

HEALTH AS A VALUE - REVIEW OF SELECTED RESEARCH EXPLORATIONS

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Abstract

Health as a value is the subject of the paper's theoretical discussion and also research explorations. The author tries to define the notion of health and health as a value, what is quite difficult to explain in details, or it's even impossible. Considerations concerning health as value are undertaken in eight planes. The final part of the paper presents review of selected research explorations concerning health as a value. The quoted researches indicate that health as the superior, priority value and therefore the most important one makes room for the hedonistic values, which contemporary young people value the most. In the final conclusions the author underlines that the shaping of the values of the young man including foremost health as a value results from the accepted world of values, shape and life of a family, as well as neglects of the school education.

Keywords: health, value, health as a value.

1 Introduction

Issues concerning health as a value are very often mentioned in the theoretical considerations and research explorations. During scientific conferences, seminars, debates there are numerous "stormy" discussions concerning health as a value, as "a construct", which is destroyed and weakened in full consciousness by us. Many research conducted by educationalists, sociologists and psychologists confirm this fact and at the same time point out that social and economic transformations have influence on the way of life of the contemporary family leading to situation in which health as the central and priority value starts to give room to hedonistic values, which become dominating ones.

The aim of this paper is to make the Reader familiar with the importance of the health in the human's life. The Author's considerations analyse health as a value, which in the result of globalization becomes value, which is not well-known, discerned and cared about. Health as a value starts to acquire different meaning what makes it difficult or even impossible to provide full definition of this notion. The review of chosen research explorations included in the final part of the paper shows evaluation in the scope of hierarchy values accepted by the young generation among which health does not occupy the central position.

2 Among selected definitions of health

Authors' considerations concerning health point that this notion has multidimensional nature and therefore it is difficult to define it unambiguously. In the "lay" language it means lack of disease or any other complaints [1].

Hippocrates of Kos was one of the first researches who made the first attempts in order to define "health". The author refers health to "good physical and mental state" in case of occurrence of a "bad physical and mental state" the disease occurs. Both health and disease depend on balance between a human and their life environment. Hippocrates points that diet and hygiene constitute essential methods which counteract occurrence of diseases [2]. In turn according to C. Boorse health is "ability and readiness of every part of the human's body to

undertake in normal micro- and macro-environmental conditions, all typical functions with sufficient efficiency” [3].

The quoted above redefinitions of the notion of the "health" let draw conclusion that the proposition given by Boorse refers to group, or groups of people, whereas the one provided by Hippocrates refers to a unit, what narrows the meaning of this notion at the same time.

Definition worked out by the *World Health Organization* (WHO) is one of the most popular ones and is quite often used both in prospective researches, as well as theoretical considerations. WHO identifies health with state of (wellbeing) good physical, mental and social condition and not only lack of disease or disability [4]. In this definition one can see close relationship between maintenance of proper physical shape, and equilibrium. The state of our health depends to substantial extend on us and our lifestyle. The M. Lalonda's conception point that the lifestyle, which we choose in 50 – 60% determines our health [5]. According to the conception of "half-health" worked out by M. Lalonda "health is a result of actions of factors connected with genetic inheritance, environment, lifestyle and "medical care". The author points at following groups of factors, which have influence on condition of the human's health and these are factors from the field of biology and genetics, behaviour and lifestyle, environmental factors (economic, social, cultural and physical ones) and factors from the field of organization of the system of the health protection [5]. Compiling, it is impossible to formulate one "final" definition of health. Zbyszko Melosik [6] underlines that, "health and disease are not only objective conditions, but to certain extent social constructions", therefore different factors which give nature to both of these notions are of big importance.

3 Health as a value – an attempt to define it

Authors refer redefinitions of health in axiological considerations to two notions: "health as a value" and "value of health". Notion of "health as a value" forms around felt value, so that one recognized by the unit as precious, attractive, or even desired one, which generates emotional attitudes and causes actions. This value depends on the physiological state of a body (*e.g.* hunger) and degree of internalization of social influences. "Health as a value" refers also to value recognized oscillating around unit's beliefs that health should be valued, because it is recognized as precious one in the social environment. In such belief dominates element of certainty, which very often stays in the sphere of declaration, nevertheless it is more durable, stabilized than felt values. Weak and even sometimes slight reference to emotions is characteristic for this kind of values [7]. According to P. Ossowski "value of health" should be referred to the power of how the health is appreciated, or even desired. In this context the author points at solemn values which were classified in the group of so called higher values, which we experience the most frequently in particular situations *e.g.* in case of dangers, successes, stress and everyday values, which we determine in everyday, practical and private actions [8].

However, it can be noticed that both in theoretical considerations, as well as research explorations health is analysed in the context of values. Mirosław Kowalski points attention to constitutive features of a value, which concern: a) Desired way of behaviour or final existential aim; b) State that behaviours or aims are irreplaceable for a unit, or society from behaviours, or alternative aims; c) Internalized values become leading action and aspiration criterion towards objects, or situations; d) Values mould behaviours and direct cognitive system [9].

Contemplations on the health as a value are undertaken by one of Polish researches Mirosław Kowalski on eight planes, which overlap, supplement each other and also interpenetrate. The first one is value of the health as reality. Here the health is understood as existential value, which is of crucial importance in the human's life. Value of health in this context does not only refer to theoretical aspect, but "lives" with it, what substantially bulges reality of its existence – the value materializes on the layer of human's existence. Realizing of health as a value gives a human possibility of experiencing sense and meaning of their own subject-personal existence.

Kowalski underlines that value of health is directly bound with other values e.g. engagement and freedom of choice [9].

On the second plane value of the health is seen due to the process of personality structuring. Kowalski underlines that it is the best seen in regulations of social and group life, as well as human's individual actions which are made on the field of institutional and non-institutional functioning. The process of human's structuring is bound with the personality structure, as well as interrelations among its components [9]. The third plane shows value of the health as some kind of obligation, responsibility, since every adult is obliged to undertake respective decisions concerning it (in case of children also doing it on their behalf). This responsibility can be seen not only in psychological experiences of personal "I" of the man, but also in their deeds. Therefore Kowalski underlines that this responsibility for health can be treated as social phenomenon, which is objective and refers to the question: Who bears responsibility for somebody's health and for the value of the health? The author undertook an attempt to answer this question pointing that "responsibility for health refers to norms, rules, codes of proceeding within the field of health. Subjectivism of this responsibility refers to sense of responsibility for health – therefore it has a personal nature" [9].

Kowalski's considerations on value of health of the fourth plane concentrate on creative existence of a unit. "Feeling value of health stabilizes functioning of a unit and strengthens their functioning in the aspect of life ordered according to some determined rules" [9]. Health as value on following plane refers to freeing of motivational powers and mobilization. Motivational powers condition attitude to surrounding world, have influence on the assessment of the past and choice of aims and directions of actions concerning area of health in the future. Value of the health in this context indicates the way, enables undertaking important decisions connected with e.g. educational and professional work, lifestyle etc., it determines criterion and aim of action and points at access point which is unanimous and therefore appropriate for the own "I" [9].

The value of health in Kowalski's considerations activates way of getting to know oneself and others, as well as making assessment of surrounding reality. Learning has in this case indirect character it consists in making conclusions concerning effects of action within the field of health. The value of health activates imagination, associations, intuition, activates will and individual's decisions. It activates ability for creation of symbols of health and reality which is favourable for health and operating with them within the scope of the social life. Kowalski quotes thesis of J. Czapiński which refers to health, and states that "in order to be active, a subject has to believe in the final triumph of this what they considered to be good. Sensitivity to evil cannot obscure them the perspective of the good. The man who ceases to trust the positive order of the world is no longer sensitive to that what could threaten this order" [9].

According to the aforementioned the value of health has generative nature, which refers to giving by a subject evaluative meanings concerning health and in indirect way supporting the will of being healthy [9]. On the eight and at the same time last plane Kowalski points that health provides life of a unit with significance, so it has also meaning-creating nature. The value of health is some kind of way for discovering, carrying out and also strengthening the sense [9]

Summarizing the above mentioned facts one should state that health is identified with value and should have one of the main places in the social and cultural life. The value of health is an element which shapes relations on following layers: man-man; man-social group; man-social environment.

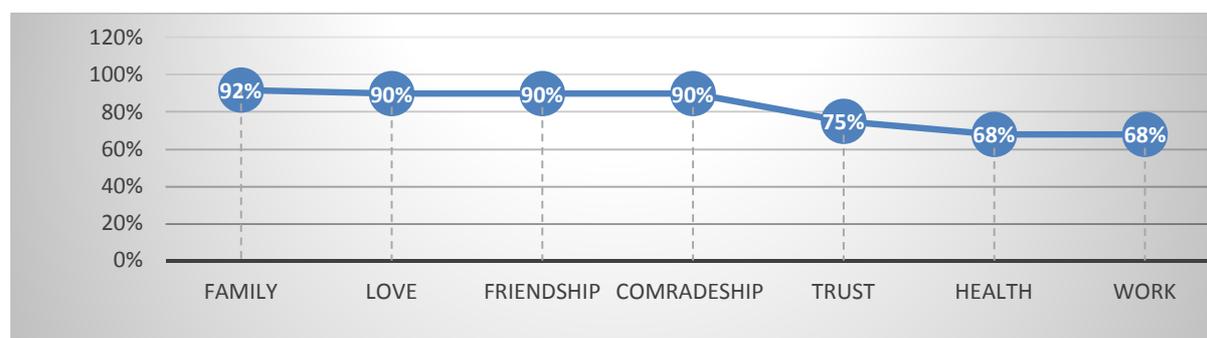
4 Health as a value in the opinion of young people – examples of selected research explorations

Numerous empirical explorations concerning health as a value have been conducted. In the most researches it is noticed that radical political and economic transformations have led to

crucial changes within the scope of the values of the society as a whole, as well as “the young generation”. Young people more and more often lead active educational and professional life, more quickly adopt to new social conditions and achieve first successes early in their lives. However, on the other hand they are more susceptible to the effects of macro-social processes, which very often have adverse effect on their health. The research conducted by V.V. Orlova [10] on 358 young Russians concerning “traditions and values of young people” indicated that consumption and hedonistic values, such as: joy of life, risk, and material values (material welfare, financial stabilization) dominate. Young people expect to use life “fully”, what is seen in their cynical attitudes and indifference towards ideas, as well as social problems. Young people identify “full use” of life with different kinds of pleasures, which not always are in accordance to binding social norms. 7% of the respondents admitted that they use drugs occasionally and 1% that they do it quite often. About 45% of respondents think that having sexual intercourse in order to earn money is normal. Young people do not see anything wrong in such behaviours. The researches show that young Russians live “here and now”, they do not care about their health and in fact forget about it till they are sick, what reminds them that health should be the most important value in their life. Also subsequent researches conducted by E. A. Samsonova and at the group of 650 persons at the age from fourteen to thirty years old E. Iu. Efimova points that the values, which are appreciated by young people, undergo gradual changes year by year. This research shows that in 2004 young people ranked health (37.9%) on the first place, while one year later health as a value was on the second position (19.2%) making room for consumption values (32.4%) [11].

Evaluations of the system of values of the young people are clearly seen in the research conducted by Polish researchers. Kinga Dziwańska [12] conducted researches within the scope of values appreciated by young people and their conditioning. Researches consisted of two stages. The first measurement was made in 1999 and the next one in 2011. 408 of students of the 3rd grade (high schools and technical schools) took part in the research. Comparing and analysing results of both stages the author noticed that there are some common values appreciated by young people (irrespective of the time of the research and these are: love, health and family life). Young people justified the choice of the most appreciated values by their importance. Close relatives and friends, family members and their environment were the most frequent factors, which were influencing their decisions.

Ewa Malczak in carried out considerations and research explorations concerning values of the young people points that values function in the world in ordered systems, some of them occupy the superior, central place, others are the steps to achieve subsequent values – in this way the hierarchy is formed. The Author’s researches show that young people on central positions place such values, as: family (92%), love, friendship, comradeship (90%), and trust (75%). Health as a value is appreciated by about 70% of questioned students and what is more these students rank work on the same position with health. In the opinion of respondents health is essential in order to achieve determined aims [13, 14] (Figure 1).



Source: On the basis of: [13, 14].

Fig. 1 Priority values of the youth

Also researches conducted by the Author of the paper [15, 16] among the students of the Institute of Pedagogy and Languages proved that health is not a priority value for young people (212 students of the full time studies (Pedagogy, Polish Philology and English Philology) took part in the research). Researches revealed that students ranked health on the third position (53.3%). The most important values for students which were ranked on first and second place were: knowledge and education (59.9%) and successful family life (54.7%). List of the most important values for students are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1 Student's values.

Given responses	N=212	%
Knowledge and experience	127	59.9
Successful family life	116	54.7
Health	113	53.3
Satisfying professional Work	93	43.9
Comfortable life	91	42.9
Fortune, high material position	74	34.9
Honesty	66	31.1
Introducing new values to culture	50	23.6
Religion	47	22.2
Social bonds	46	21.7
Carrying out moral values	42	19.8
Engagement in useful work	34	16.0
High position, managing other people	21	9.9
Participation in political life	8	3.8

Source: own researches.

Percentages do not sum up to 100.0, because respondents pointed at few answers.

The Author made an attempt to check whether such variables, as: place of residence, sex and age have influence on shaping accepted values by young people. The research explorations show that the chosen variables have crucial influence for shaping of the values. Analysing empirical data concerning place of residence and sex of the respondents and accepted by them values including health one has to point that both students coming from the urban and rural areas ranked health on the third place. The differences in data concerning place of ranking health are noticed only in case of variable which is the age of respondents. The research showed that health was ranked on the first place by students at the age of 25 - 26 years. Students at the age of 23 - 24 years old ranked it on the second place. In turn respondents from different age groups *i.e.* 21 - 22 and 19 - 20 placed health on the third position. Successful family life and hedonistic values, such as: comfortable life, high social position and material values dominated in the two latter groups. Trying to get to know why for young people health does not constitute the priority value the Author conducted interviews with five students. The student relations prove that health which is result of healthy lifestyle is for them important and therefore it is a value, but, *“everyday student's life requires constant running between the University, place of residence/dormitory, or library – it doesn't give such opportunity. When we have additionally examinations, we don't have time to eat, not mentioning even a warm meal”*. One of the respondents said:

“Studying at the day-time studies and working at the weekends makes it difficult to think about a healthy lifestyle. My activity disappears, as I have to devote time to learning. I prefer leading a healthy lifestyle, if I have time possibilities. I realize that because of such a “swing” I can have health problems later” [Agnieszka, 22 year old].

5 Conclusions

Compiling the above mentioned analyses one has to underline the fact that health is the value which is appreciated by young people, but the less frequently they experience its disturbances, or diseases, the more frequently they forget about it. Their attention and activity does not concentrate on taking care of health and leading a healthy lifestyle, but goes in the direction of different activities, which as result of social, economic and political evaluations exercise some kind of pressure within this scope. The results of researches which are quoted by the Author prove that work, education are close integrated with each other, they shape priorities and determine further aims for young people. Contemporary social expectations give young people such priorities, so that is why their aspirations and values concentrate mainly on these elements and not on health.

Shaping of values and especially value of health results mainly from the adopted system of values, shape and life of a family in which young people were brought up and are/have been. The school education has also effect in this direction. Research explorations [8] confirm the fact that promoting of healthy lifestyle and also holistic health education should take place from the moment when a child is very small. In the families in which the hedonistic values are of major importance health will not be surely constituted by leading a healthy lifestyle, or aiming at achieving balance in life. Therefore pro-healthy education should be carried out not only among students, but also their parents and all the people who participate in carrying out the child's socialization process.

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