

Department of Clinical Psychology, Medical University of Lublin

MARIOLA ŻUK, JOLANTA ZAWORA, ALICJA NASIŁOWSKA-BARUD

Optimism as a paradigm of man's health

Civilisational progress enables people to live more and more comfortably but it does not protect them from the vicissitudes of life; disease and disability still cannot be avoided. Modern methods of medical treatment are increasingly effective in saving life; however, disablement is frequently the price for survival (1, 2). It is therefore important to pose a question as to what allows a handicapped individual to endure the hardships resulting from his or her disability.

Optimism is a factor that exerts a positive influence on health understood as a feeling of physical and psychological well-being. Thus it may be assumed that optimism also helps the disabled cope with their disability. Optimism is a psychological attitude, a stance on life and the world, characterised by the faith that the world is good and that positive aspects of life predominate. Literature on the subject pays particular attention to optimistic expectations with regard to positive results of one's actions. When an individual believes that his or her action will bring the desired results, he makes the effort to achieve them, even if considerable obstacles or difficulties must be overcome. It has been proven that optimists are less affected by physical limitations. They are healthier, and when they do fall ill, they cope with their somatic disease better and recover from it sooner. Optimists manage better in difficult situations: they tackle problems head-on, do not avoid them but search for a solution. They feel they are in control of their lives; thanks to their perseverance, they can achieve success more frequently (3, 5).

Pessimists, on the other hand, respond to difficulties with escape strategies which produce poor results as they do not lead to the solution of the problem but evade it instead. When they fail, pessimists often experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and defeat (7).

For the above reasons optimism is regarded as a significant personal asset of each individual, one that is very important for achieving success in life. It can be particularly useful in coping with disability. This study attempts to present the basis on which the disabled build their optimistic attitude. The objective of the research was to assess the optimistic attitude of patients with motor disability in the context of personality traits.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

20 persons, including 9 men and 11 women, were studied. They were hospitalised at the SPSK-4 Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation Hospital in Lublin due to various diseases of organs of movement that resulted in a permanent loss of movement ability. The subjects were aged 23 to 64 years ($M=43$). Five individuals had primary or vocational education, 12 individuals – secondary education, whereas three individuals had higher education.

Two methods were chosen for the study:

1. R. Stach Optimism Questionnaire that enables to assess optimism according to several scales: general optimism; essential optimism manifested in a conviction about the good nature of the world;

causative optimism manifested in a conviction that future events will be good. Two subscales of causative optimism are distinguished: personal causative optimism based on a conviction that future events will turn out to be favourable thanks to the individual's own actions; social causative optimism which assumes that future events will turn out to be favourable for the individual thanks to the contribution of other, well-wishing individuals.

2. H. G. Gough and A. B. Heilbrun Adjective Check List (ACL). The method views personality in the context of psychological needs and can be used to examine an individual's self-concept.

RESULTS

Results of the study with the use of the R. Stach Optimism Questionnaire. The obtained results are on an average level. The personal causative optimism subscale, where the result is above average, is an exception.

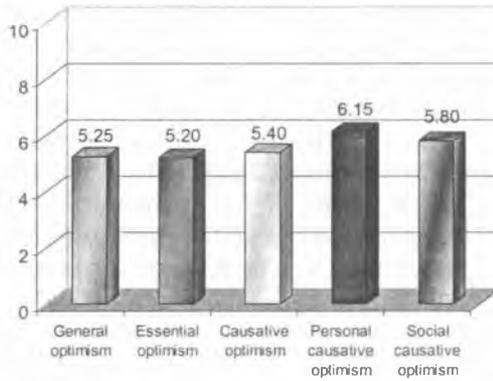


Fig.1. R. Stach Optimism Questionnaire. Average results of patients with motor disability (N=20)

Results of the study with the use of the Adjective Check List (ACL) are shown in the chart below. The subjects characterised themselves with regard to the real self-concept. Except for a few traits (En, Or, Ch) the obtained results are around average.

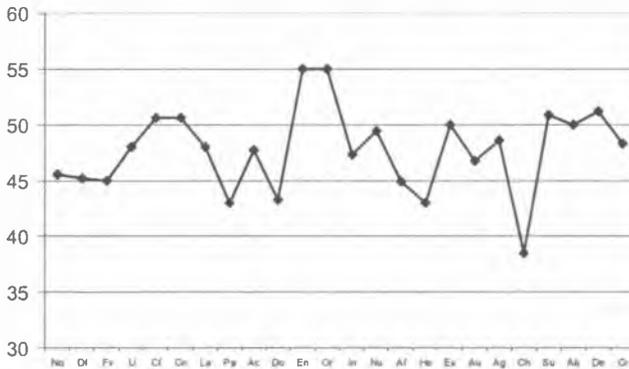


Fig. 2. H.G.Gough and A.B.Heilbrun Adjective Check List (ACL). Average profile of the real self-concept of patients with motor disability (N=20)

The obtained results indicated that the optimistic attitude in the group of subjects with a motor organ dysfunction was at an average level. The result was above average in the case of the subscale referring to the conviction that the future will turn out to be favourable for the individual thanks to his or her own action. Among personality traits, particularly noticeable is a strong need for Endurance (En) and Order (Or) and a weak need for Change (Ch).

DISCUSSION

Motor organ dysfunctions place an individual in a psychologically difficult situation for at least two reasons: the dysfunction is easily noticed by other people and limits or precludes independence in performing various activities. Yet, individuals with such a handicap maintain an average level of optimism and expect positive future events that will happen thanks to their own endeavours, skills, actions, personal traits.

With respect to the category of psychological needs related to achievements (Ac, Do, En, Or), the accomplishment of personal goals (Ac) remains at an average level. The need for assuming leadership (Do) is on a low level of intensity. The subjects willingly accept somebody else's leadership, take on subordinate roles and are submissive. The need for endurance (En) is strong, on the other hand. It manifests itself in the unwavering overcoming of difficulties and a passion for order (Or), i.e. systematising and planning everything that may contribute to setting one's life in order.

With respect to the category of needs that facilitate interpersonal contacts (In, Nu, Af, He, Ex, Su), the need to understand oneself and others (In) is at an average level: the subjects tend to act on impulse rather than reflection. This may suggest a sense of insecurity and lack of care, and may reflect a personal crisis. The need to provide assistance and help to others (Nu) is on an average level, which springs from the limitation of the subjects' physical ability. An average need for the company of others (Af) may signal a tendency to isolate oneself and a sense of redundancy. The need for contact with individuals of the opposite sex (He) and interest in heterosexual relations is on a low level. The need for receiving support from others (Su) and for opening up (Ex), i.e. sharing one's experiences and feelings with others, remain on an average level.

As far as the category of needs related to the attitude to life is concerned (Au, Ag, Ab, De, Cr), the need for autonomy (Au) is moderately intensified, which indicates the absence of the tendency to act independently and the fear of making autonomous decisions. It also shows that the subjects find a sense of safety in non-autonomous actions. A moderate need for aggression (Ag) demonstrates that the subjects tend not to engage in competition or struggle but passively wait for the accomplishment of their goals – the *fulfilment of their dreams*. The need for change (Ch) is very low which indicates that the subjects desire stability, seek to ensconce themselves in the already achieved place in life and preserve *status quo*, and show no interest whatsoever in any new solutions. The need to disparage oneself (Ab) remains on an average level; therefore, the subjects' critical attitude towards themselves is moderate. The considerably strong need for submission (De), reflected in taking on subordinate roles in social relations, serves to ensure a sense of security. This need also manifests itself in giving up the formulation of one's own goals and demands in order to avoid failure, as well as in the minimalist philosophy of life, satisfaction with anything. Moderate is the willingness to recognise the necessity for change (Cr) and to seek for the advice and help of other people. This may result from the fear of confronting negative knowledge about oneself, in an attempt to protect a positive self-assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Patients with a motor organ dysfunction do not desire drastic changes in their lives; they are interested in stability.

2. They try to persevere in their efforts and unwaveringly overcome difficulties. Their sense of responsibility and self-control is typically high. The need for systematising, planning and setting one's life in order is also strong.

3. Patients with a motor organ dysfunction exhibit a moderate need for establishing and maintaining interpersonal contacts.

4. Despite their difficult position resulting from their disability, patients with a motor organ dysfunction retain a moderate level of optimism. They view the future positively and make endeavours to achieve success.

REFERENCES

1. Dolińska-Zygmunt G.: Elementy psychologii zdrowia. 1966.
2. Konieczna A.: Poczucie krzywdy i bezradności u osób niepełnosprawnych ruchowo. Sztuka Leczenia, 2003.
3. Mc Ginnis A. L.: Potęga optymizmu. 1993.
4. Nasiłowska-Barud A.: Zmiany psychosomatyczne u chorych po świeżym zawale serca w okresie pięcioletniej rehabilitacji. 1996.
5. Peale N.: Moc pozytywnego myślenia. 1995.
6. Płużek Z.: Skrypt do Testu Przymiotników ACL H. G. Gougha i A. B. Heilbruna. 1995.
7. Seligman M. E. P., Optymizmu można się nauczyć. 1993.
8. Stach R.: Kwestionariusz do badania optymizmu. 2002.

SUMMARY

Why is it worth to deal with optimism? There cannot be justified a certain contrariness in the face of the tendency to deal with negative aspects of human life, observed in psychological works. Optimism is an attitude towards the world and life which is characterized by faith in goodness of the world and in the fact that positive aspects prevail in life. What is indispensable for successful achievement of mental health is the satisfaction of certain needs and the development of one's own abilities. The belief that the world and people are evil leads to the feelings of being threatened and motivates primarily to try and maintain the state of satisfaction of one's own needs. Unlike in this case, the belief in the goodness of the world and people is a safe harbour, from which one can set out on an adventure of personal development. That is why optimism, being an attitude which favours perfect health, is of interest to clinical psychologists. The aim of the study was to describe optimism in patients with motor organ dysfunctions.

Optymizm jako paradygmat zdrowia człowieka

Dlaczego warto zająć się optymizmem. Pewną motywacją może być przekora wobec obserwowanej w pracach psychologicznych tendencji do zajmowania się negatywnymi stronami życia człowieka. Optymizm jest sposobem ustosunkowania się do świata i życia, który cechuje wiara w to, że świat jest dobry, a w życiu przeważają strony dodatnie. Dla osiągnięcia zdrowia psychicznego niezbędne jest,

aby człowiek miał zaspokojone pewne potrzeby oraz żeby rozwijał swoje potencjały. Przekonanie o tym, że świat i ludzie są źli, prowadzi do poczucia zagrożenia i motywuje przede wszystkim do utrzymania jakiegoś stanu (starania o zaspokojenie potrzeb). Natomiast przekonanie o dobru świata i ludzi jest bezpieczną przystanią, z której można ruszyć na przygodę rozwoju. Dlatego przede wszystkim optymizm, jako postawa sprzyjająca pełni zdrowia, interesuje psychologów klinicznych. Celem niniejszego opracowania było opisanie postawy optymistycznej u pacjentów z trwałymi dysfunkcjami narządu ruchu.