation in the spouse (wife), which would allow the construction of a consensual marital relationship.

In this context, it is also worth noting the dangers that may affect future spouses and which originate from cultural conditions and customary rules associated with certain models of religiosity. These are primarily situations in which environmental pressures are exerted on future spouses and which definitely limit their ability to make their own autonomous decisions about choosing a spouse or getting married. Two mechanisms seem to be the most relevant here.

The first, consists in treating the prolonged acquaintance or friendship between future spouses as an undeclared period of fiancéhood, which must necessarily lead to future marriage. As a result of this pressure, individual people in the social environment force these future spouses to take the next steps toward marriage, treating them as obvious and expected, even though the interested parties themselves are not sufficiently convinced of this and their relationship is not supported by an adequate emotional foundation.

The second mechanism is much less subtle and delicate and consists in the obvious forcing of future spouses to marry – this happens most often in the case of unplanned pregnancies, in the name of the principle that a child must be born after marriage. The two mechanisms indicated at the level of specific situations are obviously significantly different, but their common feature is that the future spouses do not make the decision on their own, are not ready for this decision and there is no emotional bond between them, which is able to ensure the durability of the marriage.

The obtained picture of disorders and threats to the proper course of the premarital period also finds its confirmation when we look at the studied problem, recalling the results of the quantitative survey. This is because it indicates, among other things, that the families of origin of future spouses are often an environment exposed to pathological phenomena. In the case of the families of those who participated in the survey, 18% indicated alcoholism in their own family and, in addition, the phenomena of psychological (10%) and physical violence (8%). In the case of spouses' families, the intensity of pathological phenomena tended to be higher - alcohol problems were indicated by 35% of respondents, mental violence was indicated by 13% of respondents and physical violence by 21% of respondents. The marriages of the respondents were concluded after a relatively long period of acquaintance. For 29% of respondents, acquaintance between spouses lasted more than 4 years, for 45% of respondents it was between 1 and 4 years.

15 Wojciech Góralski, "Kanoniczne przeszkody małżeńskie „in genere”, *Prawo Kanoniczne* 55 nr 3, (2012): 3-17.

16 Wojciech Góralski, "Systematyka tytułów nieważności małżeństwa w zakresie zgody małżeńskiej w KPK z 1983 r." *Prawo Kanoniczne*, nr 1-2, (1992): 201-211.

17 Piotr Kroczek, "Does Obligatory Canonical Form of Marriage Contribute to "salus animarum"?." *Folia Canonica. Review of Eastern and Western Canon Law* 12 (2009): 23-30.

18 Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego, *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia AD 2019*. (Warszawa, 2019), 26.

The engagement period most often lasted less than 6 months (35%) or 6-12 months (31%). And for 19% of respondents, there was no separate engagement period (no engagement was organized). During the engagement period, 53% of the future spouses met several times a week, meetings less than once a week were had by 20% of the respondents and they stayed together permanently by 13%. It is also worth mentioning that the attitude of the parents of future spouses to the decision to marry was most often accepting (46%), a neutral attitude was adopted for 40% of the relationships and for 15% of the relationships the attitudes were negative.

The premarital period is a time not only for the future spouses to get to know each other, but also to acquire the skills to solve mutual problems, which can give rise to tensions and conflicts. According to the respondents, these usually occurred quite rarely (52%). Frequent disagreements were mentioned by 32% of respondents. However, the effect of these situations was sometimes the temporary severance of acquaintance with the future spouse - 36% of respondents experienced this during the premarital period. In contrast, the resolution of conflict situations most often took place through concessions from the respondent (57%) or joint concessions (25%). In occasional situations, concessions were made by the partner (4%).

The premarital period should be a time set aside for building the rules of married life together. Conversations during the premarital period regarding the functioning of the future family were undertaken by 63% of the respondents and focused most often on the spouses' professional work (39%), financial issues (35%), household rules (33%) and raising children (31%). However, in the case of 37% of respondents, no discussions regarding the future family were undertaken.

The premarital period is also a time for maturing the decision to marry. No reservations or doubts about getting married had 28% of respondents, while 72% struggled with such doubts, with 48% of respondents justifying these doubts with specific behaviors of their partner(s) during the engagement period. Moreover, these doubts were accompanied by symptoms that the marriage might not work out (66%). Most often they were related to the partner's behavior (66%) and also sometimes to the respondent's behavior (20%), the partner's family (42%) or the respondent's family (14%).

Recognizing the diverse context of the situation of initiating proceedings for the recognition of a marriage as null and void, it is still worth looking at it from the perspective of analyzing the motives prompting such difficult, even traumatic, decisions. Looking from this perspective seems to be very important, since the initiation of canonical proceedings should be regarded as an intentional action (given the complex and demanding procedure of canonical proceedings, this issue seems obvious with the characteristics of social intentional-rational action¹⁹). And looking at it this way, we should consider it an action that is a consequence of the appearance of a certain premise(s), at least subjectively justifying this action.

An in-depth qualitative analysis of the phenomenon under study makes it possible to identify six key types of reasons for initiating canonical proceedings. The first type of rationale involves appealing to transcendent reality and restoring a proper relationship with God. The second type of rationale is related to the axiology applicable to the faithful in the Catholic Church and justifies the initiation of proceedings by the internal need to respect religious precepts. The next type of rationale refers to the institutional rules in the Church, which provide the opportunity to regain full rights within the community of the faithful, the opportunity to enjoy the sacraments. The next type of rationale is based on the pragmatism of those initiating the proceedings and is primarily related to planning for future life including remarriage. The fifth type of rationale, on the other hand, is related to the existential need for a sense of security, for ultimate liberation from a violent

19 Max Weber, *Economy and Society, An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1978), 24-26.

and/or substance-addicted spouse. The last type of rationale is quite peculiar, as it is invoked by people who are not actually very religiously committed. The initiation of the process of annulment of their marriage is justified here primarily by the behavior of others and the unwillingness to close off any future possibilities.

In turn, statistical analysis makes it possible to indicate the hierarchy of importance of the reasons distinguished by the respondents. The most frequently indicated (in the quantitative survey) motives for initiating canonical proceedings is the possibility of regaining the right to receive the sacraments (91%) and also the possibility of remarrying sacramentally (82%). Further down the list, respondents cited the need to set a good example for their children (75%), to soothe their conscience and build a proper relationship with God (68%), to finally end a certain stage of their lives (52%) and to satisfy their current life partner (39%). It is also quite significant that meeting the expectations of loved ones and improving one's self-image are motives of relatively low importance (17% and 13% of indications, respectively).

A qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of the motives prompting the initiation of canonical proceedings indicates, first of all, the variety of reasons justifying recourse to the institution of declaring a marriage void. This is, of course, due to the great variety of specific life situations in which people find themselves, deciding to resort to the procedure for adjudicating the validity of a concluded marriage. It is worth noting, however, that the grounds identified, however, revolve around challenges of a theological nature, as they relate primarily to the problem of building a relationship with God, are related to establishing a place in the structure of the Catholic Church and functioning within the community of the faithful. This confirms, therefore, the conviction formulated earlier, that the canonical proceedings and the judgment of the church tribunal are of significant importance only for those deeply connected with God, the Catholic Church and the community of the faithful. Thus, also, the effects of these legal proceedings should be considered primarily in the theological dimension, since the judgment of the church tribunal redefines the status of the individual in the religious community.

Proceedings for the annulment of a marriage are also of great importance in psychological terms, since the very fact of seeking to declare a concluded marriage null and void is an act that requires a transformation of one's identity²⁰ or a process of alteration²¹ to enable redefinition of oneself. This allows the person involved in the process to look again at his past and conduct a reassessment and interpretation of his behavior and the situations in which he participated. However, this means constructing a completely new narrative regarding the beginning, duration and breakdown of the marriage. As a result, the events of the past begin to be perceived quite differently than they were seen before.

The initiation of canonical proceedings should also be situated in a no less important social dimension, however, limited primarily to relations within the community of believers. Analyzing the motivations that drive religiously committed people to initiate these proceedings, it should be strongly emphasized that these people are convinced that the situation in which they find themselves is not their fault. On the contrary, they feel aggrieved and, at the same time, they very often realize that their behavior (leaving their spouse, filing for divorce, initiating a process for declaring the concluded marriage null and void) is perceived by those around them as socially reprehensible behavior - this is especially true of people who come from communities associated with traditional folk religiosity. Thus, initiating proceedings to declare a marriage null and void is viewed by them not only as a way to regain full rights in the Church, but also as a confirmation of the rightness of the earlier proceedings. Of course, this is on the assumption that the com-

20 Anselm L. Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks. The Search for Identity*. (London: Routledge, 2017), 91-133.

21 Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 54-65.

munity in which the person initiating this action is located will accept the judgment of the church tribunal and its consequences - which is not so obvious in communities that subscribe to the rules of folk religiosity.

Conclusion

The aim of the study carried out on the basis of a multidisciplinary perspective was not to seek fragmented knowledge, but to achieve integrated knowledge, so to speak, across disciplinary divides. We do not have the slightest doubt that the phenomena and processes in the area of religious life require just such an approach on the part of researchers. This is primarily due to the fact that participants in religious life experience in a special way the complexity of their social existence by combining the realities of secular and religious reality. And it is the complexity of this existence that we have tried to present in this article.

In this situation, describing, explaining and understanding all the activities of participants in religious life requires combining different contexts, which becomes possible only by referring to a multidisciplinary perspective. Its implementation, however, cannot assume a simple, as it were, mechanical combination of individual bodies of knowledge, but should be realized by extracting the threads relevant to the description of the analyzed phenomena of social and religious life, which should then be interwoven with each other to form a unified, multithreaded, but also holistic narrative.

With regard to phenomena and processes in the area of religious life, this means interweaving mainly theological, legal, cultural studies, psychological, sociological knowledge, since the phenomena and processes under observation are situated in these and still other areas. Reliable and valuable observations must, of course, refer to various disciplines for analytical purposes. However, the knowledge gained from different cognitive perspectives must be interwoven with each other in the next step, because only then will it be possible to look at the studied phenomena and processes in a multidimensional way, and only then does it become possible to see them as they really are from the perspective of their participants. For no phenomenon is merely a theological, legal cultural or social phenomenon. They only become such when we look at them one-dimensionally and therefore in a significantly impoverished way.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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SPIRITUALITY AND RELATIONAL ATTACHMENT AMONG ADULT LEARNERS IN SPIRITUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS



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Submitted: 21 January 2024

Accepted for publication: 6 May 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background/Aim: This study aims to explore the interrelationships and distinctions in the level of spirituality depending on different types of attachment bonds among adult individuals in Slovakia who engage in activities within informal spiritual communities. The theoretical part of the study addresses current domestic and international scientific theories, defining terms and concepts used in this research.

Methods: The research sample included 148 participants from various spiritual communities in Slovakia, of which 128 women (86.5 %) and 20 men (13.%) aged between 23 and 65 years with an average of 51.15 years. Qualitative research methods were employed, utilizing the Expressions of Spirituality Inventory – Revised (ESI-R),² the Slovak Shortened Scale of Experiencing in Close Relationships (ECR-R-SK-14),³ and the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI).⁴ Data were analyzed using descriptive and interference statistical methods to identify correlations between the spirituality, and attachment styles with God and experiences in close relationships.

Results: The study found negative correlations between the ESI-R scales and items related to relationship attachment styles with God and experiences in close relationships. Additionally, the validity of the correspondence hypothesis was demonstrated in the research sample.

Conclusion: Future research should aim to explore these themes in more diverse demographic settings, including different age groups and cultural contexts. Such studies could provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of spirituality and its impact on personal and divine relationships in the modern world, contributing significantly to the field of psychological and spiritual studies.

Keywords: Spirituality – Attachment – Spiritual communities – Attachment to God.

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² Douglas A. MacDonald, "Spirituality: Description, measurement, and relation to the five factor model of personality." *Journal of Personality* 68 no. 1, (2000): 153-197.

³ Jana Švecová et al., "Slovak Shortened Version of Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-R-SK-14): A Psychometric Study." *Journal of Personality Assessment* 103 no. 1, (2021): 15-26.

⁴ Richard Beck, Angela McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32 no. 2, (2004): 92-103.

Introduction

In the contemporary era, characterized by the predominance of a culture valuing strength, success, and personal achievement, the depth and significance of spirituality in everyday life are often overlooked. This integral aspect of human experience, spirituality, tends to be sidelined or discussed in hushed tones, thereby acquiring a taboo status. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed a resurgence in the interest towards spiritual themes, manifesting in various forms ranging from media content to personal development endeavors.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic, much like it has catalyzed discussions around mortality and health, has also spurred an increased engagement with spiritual aspects of life.⁶ People are seeking meaning and reassurance in a world rife with uncertainty and change. Similarly, current societal events, such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, bring questions of life's purpose, peace, and spiritual tranquility to the forefront of many individuals' minds.⁷ This shift in consciousness is also reflected in public opinion surveys. For instance, findings from a recent Eurobarometer survey indicate that Slovak citizens are increasingly concerned about global events and their impact on personal spiritual life.⁸

These observations underscore the evolving nature of spiritual engagement in contemporary society, highlighting its significance as a salient topic of inquiry in the field of psychology.⁹

Spirituality can be understood as a comprehensive and multidimensional concept encompassing an individual's relationship with transcendent aspects of existence.^{10,11} This concept includes not only traditional religious expressions but also broader aspects of meaning-seeking, value exploration, and inner peace. In contemporary psychological discourse, spirituality is often associated with higher order concepts, personal transformation, and deep inner conviction. Within the framework of defining spirituality, several key components can be identified: (1) Meaning and Purpose: Spirituality provides a framework for understanding life and its goals. People often seek answers to questions about the meaning of life and their place in the universe through spiritual exploration. MacDonald¹² in his work on the Expressions of Spirituality Inventory – Revised (ESI-R) emphasizes the importance of spirituality in providing a sense of purpose and direction in life. (2) Connection to the Transcendent: This

5 Jonathan K. Smith, Norman D. Lewis, *Spirituality in the Modern World: The Search for Meaning in Times of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

6 Hedviga Tkáčová et al. "Individual (Non) Resilience of University Students to Digital Media Manipulation after COVID-19 (Case Study of Slovak Initiatives)." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 no. 2, (2023): 1605; Alexander V. Sirotkin et al. "Impact of COVID-19 on University Activities: Comparison of Experiences from Slovakia and Georgia." *Sustainability* 15 no. 3, (2023): 1897.

7 Ambrozy, Marian et al. "Stages of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 14, no. 5, (2018): 49-60.

8 European Commission. *Eurobarometer Special Surveys*. <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>; Roman Králik, Tibor Máhrik, "Metaphysics as a base for improving critical thinking," ICERI2019 Proceedings, Seville IATED, (2019): 8901-8903; Peter Kondrla, "Sustainability Values in Religious Education." *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 19-32; Roman Kralik, "Key philosophical-Theological concepts of Søren Kierkegaard in the work of Paul Tillich." *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11, no 4, (2015): 179-188.

9 Stanton L. Jones, Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021).

10 Martina Pavlikova, Igor Tavilla. "Repetition as a Path to Authentic Existence in Kierkegaard's Work." *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 2, (2023): 105-115. <https://www.jecs.pl/index.php/jecs/article/view/1589>

11 Tibor Mahrik et al. "Importance of the incarnation in the works of C.S. Lewis and S. Kierkegaard," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 14 no 2, (2018): 43-53.

12 Douglas A. MacDonald, "Expressions of Spirituality Inventory – Revised (ESI-R)," in *The measurement of spirituality and transcendence*. ed. Peter C. Hill, Ralph W. Hood, (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2001), 54-75.

aspect involves a connection to some higher being, deity, cosmic order, or higher self. It may include traditional religious beliefs, but also broader spiritual feelings connected with nature or the universe.¹³ Hill et al. in their research on measures of spirituality highlight¹⁴ the diverse ways individuals connect with the transcendent. (3) Inner Peace and Harmony: Spirituality often contributes to a sense of inner peace, tranquility, and harmony, enabling individuals to overcome life challenges with greater internal strength and balance. Pargament¹⁵ discusses how spirituality can be a source of solace and resilience in facing life's adversities. (4) Personal Transformation: The spiritual journey can also be associated with personal transformation, where individuals undergo a process of personal growth, self-discovery, and self-actualization.¹⁶ This transformative aspect of spirituality is discussed by James¹⁷ in his work, 'The Varieties of Religious Experience.' This definition encompasses various aspects of spirituality without limiting it to specific religious or spiritual traditions,¹⁸ allowing for broad application in psychological research.

Relational attachment, a concept originally introduced by John Bowlby,¹⁹ describes a deep and enduring emotional bond that forms between individuals, particularly in the early stages of life. This concept, fundamental to understanding interpersonal relationships, has significant implications for an individual's spiritual development. Ainsworth and colleagues²⁰ expanded the attachment theory, identifying three primary attachment styles – secure, anxious, and avoidant – which are influenced by early caregiving experiences. These attachment styles can potentially influence an individual's spiritual life as well. A secure attachment may facilitate the development of a positive, stable, and open spiritual identity, whereas anxious or avoidant attachments might lead to certain challenges in this domain. In the context of spirituality, secure attachment can be beneficial for forming deep and meaningful spiritual beliefs and practices that are rooted in a sense of security and acceptance. Conversely, individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may experience more difficulties in forming a stable and fulfilling spiritual identity, leading to spiritual conflicts or uncertainties. In this regard, research indicates that attachment style can affect how individuals engage with religious and spiritual practices, as well as their perception of and relationship with a higher power or spiritual entities.²¹

The concept of "Attachment to God," as explored in various psychological studies, extends John Bowlby's attachment theory to the realm of spirituality and religion. This approach pos-

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- 13 Zlatica Plašienková, "Cosmos and humanity: historical and contemporary paradigms of understanding," *Human Affairs-Postdisciplinary Humanities & Social Sciences Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (2023): 151-157; Jozef Jančovič, "Does God Micromanage the World? Learning about the Cosmos from the Book of Job," *Human Affairs-Postdisciplinary Humanities & Social Sciences Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (2023): 158-171.
 - 14 Peter Hill et al., "Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30, no. 1, (2000): 51-77; Edward Jarmoch et al. "Social work and socio-pathological phenomena in the school environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 2, (2022): 130-145.
 - 15 Kenneth I. Pargament, *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1997).
 - 16 Roman Králik, "The Influence of Family and School in Shaping the Values of Children and Youth People in the Theory of Free Time and Pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 249-268.
 - 17 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green & Co, 1902).
 - 18 Roman Králik et al. "Compassion and Solidarity with the poor in Tahakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 154-168.
 - 19 John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 1. Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
 - 20 Mary D. Salter Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978).
 - 21 Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "An Attachment-Theory Approach to the Psychology of Religion," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 1, (1992): 3-28.

its that the nature of an individual's attachment to God or a higher power mirrors their early attachment experiences with primary caregivers. Thus, one's relational attachment style can significantly influence their spiritual life, particularly in how they perceive and relate to a divine entity. In "Attachment to God: An Exploration of the Relationship between Attachment Style and God's Role in the Life of the Believer", Beck and McDonald²² note that individuals with a secure attachment are likely to perceive God as a loving and supportive figure. They tend to have a deep, personal, and trusting relationship with God, often reflecting a sense of safety and security in their faith.²³ Conversely, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may have a more complicated relationship with God. Anxiously attached individuals might experience God as capricious or less reliable, leading to spiritual anxiety and inconsistent religious engagement. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, might distance themselves from God, perceiving divine figures as distant or disinterested.²⁴ Additionally, in previous theoretical study²⁵ we explored how individual spiritual practices and beliefs are profoundly influenced by their attachment styles. The study found that secure attachment often results in a more open and explorative approach to spirituality, whereas insecure attachments can lead to rigid or conflicted spiritual expressions.

In the proposed study, we aim to integrate and explore the intricate relationships between spirituality, relational attachment, and attachment to God. This comprehensive approach seeks to understand how these distinct yet interconnected facets influence individuals' psychological and spiritual well-being. Spirituality, often regarded as a personal quest for meaning and connection with something greater than oneself, intersects profoundly with relational dynamics and one's conceptualization of the divine. The nature of an individual's attachment – whether secure, anxious, or avoidant – not only shapes their interpersonal relationships but also extends to their spiritual life, particularly in the manner they relate to or perceive God.

Our study hypothesizes that those with secure attachment styles may exhibit higher levels of spirituality, characterized by a sense of connectedness, purpose, and positive religious coping strategies. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment styles might experience spiritual struggles or a disjointed sense of spirituality. Furthermore, the concept of attachment to God becomes pivotal in understanding the role of religion and spirituality in one's life.²⁶ This attachment mirrors early attachment experiences and significantly influences religious beliefs and practices. We anticipate that secure attachment to God would correlate with a more cohesive and fulfilling spiritual experience, while insecure attachment might lead to spiritual distress or inconsistency in religious practices.

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- 22 Richard Beck, Angela McDonald, "Attachment to God: The Attachment to God Inventory, Tests of Working Model Correspondence, and an Exploration of Faith Group Differences," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32 no. 2, (2004): 92-103.
 - 23 Jozef Krupa, "Epiclesis in the Eucharist as another element of progress in the development of ecumenical dialogue," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 2, (2022): 146-152; Jozef Krupa, "Suggestions for Refining Theological Terminology in Slovak: Part III," *Studia theologica* 24 no. 3, (2022): 81-103.
 - 24 Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Attachment and Religious Representations and Behavior," in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*. ed. Jude Cassidy, Phillip R. Shaver, (New York: Guilford Press, 2008).
 - 25 Ivana Tomanová Čergetová, "God as an Attachment Figure and Psychological Power of Bonding," in *Spiritual and Social Experience in the Context of Modernism and Postmodernism (Interdisciplinary Reading of the Phenomenon)* ed. Patrik Maturkanič, Ivana Tomanová Čergetová, (Morrisville: Lulu Publishing Company, 2021), 271-291.
 - 26 Viliam Judák et al., "The Cultural-Historical Dimension of the Cyril and Methodius Mission in the Context of Later Ecclesiastical Works in Slovakia," *Konštantínove Listy* 15 no. 1, (2022): 40-52.

The integration of these themes – spirituality, relational attachment, and attachment to God – provides a comprehensive framework for examining the psychological and spiritual dimensions of human experience.²⁷ Our study aims to elucidate the intricate relationships among these variables and their collective impact on overall well-being and life satisfaction.

Methods

The data for the study was collected from January to April 2023. For the research design, we opted for a non-experimental approach – specifically, a comparative study – and utilized basic descriptive and inferential statistics for result analysis. The sample was intentionally selected, with data gathering occurring in the Slovak Republic.

In the research study data from the received questionnaires were initially processed in Microsoft Excel. This data was then transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 29.0.1.0) for further statistical analysis. The initial step involved verifying the internal consistency of the tools using Cronbach's alpha calculation. Subsequent to tool verification, Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to assess correlations between various variables.

Sample

The research sample for the study comprised graduates and current students of a private educational institution in Slovakia focusing on adult education in spirituality. A total of 299 respondents were approached through a combination of methods from January 15 to April 16, 2023. The study received 116 completed electronic questionnaires and 40 valid printed questionnaires, with 8 electronic questionnaires excluded for incomplete responses. The final sample size was 148 participants (N=148), consisting of 20 men (13.5%) and 128 women (86.5%), aged between 23 and 65 years, with an average age of 51.15 years. Education levels varied, with the majority holding a university degree (50%) or a high school diploma with a matriculation exam (43.2%).

Measuring instruments

In our research, standardized questionnaires were employed to gather data. These included: ESI-R (Expressions of Spirituality Inventory – Revised)²⁸ – the 32-item inventory where respondents rated their agreement on a five-point scale, measuring dimensions of spirituality such as Cognitive Orientation towards Spirituality (COS, $\alpha = 0.779$), Experiential-Phenomenological Dimension (EPD, $\alpha = 0.845$), Existential Well-being (EWB, $\alpha = 0.782$), Paranormal Beliefs (PAR, $\alpha = 0.672$), and Religiosity (REL, $\alpha = 0.658$); ECR-R-SK-14 (Slovak Shortened Version of Experiences in Close Relationships)²⁹ – the revised, shortened self-assessment questionnaire with 14 items divided into two subscales for anxiety ($\alpha = 0.815$) and avoidance ($\alpha = 0.850$) in adult relationship attachments, rated on a seven-point Likert scale; and AGI (Attachment to God Inventory)³⁰ – the 28-item inventory measuring similar dimensions of attachment to God as ECR scales, with even-numbered items forming an anxiety subscale ($\alpha = 0.869$) and odd-numbered items an avoidance subscale ($\alpha = 0.772$). Reliability for these tools was verified through Cronbach's alpha, yielding varying internal consistency levels for different scales.

27 Martina Pavlíková, Marián Ambrozy, "Extremely gifted students and teaching philosophy in secondary school," ICERI 12th International conference of education, research and innovation, (2019): 6474-6479; Miroslav Tvrdoň et al. "Social work as a tool for anomie correction on second stage of primary school," Ad Alta 11 no. 1, (2021): 353-357.

28 MacDonald, "Spirituality: Description, measurement," 153-197.

29 Švecová et al., "Slovak Shortened Version," 15-26.

30 Beck, MacDonald, "Attachment to God," 92-103.

Ethical issue

During the course of the research implementation, all ethical aspects were upheld.

Limitations of research

However, the research encountered certain limitations, such as potential biases in questionnaire responses and challenges in interpreting reverse-scored items. These issues highlight the need for more nuanced research tools and methodologies in future studies to accurately capture the complex nature of spirituality and relational attachments.

Results

In our study, the primary aim was to explore connections between variables related to spirituality, relational attachment in close relationships, and attachment to God. The research was grounded in the following key hypotheses: 1. We expect a relationship between level of spirituality and attachment to God. 2. We expect a relationship between level of spirituality and adult relational attachment. These hypotheses were formulated to investigate the intricate relationships between spirituality and various forms of relational attachment, both in personal relationships and in relation to God, among adults in Slovakia. The outcomes of these hypotheses were determined through statistical analyses.

A significant negative correlation was found between overall spirituality and anxious attachment to God ($r = -0.413$, $p < 0.01$), as well as a weaker negative correlation with avoidance attachment to God ($r = -0.361$, $p < 0.01$). The Experiential Well-being scale showed a strong negative correlation with anxious attachment to God ($r = -0.506$, $p < 0.01$), and the Religiosity scale showed a moderately negative correlation with avoidance attachment ($r = -0.479$, $p < 0.01$). In the correlation between spirituality and adult relational attachment, a moderately negative relationship was found for avoidance attachment ($r = -0.317$, $p < 0.01$). A strong negative correlation was observed between Experiential Well-being and anxiety in intimate relationships ($r = -0.479$, $p < 0.01$), and a weak negative correlation between Paranormal Beliefs and avoidance ($r = -0.272$, $p < 0.01$). Regarding the relationship between types of relational attachment in close relationships and attachment to God, a moderately significant correlation was found for anxiety ($r = 0.304$, $p < 0.01$) and a weaker correlation for avoidance ($r = 0.257$, $p < 0.05$). These results support the correspondence theory between experiencing secure close relationships and secure attachment to God.

Discussion

In our study, we observed a notable negative correlation between overall spirituality and attachment to God. This finding suggests a complex dynamic where individuals with a higher degree of spirituality may experience a less traditional or less personal attachment to God. This could reflect a broader, more inclusive understanding of spirituality that transcends conventional religious frameworks, aligning with the observations of Taylor,³¹ who argues for a 'secular age' where spiritual exploration transcends traditional religious boundaries. This challenges the traditional view, often emphasized in classical studies like those by Fowler,³² where heightened spirituality is directly associated with a stronger personal relationship with God.

31 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

32 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (Harper & Row, 1981).

The negative correlation between spirituality and attachment to God identified in our study contrasts with traditional perspectives often found in the literature. However, contemporary research, such as the work of Zinnbauer et al.,³³ suggests a shift in this paradigm. Modern spiritual beliefs, as observed in diverse cultural and religious contexts, increasingly emphasize a more inclusive, less structured approach to spirituality. This evolution reflects a broader understanding of spirituality, often encompassing non-traditional, secular, or universalist perspectives, which may not always align with conventional notions of divine attachment.

The strong correlation between Paranormal Beliefs and spirituality found in our study reflects a trend where individuals who identify as spiritual often embrace broader, more diverse beliefs, including those outside traditional religious boundaries. This correlation aligns with Hood et al.'s³⁴ findings that modern spirituality is becoming more inclusive of various beliefs and experiences. This expansion of what constitutes spiritual belief aligns with a growing body of literature that views spirituality as a multifaceted and personal experience, not confined to the dogmas of traditional religious systems.

The observed strong correlation between Paranormal Beliefs and spirituality diverges from traditional religious perspectives, where such beliefs are often marginalized. This finding aligns with the broader, contemporary view of spirituality, recognizing it as an inclusive, personal experience not confined to orthodox religious frameworks. This shift in understanding spirituality as a dynamic and individualistic aspect of human experience acknowledges diverse and non-traditional beliefs, as discussed in Taves.³⁵

The correlation between Paranormal Beliefs and spirituality raises important considerations regarding mental health. Machů³⁶ notes that while such beliefs are a recognized aspect of broader spirituality, they have also been associated with negative mental health outcomes in some cases. This association points to the potential for certain paranormal beliefs to correlate with mental disorders, particularly when these beliefs are extreme or disconnected from reality, echoing the concerns raised by Pecháčková.³⁷

Our study faced challenges with the interpretation of reverse-scored items and difficulties in understanding some questionnaire items. These issues can lead to response errors or biases, potentially affecting the reliability and validity of the data. Future research could address these issues by simplifying the language of the items, as suggested by DeVellis,³⁸ and potentially conducting pilot tests to identify and rectify any ambiguities in the questionnaire design, in line with recommendations by Boateng et al.³⁹

33 Brian J. Zinnbauer et al., "The Emerging Meanings of Religiousness and Spirituality: Problems and Prospects," *Journal of Personality* 67 no. 6, (1997): 889-919.

34 Ralph W. Hood Jr et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (Guilford Press, 2009).

35 Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

36 Eduard Machů, "Paranormal Beliefs and Mental Health," *Psychology Research* 5 no. 4, (2015): 218-225.

37 Simona Pecháčková, "Paranormal Beliefs and Psychological Well-Being," *Psychological Studies* 57 no. 2, (2012): 213-221.

38 Robert F. DeVellis, *Scale Development: Theory and Applications* (Sage Publications, 2016).

39 Godfred O. Boateng, "Best Practices for Developing and Validating Scales for Health, Social, and Behavioral Research: A Primer," *Frontiers in Public Health* 6, (2018): 149.

Conclusion

This study delved into the intricate dynamics of spirituality, relational attachment, and attachment to God among adults participating in informal spiritual communities in Slovakia. Our findings revealed significant correlations that challenge traditional perceptions of spirituality and divine attachment. Notably, a higher degree of spirituality was associated with a less traditional or personal attachment to God, suggesting a shift towards a more inclusive and less structured approach to spirituality that transcends conventional religious frameworks.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the study observed intriguing patterns in how individuals who identify as spiritual often embrace a diverse array of beliefs, including those beyond traditional religious boundaries, such as paranormal beliefs. This trend indicates a broader, more inclusive understanding of spirituality in contemporary society.

Future research should aim to explore these themes in more diverse demographic settings, including different age groups and cultural contexts. Such studies could provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of spirituality and its impact on personal and divine relationships in the modern world, contributing significantly to the field of psychological and spiritual studies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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40 Roman Králik, "Kierkegaard and his Influence on Tillich's Philosophy of Religion," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 11 no. 3, (2015): 183-189.

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THE STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL MISSION MODEL OF STUDENTS' RESILIENCE FORMATION IN WAR CONDITIONS IN UKRAINE



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Submitted: 14 November 2023

Accepted for publication: 22 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background/Aim: To develop and theoretically substantiate the structural and functional model of forming of the hardiness of students in Ukrainian universities in the conditions of war. Hardiness as a sociocultural and pedagogical phenomenon is actively studied by various fields of knowledge. In the conditions of the war in Ukraine, we consider the structural-functional model developed in the course of the study for the forming of students' hardiness as an opportunity to form the existential courage (endurance) of students to overcome the negative consequences of the war and post-war recovery of the country.

Results: While developing a structural-functional model of the forming of the hardiness of students in the conditions of war, we set ourselves the task of characterizing and describing the phenomenon under study to discover its main regularities, features, and trends by establishing its components and relationships between its elements.

We have theoretically studied the problem of forming of hardiness of students of Ukrainian universities in the conditions of war, and the relationship between theoretical results and educational practice. It is argued that an effective way of implementation and experimental verification is the transforming of the theoretical structural-functional model of the forming of students' hardiness.

Conclusion: We think that the structural-functional model of hardiness should be considered as a process of constructing the structure and logic of the pedagogical process regarding the forming of hardiness, which is characterized by an ordered set of qualitatively defined elements, between which there is a regular connection.

Keywords: Higher education. – Hardiness. – Personality. – Structural-functional model – University space.

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Introduction

The functioning of Ukrainian institutions of higher education in the conditions of war is characterized by the introduction of innovative forms of organization of the educational process, the search for new approaches to the organization of the educational process,¹ and effective pedagogical technologies for the planning of crisis phenomena and the post-war recovery of Ukraine. That is why the problem of forming of hardiness of students during the war is urgent. In the conditions of war, the issues of creating a comfortable educational environment and organizing a student-centered educational process are of great importance for higher education institutions in Ukraine. Military events taking place in Ukraine are stressful for all participants in the educational process. Therefore, in this difficult time, the pedagogical community is actively searching for opportunities to solve the problem of forming the hardiness of modern students, and in the future, professionals who will carry out the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine are extremely relevant. We believe that both during the war and during the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, the main task of higher education is and will be to ensure the quality of education and the formation of a successful, sustainable personality capable of realizing the ideas of sustainable development.²

In pedagogical science, the interest of scientists in studying the problem of hardiness is growing rapidly. Although the phenomenon of hardiness in its various forms has been studied separately by different fields of knowledge, it is studied comprehensively in modern conditions. Scientists have studied hardiness as a complex integrative property of personality.³ The problem of personality hardiness has attracted the attention of many researchers for more than one decade.⁴ However, despite a rather wide range of theoretical and empirical studies on the specified problem, the study of the problem of forming students' hardiness in the educational environment of the university was not the subject of a special study and does not have a developed model of the formation of the hardiness of students in Ukrainian universities in the conditions of war in Ukraine.

Hardiness as a sociocultural and pedagogical phenomenon

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the challenges associated with establishing a conducive educational environment and structuring a student-centered educational process become even more critical for higher education institutions in the region. The impact of war, coupled with additional crises such as the economic, humanitarian, and the «information age» crisis, presents substantial hurdles in nurturing the hardiness of students.⁵

- 1 František Petrovič, Patrik Maturkanič, "Urban-Rural Dichotomy of Quality of Life," *Sustainability* 14, no. 14, (2022): 8658; František Petrovič and František Murgaš, "Holistic and sustainable quality of life. Conceptualization and application," *Folia Geographica* 62, no. 1, (2020): 77-94.
- 2 Education of Ukraine under martial law, *Informačníno-analyticky zbirnyk. Osvita Ukrainy v umovakh vojennoho stanu* (Kyiv, 2022).
- 3 Paul T. Bartone and Stephen V. Bowles, "Coping with recruiter stress: Hardiness, performance and well-being in US Army recruiters," *Military Psychology* 32, no. 5, (2020): 390-397; Salvatore R. Maddi, "Hardiness as a pathway to resilience under stress," in Updesh Kumar (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 104-110.
- 4 Michael S. Cole et al., "Student Learning Motivation and Psychological Hardiness: Interactive Effects on Students' Reactions to a Management Class," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 3, no. 1, (2004): 64-85; Susanne C. Kobasa et al., "Hardiness and Health: A Prospective Study," *Journal of personality and social psychology* 42, (1982): 168-177.
- 5 Hedviga Tkáčová et al., "Individual (Non) Resilience of University Students to Digital Media Manipulation after COVID-19 (Case Study of Slovak Initiatives)," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 2, (2022): 1605.

Moreover, according to various experts, the challenges students face in the Ukrainian war may be further compounded by the enduring consequences of the pandemic. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has left the younger generation in a vulnerable state. Moreover, the Internet facilitates the dissemination of fake news through automated systems and real individual users. This situation raises inquiries about the ongoing challenges and their impact on students' hardiness.⁶ Also, the increasing online activities of children, coupled with content over-sharing, underscore the imperative need to cultivate resilience in this digital age.⁷ In this context, hardiness is one of the factors influencing a young individual's safety, perception of well-being, or the prevalence of stress. Finally, attention is also directed towards exploring the impact of social media on public health and the potential usefulness of digital tools, both of which pose challenges to individual hardiness.⁸ The ability to navigate these challenges is crucial for maintaining the hardiness of students.

The cultivation of students' hardiness emerges as a fundamental aspect, influencing their ability to navigate adversity effectively. Taking a slightly different perspective, some experts concentrate on students' hardiness by addressing the issue of stereotyping in education. They present perspectives advocating for greater inclusion of minority students, despite cultural or religious differences, contributing not only to their inclusion but also to the enhancement of their hardiness.⁹ This inclusive approach recognizes the diversity within the student population and acknowledges its role in shaping the resilience of these students in challenging circumstances.

Hardiness – the existential courage (endurance) of a person who can cope with a stressful event is one of the factors of the prevalence of stress in a person. The concept of personality hardiness was first introduced by Suzanne C. Kobasa.¹⁰ Today, there is no single approach to the interpretation of the concept of «hardiness». Thus Maddi considers this quality as personal attitudes and strategies that often contribute to the transforming of stressful circumstances and probable «catastrophes» into opportunities for growth.¹¹ If we talk about the hardiness model, scientists identify three components that perform a crucial role in determining hardiness as the existential courage of people. It is control, challenge, and commitment. At the same time, hardiness is the belief that, despite bad events, it is important and necessary to remain involved in the situation, and not to sink into alienation. Let's consider the component models of hardiness. Control refers to the state in which people believe that they can influence events and turn them into opportunities for growth. A challenge is how people perceive a stressful event as a challenge and believe that life is inherently stressful; moreover, it is a good opportunity to turn stressful circumstances into opportunities for growth by trying to

6 Hedviga Tkáčová et al., "Online media audience during the Covid-19 pandemic as an active amplifier of disinformation: Motivations of university students to share information on Facebook," *Communication Today* 14, no. 2, (2023): 154-167.

7 Hedviga Tkáčová et al., "Oversharing of content online by children during the holidays and parental control," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 60-74.

8 Martina Pavlíková et al., "Grief of the bereaved in a social media environment as one of the prominent consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 75-84.

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10 Susanne C. Kobasa, "Stressful Life Events, Personality, and Health-Inquiry into Hardiness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, (1979): 1-11.

11 Salvatore R. Maddi, "Hardiness: The courage to grow from stress," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 1, no. 3, (2006): 160-168; Salvatore R. Maddi, "Hardiness as a pathway to resilience under stress," in Updesh Kumar (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 104-110.

embrace and challenge the event. In addition, some findings have shown that there is a relationship between hardiness and stress-coping patterns. When faced with stressful circumstances, people with a high level of happiness often choose an emotionally oriented strategy. On the other hand, there is a positive relationship between hardiness and social support.¹²

The process of modeling the formation of hardiness of students at Ukrainian universities in the conditions of war

To find out the essence of the process of forming the hardiness of students and its subsequent design and implementation, theoretical substantiation of the need to modernize the professional training of students, let's turn to the optimal theoretical method of pedagogical research – modeling.

Modeling as a general scientific method of cognition is an indirect method of scientific research, which is of great importance when the direct study of objects for certain reasons is impossible, complicated, and impractical. Applying abstraction, generalization, and idealization, it is possible to single out, and then reproduce and investigate exactly those parameters, characteristics, or properties of simulated objects that are not subject to direct knowledge. The modeling method allows you to expand the possibilities of scientific knowledge through the visualization of the studied phenomenon. The educational process, during which the personality of a student is formed, is extremely complex and multidimensional, so it is worth investigating its regularities, predicting the results and possible ways of its management, which is possible only thanks to modeling.

Given the fact that hardiness as a sociocultural and pedagogical phenomenon is not sufficiently studied, in scientific sources, there are different approaches to the representation of the model of the forming of hardiness and its structural components.¹³

In our opinion, the successful formation of students' hardiness is possible under the following organizational and pedagogical conditions: organization of pedagogical support with the dominance of dialogic forms; ensuring during the organization of extracurricular work the unity of scientific knowledge, emotional and motivational judgments and practical actions of students regarding hardening for the organization of subject-subject interaction of students, their understanding of the social and subjective necessity and importance of observing the principles of endurance in behavior, based on partnership relations, mutual respect mutual understanding, freedom of thought and open interest in universal religious values.¹⁴

12 Kevin J. Eschleman et al., "A meta-analytic examination of hardiness," *International Journal of Stress Management* 17, no. 4, (2010): 277-307; Patricia Dobříková et al., "Caring for terminally ill clients in hospices and social services facilities during the peak of the covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on the experience of relatives regarding this situation," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 20-37; Dušan Bajan et al., "Developing moral competencies in the training of social workers," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 1, (2023): 144-150; Sean Bradley and Mahmoud H. Israa, "Strategies for Co-Creation and Co-Governance in Urban Contexts: Building Trust in Local Communities with Limited Social Structures," *Urban Science* 8, no. 1, (2024): 9; Elena Fernández-Martínez et al., "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Self-Harm Attempts Observed in a Hospital Emergency Department," *Healthcare* 12, no. 3, (2024): 385; Miroslav Tvrdoň et al., "Covid-19 Pandemic and Human Rights Myth or Reality?," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 221-229.

13 Lucie Rychnová et al., "Hausväterliteratur in the Education and Spirituality of a Nobleman in the Early Modern Era," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 503-514; Peter Kondrla et al., "Social Teaching of the Church and the Values of a Sustainable Society," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2022): 142-155.

14 Zlatica Plašienková and Martin Farbák, "Chemical Dehumanisation of Love vs Authentic Evolution of Love," *Philosophy and Public Issues* 10, no. 3, (2020): 227-252; Viliam Judák et al., "Religious Tourism on the Example of Nation Pilgrim Places in Slovakia (Patronages of the Virgin Mary)," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 615-630.

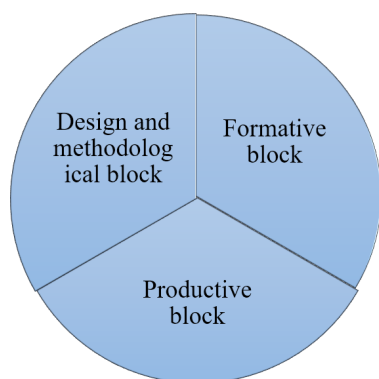
The development of a structural-functional model of the forming of higher education students' hardiness was carried out by a group of authors based on Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, West Ukrainian National University, Khmelnytskyi Humanitarian and Pedagogical Academy in the conditions of war in Ukraine.

Summarizing the above-mentioned scientific approaches to building a model of students' hardiness, we have developed a structural-functional model of the forming of hardiness of students. Under the model of the forming of students' hardiness, we will understand a holistic, dynamic, and open system of interconnected elements, which includes the following components: goals, tasks, principles, approaches, and means of learning, organizational and pedagogical conditions, disciplines' content, criteria, levels, forms and methods, and result.

The tasks of the structural-functional model of the forming of the hardiness of students consist of the characterization and description of the studied phenomenon to discover its main regularities, features, and trends by establishing its components and relationships between its elements.

The components of the developed structural-functional model of the forming of the hardiness of students in its conditions are the design and methodological block (purpose, task, methodological approaches, and principles of forming of hardiness); formative block (forms, means, methods, stages of forming of hardiness); productive block (result).

Fig. 1. Structural-functional model of the forming of students' hardiness in the conditions of war.



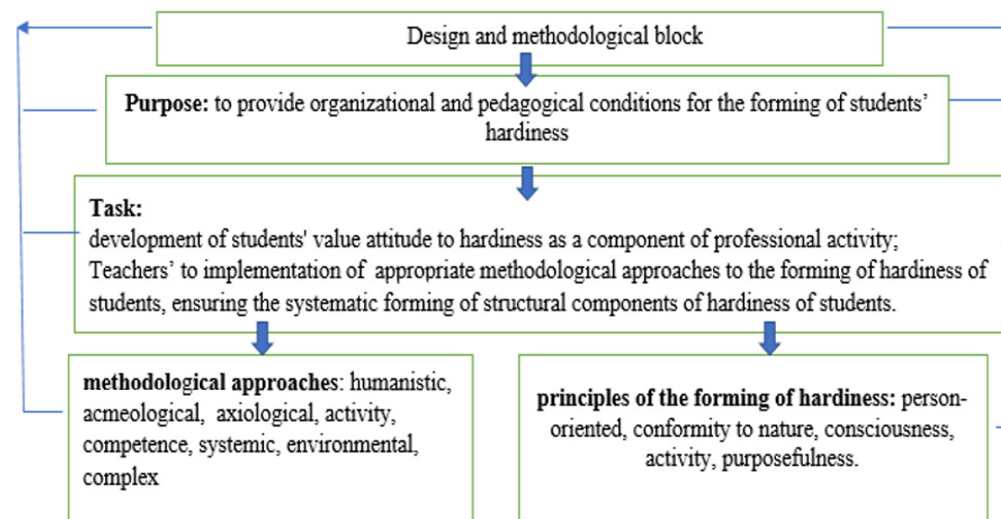
The design-methodological and formative blocks of the structural-functional model represent the components of a coherent, consistent educational process in the universities of Ukraine, which is carried out by the defined goals and objectives, based on relevant methodological approaches and principles of the formation of hardiness, in these blocks, the forms and methods of forming students' hardiness are defined in Ukrainian universities during the war. The productive block defines the result and prolongation of this process in the form of integrative, systemic integrity of the content components of students' hardiness (emotional-value, cognitive, and practical activity), as a dynamic psychological neoplasm characterized by appropriate levels of development and serves as the basis for further professional development and self-development of students at war.

Let's dwell on a more detailed justification of the components of our proposed model of forming students' hardiness (fig.2).

The design-methodological block contains the goal of forming the hardiness of students in Ukrainian universities in wartime conditions.

The relevant tasks that ensure the achievement of the goal are the formation of the hardiness of students as a component of professional activity; the teachers' use of appropriate methodological approaches to the formation of hardiness of students, ensuring the systematic formation of structural components of hardiness in students. Unfortunately, today there is no single universal approach to the methodology of professional training of students and the forming of their hardiness.

Fig. 2. Design and methodological block of the structural-functional model of the forming of hardiness of students



Approaches, principles, and conditions in the context of scientific knowledge in the implementation of the structural-functional model of the forming of hardiness of students

The implementation of a scientifically based structural and functional model of the forming of hardiness of students takes into account the most effective and efficient approaches, and principles in the context of scientific knowledge. Let's consider them in more detail.

The principle of humanization is a component of the humanistic concept of modern education, according to which the student's personality is the highest social value.¹⁵ The principle of humanization consists in the maximum disclosure of the student's abilities, satisfaction of his educational needs, promotion of his self-realization in the conditions of professional activity; ensuring the priority of universal and civic values; forming of a professionally competent specialist, prepared not only in scientific and technological terms, but also with a developed

15 Aleksander Kobylarek et al., "Holistic Education of Seniors in the Eastern European Model of the U3A," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 87-99; Feng Zhang et al., "Using Virtual Reality Interventions to Promote Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Children* 11, no. 1, (2024): 41; Jingyi Dong et al., "Effect of Achievement Motivation and Self-Efficacy on General Well-Being among Students at Normal Universities in Ningxia: The Mediating Role of Time Management," *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 1, (2024): 15.

humanistic consciousness; building harmonious relations in the «student-environment-teacher» system based on the assimilation of a wide range of humanitarian and fundamental professional knowledge; in strengthening the humanitarian focus of general education and special subjects; unity of both student and teaching teams.

From the point of view of supporters of the humanistic approach, personality education is based on the philosophical principles of understanding the existence of a person in the world,¹⁶ highlighting personality as the greatest asset of mankind. The humanistic approach in our research was used to determine the mechanisms of personality development of students, to form in them a humane attitude towards themselves and the surrounding reality, and to create the necessary conditions to ensure self-development, self-education, self-realization, and self-affirmation.

In our research, the axiological approach is one of the most important for the professional activity of students, because it enables consideration of the university as a center in which the value orientations of student youth are formed.

The axiological approach not only proclaims man as the highest value of society and the goal in itself of social development but also allows studying phenomena from the point of view of the opportunities inherent in them to satisfy human needs.¹⁷

According to the acmeological approach (the perspective of this approach is seen in the fact that it orients the individual to constant self-development and self-improvement.¹⁸ Thus, the acmeological approach provides an opportunity to consider the problem of forming hardiness in students as a value and condition for optimizing the process of their personal development.

Equally important for the forming of the hardiness of students is the environmental approach,¹⁹ which consists of creating optimal conditions for the realization of the personal qualities of students. The environmental approach in our study enables scientific substantiation of a holistic system of forming the hardiness of students.

The use of the competence approach in our model involves the formation of hardiness, in particular, competencies in solving life and professional problems in crisis conditions. This approach requires not just providing students with information on how to solve a problem situation, but the development of life skills for solving problems that arise continuously in crisis conditions. Thus, in the context of the research issues the forming of hardiness of students on

16 Zlatica Plašienková, "Cosmos and humanity: historical and contemporary paradigms of understanding," *Human Affairs-Postdisciplinary Humanities & Social Sciences Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (2023): 151-157; Jozef Krupa et al., "The Permanent Validity of the Doctrine on the Universal Mission of the Church," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 2, (2022): 283-293; Jozef Jančovič, "Does God Micromanage the World? Learning about the Cosmos from the Book of Job," *Human Affairs-Postdisciplinary Humanities & Social Sciences Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (2023): 158-171; Ľubomír Hlad, "Princíp spoluvykúpenia ako esencia fatimsky inšpirovanej mariológie Pavla M. Hnilicu: Historicko-teologická štúdia," *Studia Theologica* 23, no. 2, (2021): 125-150.

17 Vladimír Thurzo, "The Moral-Theological View of the End-of-Life Care," in *Proceedings from the 7th International Conference of Hospice and Palliative Care*, ed. Patricia Dobříková, 28-38 (Trnava: Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, 2015); Václav Tomiczek et al., "The role and experiences of social workers in hospices during the peak of the covid-19 pandemic," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 59-65.

18 Viliam Judák et al., "Reflection of Political and Social Development in the Religious Street Names of the City of Trnava and their Potential in Tourism," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 514-525; Viliam Judák et al., "Transformation of street nomenclature in relation to religion in the example of the city of Banská Stiavnica," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 85-99; Michal Levický et al., "Barriers to the Development of the Circular Economy in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Slovakia," *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues* 9, no. 3, (2022): 76-87; Peter Kondrla et al., "The Philosophical Context of Curriculum Innovations with a Focus on Competence Development," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 2, (2023): 78-92.

19 Zlatica Plašienková, "Eco-Values as a Platform of Unity of Profane and Sacral in the Context of Ecological Ethics," *Bogoslovska Smotra-Ephemerides Theologicae Zagradienses* 89, no. 5, (2019): 1007-1024.

the personal and activity model of learning, which will become the basis for shifting the emphasis in the teaching of disciplines aimed at the forming and development of hardiness, the accumulation of normatively defined systems of knowledge, abilities and skills in the area of development of the ability of students to acquire and apply them in future professional activities.

According to the system approach, relatively independent components of the educational process (auditory and non-auditory activities, independent work) are not considered separately, but in interconnections, in the system, because the interaction and interdependence of all components of the educational process are taken into account. Followers of the person-oriented approach emphasize the importance of taking into account the individual characteristics of a person.

Among the approaches to the forming of hardiness, the following should be singled out: personal-active (combines upbringing and education into a single process of help, support, social-pedagogical protection, and personality development);²⁰ problem-project (inclusion of diagnostic and qualitative support in the problem task) approaches.

The implementation of the structural-functional model involves, first of all, a comprehensive approach. In the first stage, it is necessary to assess the student's needs and draw up a road map for the formation of sustainability. After that, help will be provided in establishing contacts with specialists, services, and organizations that offer services to solve existing problems, opportunities for social protection, etc.

The theoretical concept of education, an idea of its content, goals, structure, driving forces, and laws is the basis for designing the educational process at the university and its implementation. The principles of education serve as the leading link connecting theoretical ideas with practice.²¹ Based on the results of the theoretical analysis of the research of domestic and foreign scientists, we will single out the principles of student training that are relevant in shaping their hardiness, namely: humanization, scientificity, systematicity and consistency, accessibility, democratization, activity, and consciousness. Let's consider them in more detail.

The principle of scientificity to the process of forming hardiness means its construction based on the fundamental and especially scientific methodology of pedagogical science, the application of modern methods of research and data processing; implementation of scientific concepts, approaches, and principles.

The principle of systematicity and consistency in the forming of hardiness requires the construction of a clear model of its forming (system) and compliance with the main stages of its implementation, taking into account the relationship between all its components and blocks. The principle of accessibility involves the adaptation of complex material from professional and humanitarian disciplines to the individual development of each student's personality, taking into account the level of development of his cognitive activity, mental processes, and physical capabilities; selection of methods, forms and means, communication style, which contribute to the activation of thinking processes as much as possible; the introduction into the programs of professional disciplines of material related to viability in the workplace, the ability to solve

20 Roman Králik and Tibor Máhrík, "Interpersonal relationships as the basis of student moral formation," in *ICERI2019 Proceedings: 12th Annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*, (2019): 8896-8900; Tibor Reimer, "Ethical Education and Religious Education in Slovakia A relationship between cooperation and competition," *Osterreichisches Religionspädagogisches Forum* 30, no. 1, (2022): 69-87; Roman Králik, "The Influence of Family and School in Shaping the Values of Children and Young People in the Theory of Free Time and Pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 249-268.

21 Milan Maroš et al., "Project- Based Learning and its Effectiveness: Evidence from Slovakia," *Interactive Learning Environments* 29, no. 3, (2021): 1-16.

complex life situations, which contributes to increasing the motivation to study and activates the process of informing perception, which is especially relevant in war conditions.

The principle of democratization involves modernization of the content of education, filling it with universal and civic values; cooperation, mutual respect, and co-creation between teacher and student, recognition of the latter's full rights in joint educational activities; and application of a democratic style of communication.²²

The principle of activity and consciousness is leading, as it determines the main direction of the cognitive activity of student youth and its management. It follows from the peculiarities of the formation of hardiness, which involves a meaningful and creative approach to the acquisition of knowledge. Conscious assimilation of knowledge is facilitated by: clarifying the purpose and tasks of a separate discipline, its importance for solving life problems, for the student's prospects; the use in the learning process of thinking operations (analysis, synthesis, generalization, induction, deduction); positive emotions; study motives; rational methods of work during classes; a critical approach in the process of teaching the material and its assimilation; proper control and self-control. Consciousness in learning is ensured by a high level of student activity.

The considered principles in the learning process operate in a close relationship, functioning as a whole complex. Only the systematic implementation of methodological principles ensures the correct definition of tasks, and the selection of content, forms, methods, and means of the most expedient activity during the forming of hardiness in students.

The considered principles in the learning process operate in a close relationship, functioning as a whole complex, and therefore we used the principle of systematicity. Only the systematic implementation of methodological principles ensures the correct definition of tasks, and the selection of content, forms, methods, and means of the most expedient activity during the formation of hardiness in students. In the process of implementing the structural-functional model, students must master the skills of reducing stress and anxiety, self-help, and psychological first aid to loved ones. Our model pays special attention to the development of parenting skills and child care. And also – psychological work with cold servicemen, veterans, and their families.

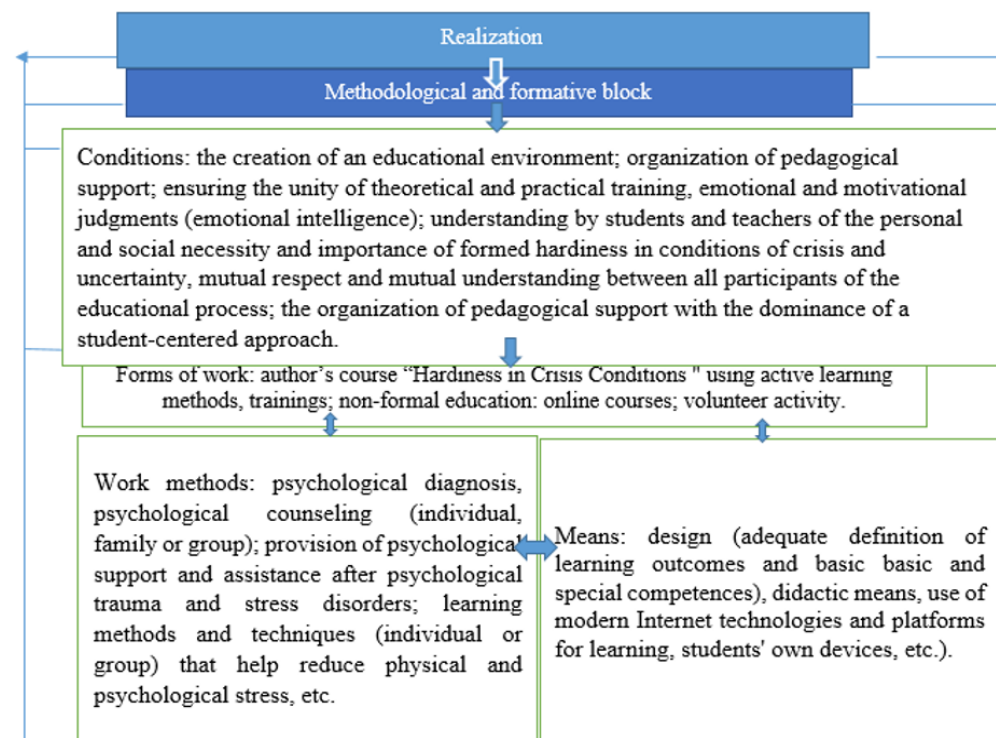
The forms of implementation of our proposed model, in our opinion, are the introduction of the author's course into the educational process of Ukrainian universities «Hardiness in Crisis Conditions» using active learning methods; pieces of training, including «Self-help Plus» courses from WHO and «Parenting without stress» from UNICEF and others;²³ non-formal education: online courses, in particular on the Prometheus platform.²⁴ In addition, in the structural-functional model, volunteer activities of teachers and students at the university are classified as forms.

Methods of implementing the model include psychological diagnosis, psychological counseling (individual, family, or group); provision of psychological support and assistance after psychological trauma and stress disorders; learning methods and techniques (individual or

group) that help reduce physical and psychological stress, etc. Religious thinking is also an important factor, which manifests itself on a spiritual level.²⁵

Graphically, methodical-formative and effective blocks are presented in the figure below.

Fig. 3. Realization of the structural-functional model of the forming of hardiness of students.



The resulting block of the structural-functional model of the formation of the hardiness of students contains the content components determined by us in the process of theoretical and methodological analysis: emotional-value, cognitive, practical-activity, result, and prolonged result. The effectiveness of the developed structural-functional model of forming students' hardiness is verified in the following schemes.

22 Aleksander Kobylarek et al., "Communication Community in the Prefigurative World," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 7-16.

23 *Service for the formation of hardiness: what? where? when?* <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/posluha-z-formuvannya-zhyttiistiki-shcho-de-koly>

24 Prometheus, *Zhyttiistiki molodi v umovakh kryz.* https://prometheus.org.ua/course/course-v1:Prometheus+RESILIENCE101+2022_T3

25 Ivana Tomanová Čergetová et al., "The Relationship of Attitudes Towards Death, Perceived Hope, and Life Satisfaction in the Context of the War in Ukraine," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 257-268; Ján Štvrtina, *Psychologické, etické a mystické symboly v tradičnej rozprávke. Kráľ, ktorý zomrel, aby sa narodil* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, s. r. o., 2023); Patrik Maturkanič et al., "Catholic Spirituality of North Bohemia Mission Area and its Future Direction," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 20-32; Marie Roubalová et al., "Basic Aspects of Sleep from the Perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 169-170; Patrik Maturkanič et al., "Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Czech Society in the 21st Century," *Constantine's Letters* 15, no. 1, (2022): 161-176; Jozef Krupa, "Epiclesis in the Eucharist as another element of progress in the development of Ecumenical dialogue," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 146-153; Jozef Krupa et al., "Refining Certain Biblical and Liturgical Terms as an Expression of Continuity in Constantine and Methodius' Translation Activities in Great Moravia," *Constantine's Letters* 16, no. 2, (2023): 201-204.

Conclusion

An important factor of sustainable development is the process of professional and personal forming of successful specialists in the process of obtaining an education, one of the important stages of which today in Ukraine is the forming of hardiness. Modern specialists in any field need to have a high level of formed hardiness, in particular, to quickly respond to changes in the socio-economic, and political life of society, to be able to quickly make decisions in any situation, in particular, which is very relevant in conditions of war. We believe that, in our opinion, the competitiveness and success of not only an individual but also Ukrainian society as a whole depend on these qualities. Therefore, the search for ways to increase the level of hardiness of students by actualizing external and mobilizing internal resources, the implementation of which will ensure personal and professional development, becomes important. In our opinion, one of the possibilities for increasing the level of hardiness of students in the conditions of the war in Ukraine and their further professional development and effective activities for the post-war recovery of our country is the introduction into the educational process of the structural and functional model of the formation of resilience of students developed by us. The proposed structural-functional model takes into account the trends, principles, and concepts of the forming of the hardiness of student youth, summarizing scientific approaches, the essential processes of modeling this process in the context of the problems of researching the phenomenon of hardiness, and the implementation of a scientifically based structural-functional model of the forming of hardiness of students is effective and efficient due to the application of the most effective approaches and principles in the context of scientific knowledge.

Among the directions of our further scientific research, we include the introduction into the practice of Ukrainian universities of the theoretical structural-functional model of the formation of the hardiness of students substantiated by us and conducting an experimental study of the effectiveness of the model developed by us.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THE SIMILARITY OF ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF VINCENT DE PAUL AND LOUISE DE MARILLAC: SELECTED ASPECTS OF PERSON-CENTRED CARE DURING A PERIOD OF COUNSELLING IN A HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT*



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Submitted: 21 October 2023

Accepted for publication: 13 April 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The article briefly discusses aspects of person-centred care and the similarities in the attitudes and actions of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. It also highlights some aspects in the context of traumatic brain injury. Person-centred care can help patients by using a personal approach.

Methods: Between January 2023 and September 2023, research was conducted with traumatic brain injury patients several months after the injury. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were the data collection instrument. The research aimed to discover what kind of support patients would need from social workers acting as therapists. Thirty respondents aged between 40 and 60 years participated in the research. For analysis, data from the interview transcripts were compared and analysed using an eight-step strategy in data analysis.

Results: Traumatic brain injury patients would welcome counselling from a social worker – therapist even in a hospital setting. They expect counselling to be provided with genuine respect and empathy.

Conclusion: Traumatic brain injury patients need to experience the approach developed by Vincent De Paul and Louis De Marillac even in the hospital environment. The research carried out opens up possibilities for further exploration.

Keywords: Compassion – Humanity – Empathy – Respect – Treatment of patients.

* **Acknowledgment**

The article is based on the project VEGA 1/0293/22 Nursing schools in the competence of the Society of the Daughters of Christian Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in the context of the political and social situation in Slovakia from the 1930s to 1950s.

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Introduction

Person-centered care in the context of accompanying a person in a hospital setting from a humanistic perspective deeply values the uniqueness of each individual. It is based on the understanding that humans have the capacity and need for growth, whilst it also emphasizes acceptance, care, empathy, sensitivity, and active listening. According to Rogers, individuals should have access to opportunities for learning, personal challenges, development, and relationship support. This approach enables them to achieve their growth potential.² This can be seen as particularly relevant for individuals with traumatic brain injuries.

Person-centered care has been supported by various nursing theories, including the theory of interpersonal relations. This theory was developed by Hildegard Elizabeth Peplau and provides a framework for understanding patient experiences in psychiatric nursing. Peplau's theory, among other aspects, emphasizes the need for connection with the patient and their family. According to this theory, the way healthcare professionals, especially nurses, interact with patients will directly impact the patient's self-esteem and well-being. This underscores the value of therapeutic relationships that foster connection and, consequently, person-centered care.³ Another relevant theory is Jean Watson's theory of caring, which views nursing as interpersonal care focused on the individual. It places the patient within the context of their family, community, and culture, emphasizing patient-centered practice over technology. This theory advocates treating the patient with dignity, respect, and compassion, seeing them as a whole person. It emphasizes accepting patients as they are now and as they may become, fostering authentic relationships, and aiding in the development of their humanity.⁴ It focuses on assisting the patient to achieve a higher degree of harmony in a holistic manner, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. This approach incorporates humanistic and altruistic values into the care provided.⁵ These theories highlight aspects such as compassion and humanity in patient care, which align with the attitudes and actions of the Daughters of Charity, shaped by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Their principles continue to inspire contemporary healthcare practices.

Inspiration from the Attitudes and Actions of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac

Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, whilst attentive to God's providence, were acutely aware of the material and spiritual poverty of their time. They dedicated their service to the poor, sick, and suffering. The Daughters of Charity perceive in those who suffer, those deprived of human rights and dignity, and those in poor health, God's children, to be brothers and sisters with whom they stand in solidarity.⁶ The sick and suffering deserve to be tenderly loved and deeply

- 2 Carl R. Rogers, *A way of being*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) ; Dawn Brooker, Isabelle Latham, *Person-Centred Dementia Care, Making Services Better with the VIPS Framework*. (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015).
- 3 Hildegard Elizabeth Peplau, "Peplau's Theory of Interpersonal Relations." *Nursing Science Quarterly* 10 no. 4, (1997): 162-167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089431849701000407>; Lynne Slater, "Person-Centredness: A Concept Analysis." *Contemporary Nurse* 23 no. 1, (2006): 135-44. <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2006.23.1.135>
- 4 Jean Watson, *Nursing: The Philosophy and Science of Caring*. (Revised Edition, University Press of Colorado, 2008) ; Jean Watson, *Human Caring Science: A Theory of Nursing*. (USA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2011) ; Jean Watson *Applying the art and science of human caring*. (New York: National League for Nursing Press, 1994) ; Joko Gunawan et al. "Nursing Administration: Watson's Theory of Human Caring." *Nursing Science Quarterly*. 35 no. 2, (2022): 235-243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08943184211070582>
- 5 William Rosa et al. "Caring Science Conscious Dying: An Emerging Metaparadigm." *Nursing Science Quarterly*. 30 no. 1, (2017): 58-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318416680538>
- 6 Louise Sullivan, *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*. (New York: New City Press, 1991) ; Jean Calvet, *Louise de Marillac par elle-même*. (Paris: Téqui, 1988).

respected, for they are indeed representatives of Christ, who identified with them.⁷ Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac recognized the unique value and dignity of each patient. They prioritized compassion, emphasizing patients' needs and guiding them towards self-realization. They worked with a great deal of empathy and active listening, demonstrating unconditional acceptance towards patients. Rather than making assumptions about patients' experiences, they observed and listened to how patients perceived their own experiences. Many patients who experience significant changes due to their illnesses, which deeply impact them personally, require them to adapt to new realities and contexts. In this regard, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac acknowledged the importance of how self-conceptualisation influences patient behaviour. Despite the period in which they worked, lacking various approaches to patient care, they unwittingly employed several principles derived from person-centered care. They were open, sincere, and authentic towards patients, providing them with genuine presence and creating a safe space for them to openly discuss their experiences without fear of rejection or judgment. They adhered to the principle of congruence, as outlined in person-centered care. Another principle they upheld was unconditional positive regard. Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and the Daughters of Charity, following their example, expressed empathetic understanding to patients, which is further principle they upheld. They treated patients with utmost respect, reverence, and dignity, empathetically and kindly without any conditions, even if this attitude might not have been reciprocated. They pondered over their words and ensured that patients felt heard and seen when discussing their feelings and experiences. They created an atmosphere for patients where their individual needs were recognized, instilling hope and helping to maintain their dignity. They allowed patients, through the principles of person-centered care, to reveal their spiritual needs. This approach improves potential outcomes leading to greater patient satisfaction and higher-quality care. In the attitudes and actions of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and the Daughters of Charity, including their approach to the sick, we can see that the Christian faith brings elevation to human suffering and death. In connection with Christ's suffering and death, it transforms into a meaningful narrative that brings salvation. In the resurrected Christ, despite all weaknesses and shortcomings, the lost dignity of human existence is restored. This ultimately renders every human life, including that of a dying patient, and their activities meaningful.⁸

Selected Aspects Related to Traumatic Brain Injury

For patients suffering from life-threatening or chronic illnesses, person-centered care can be beneficial through the incorporation of a personalized approach, in which empathy and respect for the individual play a crucial role.⁹ Person-centered care may aid patients with traumatic brain

injury in facilitating brain congruence by assisting them in being open to their experiences. Patients with traumatic brain injury often experience profound feelings of loss and grief.¹⁰ They are compelled to confront various changes in their independence, relationships, educational or occupational potential, and in activities that held particular significance for them. They are exposed to the effects of strong social and cultural conditions that influence them psychologically and emotionally. These influences can be observed in their attitudes towards themselves, in feelings of identity, and in their interconnectedness with others. Additionally, in their ability to cultivate new relationships, in their capacity to find meaning in new life roles, and in their ability to take control of their lives.¹¹ They need to have conditions established to develop their abilities¹² even after the injury, to uncover the gifts they possess, so they can utilize everyday resources for growth and fulfillment of the purpose of their lives.¹³ The understanding of life depends on the sense one finds within it. If one poses the question, "What is the meaning of my life?" they can

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 - 12 Soňa Holúbková, "Príhovor Individuálny prístup v oblasti sociálnych služieb." in *Transformácia domovov sociálnych služieb s cieľom sociálnej a pracovnej integrácie ich obyvateľov*. ed. Slavomír Krupa et al. (Bratislava: Rada pre poradenstvo v sociálnej práci, 2007). 5 ; Monica, Czerwonka, Maria Pietrzak, "Application of Catholic Social Teaching in Finance and Management Journal information." *Person and the Challenges. The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II.* 14 no. 1, (2024): 295-313 ; Olena Rohova, et al. "The Analysis of Ukrainian Policy in the Field of State-Religious Education: Secondary School." *Person and the Challenges. The Journal of Theology, Education, Canon Law and Social Studies Inspired by Pope John Paul II.* 14 no. 1, (2024): 109-128 ; Martina Pavlíková et al. "Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 106-123; Anastasia Peshkovskaya, et al. "Suicide-Related Groups and School Shooting Fan Communities on Social Media: A Network Analysis," *Computers* 13, no. 3, (2024): 61 ; Márta Péntek et al. "BURQOL-RD Research Network. Social/economic costs and health-related quality of life of mucopolysaccharidosis patients and their caregivers in Europe," *The European Journal of Health Economics* 17, Suppl 1, (2016): 89-98 ; Márta Péntek, et al. "Musculoskeletal health and capability wellbeing: Associations between the HAQ-DI, ICECAP-A and ICECAP-O measures in a population survey," *Musculoskeletal Science and Practice* 55 (2021): 102420 ; Edward Zygmunt Jarmoch et al. "Social Work and Socio-Pathological Phenomena in the School Environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 130-145; Hedviga Tkáčová, et al. "Online Media Audience During the Covid-19 Pandemic as an Active Amplifier of Disinformation: Motivations of University Students to Share Information on Facebook," *Communication Today* 14, no. 2, (2023): 154-167 ; Martina Pavlíková et al. "Grief of the bereaved in a social media environment as one of the prominent consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic," *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2, (2023): 75-84. Alexander V. Sirotkin, et al. "Impact of COVID-19 on University Activities: Comparison of Experiences from Slovakia and Georgia," *Sustainability* 15, no. 3, (2023): 1897 ; Miroslav Tvrdoň, et al. "Homelessness as a social problem – socio-pathological phenomenon – qualitative analysis," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 439-448 ; Feng Zhang, et al. "Using Virtual Reality Interventions to Promote Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Children* 11, no. 1, (2024): 41.
 - 13 Soňa Holúbková, "Príhovor Individuálny prístup," 5 ; María José Binetti et al., "Same and other: from Plato to Kierkegaard: from Plato to Kierkegaard. A reading of a metaphysical thesis in an existential key." *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 12 no. 1, (2021): 15-31 ; Roman Králik, Luboš Török, "The Moment' Kierkegaard's Attack Upon Christendom," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 3, (2016): 45-53 ; Martín, José García et al. "The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita," *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 11, no. 1-2, (2021): 48-57 ; Marie Roubalová et al. "Basic Aspects of Sleep from the Perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism." *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 1, (2022): 168-184 ; Roman Králik et al. "Compassion and Solidarity with the poor in Tahakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 1, (2022): 154-168 ; Roman Králik, Luboš Török, "Concept of relationship God-man in Kierkegaard's writing 'What we learn from the lilies in the field and from the birds in the air'," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12, no. 3, (2016): 65-74.

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choose how to respond to this challenge in their life. Their response will also serve as evidence of their most intrinsic spiritual stance.¹⁴ In making this choice of response, however, they inevitably require the support of close individuals and also healthcare personnel who can repeatedly provide them with opportunities to find meaning in life. They can never be without hope, which points forward to future fulfillment.¹⁵ Social support plays a crucial role in the ability to manage or cope with these situations. Individuals with traumatic brain injury have strong social support when they have access to people they can rely on in times of need, particularly in stressful situations. The support and presence of friends and family members can have a positive emotional impact on them. Alongside their loved ones, they require counselling in healthcare that is provided to them. This counselling should embody aspects of the approach and actions of Vincent De Paul and Louise de Marillac. Louise deeply understood that if she and the sisters she led approached patients empathetically, with respect, and accepted their unconditional worth and dignity, they could be very helpful to them. Individuals with traumatic brain injury also need to experience and see in the hospital environment, given their current health condition, that it is possible for love to overcome fear and anxiety. What could be better for them than being surrounded by healthcare professionals, social workers, who can be living witnesses of higher values?¹⁶ Similar to the Daughters of Charity, who provided great spiritual comfort to patients and emphasized a holistic approach to care alongside physical care.

Methods

Between January 2023 and September 2023, a research study was conducted with patients who had experienced traumatic brain injury several months after the injury. The research took place in Slovakia, Italy, Poland, and Serbia, in hospitals' neurological departments and various rehabilitation facilities dedicated to assisting individuals with brain injury and their families coping with various consequences of the injury. The aim of the research was to ascertain the support patients would require from social workers acting as therapists. The research question guiding the achievement of the research goal was as follows: What are the expectations of patients with traumatic brain injury regarding the provision of this support?

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with individual interviews lasting an average of 40 minutes each.

Data analysis involved comparing and analyzing transcripts using the eight-step data analysis strategy.¹⁷

14 Elizabeth Lukas, *Sehnsucht nach Sinn. Logotherapeutische Antworten auf existentielle Fragen*. (München - Wien: Profil Verlag, 1999). 15-17.

15 Peter Tavel, *Zmysel života podľa V. E. Frankla*. (Bratislava: Iris, 2004). 52; Marie Roubalová et al. "Basic Aspects of Sleep from the Perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 1, (2022): 168-184.

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17 Christopher Hansen, Holger Steinmetz, Jörn Block "How to conduct a meta-analysis in eight steps: a practical guide." *Management Review Quarterly* 72 (2022): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-021-00247-4>

Sample

In this case, the selection of the research sample was conducted using a method called purposive sampling, which allows for the utilization of a wide range of methods to locate specific cases and hard-to-reach types of respondents. The research involved 30 respondents aged 40-60 years. The inclusion criteria for the research was the experience of traumatic brain injury, the ability to understand simple questions from the researcher, and to answer them independently or in the presence of an assisting person, as well as the ability to agree to informed consent for the research. The research included twenty neurological hospital departments and two rehabilitation facilities from Slovakia, two neurological hospital departments from Italy, one neurological hospital department from Poland, and one neurological hospital department from Serbia.

Data collection

The data collection process commenced by establishing personal contact with potential research participants through approached physicians and healthcare professionals from neurological hospital departments, directors of rehabilitation facilities, or via email and other available online platforms. Following the initial contact, a presentation about the research intentions was delivered to the selected sample of respondents, both in person and online, along with a discussion on its ethical considerations. Subsequent meetings were arranged for the purpose of actual data collection.

Qualitative data were acquired through research interviews, employing standardized questions to gain a detailed insight into the participants' opinions and perceptions regarding a specific theme. Data collection occurred either in person or online, utilizing online applications where feasible. Semi-structured interviews served as the data collection tool.

Ethical issue

Participation in the research necessarily requires the voluntariness of the respondents themselves, thus it is essential to equally respect their willingness to participate in the research as well as any potential refusal to participate. Research participants were informed in writing about the option to terminate their participation in the research at any time. Throughout the research process, the anonymity of the respondents was maintained without the possibility of identification. After providing written consent for their voluntary participation in the research, respondents were presented with a declaration on the protection of personal data - GDPR, and specialized consents were also requested to ensure their legal protection, as well as the legal protection of the research, along with consent for the processing of personal data. All aforementioned consents were confirmed by the research participants with their signature.

With the consent of the research participants, the interviews were recorded and meticulously transcribed. For the preservation of respondents' anonymity, the recordings were subsequently deleted in their presence.

Credibility of the research

The research team consisted of the article authors and the supervisor for the conducted research. Together, they approached research participants, conducted all interviews, and subsequently recorded their transcripts as well as research notes. The research results were discussed at a plenary meeting with special emphasis on peculiarities and differences. The research captured the unique experience of the approached respondents.

The credibility of the research was ensured through constant immersion in the analysis and by conducting analytical meetings with the research auditor.

Limitations of research

The limitations of the research included the number of respondents and the number of facilities participating in the study. For this reason, the investigation will continue from March 2024 and will focus on further consequences of brain injury for patients and their family members. Such consequences include, for example, the impact of depression and anxiety on daily tasks, self-esteem, and family functioning within both the immediate and extended family.

Results

The research results can be conceptualized into the following areas:

Patients with traumatic brain injury have a need, particularly in the short term after the injury, for unconditional acceptance to cope with changes and losses in a safe and supportive environment. Even in the hospital setting, according to their expressions among healthcare professionals, apart from psychologists, they would need someone to listen to them, with whom they could freely discuss their concerns resulting from the injury, someone outside their usual circle of family and friends. They wish to have the freedom to say what they want to say and at the same time have the opportunity to be fully heard and understood. In this context, they expressed concerns about speaking to people in their surroundings about what they need because they do not want to burden them or hurt their loved ones whom they cherish.

From this support, they expect professionals, such as social workers, for example, to help them orient themselves towards some new meaning or goal. Patients with traumatic brain injury have a need, particularly in the short term after the injury, for unconditional acceptance to cope with changes and losses in a safe and supportive environment. Even in the hospital setting, according to their expressions among healthcare professionals, apart from psychologists, they would need someone to listen to them, with whom they could freely discuss their concerns resulting from the injury, someone outside their usual circle of family and friends. They wish to have the freedom to say what they want to say and at the same time have the opportunity to be fully heard and understood. In this context, they expressed concerns about speaking to people in their surroundings about what they need because they do not want to burden them or hurt their loved ones whom they cherish. From this support, they expect professionals, such as social workers, for example, to help them orient themselves towards some new meaning or goal. They need to experience a sense of camaraderie, which would strengthen their own abilities, skills, and strengths. They also need to feel they have enough time to explore their situation more deeply. They wish to feel free when examining their thoughts and feelings. They expressed a desire to experience a non-judgmental attitude and approach, one that is not condemning. In this context, they wish to be perceived as individuals with a unique inner identity, worthy of respect. They wish to stop feeling the need to change external circumstances. Instead, they would like to realize that change must come from within, and only then will their view of external circumstances change, which are beyond their control. They would like to have the opportunity to learn to trust their instincts in various aspects of their lives and gain strength and courage from this. They wish to be perceived as people capable of positive change and growth. They would like to learn to be more authentic, even in their work and personal relationships. They would like to be able to perceive positive changes in themselves, including the improvement of problematic relationships, some of which they may be able to end with positive results and others appreciate for their inner essence. They would like to feel free and open and freely communicate. They feel that such a form of communication would be more open, honest, and natural for them in relation to other people. They also wish to search for meaning, significance in their situations, difficulties, things they experience in their private and professional lives, which may be difficult or problematic for them. They would be glad if they could work with a professional to search for, uncover, and find what is

actually hidden meaning for them. They need to have a large or at least a small goal in life to see it in front of them, look forward to it, or hope for its fulfillment. This would drive them forward and give meaning to their lives. They need to be useful in life, to have some role, even a small one. They would like the professional to help them focus primarily on the goal, on searching for and uncovering meaning. In the hospital setting, they would need to experience the “mere” presence of a social worker therapist, who would be sincere with them, show humanity, not to make them feel as if his therapeutic effort was to comfort or alleviate their situation. They would like to be able to react without fear to unpleasant things in their lives. They confirmed that after the injury, they have low self-esteem and a lack of self-acceptance. Many have such low self-esteem that they can hardly get positive feedback from others. Through the counselling and help of a social worker therapist, they would like to gain greater recognition and understanding for the underlying low self-perception. Due to the injury, they often perceive themselves negatively. Therefore, they want to stop relying upon the assessment of others in order to gain feelings of positive self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-esteem for themselves.

Respondents, even in the hospital setting, require counselling, and in this process, they prefer aspects of person-centered care. They are aware that they need to move positively to be freer, more authentic, and more open in the area of personality development even after the injury. They condition this on being able to trust the social worker therapist. At the same time, they expressed the need for counselling that focuses on searching for meaning, the significance of experienced difficulties, searching for, uncovering, and even finding their purpose. They wish to experience counselling that would help them orient themselves towards a goal, to feel useful, and to discover meaning in their lives. They also expressed the need for counselling related to their emotions, to become aware that external circumstances do not necessarily need to change. They need self-acceptance and expect that a social worker therapist could help them with this during counselling. They also expect to learn to value who they are, to appreciate themselves, and to strive to live more authentically in the counselling process. This will help them gain respect and acceptance for all aspects of themselves.

Discussion

Counselling is utilized for personality development under various circumstances.¹⁸ Patients with traumatic brain injury would welcome counselling from a social worker therapist even in the hospital setting. From counselling, they expect genuine respect and empathy. This entails understanding the issues arising from their interpersonal relationships, as well as the social attitudes affecting their self-concept and ability to engage in satisfying relationships with others. At the onset of counselling, they need to experience a sense of alliance with the social worker therapist. Throughout the counselling process, they also need support in facing various situations rather than avoiding them and in utilizing specific strengths of their personality. Social worker therapists assist patients with traumatic brain injury in taking meaningful and deliberate steps to mitigate the impacts of problems in their lives. Some guidelines that social workers should adhere to in supporting patients with traumatic brain injury could include assessing available resources and prioritizing the area of greatest social vulnerability. Additionally, utilizing existing social relationships for ongoing support after counselling has ended.

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Conclusion

The research results have shown that patients with traumatic brain injury currently need to experience the same approach in the hospital environment as Vincent De Paul and Louise De Marillac provided.

The conducted research opens up possibilities for further exploration. It would be interesting to investigate how person-centered care helps patients with traumatic brain injury in personal development, supporting their abilities and talents, changing self-perception, and improving their relationships with others. Another potentially interesting topic for examination concerning self-perception is to what extent they will begin to value, respect, and accept their own personality with all its strengths and weaknesses, and how capable they will be of empathetic understanding and unconditionally positive relationships with themselves and others, and how close they can live to their authentic selves.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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PILGRIMAGE TOURISM AS ONE OF THE TOOLS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT*



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Submitted: 21 November 2023

Accepted for publication: 18 February 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: Currently, the term tourism is associated with leisure, its utilization for recreation, and exploration. A synonym for the term tourism is the concept of tourism. Tourism encompasses a diverse array of activities catering to the needs of travelers who are away from their permanent residence, usually during leisure periods. Its goals include relaxation, exploration, health, recreation, entertainment, cultural and sports activities, business trips, and not least, the age-old practice of pilgrimage – seeking a comprehensive experience. Within this article, we focus on cultural tourism, which includes religious or pilgrimage tourism.

Methods: To understand the context of the term pilgrimage tourism and its analysis as one of the tools of regional development, we utilized the historical-geographical method. This approach enables us to delve into the rich tradition of this particular form of tourism, serving as a foundation for future development initiatives. Based on the analysis of the area, it is possible to plan further activities related to tourism. We consider this to be one of the most important methods used in our work as it was applied on several levels.

Conclusion: The growth of tourism in a resort or region depends on the specific potential inherent to that destination. The potential for regional development of the area may lie in preserving traditions associated with Christianity, which indicate that since ancient times, there has been a predominance of deeply religious inhabitants.

Keywords: Religious tourism – Pilgrimage – Routes – Regional development.

Introduction

The motives and goals of travel are diverse. It is indisputable that among the oldest forms of tourism, we can include pilgrimage motivated by religious reasons. The understanding of the terms religious and pilgrimage tourism varies. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) con-

* Acknowledgment/Funding

This research was funded by Scientific Grant Agency KEPA project No 032UKF-4/2024 "Religious tourism in Slovakia and its potential for regional development".

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siders religious tourism as visiting a sacred site of a specific religion associated with performing certain religious rituals.² The term pilgrimage tourism carries the same semantic content as "religious tourism," referring to travel for the purpose of visiting a sacred site during a specific religious event – a *pilgrimage*. Pilgrimage tourism is considered a certain aspect of religious tourism.

Religious tourism encompasses the exploration of various objects, locations, and events linked to Christianity. Participants in such tourism aren't always adherents of the specific faith related to the sacred site; some may not identify as religious at all.³ Many tourists visit churches for their diverse architectural styles, unique decorations such as frescoes, statues, paintings, historical value (many of them are UNESCO heritage sites). Beyond churches, there is also great interest in calvaries, monasteries, and sacred sites.

Pilgrimage tourism is uniquely remarkable as it presents a challenge for non-believers to grasp the motivation behind thousands of individuals willingly sacrificing their comfort to undertake a pilgrimage. Pilgrims are willing to make sacrifices, they do not demand high-quality accommodation or dining services, they journey in all weather conditions, and depart from the pilgrimage filled with peace, rejuvenation, and strength for the days ahead. Currently, the clientele is changing with higher service expectations. For a better understanding of this phenomenon and subsequent analysis of the economic aspects of pilgrimage, it is necessary to characterize pilgrimages from the perspective of religious authors. Tourists can be seen from a different perspective than simply the destination they are heading to, whether it's the sea, mountains, or a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Even though they participate in „non-religious“ tours, they should still have a spiritual experience. Pilgrimages (*peregrinatio religiosa*) are characterized by three fundamental elements: participants of the pilgrimage (*homo religiosus*), geographical space, and religious act (*sacrum*).⁴ Pilgrimage tourism, in comparison to the hierarchically superior phenomenon of tourism, differs not only in terms of motivation but also by rejecting the participants of the pilgrimage by labeling them as participants of tourism, or even as tourists.

There is a distinction between a tourist and a pilgrim. A pilgrim distinguishes themselves from a tourist by not just focusing on admiring the beauty and monuments of designated places. Instead, they aim to immerse themselves in and recreate the era of the saints who left lasting marks in the places they traverse. The enduring examples of these witnesses of faith serve as encouragement and strength for their life. The term „pilgrimage,“ derived from the Latin word „peregrinatio,“ comes from the word „peregre,“ which means to go far. The pilgrim is a person who embarks on a long journey, usually to an unfamiliar land, and stays there for a certain period of time. Pilgrimage involves traveling to sacred places for religious purposes. Unlike religious tourism, pilgrimage has a higher purpose, even though it may involve the use of trains, planes, and accommodation facilities. It is primarily a religious phenomenon – timeless and interfaith, bound to cult.⁵ From the earliest Christian centuries, it had these basic objectives: to see, to pray, to adore, to fulfill a vow, and to obtain the granting of requests. To see – even the church

2 UNWTO, *The World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism*. <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/un-tourism-tourism-dashboard>

3 Jana Piteková, *Náboženský cestovný ruch na príklade pútnického miesta Litmanová na Slovensku*. <http://vsh.kompletweb.cz/download.php?file=file/cht/CHTP14>

4 Adam Jackowski, *Religious Tourism – Problems with Terminology*. <http://www.geo.uj.edu.pl/publikacje.php?pdf=00001506&token=c12575ea74df3f2b3a5752a5c8f3cb1a>

5 Peter Kondrla et al., "Transformations of Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition in Contemporary Religiosity," *Constantine's Letters* 15 no. 2, (2022): 160-169; Tibor Máhrík et al., "Salvation as the Teleological Vector in Kierkegaard's Practice in Christianity," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 16 no. 4, (2020): 43-52; Peter Kondrla, Roman Králík, "The Specifics of Mission of the Thessalonian Brothers and the Potential for their Acti-

writer Origen (185-254) traveled through several areas of Palestine „to seek traces of Jesus, his disciples, and his prophets.“ The personal experience of being where the history of salvation unfolded is therefore very important. Spiritually beneficial, however, is when we create an inner space at these places and can, so to speak, tangibly experience historical events. To pray, to adore – being present at sacred places leads to prayer. The pilgrim embarks on a pilgrimage to pray. Prayer should mark the atmosphere during travel. It is very important to create a moment of silence at the actual sites so that we can realize that we are in a place where God acted, and we want to participate in His presence and action. Fulfilling a vow – many have made a vow that if God listens to their prayers, they will travel to some pilgrimage site. Or they decided to do so after conversion, experiencing God's help even without a vow. Pilgrimage as penance spread in Western Europe from the 6th century. Achieving the hearing of prayers – the prayer of pilgrims is also supplicatory. Along the way and at sacred sites, pilgrims seek various graces. The most common request is for healing. Many sick people who need physical healing or come to plead visit every shrine (Lourdes, Fatima, etc.).⁶

Methods

The work consists of several steps, including collecting photographic documentation material, mapping the area, visiting parish offices and churches to become familiar with the territory. We used the method of observation and field research when gathering sources.

In processing, we also utilized the method of explanatory description. It is the initial phase of geographic exploration. Through it, we analyzed the area of interest. The application of this method was evident throughout the work.

Another method we used was the historical-geographical method, which allows us to understand changes in the landscape, the development of its individual elements, and the evolution of the landscape as a whole. We can find it in the analysis of the historical development of the area.

Throughout the work, the systemic method was employed, which relies on a systematic approach. Its foundation lies in understanding the studied problem as a system, along with the knowledge of the sequence of steps in its comprehensive investigation, from analysis to synthesis.

Pilgrimage – pilgrimage tourism

Pilgrimage is not religious tourism. A pilgrimage, a journey, is a symbol of universal value in which every person participates: „homo viator,“ the pilgrim, the person who is always on the road. Along his journey, he encounters many dangers, many crosses, trials, until he „arrives“ at the holiest place where God resides, the „heavenly Jerusalem.“ The main goal of pilgrims, which persists to this day, is not relics but miraculous statues, images, and icons. From approximately the 11th century, reverence for the Virgin Mary grew in Western Europe, and temples dedicated to her were built. The focal point of worship practically always becomes a gracious statue or image. The term „gracious“ is used because miraculous effects (healing, saving lives, fertility, childbirth, etc.)⁷ are attributed to her. Pilgrimage sites dedicated to Mary have played and continue to play an important role in preserving spiritual strength and Christian faith. In addition to these pilgrimage sites, there are also various devotional walks, such as when youth embark on

alization,” *Constantine's Letters* 9 no. 2, (2016): 90-97; Lucie Rychnová et al., „Open-air Museums – the Future of the Presentation of Spiritual and Architectural Heritage,” *Museology and Cultural Heritage* 10 no. 1, (2022): 5-18.

6 František Dancák, *Náboženský turizmus*. www.zoe.sk/pub/doc/theologos/p_nabozensky_turizmus.pdf

7 Peter Ivanič, „Relics of st. Constantine-Cyril in Slovakia,” *Constantine's Letters* 15, no. 2, (2022): 106-126; Alfred Krogmann et al., *Religiózný cestovný ruch v Nitrianskej diecéze* (Nitra: FVP UKF v Nitre, 2020).

a night pilgrimage to a chapel in fields or forests. These spiritual exercises are more of a private devotion. Pilgrimage can be interpreted as a form of ascetic practice because the pilgrim voluntarily leaves behind the familiar order. Motivation for pilgrimage may include seeking salvation, seeking forgiveness for sins committed, or obtaining indulgences. It can be said, therefore, that every person is like a pilgrim who is constantly in motion. They traverse „fields“ or „boundaries.“ In both cases, it suggests that they are strangers on a journey toward a goal. This sets them apart from wanderers, for whom no goal is fixed because they wander without knowing what they seek. „The land is mine, and you are but foreigners“ (*Leviticus* 25:23). These words of God, recorded in the Book of Leviticus, instilled in Abraham's descendants the awareness that they are guests and pilgrims to the promised land.⁸ Typical pilgrimage destinations are usually settlements: cities, towns, and villages, or geographical features such as sacred mountains, holy rivers, and the like. In our case, it concerns the territory in the Novobanská štálová Area.

Examples include the municipalities of Veľká and Malá Lehota and the pilgrimage site Kohútovo in the district of Žarnovica, which is among the most sought-after places in the immediate vicinity of Nová Baňa. The pilgrimage site owes its origin to the discovery of a plentiful water spring during a period of severe drought in 1863. The history of this pilgrimage site has been preserved not only orally but also through written records. Testimonies of several individuals who either experienced healing from illnesses or witnessed some signs have been preserved.

Later, in 1867, the chronicle records additional cases of healing confirmed by witnesses. The first pilgrimage took place on July 1, 1866, on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost (according to the then valid Tridentine arrangement of the liturgical year), led and organized by the parish priest of Nová Baňa, Alexej Peťko. At that time, about 4000 people from Nová Baňa and the surrounding area visited the shrine in Kohútovo in a procession from the Parish Church. During the 40 years of communist rule, participation in pilgrimages was severely restricted by the ruling regime. Various actions were organized during pilgrimage times to divert attention away from families and children, and processions through the town were prohibited. Despite all efforts to minimize the number of pilgrims, it was not successful. When the pilgrimage statue of Our Lady of Fatima traveled through Slovakia in 1994, it was brought to Kohútovo on May 6, 1994, where a holy Mass was celebrated in the presence of the diocesan bishop Mons. Rudolf Baláž, numerous priests, and a huge number of believers. Kohútovo, as it did in the past, still attracts many believers today to lay down their pains, sufferings, and joys here. The area of the pilgrimage site in Kohútovo serves as a place of peace, prayer, and relaxation for everyone who visits. Large numbers of people participate in pilgrimages in May and September each year, and distinguished preachers are invited to join the pilgrims in celebrating and honoring our heavenly Mother, the Virgin Mary.⁹

In the municipality of Malá Lehota, one can see religious monuments in the form of two churches, numerous crosses, and Stations of the Cross. The most valuable monument in the village is the classicist Roman Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary built in 1820 on the site of a former barn. The building served its purpose until September 1999. The classicist main altar dates back to the time of the church's construction, and the current central painting of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary is the work of J. Šinkovič from the years 1975 – 1976. On the altar, there is a statue of the Madonna, with cherubim sculptures on the sides. It is peculiar that the original classicist central altar painting of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary is hung near the newer entrance to the church, although it is much more beautiful and valuable than the present one.

8 František Mróz et al., „Factors Conditioning the Creation and Development of a Network of Camino de Santiago Routes in Visegrad Group Countries,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 7, no. 5, (2019): 56-71; Gisbert Rinschede, „Forms of Religious Tourism,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, no. 1 (1992): 51-67.

9 *Fara Nová Baňa*, <https://www.mojakomunita.sk/web/farnost-nova-bana>

The new Stations of the Cross were a gift from the parish office in Vysoká pri Banskej Štiavnici from 1964. The pilgrimage stop from the second half of the 19th century has an image of St. Barbara. The classicist organ from the first half of the 19th century was brought here in 1890 at the initiative of Father Martinček and was replaced with a new one in 1964. In the small tower, two bronze bells are hung, which were cast by local believers in 1924 at R. Manouška and Co. in Brno as a replacement for the bells destroyed along with the tower, which received a direct hit during World War I. The younger church is the Church of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. It is a modern building with a projected square tower. It was constructed with the support of parishioners between 1993 and 1999. The marble memorial plaque in the interior of the church was blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1990.¹⁰ In the village of Veľká Lehota, there is the Church of St. Martin the Bishop, which was built on the site of a Baroque chapel in 1809 as a Neo-Gothic single-nave structure with a polygonal closure of the sanctuary. There is a small tower above the gabled facade. The predecessor of the church was a temporary prayer house built during the time of the Rákóczi family, and later a brick late-Baroque chapel, which stood here from 1780. Among the valuable artifacts preserved in it are sculptures from the 19th century and a hanging painting from the late 18th century depicting the Crucifixion. The church houses the main altar of St. Martin and side altars of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary, the Rosary Virgin Mary, and St. Joseph. The original pulpit is located in the church. An atypical feature is the wooden beam ceiling. Below the church, there is a Lourdes grotto. Above the church, there is an attached rectory with a beautiful garden with a statue of Jesus.¹¹

Regional development

Tourism is currently the driving force of regional development in the area. Regional development involves economic and social processes taking place in the natural and social environment of the region, which should utilize and respect the opportunities, conditions, and peculiarities of the region. Regional development can be understood as ensuring the growth of the economic and social potential of the region, the utilization of which should lead to an improvement in the living standards of its inhabitants, to the social and economic landscape development, while maintaining sustainable development.¹²

Tourism becomes a factor in regional development usually where there is a suitable primary offer, i.e., where natural and cultural-historical attractions generate visits. Where the primary offer of tourism is most attractive, it becomes the subject of economic evaluation and a tool for regional development. The more attractive the primary offer of tourism, the greater its significance, and the more significant the role of tourism in the region as a tool for its economic, social, and cultural development.

The basis of regional specialization in terms of tourism is its primary offer, i.e., natural and cultural-historical potential and organized events. If tourism is a determining factor in the region's development, then comprehensive economic specialization develops within it. This means that, in response to the needs of tourism, other supporting and ancillary activities induced by the tourism industry also develop. In order for tourism to develop in the destination (region), it is necessary to build specific economic activities characteristic of tourism and economic activities induced by the tourism industry, which satisfy the demand of visitors to varying degrees.

10 Branislav Medved', Katarína Konečná, *Bedeker Nová Baňa a okolie* (Banská Bystrica: štúdio HARMONY, 2004).

11 *Región Gron*, <https://regiongron.sk/#cat=Cykloturistika&filter=r-fullyTranslatedLangus,-r-only-Opened,-sb-sortedBy-0&z=11,18,71727,48,53116>

12 Eva Rajčáková, *Regionálny rozvoj a regionálna politika Európskej únie a Slovenska* (Bratislava: Geografika, 2009).

Only when supporting and ancillary activities, as well as technical and social infrastructure in the destination (region), are sufficiently developed, can the impact of tourism on its economic, social, and cultural development be expected.¹³

Participants in tourism perceive their stay in the resort or region as a complex of all experiences, impressions, perceptions, as well as services provided to them. Therefore, when creating tourism offerings in the region, it is essential to consider the importance of the overall impression.

For regional development, partnerships are important as a form of cooperation among socio-economic partners in the preparation, implementation, financing, monitoring, and evaluation of the priorities and goals of regional development. Socio-economic partners include central government authorities, local government authorities, self-governing regions, municipalities, micro-regional associations, and other natural and legal persons operating in the field of regional development at the national, regional, and local levels, i.e., public, private, and third sectors (non-governmental organizations).

From the perspective of regional development, micro-regions (associations of municipalities and towns) are significant legal entities established to achieve common goals in enhancing economic, social, and territorial development. In the context of accessing funds from EU funds, other forms of associations are also important, such as Euroregions established for cross-border cooperation purposes, local partnerships for social inclusion bringing together communities and representatives of partner organizations and stakeholders, and local action groups (MAS) as partnerships between the public and private sectors to address rural development.

Several legal entities are involved in financing tourism development in Slovakia. Among the public sector entities, we include the Ministry of Transport, Construction, and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, self-governing regions, municipalities, and a contributory organization established by the ministry (Slovak Tourist Board).¹⁴ The Slovak Tourist Board serves as a managerial organization at the national level, i.e., for the state as a tourist destination. Legal entities also participate in the development and financing of tourism through public-private partnerships. At the regional level, regional tourism organizations serve as managerial organizations, and at the local level, regional tourism organizations operate, whose members include legal and natural persons from the public and private sectors.

Within religious tourism, the regular pilgrimage of hundreds to thousands of believers to specific places or regions undoubtedly also has economic significance. On one hand, it is the responsibility of municipal authorities to provide parking areas, organizers, regulate traffic, establish rules for stall sales, maintain access roads (if the pilgrimage site is outside the settlement), coordinate health and safety services, etc. On the other hand, essentially without spending on marketing and promotion of the city, municipality, or region, thousands of pilgrims arrive who, besides the main purpose of the pilgrimage, consume goods and services including accommodation. These are finances, most of which remain in the region, and the multiplier effect of these initial expenditures is also significant. Municipalities cannot influence their town, city, or region to become a pilgrimage destination. However, if a „higher power“ intervenes and a relatively insignificant destination in terms of tourism suddenly becomes the destination for thousands of believers and non-believers, it affects both the municipality and the wider region. The natural and anthropogenic potential of the municipality can satisfy the needs of participants to varying

13 Marián Gúčík et al., *Manažment cieľového miesta cestovného ruchu* (Banská Bystrica: DALI-BB, 2012).

14 SLOV-LEX, *Právne predpisy*. <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2008/539/20170101>

degrees and stimulate repeat visits. The subsequent effects of tourism mean benefits for the region's economy, tourism entrepreneurs, local residents, and the visitors themselves.¹⁵

The area of interest belongs to the microregion of Nová Baňa, which has great potential for its development. It consists of the cadastral areas of the town of Nová Baňa and the adjacent villages of Hronský Beňadik, Orovnica, Tekovská Breznica, Brehy, Rudno nad Hronom, Veľká Lehota, and Malá Lehota. The mission of the microregion is to comprehensively support the development of the area, initiate activities in the field of tourism mainly focusing on rural tourism and agrotourism, preserve and enhance natural and landscape values, protect local cultural heritage, revive local traditions and customs, and more. In Nová Baňa, the contact point is the Regional Tourism Organization Gron. The organization focuses on promoting tourism development in the territory of its members. Its task is to jointly present natural attractions, history, folk traditions, cultural life, and events. The city has signed a partnership agreement with 2 cities in Europe: Mimoň (Czech Republic) and Nin (Croatia).¹⁶

Conclusion

Pilgrimages are one of the oldest reasons for travel. Many inns were established specifically to accommodate pilgrims. Pilgrimages often involve groups of travelers visiting various parts of the world, including Slovakia, on excursions to the most beautiful temples and residences of various religious denominations. Currently, we are witnessing a renaissance in pilgrimage. Besides pilgrims, tourists also visit pilgrimage sites, driven by an interest in exploration. The need to classify these motivation-driven migrations to religious centers led to the introduction of a new term – religious tourism. Over the past two decades, we have witnessed the development of pilgrimage sites in most European countries.

The development of tourism in a resort or region is conditioned by a certain potential that the destination possesses. Apart from the potential offered by the environment, the issue of optimal tourism development remains relevant. Collaboration appears to be the solution to this problem. In tourism, there are four levels of collaboration: local, regional, national, and supranational. Participants involved in tourism development, whether it be local government, various organizations, institutions, or entrepreneurs providing accommodation, catering, transportation, and various other services, play a crucial role in partnerships at each level. Their partnership is extremely important and directly or indirectly influences the development of tourism in the region.

The potential for regional development of an area could lie in preserving traditions associated with Christianity, which indicate that there has been a strong presence of devout inhabitants since ancient times. A supportive mechanism for the development of the area and the preservation of cultural heritage could be religious tourism, which could be based on the design of pilgrimage routes through the territory.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

15 Aleksander Kobylarek, et al., "Communication Community in the Prefigurative World," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13 no. 2, (2022): 7-16.

16 *Región Nová Baňa*, <https://www.novabana.sk/>; František Petrovič, *Vývoj krajiny v oblasti štálového osídlenia Pohronského Inovca a Tribeča* (Bratislava: Ústav krajinej ekológie SAV v Bratislave, 2005); Lucia Šolcová, *Vývoj krajiny s disperzným typom osídlenia v Novobanskej štálovej oblasti* (Nitra: FPV UKF v Nitre, 2012).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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LIFESTYLE IN OLD AGE*

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Submitted: 13 December 2023

Accepted for publication: 29 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background: The article highlights selected aspects of a successful ageing process that affect the lifestyle of older people and seniors and their perception of retirement. It also discusses certain areas of the biomedical and psychosocial model of the successful and unsuccessful ageing process and the relationship between quality of life and the assessment of the life of the elderly.

Methods: A survey was conducted between January 2022 and June 2023 to investigate seniors' perceptions of life satisfaction. The survey was conducted using quantitative strategies. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire of our own design. The surveys were filled out by 110 respondents, of whom 39 were men and 71 were women.

Results: From the respondents' answers, we can notice the following fears before retirement: lack of financial resources, feelings of uselessness, loneliness, deterioration of health, loss of active life, perception of the new life and new situation, the need to maintain a sense of usefulness, loss of contacts, and decline in the standard of living.

Conclusion: The preparation for successful ageing does not start at the end of working life but during the working age right after integration into the working environment. For example, it involves securing financial resources, taking care of physical and mental health, having a healthy and active lifestyle, and developing social relationships. Further research in this area could look more closely at the factors that influence successful ageing, based on the perspective of older people and seniors.

Keywords: Successful ageing – Retirement age – Physical and mental health – Satisfaction – Social factors.

* Acknowledgment

The paper was supported by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency (KEGA) of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic based on the project: "Social work based on moral values – innovation of the study program" Number 011KU-4/2023.

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Introduction

In the process of successful aging, seniors select various activities, goals, and inspirations, seeking and applying methods and means to compensate for necessary skills. They allocate remaining resources to both old and new activities or objectives. These mechanisms contribute to maintaining a sense of control over their lives, which depends on individual personal, health, social, and material conditions, as well as interests.² Continuing to work, for example, is a component of successful aging that is not complicated by accumulated health problems. This option is associated with improved financial situations, the preservation of a certain social status in relation to others, or the maintenance of social contacts, which are particularly important during retirement.³ These contacts help prevent social isolation and the resulting loneliness.⁴

Other possibilities for experiencing successful aging, given favourable health conditions, include utilizing free time according to one's discretion. For instance, active participation in educational activities at universities or academies for seniors, lectures, courses, discussions organized in senior clubs or day centres, or engaging in diverse hobbies.⁵ Life experience can be enriched by these activities, contributing to a fulfilling and successful aging process. In this new stage of life will be rather joyful, fulfilling life's dreams, space for further personal growth, enjoying the added years, developing interpersonal relationships.⁶ Conducted research confirms that if seniors maintain good health and a sense of belonging within society, they can contribute to the enrichment of societal life through their experiences, skills, and wisdom.⁷ In this context, the results of another study are also noteworthy, where aging is often perceived positively in terms of personal growth, development, and positive changes. Additional research conducted in various fields further confirms that satisfaction influences the ability to cope with changes in life and the surrounding environment. This includes satisfaction with healthcare, subjective health status, the degree of loneliness, the intensity of interest-driven activities⁸, income, education, and the sense of safety within one's home and community.⁹

- 2 Dana Sýkorová, "Teorie adaptace ve stáří," in Oldřich Matoušek et al. *Encyklopedie sociální práce* (Praha, 2013), 64.
- 3 Martina Pavlíková, Igor Tavilla, "Repetition as a Path to Authentic Existence in Kierkegaard's Work," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 200-204; Hedviga Tkáčová et al., "Individual (Non) Resilience of University Students to Digital Media Manipulation after COVID-19 (Case Study of Slovak Initiatives)," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 2, (2023): 1605; Elena Fernández-Martínez et al., "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Self-Harm Attempts Observed in a Hospital Emergency Department," *Healthcare* 12, no. 3, (2024): 385; Katarína Vilinová, Lucia Petrikovičová, "Spatial Autocorrelation of COVID-19 in Slovakia," *Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease* 8, no. 6, (2023): 1-15; Milan Fila et al., "Citizen satisfaction survey as a tool of citizen relationship management of local Government in Slovakia," *Serbian Journal of Management* 10, no. 1, (2015): 117-129.
- 4 Hana Draganová et al. *Sociálna starostlivosť* (Martin, 2006), 124-126.
- 5 Martina Hrozenská et al. *Sociálna práca so starším ľuďmi a jej teoreticko-praktické východiská* (Martin, 2008), 26.
- 6 Peter Kondrila et al. "The Philosophical Context of Curriculum Innovations with a Focus on Competence Development," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 78-92.
- 7 Alexander V. Sirotkin et al. "Impact of COVID-19 on University Activities: Comparison of Experiences from Slovakia and Georgia," *Sustainability* 15, no. 3, (2023): 1897; Miroslav Štílec, *Program aktivního stylu života pro seniory* (Praha: Portál, 2004), 12-16.
- 8 Andrea Lesková et al. "Challenges and current issues of education in the era of digital and technological changes," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 319-327; Celeste Rubinia Bonfanti et al., "The Antecedents of the Technology Acceptance Model in Microentrepreneurs' Intention to Use Social Networking Sites," *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 13 no. 7, (2023): 1306-1317; Daniela Marchetti et al. "The Role of Pre-Pandemic Mental Health Status and Personality Traits on Psychological Distress during the COVID-19 Lockdown among Italian Young Adults," *Behavioral Sciences* 13 no. 2, (2023): 141.
- 9 Hana Janečková, "Vysoké stáří," in *Encyklopedie sociální práce*. Oldřich Matoušek et al. (Praha, 2013), 371.

The opposite of successful aging is experiencing unsuccessful aging characterized by deteriorating health, immobility, and dependency on the care of others.¹⁰ Everything depends on the quality of life, which gains increasing importance with the extension of human lifespan and the aging process.¹¹

The aging process can also be perceived negatively, which affects seniors' perception of their quality of life and life satisfaction. A global issue related to the rapid aging of the population is that the majority of seniors will require affordable and effective acute and long-term care.¹² This situation raises various economic, psychological, political, and social issues.¹³ All countries are striving to establish comprehensive and accessible systems of care, including pension systems and social security frameworks, as well as housing for seniors, and to meet the increased demand for health and social services, among other needs.¹⁴ Society accepts minor health problems as an inherent part of ageing, but more serious problems are not considered acceptable at any age. Where these boundaries lie is of great importance for the planning and funding of health and social care.¹⁵ In this context, understanding the capability for well-being is also important.¹⁶ Society often perceives aging and old age, due to these and many other factors, as excessively costly and unproductive. This perception can instil in seniors the feeling that the longer they live, the lower their human value becomes. Such aspects can cause many seniors to fear retirement. They may worry about losing respect and esteem, changes in their social status, which can depend on the amount of their pension and material security, and difficulties adapting to the new role of being retired. Consequently, they might resign from previous life roles or social relationships.¹⁷ An important factor in the perception of old age and the associated transition to retirement is the attitude toward aging and old age. This attitude is significantly influenced from childhood by the behavioural models of parents towards their children and their own parents. It reflects the social existence of the individual and the environment in which they live.¹⁸

The Biomedical and Psychosocial Models of Aging

Studies concerning successful and unsuccessful aging are typically categorized into two primary models: the biomedical model and the psychosocial model. The biomedical model tends to focus more on illness rather than health. For successful aging, it establishes criteria such as the absence of disease and disability, independent physical and cognitive function, and active engagement. For unsuccessful aging, it delineates criteria such as tissue, organ, and system function decline, depletion of cellular reserves, and deceleration of multiple functions, including

- 10 Peter Kondrla et al., "The Philosophical Context," 78-92.
- 11 František Murgaš, "The Impact of Religiosity on Quality of Life," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 1, (2023): 169-186.
- 12 Hedviga Tkáčová et al. "We Must Protect Children but Also Their Grandparents: A Qualitative Understanding of Older Adults' General Perceptions and Understanding of Social Networks," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 297-316.
- 13 Hedviga Tkáčová et al. "Online Media Audience During the Covid-19 Pandemic as an Active Amplifier of Disinformation: Motivations of University Students to Share Information on Facebook," *Communication Today* 14 no. 2, (2023): 154-167; Roman Kralik et al. "The Relevance of therapeutic approaches in accompaniment for social work students with Post-COVID-19 Syndrome," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 1, (2023): 101.
- 14 Janečková, "Vysoké stáří," 369; Marie Roubalová et al. "Basic Aspects of Sleep from the Perspective of Tanakh and Rabbinic Judaism," *Acta Missiologica* 16 no. 1, (2022): 169-170.
- 15 Márta Péntek et al., "Acceptable health and ageing: results of a cross-sectional study from Hungary," *Health Qual Life Outcomes*, (2020): 18:346.
- 16 Péntek et al., "Acceptable," 346.
- 17 Peter Kondrla et al. "The Philosophical Context," 78-92.
- 18 Aleksander Kobylarek et al., "Holistic Education of Seniors in the Eastern European Model of the USA," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 87-99.

mental activity, particularly in reaction speed. The greatest contributor to the slowing of reaction speed is attributed to central processes associated with situational processing and decision-making regarding the mode of response.¹⁹ Additionally, sensory perception manifestations can induce emotional issues such as anxiety, depression, and irritability. Changes in motor abilities, characterized by the loss of muscle mass and strength, are also evident²⁰, manifestations of changes in learning and memory (remembering new things).²¹

The psychosocial model emphasizes life satisfaction, social functioning, and psychological resources such as personal growth and social support²², which focuses on factors such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, coping, and motivation to adapt to old age. Successful aging is defined as the maximization of potential to achieve positive or desired outcomes while simultaneously minimizing negative or undesired outcomes or their elimination.²³ According to this model, lifestyle can indeed influence the pace and quality of one's aging process.²⁴ From this perspective, preparing for old age from a young age is important. It involves initiating planning and asking oneself questions such as: Can I imagine my old age? What I am willing to do for successful aging?²⁵ From the perspective of the psychosocial model, autonomy is an important life value that influences the quality of life for seniors.²⁶ Autonomy encompasses self-determination, freedom, independence, and decision-making control. The foundation of autonomy is physical independence, complemented by financial independence. Seniors perceive independence in both areas as a source of self-esteem and self-assurance. It means not burdening or imposing on others. Moreover, physical independence brings them a sense of recognition from others. A reduction in the sense of physical independence subsequently leads to a weakening of the sense of autonomy.²⁷ Autonomy in a narrower sense for seniors regarding successful aging includes advising and organizing one's own activities without outside help, asserting one's own opinions, emphasizing one's own responsibility, emphasizing social relations with close family and friends.²⁸

- 19 Kobylarek et al., "Holistic Education," 87-99.
- 20 Lucia Ludvigh Cintulová et al., "Post-covid-19 syndrome and impact of physical activity on mental well-being," *International Journal of Health, New Technologies and Social Work* 18, no. 1, (2023): 1-5; Edward Zygmunt Jarmoch et al., "Social work and socio-pathological phenomena in the school environment," *Acta Missiologica* 16, no. 2, (2022): 130-145; Jingyi Dong et al., "Effect of Achievement Motivation and Self-Efficacy on General Well-Being among Students at Normal Universities in Ningxia: The Mediating Role of Time Management," *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 1, (2024): 15; Lýdia Lešková, Lenka Haburajová Ilavská, "Peer Mediation as a Means of Eliminating Conflict in the School Environment," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14, no. 1, (2023): 161-184.
- 21 Štílec, "Program aktivního stylu," 12-16.
- 22 Robert Crosnoe, Glen H. Elder. "Successful Adaptation in the Later Years: A Life Course Approach to Aging," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 65 no. 4, (2002): 309-328.
- 23 Colin A. Depp, Dilip V. Jeste, "Definitions and Predictors of Successful Aging: A Comprehensive Review of Larger Quantitative Studies." *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 14 no. 1, (2006): 6-20.
- 24 Dana Klevetová, Iveta Dlabalová, *Motivační prvky při práci se seniory* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2008), 22-23.
- 25 Lucia Petrikovičová et al. "Is the Size of the City Important for the Quality of Urban Life? Comparison of a Small and a Large City," *Sustainability* 14 no. 23, (2022): 15589.
- 26 Roman Králik, Luboš Török, "Concept of relationship God-Man in Kierkegaard's writing 'What we learn from the lilies in the Social and from the birds in the air,'" *European Journal of Science and Theology* 12 no. 2, (2016): 65-74.
- 27 Martina Pavlíková et al., "Social Interventions in the Family in the Post-COVID Pandemic Period," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 106-123; Lýdia Lešková, Anton Fabian, "Undergraduate students approach to marriage and froms of cohabitation as the starting point to initiate dialogue on traditional family values," *Acta Missiologica* 13 no. 2, (2019): 125-136.
- 28 Tomáš Machula, "Důstojnost", in *Encyklopedie sociální práce*. Oldřich Matoušek et al. (Praha, 2013), 204-206.

In the context of the psychosocial model of aging process and successful aging, questions about the meaning of further life are also important. During the aging process, seniors confront essential questions regarding the purpose of life. As their workforce diminishes, they may experience disappointment. Their creative, attitudinal, and experiential values evolve over the course of life.²⁹ They are exposed to situations where they must make decisions for resolution.³⁰ Their task and simultaneously the highest value in terms of further meaning of life is to take a stance towards specific life events and situations, to search for and find answers to how they can accept pain and suffering and bear their cross in their lives. In this context, it is necessary to support their potential and help them realize that it is not important to strive for what they already lack in their lives, but rather to utilize what they have at their disposal and can still use for their own benefit and that of others.³¹

Selected aspects of quality of life in relation to assessing the lives of seniors

Quality of life is a subjective, multidimensional, and measurable indicator that expresses how an individual evaluates his own life situation, focused on psychosocial and health interventions. Quality of life is understood as an indicator of health, how a person perceives his position in his culture and in relation to his goals, expectations, lifestyle, and interests. It is an assessment of the quality of one's own life, conditioned by culture and relationships to individual values and the way they are realized. We look at the measurement of the quality of life from three points of view: objective measurement of social indicators, personal estimate of overall satisfaction with life, and own satisfaction in individual areas of life.

Social factors such as safety, education, family stability affect the quality of life only partially, when they fall below a certain minimum threshold. Overall satisfaction is the result of personal values and lifestyle. The assessment of satisfaction in various areas of life includes physical condition, the ability to perform normal daily activities, survival, relationships with close people, the wider environment, in the environment where a person lives and spends his free time.

The quality of life, concerning the evaluation of seniors' lives in certain countries, serves as a criterion for the success of addressing important tasks of social policy³² and social work regarding the provision of quality social and healthcare services for seniors and the development of care for individuals with long-term mental disorders.³³ In relation to life and in connection with seniors, it compares the life of one individual with that of another, from historical or contemporary perspectives.³⁴

29 Peter Kondrla et al., "Social teaching of the church and the values of a sustainable society," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 2, (2023): 142-154; Miroslav Tvrdoň et al., "Homelessness as a social problem – socio-pathological phenomenon – qualitative analysis," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 13, no. 2, (2022): 439-448.

30 Roman Králik, "The influence of family and school in shaping the values of children and youth in the theory of free time and pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 120-124.

31 Klevetová, Dlabalová, "Motivační prvky," 39-41.

32 The goal of social policy should be to support the independence of citizens in old age, the preservation of self-sufficiency, create conditions for an equal and active life of seniors, strengthen intergenerational solidarity and combat the social exclusion of seniors. (Monika Žumárová, Beáta Balogová, *Medzigeneračné mosty* (Menta media, 2010), 13-16.)

33 Elena Dragomirecká, "Kvalita života," in *Encyklopedie sociální práce*. ed. Oldřich Matoušek et al. (Praha, 2013), 223-225; Miroslav Tvrdoň et al. "Social work as a tool for anomie correction on second stage of primary school," *Ad Alta* 11 no. 1, (2021): 353-357; Dušan Bajan et al. "Developing Moral Competencies in the Training of Social Workers," *Acta Missiologica* 17 no. 1, (2023): 144-150.

34 Zuzana Budayová et al. "Raising and educating children in a Roma family to Practice their faith Through Roma customs," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 2, (2023): 456-467.

Six fundamental areas contribute to the quality of life, even in the assessment of seniors' lives: physical health, social relationships, psychological functions, level of independence, environment, and spirituality. Of course, the most crucial measure of quality of life in seniors is their health status.³⁵ The state of health determines the seniors' experience of life, it affects all seniors' activities, which play a significant role in the perception of satisfaction with their own old age. The quality of life of seniors is further influenced by a number of factors, including lifestyle, material security, social environment, work, education, ethical principles³⁶ applied in society, housing, health care. Some studies also focus on assessing the quality of life of seniors in terms of bio-psychosocial factors. From a subjective point of view, educational level, state of health, and the existence of family and friendly ties belong to the focal point of departure. The level of education achieved has a significant impact on the development of the personality for self-realization, on maintaining mental and physical activity, on facilitating adaptation to current characteristic changes³⁷ significantly influencing the perception of old age. In this context, the feeling of security and support is also important. A significant factor determining the quality of life in old age is contact with family and friends, which provides psychological, physical, and material support.³⁸ In evaluating the quality of life of seniors, it is also essential to understand and measure subjective expectations regarding ageing and social functioning. What age they expect to live to, how old they will be, when they can retire, how limited, happy and well-off they will be in old age; how many hours of help they will need and who will look after them in old age if they need it.³⁹ So that it's possible to develop appropriate and sustainable social policies these aspects must also be measured: the lifestyle, health-related quality of life, expectations and wellbeing of the ageing population.

Implemented Survey

Methods

During the period from January 2022 to June 2023, a survey was conducted to assess how seniors perceive life satisfaction. The survey was conducted based on quantitative strategies.

Sample, Data collection

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for participation in the survey were seniors aged 65 and above, who were actively involved in senior clubs or residing in social service facilities. A total of 110 respondents, comprising 39 men and 71 women,

35 Žumárová, Balogová, "Medzigeneračné mosty," 13-16; The most frequently used generic preference-based health related quality of life measure is the EQ-5D questionnaire, this instrument has probably been tested for face validity and reproducibility more than any other such measure yet. (Fanni Rencz et al. "Parallel Valuation of the EQ-5D-3L and EQ-5D-5L by Time Trade-Off in Hungary," *Value Health* 23, no. 9, (2020): 1235-1245).

36 José García Martín et al., "The Kantian ethical perspective seen from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard's Victor Eremita," *Ethics & Bioethics*, 11, no. 1- 2, (2021): 48-57.

37 Roman Králik, "The influence of family and school in shaping the values of children and youth in the theory of free time and pedagogy," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 14 no. 1, (2023): 249-268.

38 Žumárová, Balogová, "Medzigeneračné mosty," 18-28.

39 Márta Péntek, "Subjective expectations regarding ageing: a cross-sectional online population survey in Hungary," *The European Journal of Health Economics* 20 no. 1, (2019): S17-S30; Petra Baji et al., "Capability of well-being: validation of the Hungarian version of the ICECAP-A and ICECAP-O questionnaires and population normative data," *Quality of Life Research* 29, (2020): 2863-2874; Petra Baji et al., "Development of Population Tariffs for the CarerQoL Instrument for Hungary, Poland and Slovenia: A Discrete Choice Experiment Study to Measure the Burden of Informal Caregiving," *PharmacoEconomics* 38, no. 6, (2020): 633-643.

completed the questionnaires. Questions 7 and 8, which explored how seniors perceive retirement, are relevant to the subject matter of this article.

The data collection tool was a self-constructed questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. The questionnaires were distributed in the Eastern Slovak region, specifically in senior clubs and social service facilities in the towns of Spišská Nová Ves and Levoča. The results were processed using a statistical method - in Microsoft Excel and SPSS Statistics software.

Ethical Issue

All ethical aspects, including voluntary participation in the research and maintaining respondent anonymity, were adhered to during the survey implementation.

Limitations of research

Limiting factors in the survey include the geographical scope, the number of locations involved, and the lower number of respondents. These limitations could be addressed by conducting similar or related surveys with a broader geographical focus, more precisely defining the specific facilities where questionnaires will be distributed and involving a larger number of respondents.

Results

We will proceed to a brief interpretation of results from mentioned questions.

Question no. 7 What were you most afraid of when you retired? (selection of questions)

the answer	Women	%	Men	%	Together	%
the answer 1	31	43,7	15	38,5	46	41,8
the answer 2	2	2,8	2	5,1	4	3,6
the answer 3	8	11,3	3	7,7	11	10
the answer 4	12	16,9	5	12,8	17	15,5
the answer 5	1	1,4	5	12,8	6	5,5
the answer 6	4	5,6	2	5,1	9	8,2
the answer 7	4	5,6	1	2,6	6	5,5
the answer 8	0	0	1	2,6	1	1
the answer 9	0	0	0	0	1	1
the answer 10	3	4	0	0	3	2,7
the answers 11-16	1	1,4	1	0	1	1

Legend: 1 the answer – nothing, nothing; 2 the answer – loneliness; 3 the answer – health; 4 the answer – lack of funds; 5 the answer – spending free time; 6 the answer – reductions in living standards; 7 the answer – low pension; 8 the answer – how will I continue to live; 9 the answer – to get used to a new life situation; 10 the answer – collective losses; 11 the answer – with submission; 12 the answer – I want to be useful; 13 the answer – as I get used to it; 14 the answer – a feeling of inferiority; 15 the answer – doing nothing; 16 the answer – normally.

In this open question, we found that up to 46 respondents, which is 42%, were not worried about anything when retiring. 17 respondents, representing 15%, said that they were worried about lack of finances, health and poor health were worried by 11 (10%) respondents. 9 respondents, which is 8%, were afraid of a decrease in the standard of living, 6 (5%) respondents were afraid of a low pension, and another 6 respondents, which is 5%, said that they were afraid of spending their free time. 4 respondents are worried about loneliness in retirement, which is

4%, 3 respondents were worried about their health, which is 3%. The other 8 respondents gave separate answers, in which each represents 54 1%. These are the answers: how will I continue to live, get used to a new life situation, with dedication, I want to be useful, how do I get used to the feeling of inferiority, doing nothing, normally.

Question no. 8 State in one word what bothered or bothered you the most during the period before you got used to being on an old-age pension? (selection of questions)

the answer	W	%	M	%	Together	%
the answer 1	27	38	20	51	47	43
the answer 2	6	8	1	3	7	6
the answer 3	4	6	1	3	5	5
the answer 4	5	7	2	5	7	6
the answer 5	3	4	0	0	3	3
the answer 6	3	4	2	5	5	5
the answer 7	2	3	1	3	3	3
the answer 8	3	4	0	0	3	3
the answer 9	2	3	0	0	2	2
the answer 10	2	3	0	0	2	2
the answer 11	2	3	2	5	4	4
the answer 12	3	4	0	0	3	3
the answer 13	2	3	0	0	2	2
the answer 14	0	0	1	3	1	1
the answer 15	0	0	1	3	1	1
the answer 16	1	1	2	5	3	3
the answer 17	0	0	1	3	1	1
the answer 18	2	3	1	3	3	3
the answer 19	1	1	1	3	2	2
the answer 20	0	0	1	3	1	1
the answer 21	3	4	2	5	5	5

Legend: 1 the answer – nothing; 2 the answer – low pension; 3 the answer – normal; 4 the answer – good 5 the answer – that I will be without a team; 6 the answer – unnecessary 7 the answer – loneliness; 8 the answer – I am satisfied; 9 the answer – my weaker performance; 10 the answer – I didn't even realize it 11 the answer – lifestyle changes; 12 the answer – waiting for the postman 13 the answer – I continued working; 14 the answer – how to proceed; 15 the answer – length of processing at the authorities; 16 the answer – division of euros; 17 the answer – bad political situation; 18 the answer – free time; 19 the answer – termination of active life; 20 the answer – whether I don't have to work anymore; 21 the answer – health problems.

In this open question, we found that 47 respondents, which is 43%, did not worry or bother about retirement pension. 7 respondents, which is 6%, were worried about a low pension. The answer normal, expressed by 5 (5%) respondents, well stated by 7 respondents, which is 6%. 3 (3%) respondents stated that they will miss the team, 5 respondents felt unnecessary 58, which is 5%. Loneliness bothered 3 respondents and 3 respondents were also satisfied, which in both cases was 3%. 2 (2%) respondents reported poorer performance, 2 (2%) respondents were also unaware of this. 4 respondents were troubled or bothered by a change in lifestyle, which makes up 4%, waiting for the postman bothered 3 (3%) respondents. 2 (2%) respondents continued to

work, 3 respondents (3%) mentioned dividing euros, which is 3%, also 3 (3%) respondents were worried about their free time. Health problems were mentioned by 5 respondents, which is 5%, cessation of active life was mentioned by 2 (2%) respondents. 4 respondents gave separate answers, which make up 1% in each case, these are the answers: what to do next, length of processing at the offices, bad political situation, whether I don't have to work anymore.

Due to high discrepancies in individual variables, we decided to group the variables and categorize them into a new variable. The first variable was a dichotomous nominal variable chosen by operationalization, which was categorized based on the client's feeling. In this variable, we tried to narrow down the client's concerns, whether he has concerns or whether or not he had them or did not have. Based on the Chi-square goodness of fit performed by us, the new variable turned out to be statistically significant $X^2 p < 0.05$. We can therefore assume a similar ratio in the general population in Slovakia. Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was not significant, $X^2 p > 0.05$, nor Fisher's exact test (Fisher's exact test) was not significant $p > 0.05$. Thus, we cannot state a contingent difference for the general population in Slovakia.

Table 1 Contingency table of the newly operationalized variable

	W	W %	M	M %	Total	Total %
He is scared	28	39,4 %	16	41 %	44	40 %
It's not afraid	43	60,6 %	23	59 %	66	60 %

Source: own processing based on own data

The above table shows that 60% of the total number of respondents were not worried about any phenomenon or condition during the acclimatization to retirement. Likewise, no trends can be established within gender, as the differences range in intentions in units of percentages.

The final part of transforming the variables into a new variable is to recategorize the reasons for the clients' concerns before they get used to retirement. The reasons categorized by us are: new living situation and loneliness in terms of concerns. From the point of view of satisfaction, we did not capture specific differences in the understanding of satisfaction through operationalization, therefore we named this variable satisfaction. Pearson's Chi-square test of independence yielded an insignificant $X p > 0.05$. On the other hand, the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test yielded a significant $X^2 p < 0.001$

Table 2 Concerns about a new life situation

	W	W %	M	M %	Total	Total %
Satisfied	41	57,7 %	23	59 %	64	58,2 %
Life situations	20	28,2 %	12	30,8 %	32	29,1 %
Solitude	10	14,1 %	4	10,3 %	14	12,7 %

Within the recategorization of variables, it can be stated that women are most often afraid of their new life situation, which corresponds to 28.2% of the total number of women. Also, we have to point out the 4% discrepancy between loneliness in women and loneliness in men. At the same time, we must state that this finding is subject to data bias, given our data set and inequalities between the representation of men and women in our research sample. Therefore, we recommend a more homogeneous group in terms of gender for further research.

Discussion

The ageing process is unique to each person.⁴⁰ From the respondents' answers, we notice the following fears before retirement: lack of financial resources, feelings of uselessness, loneliness, deterioration of health, loss of active life, perception of the new life and new situation, the need to maintain a sense of usefulness, loss of contacts, and decline in the standard of living. Social relationships, the quality of relationships with family members and relatives, the level of autonomy and independence, as well as good health condition are important for retirement and a successful ageing process. As confirmed by other research, if seniors have been active during their working years, they need help to continue pursuing activities (based on their abilities and health condition) that positively impact their lives in retirement.⁴¹ It is important to start preparing for successful ageing and retirement at a young age by taking care of physical and mental health, having a healthy lifestyle, social relationships, and financial security. Other important factors in this preparation include, for example, the perception of life satisfaction before retirement, an active life, work and life balance, and the option to continue working during retirement. The state's role here should be to ensure job opportunities even at retirement age, improve access to lifelong learning, and reduce discrimination on the basis of age or gender from working age onwards.⁴²

Conclusion

The level of preparation for successful ageing as well as for retirement is highly individual and is determined by previous quality of life. In preparing for successful ageing, it is important to know seniors' and society's subjective expectations regarding ageing. Further research in this area could look more closely at the factors that influence successful ageing, based on the perspective of older people and seniors. In this context, it would be interesting to explore how seniors with certain less severe health limitations can achieve at least some degree of successful ageing.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All the mentioned authors significantly, directly, and intellectually contributed to the work and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

40 Žumárová, Balogová, "Medzigeneračné mosty", 18-28.

41 Žumárová, Balogová, "Medzigeneračné mosty", 18-28.

42 František Petrovič, Patrik Maturkanič, "Urban-Rural Dichotomy of Quality of Life," *Sustainability* 14 no. 14, (2022): 8658; František Murgaš, František Petrovič, "Quality of Life and Quality of Environment in Czechia in the Period of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Geographical Journal* 72 no. 3, (2020): 261-274.

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ADAPTATION PROCESS OF SENIORS TO RESIDENTIAL CARE: SELECTED RESEARCH FINDINGS



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Submitted: 28 November 2023

Accepted for publication: 13 March 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

Abstract

Background/Aim: The aim of this contribution is to briefly analyze important factors for the adaptation process of seniors to residential care in selected research studies by both domestic and foreign authors.

Methods: A qualitative research strategy was employed for the analysis. Individual results were processed using analytical steps of grounded theory. The analysis was based on the research problem: the adaptation process of seniors to residential care. Research findings were processed through three analytical steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.


Results: The analysis results are contained within the following areas: causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. Significant factors include the burden and risk of institutionalization, which encompass changes in the living environment, loss of privacy and autonomy, and diminished self-esteem. Other factors include difficulties in maintaining internal order and problematic interpersonal relationships, preserving the client's independence and identity, seniors' personalities, and the adaptation process of seniors to residential social services from the perspectives of social workers who work directly with service recipients, seniors, and service recipients themselves.

Conclusion: Similar analyses can contribute to supporting the investigation of factors conducive to a more favorable environment in the field of senior care, ultimately aiding in improving the quality of their lives.

Keywords: Adaptation process - seniors - residential care - social services.

Introduction

The relocation of a senior from their natural environment to residential care brings various challenges that can negatively impact their mental, physical, or social well-being. The ability to adapt to new surroundings and conditions depends on the senior's health status, age, and coping abilities. In the process of adapting to residential care, they are initially exposed to adjusting to the environment, adapting to relationships, and setting their own expectations, which may result in various emotional behavioral deviations. These stressful circumstances may trigger irritability, psychological tension, fatigue, weakness, disturbed perception concentration, or behavioral dis-

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organization. Subsequently, their overall physical and mental state may deteriorate negatively.² Additional phases in the adaptation process include building relationships with staff and other seniors, adjusting to a new daily routine, accepting the social service facility as their new home, stabilizing their emotional state, and engaging in activities.

Family members, friends, or acquaintances play an important role in helping seniors adjust to their new environment, but workers in social service facilities also play a significant role. Problematic or unsuccessful adaptation of seniors to a new environment can be caused by various issues stemming from the established routine and organization of life in social service facilities.³ Among these problems, we can include: low staffing levels that may not adequately provide individual care, insufficient number of beds, low flexibility in care, lack of privacy, various architectural barriers that limit seniors' mobility,⁴ therefore, it is important to make maximum efforts to create the best possible conditions in the residential care environment.

There are many factors that significantly aid seniors in adapting to new living conditions in residential care. Among the most significant factors and perhaps the greatest advantage of residential care is the professionalism of social service providers, as well as the quality of the services themselves⁵. Another factor that can be considered an advantage of this type of care is the collaboration of a multidisciplinary team of experts aimed at improving the quality of life for seniors.

The aim of the contribution is to briefly analyze additional important factors for the adaptation process of seniors to residential care in selected research findings.

Selected research findings

Next, an exploration of various studies authored by both domestic and international researchers will be undertaken, focusing on the transition experienced by seniors as they adapt to residential care environments.

The first study is by Bartošovič⁶, which highlights the identifying features and social characteristics of clients in social service facilities that significantly influence the adaptation process. It elaborates on the burden and risk of institutionalization, such as environmental changes, loss of privacy and autonomy, and diminished self-esteem. Schimmerling in Bartošovič⁷ states that contact with one's own family is important in the adaptation process. Complaints about contact with relatives, most commonly with children, arise when social service recipients meet them in person less than once every three weeks and communicate with them in writing for less than fourteen days. Kasalová in Bartošovič, in this context, further state that "visits from friends and siblings, but even their mere existence without closer contact, positively affect their satisfaction and mood improvement."⁸

2 Lenka Štefáková, Katarína Kohútová, Filip Gerec, "Stress Management Strategies for Hospice Care Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Acta Missiologica* 15, no. 2 (2021): 172-185.

3 Ctibor Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť o nesebestačných seniorov alebo o medzigeneračnej solidarite inak." in *Medzigeneračné mosty – vstupujeme do roka medzigeneračnej solidarity: zborník príspevkov z konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou 10. 11. 2011 v Prešove*. (Prešov: Filozofická fakulta Prešovskej univerzity, 2011).

4 Ivan Bartošovič, *Seniari v domove dôchodcov*. (Bratislava: Charis, 2006) ; Ivan Bartošovič, Peter Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov v domovoch dôchodcov." *Via practica* 3 no. 7-8, (2006): 347-350.

5 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"

6 Bartošovič, "Seniari v domove dôchodcov," ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"

7 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniari v domove dôchodcov," ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"

8 Kasalová in Bartošovič, "Seniari v domove dôchodcov ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov," p. 59.

The second study is the research conducted by Határ⁹, which focused on examining the quality of social and educational services for seniors in residential care. It investigated the adaptation problems of seniors after transitioning from their natural environment to residential care. Factors identified included difficulties in maintaining internal order and problematic interpersonal relationships. Family and relatives of the clients played a significant role in this process.

The third study is the research conducted by Kamanová.¹⁰ The third study focused on examining the factors that were active in the adaptation process during the first six months amongst seniors in residential care. Among the factors included in this study that influenced the adaptation process were family, relationships with cohabitants, and the work of social workers.

The fourth study is the research conducted by Riedl, Mantovan, and Thema¹¹ which investigated the experiences of recipients of social services in the year following their transition to institutional environments and how to maintain the independence and identity of the client. Based on the research results, the authors point out that while this period is critical in the lives of seniors, they are capable of managing this change provided they receive assistance not only from institution professionals but also from family members. Any change requires adaptation, and in the adaptation process, it is essential for the client to remain autonomous and mobile, participate in decision-making, and experience positive self-evaluation. The client's new identity is formed through intersubjective interaction with other clients in the facility. According to the findings of the research, for better adaptation, it is necessary for the client to participate in decisions regarding their placement in the institution and to be involved in decision-making on all matters directly concerning them.

The fifth study is the research conducted by Kong, Meng-Sang Fang, and Lou,¹² focused on the personality of seniors in nursing homes in the Chinese context of Hong Kong through a qualitative strategy. The research yielded intriguing results: The "personality puzzle-solving" is a cyclical process conceptualized in this study to illustrate the socio-structural processes involved in the identification, creation, and maintenance of "social dignity" among older people by achieving "relational personality." This process involves three mutually influencing socio-structural processes that continuously inform each other to solve the "personality puzzle." These socio-structural processes include (a) identification of inhibiting personal experiences: how professionals identify processes in which older people experience self-loss due to aging in residential care; (b) understanding human-to-human relationships over time: how extended assessments can be used to capture how older people perceive their own worth; and (c) enabling personalized care for better psychosocial outcomes: how to balance current medical care with improved psychosocial outcomes in the residential care environment. The conducted research enriches the understanding of how relational personality can be achieved in residential care settings.

The sixth study by Divišová and Kamanová,¹³ focused on examining the adaptation process of seniors to residential social services from the perspectives of: a) social workers who work di-

9 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"

10 Irena Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb pre seniorov." in *Multidisciplinárne prístupy v kontexte sociálnej práce*. [CD-ROM]. (Ružomberok: Pedagogická fakulta Katolíckej univerzity v Ružomberku, 2010). 72 – 79.

11 Maria Riedl, Franco Mantovan, Christa Them, "Being a Nursing Home Resident: A Challenge to One's Identity." *Nursing Research and Practice* Volume 2013 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2013/932381>

12 Sui-Ting Kong, Christine Meng-Sang Fang, Vivian W. Q. Lou, "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly in the Hong Kong Chinese Context." *Qualitative Health Research* 27 no. 3, (2017): 421-433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316658266>

13 Monika Divišová, Irena Kamanová, *Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť: teoreticko-praktické východiská*. (Ružomberok: Verbum, 2018).

rectly with service recipients - seniors, and b) recipients of social services - seniors themselves. They posed the fundamental research question: What is the adaptation process of seniors to residential social services? The research results were processed using grounded theory in three analytical steps. The phases of the adaptation process (progression). Planning the adaptation process. Leisure activities of the facility as determinants of the adaptation process. Interpersonal relationships as determinants of the adaptation process. The role of the social worker in the adaptation process. Multidisciplinary as a determinant of the adaptation process. The phases of the adaptation process (course) from the perspective of social workers: voluntariness/involuntariness of placement, health status, age, personality traits of the service recipient. In complex situations in the adaptation process, factors such as aggressiveness, conflict, self-isolation, stubbornness may arise.

The time interval for successful adaptation ranged from moments of immediate adaptation (approximately one week) through a period of six months to one year. Sometimes there are situations where the client does not adapt. The phases of the adaptation process (course) from the perspective of recipients of social services - seniors: During the transitional period, basic information about the facility, the amount of payment, concerns about relationships within the facility, and the routine were important for clients. The adaptation process occurred at various time intervals (from immediate adaptation on the first day to a period of one month). The period was accompanied by various emotions, which clients coped with through the assistance and support of staff, family members, and other facility clients, or by turning to faith in God.

The seventh study by Chruściel and Dobrowolska¹⁴ focused on the correlation between social support and the quality of life of seniors without cognitive impairment in institutional settings in Lublin. It was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The aim of the research was to confirm the correlation between social support and the quality of life of seniors, which was tested by two hypotheses, both of which confirmed the dependence of seniors' quality of life on a higher level of social support.

Methods

Important factors for the adaptation process of seniors to residential care were analyzed through a qualitative research strategy. The individual results were processed using the analytical steps of grounded theory.

The analysis in question was based on the research problem: the adaptation process of seniors to residential care.

The research results were processed in three analytical steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.¹⁵ In the phase of open coding, the outputs of each author were compared, and data conceptualization and categorization were performed. Subsequently, a central concept was created: the adaptation of seniors, and categorized categories were assigned to the concept.

Axial coding focused on examining the phenomenon using the paradigmatic model: causal conditions → phenomenon → context → intervening conditions → action and interaction strategies → consequences.

In the phase of selective coding, the generalized information created by axial coding was synthesized.

14 Paweł Chruściel, Beata Dobrowolska, "The Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life of Seniors without Cognitive Disorders from an Institutional Environment—A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Survey." *Healthcare* 8, no. 3: 212 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare8030212>

15 Roman Švaiříček, Klára Šedová a kol., *Kvalitativní výzkum v pedagogických vědách*. (Praha: Portál, 2007) ; Michal Miovský, *Kvalitativní přístup a metody v psychologickém výzkumu*. (Praha: Grada, 2006) ; Jan Hendl, *Kvalitativní výzkum. Základní metody a aplikace*. (Praha: Portál, 2008).

Results

The results of the analysis can be conceptualized into the following areas: The first area is causal conditions. In Bartošovič's research, we can classify burden and the risk of institutionalization as causal conditions. Schimmerling, in the context of Bartošovič's¹⁶ research, identifies contact with one's own family as causal conditions, similarly, Kasalová, in Bartošovič's¹⁷ research, also perceives contact with family as causal conditions. In Határ's research,¹⁸ internal order is identified as a causal condition. In Kamanová's and Reidl et al.'s¹⁹ research, just as in Bartošovič's study, contact with family is also considered as causal conditions. In Sui-Ting Kong et al.'s²⁰ research, causal conditions relate to relationships and human dignity. Relationships and human dignity are also identified as causal conditions in Divišová and Kamanová's²¹ research. In this research, causal conditions also include important information from their own studies and voluntary entry into residential care. In Chruściel and Dobrowolska's²² research, the causal conditions are the social support of close ones.

The second area is context, which represents the context of categories, their interconnection, and the verification of individual statements. In this context area, Bartošovič's²³ research highlights findings such as loss of privacy and autonomy, as well as loss of self-esteem. Schimmerling, in Bartošovič's²⁴ study, also notes that complaints during the adaptation process from seniors arise from limited or restricted contact with their own family. In the context area, Határ's²⁵ research emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships within the family and between staff in the facility. Kamanová's²⁶ research includes practical social work in the context area. Riedl et al.'s study, in the context area, emphasizes the mobility of social service recipients and their ability to make decisions in context. Riedl et al.'s study, in the context area, emphasizes the mobility of social service recipients and their ability to make decisions within their context. In the context area, Sui-Ting Kong et al.'s²⁷ research emphasizes the self-esteem of older people. In the context area, the research of Divišová and Kamanová²⁸ also includes workers directly interacting with recipients of social services. Chruściel and Dobrowolska's²⁹ research, in the context area, emphasizes specific indicators of quality of life and social support.

The third area concerns intervention conditions. The process of adapting seniors to a new environment of residential care is regulated in the Slovak environment through various processes ensuring the quality of provided social services. However, emphasis on institutional conditions is placed not only by providers in the Slovak context but by all providers. Intervention conditions are

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- 16 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniory v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
 - 17 Kasalová in Bartošovič, "Seniory v domove dôchodcov ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
 - 18 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"
 - 19 Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb, "; Reidl et al. "Being a Nursing Home Resident,"
 - 20 Sui-Ting Kong et al. "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care,"
 - 21 Divišová, Kamanová, "Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť,"
 - 22 Chruściel, Dobrowolska, "The Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life,"
 - 23 Bartošovič, "Seniory v domove dôchodcov ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
 - 24 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniory v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
 - 25 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"
 - 26 Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb,"
 - 27 Sui-Ting Kong et al. "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care,"
 - 28 Divišová, Kamanová, "Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť,"
 - 29 Chruściel, Dobrowolska, "The Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life,"

related to and influence the adaptation and adjustment process. Bartošovič's³⁰ research emphasizes the social characteristics of clients of social service facilities as intervention conditions in this third area. These characteristics significantly influence the adaptation process. Schimmerling in Bartošovič's³¹ research mentions the time factor as an intervention condition, Kasalová in Bartošovič's³² research emphasizes emotional stability as an intervention condition. In the area of intervention conditions, Határ's³³ research focused on the forms of educational services for seniors in residential care. In the field of intervention conditions, Kamanová's³⁴ research classifies the work of social workers, outlining their individual activities. In the realm of intervention conditions, Riedl et al.'s³⁵ research highlights adaptation as a critical period in a senior's life, requiring them to cope with this change not only with the help of institution professionals but also with the support of family members. In the domain of intervention conditions, Sui-Ting Kong's³⁶ research perceives the adaptation process as "solving the puzzle of the senior's personality." The research by Divišová and Kamanová³⁷ perceives intervention conditions influencing the adaptation process in terms of multidisciplinary. The research by Chrušciel and Dobrowolska³⁸ emphasizes individual indicators of quality of life and social support.

The fourth area is strategy of action. In every process of providing social services, legislative frameworks are established. The strategy of action in the adaptation process is implemented at the micro-level of the individual, who perceives it directly. In this fourth area, Bartošovič's³⁹ research highlights the loss of privacy and autonomy, as well as the loss of self-esteem. Schimmerling in Bartošovič's⁴⁰ research indicates an increase in the intensity of contact with one's own family, similarly, like the research by Határ and Kamanová⁴¹. Kasalová in Bartošovič⁴² points out the mere existence of closer contacts. The study by Riedl et al.⁴³ emphasizes in the area of intervention strategy on maintaining the independence and identity of the client. The study by Sui-Ting Kong⁴⁴ et al. in the area of intervention strategy emphasizes personalized care, balancing medical care. The research by Divišová and Kamanová⁴⁵ highlights planning in this area. The research by Chrušciel and Dobrowolska⁴⁶ confirms, in the area of intervention strategy, the correlation between social support and the quality of life of seniors.

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- 30 Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 31 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 32 Kasalová in Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 33 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"
- 34 Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb,"
- 35 Reidl et al. "Being a Nursing Home Resident,"
- 36 Sui-Ting Kong et al. "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care,"
- 37 Divišová, Kamanová, "Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť,"
- 38 Chrušciel, Dobrowolska, "The Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life,"
- 39 Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 40 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 41 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť," Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb,"
- 42 Kasalová in Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 43 Reidl et al. "Being a Nursing Home Resident,"
- 44 Sui-Ting Kong et al. "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care,"
- 45 Divišová, Kamanová, "Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť,"
- 46 Chrušciel, Dobrowolska, "The Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life,"

The fifth area concerns the consequences. These aspects lead to paradigmatic model outcomes. Bartošovič's⁴⁷ research perceives the risk of institutionalization in this area as a burden for seniors due to changes in their environment. Schimmerling in Bartošovič's⁴⁸ research highlights the prevention of seniors' complaints by creating space for written and physical contact with their families. The research by Határ⁴⁹ mentions, in terms of consequences, the prevention of non-compliance through the clarity of internal regulations of the social service provider. In the research by Kamanová,⁵⁰ the consequences include the number of professionals from helping professions. In the research by Riedl et al.⁵¹ in the area of consequences, it mentions creating conditions focused on the new identity of the client, interaction with other clients of the institution. In the study by Sui-Ting Kong et al.⁵² in the area of consequences, it recommends focusing on processes that influence seniors, expanding forms of senior assessment. In the study by Divišová and Kamanová⁵³, in the area of consequences, it states that factors such as information, the amount charged for social services, and internal regulations influence the adaptation process of seniors to residential social care.

Discussion

The adaptation to a new environment varies individually among seniors, recipients of social services, and should be known, assumed, revealed, and verified by the provider of the social service. Therefore, every provider of social services strives to create conditions, methods, and tools for effectively managing this process. Selected research findings collectively contribute to understanding the complexity in the field of elderly care. They touch on key aspects such as social support, adaptation, organizational engagement, stress, burden, and the risk of institutionalization.

Results of a brief analysis, for example, have shown that causal conditions of burden and the risk of institutionalization include reduced contact with one's own family, the internal order of the social service provider, the dignity of the service recipient, and the social support of loved ones. Contexts encompass the loss of privacy and autonomy, self-esteem, and the loss of self-worth.

Interventional conditions placed on the process of adapting seniors include the social characteristics of social service recipients, which significantly influence the adaptation process. They create emotional stability in inter and intra-personal relationships.

Strategies for action are implemented at the micro-level of the individual, at the meso-level of relationships between social service recipients themselves and with staff.

The aspects mentioned in the brief analysis have a significant impact on the overall process of adapting seniors to residential care.

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- 47 Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 48 Schimmerling in Bartošovič, "Seniori v domove dôchodcov, " ; Bartošovič, Pavlov, "Starostlivosť o seniorov,"
- 49 Határ, "Domáca verzus inštitucionálna starostlivosť,"
- 50 Kamanová, "Proces adaptácie klienta v zariadení sociálnych služieb,"
- 51 Reidl et al. "Being a Nursing Home Resident,"
- 52 Sui-Ting Kong et al. "Solving the "Personhood Jigsaw Puzzle" in Residential Care,"
- 53 Divišová, Kamanová, "Adaptácia seniorov na rezidenčnú starostlivosť,"

Conclusion

The present brief analysis underscores the importance of further research in the area of seniors' adaptation to residential care. In subsequent studies, it is relevant to focus on the approaches utilized in providing specific forms and types of social services, as well as the emphasis placed on seniors' integrity and self-determination within the service provision process.

Similar analyses can contribute to supporting the investigation of factors conducive to a more favorable environment in senior care, ultimately aiding in improving their quality of life.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author hereby declares to be the sole author of this work and has approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research involved in the article and the publication of the article were carried out without having any business, financial or other relations and/or circumstances that could be considered as a potential conflict of interest. At the same time, all the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this article or its review.

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY
LEWIS AYRES, (ED.) – MEDI ANN VOLPE, (ED.)
|3RD EDITION| OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2023. | 1008 PP. |



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Submitted: 16 January 2024

Accepted for publication: 3 April 2024

First published: 29 May © Acta Missiologica | Volume 18 | Number 1 | 2024

A comprehensive monograph, The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology, now in its third edition in 2023, offers the reader an exceptionally solid one-volume introduction to Catholic theology in all its global facets. In doing so, the reader gets a glimpse of the development and present of Catholic theology on every continent, which is a great added value of this generous introduction to Catholic theology. Fifty-six of the world's leading Catholic scholars have contributed to the book, edited by Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe. The monograph's size, exceeding one thousand pages, should not deter the reader, for it is an engrossing and rewarding read.

The first part of the monograph contains chapters devoted to elementary topics in Catholic theology. In the first chapter, Lewis Ayres asks the question of what Catholic theology is. Theological thought, according to the author, contains at its core a dynamic relationship between careful interpretation of Scripture and attention to the radical newness brought about by the continuing work of Christ and the Spirit in the world. In the second chapter, Matthew Levering examines Scripture and its interpretation. Scripture and tradition, according to the author, function as a mirror in which the church can contemplate the mystery of God and learn to live in holiness. In the next chapter, Balázs M. Mezei deals with the justification of faith. After a glimpse of the interrelation of faith and reason in John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et ratio*. The author reflects on the concept of revelation and presents the ways in which revelation is open to human reason. In chapter four, William Desmond discusses the theme of reason and analogy. Analogy is explored in modern rationalism and empiricism, in Kant's critical reason, in Hegel's speculative reason, and in a number of post-dialectical forms.

In the next section of the monograph, John McDade discusses creation and redemption in chapter five. This chapter offers an overview of Catholic teaching on the relationship between creation and redemption, culminating in a comparison of the approaches of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner as examples of key debates in contemporary Catholic soteriology. In the following chapter, Thomas G. Weinandy reflects on the loving act of creation by the Triune God. He begins with an overview of biblical proclamation in the Old and New Testaments and continues by citing the writings of Irenaeus as an example of early patristic thought. It then examines the doctrinal and philosophical understanding of God as one and as a trinity of persons, with particular emphasis on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In a challenging seventh chapter, Nicholas E. Lombardo addresses the issues of evil, suffering, and original sin. The Divine Trinity is the subject of the follow-

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ing chapter by Emmanuel Durand. Then, in this section, Tomas G. Weinandy deals with the mystery of the Incarnation, Thomas Josph White with the Holy Spirit, Paul McPartlan with the Church, Emery de Gaal with the Virgin Mary and the saints, and Paul O'Callaghan with eschatology.

The next section of the first part is entitled The Sacramental Life. In this section, David W. Fagerberg discusses the sacramental life, Pamela Jackson treats the topic of liturgy, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt deals with the Eucharist, Susan K. Wood deals with Holy Orders, David Cloutier treats the topic of marriage and sexuality, Daniel A. Keating deals with mission and evangelization, and Martin Laird deals with the relexion of prayer.

The following section deals with Catholic moral theology. In her twenty-first chapter, Medi Ann Volpe reflects on Catholic moral anthropology, emphasizing the human person as the image of God. This is followed by Livio Melino's reflections on the virtues and Catholic moral theology, especially from Thomistic positions. Kevin L. Flannery follows with a chapter on natural law in Christian ethics. Other chapters in this section are by Joseph P. Wawrykow, Jana Bennett, David Matzko McCarthy, and Chad C. Pecknold.

The second part of the monograph is devoted to modern Catholic theology. The first section is devoted to the sources of Catholic theology, with a survey beginning with Patristics and ending with the First Vatican Council. Contributors to this section include Lewis Ayres, Wayne J. Hankey, William Harmless, John T. Slotemaker, Ueli Zahnd, Aaron Canty, Trent Pomplum, Rik van Nieuwenhove, Ulrich L. Lehner, Grant Kaplan, Holly Taylor Coolman, and Christian D. Washburn. Due to the scope of the review, we cannot present all chapters in detail.

The next section of the monograph deals with Catholic theology after the First Vatican Council. In the opening chapter of this section, Francesca Aran Murphy examines Thomistic theology between the First and Second Vatican Councils. She reflects on the benefits and risks of Thomism and places them in the context of doctrine. This is followed by Serge-Thomas Bonino, who discusses Thomistic theology and its retreat from the mainstream after the Second Vatican Council to the present. The contributions of the Franciscan language to Catholic theology are further explored by Gabriel Flynn. He is followed by a very interesting chapter on transcendental Thomism by Declan Marmion, after which the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar is introduced by Kevin Mongrain. Contemporary Catholic personalism is dealt with by David Schindler. The development of sacramental and liturgical theology over the last hundred years is traced by Kimberly Hope Belcher. Authors Mary Healy, Gavin D'Costa, Roberto Goizueta, Ian Ker, Danielle Nussberger, Peter Joseph Frits, and José Granados follow with their contributions.

Of great added value are the concluding chapters dealing with Catholic theology in different parts of the world. Asian Catholic theology is covered by Vimal Tirimanna. The author assumes that Asian theology relies on the basic principles of universal Christian theology, though in his reflections on these principles in light of his unique lived experience, he reaches conclusions that are unique but not inconsistent with universal theology. The chapter goes on to explore six basic principles shared by Asian theology: God is actively present in all of creation; plurality necessarily requires dialogical existence; the lived reality of harmony is a fundamental Asian theological concept; theology occurs in and through lived contexts; the kingdom Jesus preached is broader than the visible church; and theology needs to bring about full, integral human liberation.

In another extremely interesting chapter, Anthony Akinwale discusses African theology. Here he details the three ages of the Christianization of Africa with their pros and cons. This is followed by Paul D. Murray's contribution on Catholicism and ecumenism. Eastern Orthodox theology in relation to Catholic theology is discussed by Jaroslav Z. Skira. The monograph concludes with a chapter by Michael Barnes that examines the relationship of Catholic theology to other religions.

Aimed at students of theology across the levels, the monograph is very readable and will certainly serve the reader more than a mere introduction as it modestly states in the abstract.

THE LIST OF THE PEER-REVIEWERS ARTICLES OF NO. 1, VOL. 18, 2024 ISSUE

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