

THE SENSE OF LIFE AND STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

Anna Porczyńska-Ciszewska 

Assistant Professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

annapsych@interia.pl

Magdalena Kraczkla

Assistant Professor at the WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland

magda.kraczkla@wp.pl

Urszula Wąsikiewicz-Rusnak

Associate Professor at the WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland

ulawr@onet.eu

Anna Wziątek-Staśko

Associate Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland

anna.wziatek-stasko@uj.edu.pl

Radosław Molenda

Assistant Professor at the WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland

adnelom@wp.pl

Abstract

The sense of life is undoubtedly one of the most important subjective characteristics of human beings and plays an extremely important role in dealing with various kinds of situations, including difficult situations that are a source of stress. Due to the diversity and multiplicity of the areas in which it occurs, issues relating to the sense of life can be analysed from many different points of view. A sense of life is related to an individual's personality, life situation, and the conditions in which they live, all of which seemingly determine the choices they make and thus affect the effectiveness of coping with stressful situations. It can therefore be said that questions about the meaning of life seem to determine the form of human life. At the same time, it should

be remembered that, as V.E. Frankl stated, such existential questions require individual answers in the unrepeatable and unique context of one's own life. However, when dealing with issues related to the sense of life, it is possible to establish certain general regularities, and for this reason it seems important to analyse the relationship between the sense of one's own existence and coping with stressful situations. The aim of this article is therefore to point out the relationship between the sense of life and the strategies adopted to deal with stress. The article emphasizes the importance of the sense of life as an important motivator of human activity and points out that it is the sense of one's own existence, which is in turn related to the individual hierarchy of needs, goals, expectations, sense of control or self-assessment, that determines our way of functioning and decisions. Therefore, considerations about the sense of life in the context of coping with stress prove to be an extremely important mechanism in determining the effectiveness of an individual's coping strategies.

Keywords: Stress management, sense of life, stress, stress coping strategies, well-being

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the meaning of life is one that touches many sciences of human nature as it is raised by philosophers, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, and even historians or writers. Asking questions about one's own life, one's own existence - its meaning and values - is extremely important, especially for contemporary people who are exposed to the constant stress of a variety of life situations. The need for a sense of life is undoubtedly one of the most important drivers of human activity: it enables people to take any action, to be orientated in reality, and to make choices about objectives and methods of action, thus influencing their ability to cope with stressful situations.

When considering the relationship between the sense of life and coping with stress, it is important to remember that a person's response to a situation depends primarily on how they perceive, understand, and interpret the situation. This means that it is particularly important to assess the relationship between this situation and the current hierarchy of needs and goals of the individual and to recognise the significance of the situation for the person acting within it, which is undoubtedly related to the perceived degree of the meaningfulness of life. It should be remembered that the same external situation may be perceived differently by different people and may evoke different emotional reactions and types of behaviour (Sobczak-Matysiak, 1998). Undoubtedly, each person's repertoire includes specific coping strategies as dispositions that can be triggered in the process of coping with a specific stressful transaction. However, when

discussing the phenomenon of stress management, it is important to bear in mind that there are both some individual differences in the ability to cope and the ability of an individual to flexibly adapt their behaviour to the requirements of a given situation (Heszen-Niejodek, 1996), all of which are most likely related to their sense of life. In this context, considerations of the sense of life in relation to coping with stress prove to be an extremely important mechanism in determining the effectiveness of an individual's coping strategies.

It should also be noted that although the issue of the sense of life has been addressed since ancient times, the greatest change in the way of thinking about the sense of life occurred over the last few decades, when psychologists attempted to systematically describe and explain this phenomenon (Steger et al., 2006, p. 80; McDonald et al., 2012, p. 357). However, there are many issues to which no clear answers have been obtained and areas which have not yet been analysed; the sense of life is a fundamental problem that awaits proposals for its classification, both theoretical and research-based. It is therefore important to continue researching the existential dilemmas described and answer the questions that are still open in order to consciously and creatively manage one's own life.

STRESS AND COPING WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Today's researchers who are interested in the phenomenon of stress emphasize that it is a permanent element that is integral to human life as people experience stress and are subjected to its consequences throughout their lives. Researchers also point out that regardless of the stress source, human bodily reactions to stress are always the same. In analysing the process of stress formation and experience, P. G. Zimbardo and F. Ruch drew attention to the fact that the causes of stress can vary from one individual to another and can also take the form of both pleasant and unpleasant events. The essence, however, is that regardless of their nature, they require a change from the human being that means readapting to the situation that has arisen. In this sense, human life will always be a source of new demands, and stress itself will be an important factor in mobilizing the potential of human activities (Zimbardo & Ruch, 1999).

Psychologists understand stress as a result of various stimuli, both positive and negative, which can be a source of psychosomatic disorders and diseases but can also mobilize individuals to fight and create opportunities for human development (Chodkiewicz, 2005). Therefore, it can be assumed that all kinds of stressful situations are a factor in regulating human behaviour in the broadly understood space of life circumstances. Undertaking stress analysis therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand the different levels of stress, the interactions between them, and the dynamics of the initiation and duration of the body's adaptive responses. For this reason, scientific research on stress is carried out in

the field of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and the medical sciences. For obvious reasons, the analyses carried out within the indicated scientific disciplines define the phenomenon of stress in slightly different ways, but also provide common guidelines that determine ways of coping with stressful experiences (Kraczla, 2013). It can be assumed that “stress is an active response of the body to requirements and emerging risks, i.e. to stress”. (Litzke & Schuh, 2007, p.11). The consequence of experiencing stress is an internal tension with which people are to some extent able to cope; they then adapt to the situation and return to balance after the stressful stimuli have disappeared. This range is determined in each case by the adaptability of an individual and the characteristics of the environment (Le Blanc et al., 2003). An emerging state of stress can manifest itself on many levels: physiological, psychological, and social. There are interactions between these levels which ultimately affect the state of the human body and mind and determine the range of possibilities that a person possesses to cope with stressful circumstances. This means that you are constantly struggling to adapt to the many pressures you face on a daily basis (Kabat-Zinn, 2012).

The natural consequence of dealing with stress is that one needs to consider how to deal with it. The psychological approach clearly emphasizes the analysis of the creative and committed activity undertaken by human beings in stressful conditions. “A stressful situation stimulates activity aimed at restoring the balance between requirements and possibilities and improving the emotional state” (Bartkowiak, 2009). It is precisely this action that is assigned the ‘term stress management’ (Strelau, 2007). Dealing with stress can be seen as a process, as a strategy, and as a style (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000). The stress coping process concerns all the activities a person undertakes in a stressful situation. This activity can be very complex and dynamic and involves a set of different strategies that are defined by changing individual characteristics or situations. Stress coping strategies relate to the cognitive and behavioural practices undertaken by a person under stress. The types of activities undertaken by a given individual are determined by personal predispositions, characteristics (i.e. gender, age, psychophysical condition), as well as features of the stress situation. Stress coping style, on the other hand, concerns “individual differentiation of the dispositions determining behaviour in stressful conditions” (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000, p.18). It refers, therefore, to the individual’s relatively stable characteristics, which determine his typical way of overcoming difficulties in stressful situations (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Wrześniewski, 2000).

Dealing with stress can therefore be seen as a fundamental adaptation mechanism, the essence of which is to make a conscious effort to restore the internal balance of the body. Thus, this mechanism fulfils the regulatory function between human requirements and capabilities (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006). The choice of how to deal with stressful situations depends on the

individual characteristics of each person, the scope of their personal resources, and the nature of the situation itself (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2008). However, stress coping strategies will always be geared to dealing with the threat posed by stressful situations. Therefore, it should be assumed that the stress coping process involves all the efforts an individual decides to make in response to stress. These activities are both active and passive, positive and negative, as well as constructive or unconstructive (Bartkowiak, 2009). It can be assumed that these are all kinds of individual cognitive, emotional, and behavioural actions in response to existing internal or external requirements (Terelak, 2004).

In the literature there are many different models of dealing with stress. An interesting approach is presented by N.S. Endler and D.A. Parker (1990, 1993), who, referring to R.S. Lazarus' and S. Folkman's relational theory of stress coping, applied the coping style notion to describe three styles of dealing with stressful situations. Two of the described styles refer to the functions described in R.S. Lazarus' and S. Folkman's concept of task- and emotion-oriented coping. The third style was described by N.S. Endler and D.A. Parker as avoidance-oriented. The stress coping styles identified by the authors open up space for the variety of actions people take under stressful conditions (Endler & Parker, 1990). The classification made by the authors is an example of presenting a coping style adopted while experiencing psychological strain as a constellation of dispositions or characteristics of an individual (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Wrześniewski, 2000). Thus, if a style is to be attributed the status of a characteristic, then the style of coping with stress could be defined as a relatively constant tendency for an individual to use, in different situations, specific ways of coping with it in order to reduce its level (Carver, 2000; Wrześniewski, 1996). In this way, the styles distinguished by N.S. Endler and D.A. Parker can be attributed psychological characteristics that relate to the well-established specificity of an individual's behaviour in a stressful situation. The task-oriented style determines how to cope with stress associated with undertaking tasks. People who reveal such a style of behaviour in stressful conditions show tendencies to act and overcome difficult situations by trying to change them. The main activity of an individual with a task-oriented style is focused on efforts to solve the problem. The emotion-oriented style is manifested by people who, under stress conditions, show a tendency to concentrate on themselves and on their own emotional experiences, i.e. anger, tension or guilt. When such people are confronted with stress, they often experience anger, tension or guilt and show a tendency to fantasy and wishful thinking. The aim of such measures is to reduce the emotional tension caused by the stressful situation. Paradoxically, however, they can contribute to increasing stress, heightening tensions, and the feeling of depression. The avoidance-oriented style is typical for people who in stressful situations tend to avoid thinking, perceiving, and experiencing such circumstances. The

avoidance style may take the form of engaging in various replacement activities such as watching TV, overeating, thinking about pleasant matters or escaping to sleep, or being active in the area of seeking social contact (Endler & Parker, 1994).

As you can see, the task-, emotion- and avoidance-styles of coping with stress generate different types of activities in an individual. In the task-oriented style of coping with stress, an individual tries to eliminate the stress. In the style that focuses on regulating emotions, an individual seeks to reduce emotional tension through, for example, acceptance of the situation, escape reactions, psychological mechanisms of denial or suppression, compensation of stress with successes in other areas of life, or through self-recrimination. In the avoidance approach, an individual tries to “silence” stress by starting replacement activities and focusing activity on actions that are not related to the stress situation. It is worth pointing out that stress coping strategies can be used by different people separately or at the same time. However, their intensity and area of application always depend on individual characteristics. The results obtained by overcoming difficulties and recovering balance are determined by a person’s flexibility in applying selected methods of dealing with stress and the efficiency of their use in a specific stressful situation (Kraczla, 2013).

EXPERIENCING THE SENSE OF LIFE

The concept of the sense of life is undoubtedly the source of much controversy as well as the subject of much polemic; questions about the meaning of life are no longer the exclusive preserve of theologians, philosophers, psychologists, historians, or writers. Dilemmas of an existential nature are experienced in various forms in the consciousness of individuals who have different views of the world and are from different social strata. It is undoubtedly impossible to give an unambiguous and unquestionable answer to the issue of the meaning of life. The diversity of answers results both from the fact that each person is unique and from the diversity of everyday situations in which an individual participates (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). In terms of tradition, one can say that the problem of the sense of life is a typically philosophical issue. It should be noted, however, that the “feeling of the meaning of life”, especially its anthropological and existential aspects, is undoubtedly the subject of psychological research.

The psychological approach to the problem of the meaning of life emphasizes above all individual needs, inherited predispositions, preferences, choices, as well as personal values situated along the path of making these choices and preferences. Psychologists analyse the mutual relations between the sense of life and various components of human personality; they also draw attention to the genesis of the need for the sense of life and focus on the techniques (both positive and negative) of satisfying it within the framework of integration or disintegration

of personality (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). They count the need for a sense of life as well as cognitive and emotional needs among the fundamental motives of human behaviour. From a psychological point of view, the meaning of life is undoubtedly related to the fulfilment of oneself, one's abilities and interests (Popielski, 1982).

It is worth emphasizing, however, that within psychology there are many different ways of approaching the term "sense of life" (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). From a psychological point of view, one can speak of the need for meaning, as K. Obuchowski does, as well as of the human right to shape and fulfil this sense in every serious matter and at every stage of life. In the view of K. Popielski (1996), the meaning of life is presented as the most general, the deepest personal and individual need, while by J. Szczepański it is defined as an inseparable feature of the human species. M. S. Nejmark, on the other hand, assumed that it was an overarching motivational trend, while A. N. Leontiew assumed that it was a sense- and meaning-making motive (Marciszewski, 1960, as cited in Mariański, 1990). In turn, Emmons (2005) defines the meaning of life as the pursuit of important personal goals combined with values, the development of which allows for a sense of greater sense, which in turn determines the quality of a person's life. It can therefore be said that the meaning of life refers to a eudemonistic rather than hedonistic understanding of mental well-being and therefore constitutes part of a multidimensional concept of a good life (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Seligman, 2011; Kossakowska, 2013). In the subject literature there are also static and dynamic approaches to the meaning of life. The static approach defines the sense of life as "a subjective psychological state of a particular person connected with the feeling of subjective satisfaction from life" (Życińska & Januszek, 2011, p.1), while the dynamic perspective of the sense of life perceives the meaning of life as a need (Życińska & Januszek, 2011).

Psychologists also emphasize that the sense of life is one of the most important features of a person's personality that plays an extremely important role in his/her development. It can therefore be said that the sense of life does not exist in isolation from the individual but is rooted in the realities of every human existence. This also means that certain situations and events evoke reflections on the meaning of life and activate the pursuit of it (e.g. difficult situations, diseases, loss of a loved person) (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013), influencing also the choice of how difficult and stressful situations are dealt with. Undoubtedly, the sense of one's own existence is closely related to the individual hierarchy of needs, goals, expectations, locus of control, and self-esteem, thus determining the way of functioning as well as the correctness of one's actions, including the choice of stress coping strategies.

Although the issue of the relationship between personality traits and the sense of life is not a common subject of scientific exploration, there are studies that highlight the important role

of personality in having the sense of life (Halama, 2005). The literature contains reports on the links between the sense of life and subjective traits such as locus of internal and external control, the ability to act constructively, and the level of self-acceptance, creative activity, or neuroticism (Gaś, 1986; Stokłosa, 1986; Wood et al., 1969, as cited in Pufal-Struzik, 1994; Kościelak, 1995; Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). Researchers also stress the positive relationship between the sense of one's own existence and the quality of life and mental well-being (Ryff, 1989; Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013).

Empirical research and quantitative and qualitative analyses of the relationship between the ability to act constructively and the sense of life were carried out by Z. Gaś and confirmed the existence of a relationship between the examined variables. The results of the research showed that people with a high ability to act constructively (i.e. enabling an individual to achieve their goals and meet their needs) are characterized by an appropriate level of meaning of life, the vision of which is dominated by a negative attitude to suicide, having clear goals and aspirations in life, perceiving the purpose and sense of one's existence, and a belief in the variability and attractiveness of everyday life (Gaś, 1986), all of which seems to be combined with the ability to effectively cope with stress.

Existing empirical studies on the locus of control suggest that there is a relationship between the sense of control and the sense of life. It has been shown that an internal sense of control is positively correlated with satisfaction with life, acceptance of life and one's role in it, while an external sense of control is much more related to depression and dissatisfaction. The existence of a functional relationship between the sense of life and the location of control was confirmed by R. Kościelak in his research. The author proved that people with an inner sense of control have a stronger sense of life than individuals with an outer sense of control (Kościelak, 1995).

Similar results were obtained by B. Stokłosa, on the basis of which she concluded that inner-contained people have a greater sense of life, while outer-contained people have a lesser sense of life (Stokłosa, 1986). Individuals with internal locus control who attribute effects of their actions to themselves show a more optimistic attitude towards both reality and their own abilities. They also believe that they have a decisive influence on what happens to them and that they are confident that they have the freedom of choice. Research carried out by Stokłosa confirmed the existence of a relationship between the sense of locus of control and the sense of life. On the basis of the results obtained by B. Stokłosa, in the light of the humanistic psychological theory it can be concluded that the sense of life meaning is the supreme psychological mechanism that determines human behaviour (Stokłosa, 1986) and apparently plays a role in coping with stress.

Researchers also analysed the relation between the sense of life and the formation of one's own image and its acceptance because it is known that determining one's own image, defining one's life tasks, as well as preferences in terms of a system of values, are important for the meaning of life. Research on this relationship by B. Niżankowska-Półtorak (1986) confirmed that individuals with low self-esteem have a low sense of life, while young people with high self-esteem evaluate themselves very positively, especially in terms of their life goals, affirmation of life and their own existence. They also positively describe their own plans and aspirations (Niżankowska-Półtorak, 1986). Concurrent results were obtained in his research by R. Kościelak (1995), who empirically confirmed that people with more specific goals, aspirations, and life plans more often evaluated themselves positively, and their self-esteem was higher than that of people without such goals, aspirations, and plans. Undoubtedly, belief in one's skills, capabilities, and the ability to act constructively is a factor that favours the crystallization of one's objectives, life goals and their implementation in people with high self-esteem, as opposed to people with low self-esteem. It is also worth noting that individuals with high self-esteem have greater opportunities to choose their own way of life, goals, and values, as well as to create their own future. For this reason, people with a high level of self-esteem present a stronger sense of life than people with a low level of self-esteem (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013); also, as we know, high self-esteem positively correlates with stress management.

Research on the relationship between subjective traits and quality of life, including the sense of self-existence, was also conducted by I. Pufal-Struzik (1994). The author examined the significance of creative activity for the formation of judgements and the opinions on the quality of life, including the aspect of purposefulness and vision of one's own life, as well as particularly esteemed values that give meaning to one's existence. The results of this research prove that the greatest achievement in life for creative individuals is creativity and the successes associated with it. These individuals derive their satisfaction primarily from their creative activity, accept their chosen life path, including their decisions and experiences, have a sense of success in achieving their creative goals, and are accompanied by well-being (satisfaction conducive to life satisfaction) (Wood et al., 1969, as cited in Pufal-Struzik, 1994), which seems to be conducive to effective management of stress.

When discussing the relationship between the sense of life and personality traits, it is worthwhile paying attention to Płużek's research (1996) on the effects of a loss of meaning of life on one's personality. The author analysed two groups of people rescued after suicide attempts: one with an extremely strong sense of life and the other with an extremely weak sense of life. The results of the research conducted by the author show that people with a low sense of life were characterized by a pathological personality profile indicating depression, loss

of social contact, sense of rejection by their family and friends, alienation, lack of understanding, feeling of insecurity and anxiety, as well as difficulties in social adaptation. Respondents with an extremely weak sense of life were also characterized by intensified conflicts in the four spheres measured by the Sack and Sydney Tests and so effective stress coping is undoubtedly not contributed to by the sphere of fear and anxiety, attitudes towards family and other people, the tendency to significantly underestimate one's own judgement, and low self-esteem (Płużek, 1996). A. Kulpa (1983) confirmed in his research the tendency for neurotic people to experience a sense of meaninglessness. According to the author, individuals who perceive their lives as full of meaning and who can find values and goals important to them are mentally healthy and balanced, while those who perceive their lives as empty and worthless more often tend to fall into neurotic states. Neuroticism is probably a variable that affects the proper identification and pursuit of the supreme life values individually selected by a person that give sense to his life (Kulpa, 1983); therefore, neuroticism is undoubtedly also a feature that makes it difficult to cope with stress.

To sum up, we can say that analysis of the literary reports concerning the issues of the sense of life allows us to state that there are relationships between the sense of life and personality traits (on which, undoubtedly, depends the effectiveness of coping with stress). This analysis also points to the mutual relations that most probably exist between the level of perceived sense of one's own existence and coping with stressful situations.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SENSE OF LIFE

Given the diversity and multiplicity of the planes on which the problem of the sense of life occurs, it can be analysed from many different points of view. The sense of life's meaning is related to an individual's personality, their life situation, and the conditions in which they live. Psychologists stress in particular the connection between the sense of life, some personality traits, and the life situation of a person (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). Management specialists particularly emphasize the dependence of the aforementioned categories on the model of a company's organizational culture and the scale and intensity of pathological phenomena in the process of human capital management (Wziętek-Staśko, 2016).

The stressful situations to which a person is subjected in their life and with which they have to cope are determined by the very often experienced plane of human existence. Thus, they create an important area for initiation of reflections on the meaning of one's own life and life in general, including the significant role and place one holds in the work environment (Wziętek-Staśko, 2017).

As mentioned previously, the relationship between personality traits and the sense of life is not a very broad area of scientific research. However, there are studies that show that personality plays a significant role in the sense of life (Halama, 2005). From the point of view of this paper, studies which reveal the relation between the sense of life and resistance to stress are particularly interesting. As has been shown, a high level of self-esteem increases resistance to stress and has a positive impact on physical health (Chamberlain et al., 1992; Flannery & Flannery, 1990; Mullen et al., 1994; Nyamatti, 1993).

The personality determinants of stress coping strategies have been confirmed by extensive and interesting empirical studies conducted by the co-author of this paper and provide valuable guidance for understanding human behaviour in psychological stress situations (Kraczla, 2016). These analyses made it possible to not only formulate conclusions which empirically determined the relationships between stress coping styles and the intensity of personality traits, but also to indicate differences in this respect between the main methods of dealing with stress (task, emotional, and avoidance approaches). The task-oriented style of coping with stress was found to be strongly linked to task-orientation, persistence in achieving an objective, high sense of responsibility, high conscientiousness and self-discipline, and good planning and organization of activities. It is also associated with high self-acceptance and confidence in oneself and in the success of one's actions, all of which counterbalance the pessimistic prediction of failures. The stress coping style which focuses on emotions is associated with a negative image of oneself and with a tendency to blame oneself and to adopt a pessimistic attitude. An emotional strategy in dealing with stress is also characterized by low motivation to act and reduced need for achievement, which also implies less self-discipline and perseverance in behaviour, and less ability to plan and organize actions. On the level of interpersonal functioning, the emotional style of dealing with stress reveals a small need to build close interpersonal relations, a poorly outlined willingness to cooperate and interact with others, and a greater tendency to adopt a cautious and distanced attitude. Respondents who resort to an emotional strategy of responding to stress also revealed a reduced need to understand themselves and others, a reduced need to adopt a helpful and supportive attitude, and a much greater tendency to adopt a submissive attitude, to submit to others, to experience a sense of harm, while expecting compassion and support from others. The emotion-oriented style of coping with stress has also revealed an important relationship between reduced social adaptation and confidence in oneself and one's own abilities, as well as less willingness to take the initiative and make efforts to achieve one's plans and goals. The emotional style has also been shown to be associated with a reduced ability to cope with the demands of adult life (which manifests itself as some kind of difficulty in leaving children's roles behind), a clear reluctance to

act in uncertain and stressful situations, as well as with a weakened ability to behave spontaneously. The avoidance-oriented style of coping with stress (in its component aspect of engaging in substitution activities) has revealed a relation to the tendency to act freely and engage in the exploration of the surrounding world, with limited responsibility and stability in behaviour (Kraczla, 2016, pp.171-172).

As the studies above show, the task-oriented style of coping with stress represents the most constructive strategy for dealing with emotional strain and stress and can lead to and enable the overcoming of difficult situations. The behaviours revealed within the performance style are closely related to the personality traits that feed the so-called performance orientation, which requires the assumption that with the intensification of traits such as perseverance, conscientiousness, self-discipline, responsibility, reliability, and good organization or order, the task-oriented approach to stress is intensified. Similar relationships can also be clearly identified in relation to emotion- and avoidance-oriented stress coping strategies. Thus, it can be assumed that personality traits are a group of important (often unconscious and underestimated) determinants of the choice of strategies to deal with stressful situations.

The empirically proven relationship between personality variables and the choice of strategies to deal with stress can therefore be referred to as a result of research which shows that resistance to stress increases with the increase in the sense of life's meaning (Chamberlain et al., 1992; Flannery & Flannery, 1990; Mullen et al., 1994; Nyamatti, 1993). It can therefore be predicted that a strong sense of life will contribute to the implementation of a task-oriented style of stress coping, a strategy in which the actions an individual takes to overcome emerging burdens are believed to be the most constructive. It seems that the ability to undertake pragmatic activity in the face of stress must be closely related to the ability to find deeper meaning in difficult circumstances – to create meaning for oneself and for others (Frankl, 2011). According to most researchers in this field, shaping the meaning and the sense of one's life is a way of dealing with and overcoming the difficulties of the present; it is also an opportunity to open oneself up to a better future (Coutu, 2002).

Giving meaning to the everyday life of each individual can therefore be this internal force that enables the undertaking of task-based activity, which helps to make changes and overcome the hardships of life. Therefore, it is worth defining and planning a research area to empirically confirm the predicted relationship between stress management and a strong sense of life. It seems that such dependence may also apply to the avoidance-directed style of coping with stress. Although the avoidance style manifests itself in its essence by "waiting stress out" through building emotional and mental distance from difficult situations in the form of replacement activities, it is positively correlated with cognitive curiosity and high commitment to

exploring the surrounding world. Such personality correlations may in turn be fostered by a strong sense of life. However, what might be just the opposite of the predicted trends is the emotion-oriented style of dealing with stress. Empirically proven personality traits that correlate with an emotional strategy to deal with stress allow us to predict that this strategy will be associated with a weak sense of life meaning. The perspective of the empirical research outlined above will constitute a research area for further scientific investigations into the relationship between coping with stress and the sense of life.

CONCLUSION

Analysing human behaviour requires that many variables and meaning perspectives are considered in each case. The subject of this paper was the analysis of the relation between the sense of life as an important subjective feature of human life and its significance in experiencing difficult situations, including those described as stressful situations. On the basis of the conclusions available in the literature and from previous research projects, it has been pointed out that there is a relation between the sense of life and the personality of a human being, their life situation, or the conditions in which they fulfil their existence. Also referred to was a study on the personality determinants of stress management that indicates correlations between many personality traits and specific styles of coping with psychological stress. Subsequently, recognizing the sense of life as a key subjective feature of human life, the predicted relationships between the sense of life and the effectiveness of dealing with stressful situations were formulated, thus delineating an extremely interesting area of empirical research. Consolidated by theoretical deductions, the research curiosity of the authors of this paper prompts us to seek empirical confirmation of the predicted relationship between the sense of life and ways of dealing with stress. The conclusions formulated in the article clearly indicate that people with different levels of sense of life also differ in terms of personality, which in turn should be reflected in individual strategies of responding in stressful conditions. Empirical verification in this area can provide valuable guidelines for building personal resistance to stress while taking into account individual personality predispositions and conscious shaping of one's life by experiencing its sense and meaning. Clearly, experiencing the sense and meaning of life may not be easy to grasp as it may also be subject to change and may need to be rediscovered. However, finding sense in one's own environment and in life events is an important aspect of resistance to stress and a source of activation of all mechanisms aimed at overcoming the difficulties that arise in a person's life.

These findings make the theoretical considerations presented in the article a valuable source of inspiration for the development of empirical research into the link between subjective

traits such as the feeling of sense of life – which is an aspect of psychological well-being – and the ability to deal with the ubiquitous stress of modern-day life.

REFERENCES

- Bartkowiak, G. (2009). *Człowiek w pracy. Od stresu do sukcesu w organizacji*. Warsaw, Poland: Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne.
- Carver, C.S. (2000). Coping. *Encyclopaedia of Psychology* (vol. 2, pp. 300-305). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Chamberlain, K., Petrie, K. & Azariah, R. (1992). The role of optimism and sense of coherence in predicting recovery following surgery. *Psychology and Health*, 7(4), 301-310.
- Chodkiewicz, J. (2005). *Psychologia zdrowia, wybrane zagadnienia*. Łódź, Poland: Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna.
- Coutu, D. L. (2002). How resilience works? *Harvard Business Review*, 80(35), 46-56.
- Emmons, R. A. (2005). Striving for the Sacred: Personal Goals, Life Meaning, and Religion. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(4), 731-745.
- Endler, N.S. & Parker, D.A. (1990). Multidimensional Assessment of Coping: A Critical Evaluation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(5), 844-854.
- Endler, N.S. & Parker, D.A. (1993). The Multidimensional Assessment of Coping: Concepts, Issues and Measurement. In G.L. van Heck, P. Bonaiuto, I. Deary, & W. Nowack (Eds.), *Personality Psychology in Europe* (vol. 4, pp. 309-319). Tilburg, Netherlands: Tilburg University Press.
- Endler, N.S. & Parker, J.D.A. (1994). Assessment of Multidimensional Coping: Task, Emotion and Avoidance Strategies. *Psychological Assessment*, vol. 6, 50-60.
- Flannery, R. B. & Flannery, G.J. (1990). Sense of Coherence, Life Stress, and Psychological Distress: a Prospective Methodological Inquiry. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 46(4), 415-420.
- Frankl, V.E. (2011). *Człowiek w poszukiwaniu sensu*. Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo „Czarna Owca”.
- Gaś, Z. (1986). Umiejętność działania konstruktywnego a poczucie sensu życia. In B. Pilecka (Ed.) *Osobowości i środowiskowe korelaty poczucia sensu życia*. Rzeszów, Poland: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Rzeszowie.
- Halama, P. (2005). Relationship Between Meaning in Life and the Big Five Personality Traits in Young Adults and the Elderly. *Studia Psychologica*, 47(3), 167-178.
- Heszen-Niejodek, I. (1996). Stres i radzenie sobie – główne kontrowersje. In I. Heszen-Niejodek & Z. Ratajczak (Eds.), *Człowiek w sytuacji stresu. Problemy teoretyczne i metodologiczne*. Katowice, Poland: Uniwersytet Śląski.
- Heszen-Niejodek, I. (2000). Stres i radzenie sobie – główne kontrowersje. In I. Heszen-Niejodek & Z. Ratajczak (Eds.), *Człowiek w sytuacji stresu* (pp. 12-43). Katowice, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2012). *Życie piękna katastrofa*. Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo „Czarna Owca”.
- Kossakowska, M. (2013). Sens w życiu. Polska wersja kwestionariusza MLQ (Meaning in Life Questionnaire). *Psychologia Jakości Życia*, 12(2), 111-131.
- Kościelak, R. (1995). Poczucie sensu życia, poczucie umiejscowienia i kontroli i samoocena osób z trwałą dysfunkcją narządu ruchu. *Postępy Rehabilitacji*, vol. 9, 57-69.
- Kraczla, M. (2013). Wypalenie zawodowe jako efekt długotrwałego stresu. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas. Zarządzanie*, 1(2), 69-81.
- Kraczla, M. (2016). *Stres w pracy menedżera* (2nd ed.) Warsaw, Poland: CeDeWu Sp. z o.o.
- Kulpa, A. (1983). Poczucie sensu życia a neurotyzm i wartości u chorych z zespołem zależności alkoholowej. *Zdrowie Psychiczne*, vol. 4, 78-83.
- Le Blanc, P., de Longe, J. & Schaufeli, W. (2002). Stres zawodowy a zdrowie pracowników. In N. Chmiel (Ed.), *Psychologia pracy i organizacji* (pp. 169-203). Gdańsk, Poland: GWP.
- Litzke, S.M. & Schuh, H. (2007). *Stress, mobbing i wypalenie zawodowe*. Gdańsk, Poland: GWP.

- Mariański, J. (1990). W poszukiwaniu sensu życia. Lublin, Poland: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- McDonald, M. J., Wong, P. T. P. & Gingras, D. T. (2012). Meaning-in-Life Measures and Development of a Brief Version of the Personal Meaning Profile. In P.T.P. Wong (Ed.), *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications* (pp.357–382). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Mullen, P. M., Smith, R. M. & Hill, E. W. (1994). Sense of Coherence as a Mediator of Stress for Cancer Patients and Spouses. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 11(3), 23-46.
- Niżankowska-Półtorak, B. (1986). Poczucie sensu życia a poziom akceptacji siebie u młodzieży licealnej. In B. Pilecka (Ed.), *Osobowościowe i środowiskowe korelaty poczucia sensu życia*. Rzeszów, Poland: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Rzeszowie.
- Nyamathi, A. M. (1993). Sense of Coherence in Minority Women and the Risk for HIV Infection. *Public Health Nursing*, 10(3), 151-158.
- Obuchowski, K. (1990). Wprowadzenie do problemu sensu życia. In K. Obuchowski & K. Puszczewicz (Eds.), *Sens życia*. Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwa Nauczycielskiego Uniwersytetu Radiowo-Telewizyjnego NURT.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N. (2006). *Stres zawodowy w zawodach usług społecznych. Źródła-konsekwencje- zapobieganie*. Warsaw, Poland: Difin Sp. z o.o.
- Ogińska-Bulik, N. & Juczyński Z. (2008). *Osobowość, stres a zdrowie*. Warsaw, Poland: Difin Sp. z o.o.
- Plużek, Z. (1996). Osobowościowe warunki pytania o sens życia. In K. Popielski (Ed.), *Człowiek-wartości - sens. Studia z psychologii egzystencji*. Lublin, Poland: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Popielski, K. (1982). Miejsce i znaczenie analizy egzystencjalnej i logoterapii. *Zdrowie Psychiczne*, 1(2), 5-16.
- Popielski, K. (1996). Psychologiczno-egzystencjalna interpretacja problematyki sensu i sensowności. In K. Popielski (Ed.), *Człowiek – wartości – sens. Studia z psychologii egzystencjalnej*. Lublin, Poland: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Porczyńska-Ciszewska, A. (2013). *Cechy osobowości a doświadczanie szczęścia i poczucie sensu życia*. Katowice, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Pufal-Struzik, I. (1994). Aktywność twórcza człowieka i jej związek z samooceną jakości życia. In A. Bańka & R. Derbis (Eds.), *Psychologiczne i pedagogiczne wymiary jakości życia*. Poznań-Częstochowa, Poland: Uniwersytet im. A. Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Częstochowie.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081.
- Ryff, C. D. & Singer, B. H. (1998). The Contours of Positive Human Health. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9(1), 1–28.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York, USA: Free Press.
- Sobczak-Matysiak, J. (1998). *Psychologia kontaktu z klientem*. Poznań, Poland: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej.
- Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S. & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the Presence of and Search for Meaning in Life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(1), 80–93.
- Stokłosa, B. (1986). Lokalizacja kontroli a poczucie sensu życia. In B. Pilecka (Ed.), *Osobowościowe i środowiskowe korelaty poczucia sensu życia*. Rzeszów, Poland: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Rzeszowie.
- Strelau, J. (2007). *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki (vol. 2 & 3)*. Gdańsk, Poland: GWP.
- Terelak, J. (2004). *Stres organizacyjny*. Warsaw, Poland: Wydawnictwo WSM-SIG.
- Wrześniewski, K. (2000). Style i strategii radzenia sobie ze stresem. *Problemy pomiaru*. In I. Heszen-Niejodek & Z. Ratajczak (Eds.), *Człowiek w sytuacji stresu* (pp. 44-64). Katowice, Poland: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Wziątek-Staśko, A. (2016). *Motywowanie w erze Web 2.0+ (pp. 60-88)*. Warsaw, Poland: CeDeWu.
- Wziątek-Staśko, A. (2017). Model kultury organizacyjnej a zjawiska patologiczne w środowisku pracy. *Przegląd Organizacji*, vol. 10, 27-34.
- Zimbardo, P.G. & Ruch F. (1999). *Psychologia i życie* (p. 527). Warsaw, Poland: PWN.
- Życińska, J. & Januszek M. (2011). Test Sensu Życia (Purpose in Life Test, PIL) J.C. Crumbaugh i L.T. Maholicka: analiza psychometryczna. *Czasopismo psychologiczne*, 17(1), 133-141.