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The Concept of a Strategy for Nooetic Qualities as an Example of Designing the Development of Psychic Resilience in Children and Adolescents

Koncepcja strategii jakości noetycznych jako przykład metody projektowania wsparcia rozwoju odporności psychicznej dzieci i młodzieży

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the original concept of a strategy for nooetic qualities as a way of supporting the development of psychic resilience in children and young people. The research questions are “Can the strategy of nooetic qualities be used in prevention as a method for supporting the development of psychic resilience in children and adolescents, and if so how?” and “What practical implications result from the assumptions of this strategy?” The analytical-synthetic method was used on the literature on the subject to create the article.

On the basis of the literature on the subject, the dependence between the nooetic dimension of personality and psychic resilience is analyzed and the process of conceptualizing a strategy for nooetic qualities is discussed. The place and significance of the original

KEYWORDS

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strategy in prophylaxis are presented and practical implications resulting from its assumptions are determined.

It follows from the analysis that qualities of the noetic dimension of personality are protective factors for individuals in difficult situations. The goals which are set and the mechanism of this strategy's functioning are founded on the theory of noodynamics of Kazimierz Popielski. The concept of the strategy for noetic qualities provides theoretical foundations to look for practical implementations in prophylaxis and logoprophyllaxis. It presents methods for strengthening and developing personalities in a noetic dimension, which can considerably contribute to the development of individuals' psychic resistance. It can be used to build preventive programs designed for children and adolescents.

ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie autorskiej koncepcji strategii jakości noetycznych jako metody wsparcia rozwoju odporności psychicznej dzieci i młodzieży. Problem badawczy dotyczy odpowiedzi na pytanie: czy i w jaki sposób strategię jakości noetycznych można wykorzystać w profilaktyce jako metodę wsparcia rozwoju odporności psychicznej dzieci i młodzieży oraz jakie praktyczne implikacje wynikają z założeń strategii. W artykule zastosowano metodę analityczno-syntetyczną badania literatury przedmiotu.

Na podstawie opracowań literatury przedmiotu przeprowadzono analizę zależności pomiędzy noetycznym wymiarem osobowości a odpornością psychiczną oraz dokonano procesu konceptualizacji strategii jakości noetycznych. Przedstawiono miejsce i znaczenie autorskiej strategii w profilaktyce oraz określono praktyczne implikacje wynikające z jej założeń.

Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, iż jakości noetycznego wymiaru osobowości są czynnikami chroniącymi dla jednostek w sytuacjach trudnych. Wyznaczone cele oraz mechanizm działania strategii jakości noetycznych opiera się na strukturze noodynamiki Kazimierza Popielskiego. Koncepcja strategii jakości noetycznych daje teoretyczne podstawy do poszukiwania wdrożeń praktycznych dla profilaktyki i logoprofilaktyki. Ukazuje ona sposoby wzmacniania i rozwoju osobowości w noetycznym wymiarze, co w znaczący sposób może przyczynić się do wspierania rozwoju odporności psychicznej jednostek. Może być ona wykorzystywana do budowy programów profilaktycznych skierowanych do dzieci i młodzieży.

Introduction

Difficult situations, crises, and suffering are inseparable elements of each individual's existence. They occur with different intensity and frequency at various stages of our lives. Their causes are both events of a global nature and conditions closely linked to the individual—and thus to the environments in which individuals grow and develop—and their predispositions based on biology or personality. Role models and authority presented by culture and the manner of transmitting values in the process of life education are not without significance in this regard, either.

Experiencing unfavorable events in our lives involves behavioral strategies which we choose and present, thus adopting an attitude toward them. It is important to emphasize the fact that humans—as multifaceted beings capable of solving problems—always have the possibility of adopting an attitude toward the situations that life has brought about and posed to the individual (Frankl 1978: 288). The first form of behavior that a person can choose in response to a situation is resignation; this is destructive, worsening the unfavorable situation and leading to an escalation of the given occurrences. The other one is creative behaviors—those that enable people to overcome difficult situations and the conditions behind them, as well as to experience suffering as a challenge to human existence, a force to broaden one's possibilities, and the road to “being and becoming” (Popielski 2008a: 202–203).

People have the right to choose an attitude toward the pain and suffering that results from the necessity of fate. It is vital that one should be prepared to make this choice through actions intended to deepen one's self-awareness with reference to the essence of humanity: spirituality and the ways it is realized. Thanks to this, humans are able to overcome the existing conditions, since “if man, as a unity and physical-psychical-spiritual whole, is conditioned ‘bottom-up’ through a psychophysical factor, he is formed and determined ‘in advance’ by a spirit” (Frankl 1978: 277).

Psychic Resilience and the Nooetic Dimension of Personality

Equipping individuals with skills that improve their chances of overcoming difficult situations that threaten their proper development and health is part of prophylaxis (Gaś 2004: 33). The essence of prophylactic actions is thus prevention of dangers and striving to maintain the desired or satisfactory state of things (Jarosz 2019: 11). It is worth noting that prophylaxis is an anticipatory process, which means that these actions are taken before they occur. Its main task comes down to limiting and removing risk factors that disturb proper development and disorganize a healthy life by strengthening the development of protective factors (Gaś 2004: 32).

Protective factors are individual properties, situations, and conditions (relationships with loved ones and features of the family and social environment) which can neutralize the negative impact of risk factors, augmenting the individual's overall resistance. In the majority of cases, their influence does not remove negative factors from the individual's life or the life of a given social group, but allows individuals to cope with them successfully (Jarosz 2019: 44). Studies in prophylaxis aim to identify universal protective factors of high potency, on the basis of which prophylactic programs are designed.

The significance of protective factors in the development of adaptive possibilities among individuals, families, or whole communities—in the face of adversities of fate or traumatic events—was addressed by research on the concept of resilience. As part of the investigation, researchers undertook to diagnose the mechanisms that enable proper development despite the occurrence of numerous unfavorable conditions that form a system of risk factor sequences (Ostaszewski 2014: 69–71).

In the literature on the subject, the term *resilience* most often refers to psychic resistance, immunity to being injured, or vigor; it is used with reference to a set of protective factors, processes, and mechanisms which favor the positive functioning of the individual and social groups, despite adversity or traumatic experience in the present or the past (Junik 2011: 12, 49–50). Thus, the processes explain the functioning of protective factors and an individual's resources in confrontation with negative events or threats.

At present, the concept of resilience combines knowledge of biology, social psychology, developmental psychology, and the health sciences. It contributes considerably to the development of research aimed at working out effective ways of assisting children, adolescents, and families in groups at higher risk. In connection with this, special significance is attributed to strategies that strengthen the impact of protective factors that enrich individual, familial, and environmental resources (Jarosz 2019: 48).

An important step in research on protective factors and health was the inclusion of the noetic dimension in studies on human beings by V. E. Frankl (Popielski 1994, 2008; Klamut 2002; Benard 2004). Its attributes—the sense of focusing on life, goals, and values—constitute the most significant properties of an individual’s resilience (Frankl 1986; Werner, Smith 1992; Antonovsky 1995).

Frankl’s deeply analyzed personal experience of the Holocaust contributed to him creating therapeutic and prophylactic strategies based on spirituality (Gąsior 2012: 118–119). Spirituality is an element of freedom in a person (Frankl 1978: 284), which enables them to assume a standpoint in each situation and maintain distance, make a decision, or even affirm an urge or oppose it: “I have undertaken to testify to man’s being not only a physical and psychical being, but also to his being a spiritual creation, free and responsible” (Frankl 1978: 310). Thanks to spiritual freedom, individuals are able to control every situation and acquire the ability to rise above themselves by assuming a personal spiritual attitude (Frankl 1978: 285, 294).

The power of spirituality is defined by the term “noodynamics,” which refers to a state of increased tension resulting from looking for meaning in life. As an inseparable feature of human nature, it constitutes the basic condition of psychic health (Frankl 1978: 295). Frankl illustrates this state as “a dichotomy between what we have accomplished and what we still have to achieve, or between who we are and who we should be” (Frankl 2009: 158). This is a force that drives humans to endeavor to achieve valuable goals and be able to find the potential meaning contained in every situation in life, difficult though it may be (Frankl 2010: 94).

The spiritual dimension of existence includes noetic qualities, which are a source of activity of each person who can react with spiritual activities and raise over necessities, even if the person itself

does not fully reach their potential (Frankl 1978: 280). The traits were distinguished in the process of operationalizing the noetic dimension of personality by Frankl's disciple, Kazimierz Popielski. According to him, the noetic dimension manifests itself by means of the following elements that constitute it:

- noetic qualities (the subjective potential innate to every human being—freedom, dignity, suffering, hope, and subjectivity—which allow being and materializing existence, conforming an experience of the meaning of life) (Popielski 1994: 100–102)
- temporal orientations (consisting of the individual feeling their existence within a “time optimum,” which protects the person from excessively focusing on only one of the possible times: the past, the present, and the future) (Popielski 1994: 103)
- noetic activities (which brings about the realization of subjective traits and personal existence; they include such skills as self-confirmation, self-transcendence, self-distance, life acceptance, creativity, and acceptance of others) (Popielski 1994: 103–105)
- noetic attitudes (make manifestations of worked-out ways of person's being, assuming subjective attitudes toward reality in the form of general activity and actions, attitudes toward success and death, the attitudes of engaging, and intellectual and emotional attitudes) (Popielski 1994: 105–106).

The above list formulates and expresses the essence of the idea of humans as multi-dimensional and spiritual beings. Moreover, it served to construct the Test of Noodynamics (Popielski 1994: 99). Noodynamics, as many studies have proven, is of considerable significance to the individual's ability to cope with illness, stress, or trauma (Klamut 2002; Suchocka 2008, 2011; Popielski, Mamcarz 2015), or other adverse conditions in life—for instance, being raised in a family with alcohol problems (Gašior 2012).

The dependences mentioned above, which occur between psychic resilience and the noetic dimension of existence, point to the need to conceptualize a new prophylactic strategy directed at noetic qualities.

Concept of a Strategy for Nooetic Qualities in Prophylaxis

Strategies in prophylaxis are ways of acting through which we strive to achieve our intended goals. Prophylactic strategies derive from theoretical models that explain the functioning and development of the individual (Okulicz-Kozaryn 2003: 36–37). Thus, they are manners of conduct, in line with a theory, meant to weaken the power of risk factors and to strengthen protective factors, which—as a result—is expected to prevent potential threats. We make use of strategies to construct and implement prophylactic programs. The main prophylactic strategies include the information strategy, educational strategy, strategy of alternatives, intervention strategy, strategy of normative education, and strategy of diminishing damage (Ostaszewski 2010: 85–92).

The original concept of nooetic qualities strategy is based on the above-mentioned concept of noodynamics outlined by Popielski. Its main goals are to support the multidimensional development of children and adolescents, with particular attention paid to the nooetic dimension of the personality and preparing the individual to cope with adversities of fate through discovering the meaning of life and putting into practice the internalized values.

In turn, the first particular aim of the strategy of nooetic qualities is to broaden the individual's knowledge of their personal potential, thanks to which they can realize the state of their personal way of being. With reference to these resources, the individual is capable of optimal personal development, which differs from that which is the effect of circumstances or is connected with “possessing” something. This results from the fact that nooetic qualities are innate to each human being and flow out of human nature. Taking advantage of this potential is especially important in difficult or extreme situations, when a person can be deprived—to varying degrees—of their biological and psychic resources as a consequence of adversity (Popielski 2008b: 17–20).

Thus, as part of prophylactic programs based on a strategy for nooetic qualities, actions should be undertaken to broaden the knowledge of typically human resources and potential, which include directing individuals and groups of society toward such values as freedom, responsibility, dignity, love, hope, trust, openness,

self-acceptance, subjectiveness, and focusing on goals, since these allow one to feel that one is the subject of one's own existence and is managing one's own life. This is possible through accepting the value of an attitude, ranging from what can limit the functioning of the individual in a given situation to striving for and discovering meaning in this situation.

The second specific aim of such a strategy is to support the development of noetic activities, which make it possible for the individual to assume such attitudes as the attitude toward life as a task, the attitude of overcoming difficulties and making effort, or the attitude of acceptance and kindness toward others (Popielski 1994: 103). The activities that facilitate one's assumption of the attitude toward life as a task are self-confirmation, satisfaction with achievements, trust in life, being directed by conscience in life, and one's own evaluation of the sense of meaning (and significance) of life (Popielski 1994: 104–105). Accordingly, the frameworks of prophylactic programs based on knowledge of noetic qualities, which were outlined above, should include activities that support developing skills, undertaking tasks, solving problems, carrying out commitments, and engaging and making an effort, with particular attention paid to being directed in life by conscience.

The next group of skills whose development ought to be supported within the framework of prophylactic activities founded on the strategy for noetic qualities concerns crossing over conditions and assuming an attitude of distance toward oneself, one's problems, and the obstacles in life that occur on the path of creative solutions, efforts, and actions. When striving to develop noetic activities, it is necessary to also take into account the process of building relationships with other people, relationships based on a kind and active approach to other people's needs and acceptance of them. An important skill which should be paid attention to while constructing and implementing prophylactic actions is self-transcendence, which consists in going beyond conditions by the ability to make reference to extra- and supra-personal values (Popielski 1994: 103–106).

The third particular goal which should be realized within the framework of the strategy being described is connected with noetic temporality and consists in supporting the development of "the ability to construct 'temporal optimum' in children and youths, that is, such

a placement of existence in time, or such a manner of the individual's communicating with reality, that are to serve the most advantageous realization of man" (Popielski 1994: 103). In prophylactic programs, this issue can be addressed by developing the skill of concentrating on possibilities contained in the past, present, and future. This follows as a consequence of building a sense of being able to influence one's own future and caring for one's prosperity.

The mechanism of functioning of the strategy for nooetic qualities is founded on the principle of the individual's creative being and becoming, defined by Popielski as a reference, a tendency "to..." This is a subjective principle of an active, creative, and reflective way of being and becoming a human being. It is based on the assumption that a person is pushed and drawn by needs and values, still as an active subject, and refers "to..." somebody or something that is valuable to them. Thanks to this, the person functions not only on the principle of needs, but makes reference to the values and meaning which become the foundation of their motivations, choices, and decisions, as well as continuous being and becoming (Popielski 1994: 59–60).

In prophylactic practice, this allows actions, skills of satisfying and regulating—or even of deferring—needs to be developed in the individual by reference "to..." values. The result is mature existence perceived as an effect of a conscious choice, reflection, decision, endeavoring, and referring. Reference "to..." values which are subjectively important is possible even in an individually unfavorable situation—for instance, one demanding renunciation or suffering—and to a considerable degree supports the development of psychic resilience by taking advantage of the potential of nooetic qualities (cf. Popielski 2008: 20–22).

Referring in the prophylactic work to the tendency of directing the individual "to..." values should encompass the following thematic areas: kinds, functions, and ways of making values in existence, forming skills of distinguishing and discovering values, from existentially meaningful to those that typically sustain life, and absolutizing values and quasi-values (cf. Popielski 2008a: 67–75).

The strategy of nooetic qualities combines elements of the information and educational strategies, enriching prophylactic activity with a tendency toward the individual's attitude "to..." values. This corresponds to the fourth lever of effective prophylaxis, put forward

by Szymon Grzelak (2015)—“Build on values and dreams held on to by the young”—the concept of positive prophylaxis proposed by Krzysztof Ostaszewski (2006), and the model of positive prophylaxis by Katarzyna Jarosz (2019).

The particular place and significance of the nooetic qualities strategy are perceptible within the area of logoprophyllaxis, defined as “a concept of applying the philosophy of Prof. Frankl to integrated prophylaxis, which is universal, contains a rational, coherent, and bold vision, and offers more than just preventing addictions or propagating a healthy lifestyle. It is all about us, adults, being able to effectively support young people in building a mature world of values and realizing their profoundest dreams and life aims” (Solecki quoted by Gubała 2022: 13). The strategy in question—due to the above-listed goals and its mechanism of functioning—makes a vital element in expanding the concept of logoprophyllaxis.

Moreover, the strategy of nooetic qualities can be used as prophylaxis, not only universally but also selectively, within the framework of which there are organized actions directed at children and adolescents in groups at increased risk, those who because of their social or family situation are in danger of a higher than average occurrence of problematic behavior. Showing this group of recipients the possibilities and resources provided by existence, despite unfavorable conditions, can prove a significant protective process for their further development.

Strategy of Nooetic Qualities in Prophylaxis – Instances of Good Practices

Taking into account selected assumptions behind Frankl’s logotherapy and the ways of coping with crises, the “Archezja” Foundation of Support of Rearing elaborated on a prophylactic program called “Cuder – live sensibly.” The program is addressed to children and youths and its main aim is to support the development of skills for coping with developmental crises by inspiring young people to reflect on the spiritual and moral potential of humankind. This is accomplished through creative ways of organizing activities during which the assumptions of Frankl’s personalistic anthropology are presented

and the large-format prophylactic game “Cuder” is played. The program’s activities are intended to prepare the youths “to be ready to confront hardships of living by ordering their relations, emotions, spirituality, minds and physicality” (Gubała 2022: 14). Moreover, the Foundation materializes a series of actions based on the concept of discovering the meaning of life and realizing values. The activities include integrational and prophylactic workshops in Ojców National Park and the all-Polish educational/prophylactic projects “Let’s Be Authority Seekers” and “Let’s Seek Love in the Family” (Kmicik-Jusięga 2022: 27–28).

Another prophylactic program which is based on Frankl’s concept of the multidimensional human is called “Support of the Multidimensional Development of Youths” proposed by Jarosz. It takes the form of structuralized educational/social/therapeutic activities, whose themes refer to the potentials in individual dimensions of existence, that is, biological, social, subjective, and spiritual—those deemed to be protective factors. The selection of protective factors in a given dimension of existence is based on specific theories, including Aaron Antonovsky’s salutogenetic conception (biological dimension), Stephen Greenspan’s conception of social intelligence (social dimension), Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey’s conception of emotional intelligence, Józef Koziński’s conception of transgressive behaviors (subjective dimension), and V. E. Frankl’s conception of the meaning of life (spiritual dimension) (Jarosz 2019: 8–9).

The program starts with an activity called “Who Is Man?” which is meant to assist the young people in answering this question by showing the relationship between the qualities of the individual dimensions of existence. The subsequent activities concentrate on supporting protective factors in the given dimension, as a result of which the participants are provided with ways of taking advantage of the possibilities of existence, with special attention being paid to discovering the meaning of life and materializing values (Jarosz 2022: 86–87).

Conclusion

To sum up, the strategy of nooetic qualities—due to the accepted aims connected with the structure of the human dimension of personality—to a considerable degree expands the range of prophylactic

activities. The proposed strategy refers to motivations of the noetic dimension of existence, that is, discovering the meaning of life through materializing values. In this way, it significantly extends and complements the main strategies used to build prophylactic programs.

Consequently, the strategy presented herein enables actions to be designed which support the development of attitudes which encourage perception and taking advantage of the potential inherent in existence, despite unfavorable occurrences and conditions that children and youths can face, since “the whole of the potential of our ‘I’ is satisfaction of the sense and making values real, as well as possibilities which follow in a non-direct way in the confrontation between man and necessities of fate” (Frankl 1978: 18).

Implementing the above-mentioned actions is of paramount importance, since they allow for pro-development motivations which inspire the individual to say “yes” to living, despite all adversities. They are a way of opposing despair, resignation, withdrawal from active living, or merely awaiting chances in life. They also enhance acceptance of oneself and one’s life as they are through acceptance of the way they are and how they can be realized.

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