

THE CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE CATEGORY “PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH”

Shevchenko Elena

Postgraduate Student and Assistant of the
Department of Clinical Psychology Institute of
Innovative and Postgraduate Education Odessa
National I.I.Mechnikov University, Ukraine

Abstract: This paper is dedicated to the study of the genesis of the “*mental health*” and “*psychological health*” concepts, finding identifying features and differences of these concepts. In the framework of the “health psychology” scientific field, the psychological determinants of health, methods and ways of its preservation, improvement and development were considered. In the process of theoretical research of the psychological wellbeing concepts, basic principles in the analysis of socio-psychological health were defined. The paper affirms that the psychological health is a dynamic set of a person’s mental properties, which ensure harmony between the needs of the individual and the society, which is one of the basic conditions for successful self-realisation. It also states that it is the coherence of a person’s motives, objectives, and values with the requirements of his/her environmental and his/her own internal abilities that is the main condition and manifestation of psychological health.

Key words: mental health, psychological health, psychological well-being

Statement of the problem. The problem of psychological health and the conditions of its optimization belongs to the number of topical issues both in theoretical and practical terms. The psychological health of individuals is essential to the social stability and predictability of the processes taking place in a society. The fact that human health is largely dependent on lifestyle, points to the need to address health problems as an question of changing people’s behaviour, i.e. it is a psychological problem. One can judge about the significance of human health from the definition of health in the WHO statute: „Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Mental health is an integral part of overall health. Recently, the WHO declared that „there is no health without mental health” [4].

At the biological level, the essence of health is seen as a dynamic balance of the functioning of all internal organs and their adequate response

to environmental influences. Different types of serious organic disorders lead to changes in the psyche, personality status and human social behaviour. The more severe is a disease of the organism, the more it affects the mental and social health.

The psychological level of considering health is linked to the personality context, in which an individual appears as a mental whole. Among the criteria for mental health, such hallmarks as the integrity of the personality, its harmony, balance, spirituality and focus on self-development are especially significant [3].

In medicine there is a psychosomatic approach to explaining the causes of diseases. According to this approach, special attention is paid to the role of psychological factors in the occurrence, course and outcome of somatic (physical) diseases, to developing a system of correspondences between organic diseases and specific personality traits and types of emotional conflicts. In psychology, the term „mental health” is interpreted as „a state of mental well-being characterized by the absence of symptoms of mental disorders, which provides the regulation of behaviour and activity adequate to the real conditions”.

The term „psychological health” was studied in details by I. V. Dubrovina. In her understanding, psychological health means psychological aspects of mental health, i.e. this term refers to the personality as a whole in its close connection with the higher manifestations of human spirit. Psychological health is a prerequisite for a person’s full functioning and development in the process of life. On one hand, it is a condition of a person’s adequate fulfilling of his/her age, social and cultural roles (of a child or adult, a teacher or an employer, etc.); on the other hand, it enables a person to continue his/her development throughout life.

The term „psychological health” reflects the inseparability of the physical and the mental in a person, it emphasizes the necessity of both spheres for the fullness of life activities. In the framework of such a scientific field as „the psychology of health”, psychological determinants of health, methods and ways of its preservation, improvement and development are explored, the influence of psychological factors on the preservation of health and the appearance of the disease are studied in detail. We can conclude from this, that psychological health is a prerequisite for physical health. That is, if we exclude the influence of genetic factors,

accidents, natural disasters, etc., a psychologically healthy person is likely to be physically healthy too.

Psychological health is understood as a person's dynamic balance with his (her) natural and social environment, which enables him to carry out his social functions effectively; it is a condition for full and complete activity. The concept of „psychological health” is considered alongside (and often as a synonym) with the concepts of „mental health” and „psychological well-being”. All these concepts have a socio-psychological component. In the context of considering psychological health through the category of „psychological well-being”, this concept gains a social dimension (Bradburn N., Diener E.).

In the Ukrainian social psychology the problem of social-psychological determinants of mental health is just beginning to be developed. The concept of health is considered in the works of foreign scholars S. Grof, A. Maslow, G. Allport, and Carl Rogers. Our native authors began to study an individual's attitude toward health with the works of V. Bekhterev and continued to develop further in the works of B. Ananov, M. Basov, R. Berezovskaya, I. Gurevich, I. Yezhov, L. Kulikov, A. Lazurskiy, A. Licko, A. Luria, G. Nikiforov, V. Ozerov, and Yu. Orlov. The value attitude toward health was studied by B. Bratus', G. Vasilyeva, V. Dorfman, L. Dragoonskaya, D. Leontyev, E. Kaliteevskaya, V. Novikov, V. Ozerov, and F. Filatov.

The studies which examine the problem of preserving and maintaining the psychological health of the personality in the framework of the humanistic psychology are particularly noteworthy (A. Maslow, C. Rogers), as well as the scientific ideas developed by K. Venttsel, D. Kavtaradze, D. Markovich, A. Markova, V. Slobodchikov, S. Smirnov, I. Yakimanskaya, and V. Levin – the authors who have become aware that the psychological health is a strategic goal of the modern society. In this connection, the preservation and maintenance of mental health is a result of an individual's involvement in the cognitive and value-orientated activities, of the manifestation of his/her independent moral will in the issues of healthy lifestyles.

The psychological (and mental) health is conceptualized through the idea of well-being. The concept of „psychological well-being” was adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the main criterion of health, and is considered as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. According to the WHO experts, well-being to a greater

extent is due to one's self-esteem and sense of social belonging, than to the biological functions of his/her body. It is associated with the implementation of human physical, spiritual and social potentialities.

In our domestic psychology the concept of psychological well-being is considered in the context of subjective categories (L. Kulikov, M. Dmitrieva, M. Dolina, O. Ivanov, M. Rozanova, T. Tymoshenko). The authors point to the feasibility of incorporating two components in the concept of subjective well-being: the cognitive and emotional ones. The cognitive (reflexive) component of well-being acts as a system of ideas about specific aspects of one's being, and the emotional component – as the dominant emotional tone of one's attitude toward these aspects.

The psychological well-being is also considered in the context of happiness (M. Argyle, R. Ahmerov, I. Dzhydaryan, A. Kronik, et al.) M. Argyle considers happiness as „an awareness of one's satisfaction with life or as the frequency and intensity of positive emotions; there is another component too – the absence of depression, anxiety or other negative emotions. Happiness depends on objective conditions, such as our marital and social status; it is also linked to our way of thinking, to the way we look at things, to our attitudes. Partly the sources of happiness are such objective characteristics of life as welfare, employment and marriage, but subjective factors, such as our reception of our living conditions, social comparison and adjustment also play a role in it. Another source of happiness is the possession of an appropriate type of personality; the personality traits may change, though, under the influence of experienced life events” (M. Argyle).

The understanding of the meaning of happiness is presented in the works of different authors. For instance, A. Kronik understands happiness as a form of experience of the fullness of life related to one's self-realization. Happiness is possible in the case of one's high estimation of the world and his/her own potential. On the basis of this a person finds happiness in his/her individual way, according to the principles of self-regulation due to his/her motivation toward the world (i.e. lifestyle): the world's utility maximization (the hedonic lifestyle); minimization of one's needs (asceticism); minimization of the complexity (contemplative style); maximization of one's abilities (an active approach to virtue self-cultivation).

Myers and Diener (1995) draw our attention to the fact that the personality is the main determinant of long-term happiness and well-being. These authors conclude that there are three principles which should be taken into account in constructing a theory of happiness:

1. Owing to adaptation, the impact of life events is brief;
2. These life events should be interpreted in the framework of a person's worldview and his/her culture, which considers them as a source of suffering or an opportunity for growth;
3. The people's goals and values can contribute to the overall level of their happiness [5].

There are some proven methods for assessing happiness, which have high internal consistency, are stable over time and valid as compared to other methods. However, the measurement results can be influenced by such subjective factors as the respondent's direct mood, which causes a desire to appear more or less happy than he/she actually is; this can be compared to the effect of local customs on inter-ethnic comparisons [1].

The „predisposition” to happiness is partly due to genetic factors, but it is obvious that happiness is associated with certain personality traits. A number of them have an innate nature, which, however, does not mean that the extent of one's happiness cannot be changed. One of the most important personality traits is extroversion, it can be increased by regular positive feelings that arise when communicating with friends and at work. Other personal characteristics (eg., social skills) are amenable to training. Extroverts tend to be happier than introverts and experience more positive emotions. Since this is only a statistical correlation, it is clear that there are some happy introverts, but they derive their happiness from other sources. Emotionally stable individuals are usually happier than those who have strongly expressed neuroticism or who experience more negative emotions [1].

Returning to the problem of subjective psychological well-being and its relationship with the sense of happiness, it should be noted that in the Western psychology this issue is well studied. Foreign authors use the term „psychological well-being” in a slightly different context than „mental health”: as an attribute of a person's positive full functioning (N. Bradburn). The first author to use this definition (*positive psychological well-being*), and to delimit it from the term “mental health” was N. Bradburn, who

developed its structural model and a psycho-diagnostic instrument (*The Affect Balance Scale*) for its measurement. They became the main theoretical basis for understanding the phenomenon of psychological well-being. Author identifies psychological well-being with the subjective sense of happiness and overall life satisfaction. The main concept in Bradburn's model of psychological well-being is the balance, achieved by constant interaction of two types of affect – the *positive* and *negative* ones. The events of everyday life reflected in our minds are accumulated as the corresponding (positive or negative) affect. The difference between them is a measure of psychological well-being and reflects one's general feeling of satisfaction with life. A high level of satisfaction with life is manifested by people with a predominance of positive affect over negative. If the number of negative experiences exceeds the number of positive ones, this results in a low level of life satisfaction. According to Bradburn, positive and negative affects are unrelated to each other. It is impossible to draw a conclusion about the level of the negative affect on the basis of data concerning the level of positive affect, and vice versa.

Taking into account Bradburn's concept, E. Diener introduces the concept of „subjective well-being” inherently synonymous with Bradburn's „psychological well-being” (E. Diener, 1984). According to Diener, subjective well-being refers to both the general stable affective state of emotional well-being, and to the cognitive state of life satisfaction and meaningfulness of life; it consists of three main components: *satisfaction*, *pleasant emotions* and *unpleasant emotions*. The author emphasizes that the state of subjective well-being is based on the cognitive and emotional aspects of self-acceptance. The cognitive aspect reflects the intellectual estimation of satisfaction with various aspects of one's life; the emotional aspect reflects the presence of a bad or good mood.

As well as Bradburn, Diener identifies subjective well-being with the experience of happiness. According to Diener, each component of psychological well-being may be divided into separate elements: life satisfaction – into satisfaction with such fields as love, friendship, marriage and the like; unpleasant emotions can be regarded as specific emotions of shame, fear, guilt, whereas pleasant ones – as pride, joy, etc. This allows us to consider the concept of well-being not only globally, but also at more specific levels.

Satisfaction with life – the cognitive aspect of wellbeing – is „a person’s global assessment of his/her life” (Lucas, Diener, Suh, 1996), which reflects the extent to which this person’s real life is close to his/her conception of the ideal. According to Diener, the most suitable method for studying subjective well-being is the method of self-report, because it can only be defined in terms of the subject’s inner experience. E. Diener considers subjective well-being as a structural unit of psychological well-being and notes its effect on the mental health. The cognitive component of well-being (life satisfaction) is often measured with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, Griffin, 1985), a short and highly reliable method for assessing a person’s life in general. The evidence of the validity and reliability of the SWLS, widely used in both clinical and non-clinical cases, can be found in a paper by Pavot and Diener (Pavot, Diener, 1993). In other studies (eg , Kasser, Ryan, 1993, 1996) authors use a variety of well-being scales, based on the assessment of personality traits, including measurements of vitality, self-actualization, self-esteem and openness to experience. Vitality, a concept introduced by Ryan and Frederick (Ryan, Frederick, 1997), is a “subjective feeling of vitality and energy” [5].

The Western concepts concerning psychological well-being, according to R. Ryan (2000), can be divided into two main groups: hedonistic concepts (regarding the dichotomy „satisfaction-dissatisfaction”) and eudemonic concepts (in which the psychological well-being is considered as an indicator of personal growth). Ryan attributed N. Bradburn’s and E. Diener’s theories to the hedonistic group. R. Ryan emphasized the limitations of N. Bradburn’s and E. Diener’s hedonistic concepts, referring to the eudemonic theories of psychological well-being proposed by humanistic psychologists (A. Maslow, C. Rogers, G. Allport, S. Buhler, et al.).

The eudemonic point of view regarding the psychological well-being is presented by C. Raff (C. D. Ruff, 1995). He identifies six main components of psychological well-being:

- acceptance of oneself;
- a positive attitude toward others;
- independence;
- control of the circumstances;
- having a goal in life;

– personal growth.

Respectively to these components, he offered a psycho-diagnostic questionnaire „Scales of Psychological Well-Being” (SPWB).

We consider the psychological well-being as a conscious state, manifested at the cognitive (reflexive) and emotional levels of a person’s full functioning in different spaces of his/her being. Based on the understanding of psychological health as a person’s dynamic balance with his (her) natural and social environment, which enables him to carry out his social functions effectively, we see it as a component of overall health, as well as one of the conditions for an individual’s full functioning. We believe that the internal picture of a person’s socio-psychological health, represented at the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels, is determined by the socio-psychological characteristics of his/her age group and the socio-psychological characteristics of his/her stage of professionalization [3].

Social processes which take place in the society have a significant impact on all aspects of an individual’s life, including his/her health. Social upheaval (the stressfulness of the society) limit the people’s development and cause disturbances in the development of psychological health.

As A. Maslow pointed out, „psychological health not only fills a person with a subjective feeling of well-being, it is in itself correct, true and real. In this sense it is ‘better’ than illness and ‘superior’ to it. The lack of mental health not only depresses a person, but it can be regarded as a form of blindness, cognitive pathology, as well as a form of moral and emotional disability. Illness is always an inferiority, weakening or loss of the ability to activity and self-realization”.

Conclusions. The analysis of the psychological well-being concepts enabled us to determine the main points in the analysis of social and psychological health:

- psychological well-being is one of the manifestations of positive human functioning (N. Bredburn);
- psychological well-being is subjective by nature and due to the extent of satisfaction with life and the ratio of positive and negative emotions (E. Diener);
- psychological well-being is due to the level of an individual’s personal growth and the presence of purpose in his/her life (K. Ruff);
- psychological well-being includes the cognitive and emotional levels (L. Kulikov);

The psychological health is a dynamic set of an individual's mental properties, which provide harmony between the needs of the individual and the society, which is one of the basic conditions for successful self-realization; it presupposes interest in life, freedom of thought and initiative, involvement in some field of practice, activity and independence, responsibility and ability to take risks, self-confidence and respect for others, selectivity in the means of achieving goals, ability to strong feelings and experiences, and awareness of one's individuality. It is the consistency of a person's motives, goals and values with the requirements of the environment and his/her own internal abilities that is considered to be a condition and manifestation of the psychological health.

We believe that greater awareness and understanding of the nature of psychological health is a positive factor in itself; it encourages large numbers of people to pay more attention to their own psychological condition, which in turn involves positive changes in their lifestyle (behavior) and timely seeking help and support in the event of psychological health problems.

REFERENCES

1. **Argyle, M.** The Psychology of Happiness (Methuen 1987). Translation to Russian: Аргайл М. Психология счастья. / М. Аргайл. – [издание 2-е]. СПб.: Питер, 2003. 272 с.

2. The Psychology of health. Textbook for universities / Ed. by G. Nikiforov. – St. Petersburg, 2003. 607 p. Rus.: Психология здоровья. Учебник для ВУЗов / Под. ред. Г. С. Никонифорова. СПб.: Питер, 2003. 607 с.

3. Workshop on the Psychology of Health. Textbook for universities / Ed. by G. Nikiforov. St. Petersburg, 2005. 177 p. Rus.: Практикум по психологии здоровья. Учебник для ВУЗов / Под. ред. Г. С. Никонифорова. – СПб.: Изд-во Питер, 2005. 177 с.

4. **Rozanov, V. A.** Human Ecology (selected sections). Textbook for universities / V. Rizanov. // 3rd Edition. Odessa, 2013. 208 p. Rus.: **Розанов, В. А.** Экология человека (избранные разделы): Учебное пособие для студентов-психологов. / В. А. Розанов. // Издание 3-е, исправленное и дополненное. Одесса: ВМВ, 2013. 208 с.

5. **Emmons, R. A.** The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality. New-York, London: The Guilford Press, 1999. Translated to Russian: **Эммонс, Р.** Психология высших устремлений: мотивация и духовность личности / Р. Эммонс. / [Пер.с англ.; Под ред. Д. А. Леонтьева.] М.: Смысл, 2004. 416 с.