

CORRELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract: Education is an important part of life and is closely related to social diversity, economic and social rights, as well as to equality. Basic Guidelines of the Family State Policy for the 2011 – 2017 have set a target to develop well-being and stability and support education for families of children with special needs; though the current situation in Latvia is characterized by a lack of understanding of the need to support families of children with special needs which might compensate the impact of disability on family's quality of life (FQoL). Children with special needs have the ordinary requirements children of their age have, as well as the unique and specific needs the particular child inheres. The multidimensional concept of quality of life (QoL) contains all the most important spheres of one's life. QoL is characterized by the available consumption level, variety and quality of social services, a chance to have an education, to live a long and prosperous life, and to take part into social and political activities. QoL is closely related to the country one lives in, and state support for both an individual, and family as a whole. The aim of the article is to identify the resources that affect the FQoL of children with special needs.

Keywords: children with special needs, QoL, family education.

Introduction

Every single person wants to live a prosperous life and to ensure a high quality of life for themselves and their families. Caring for the education for children with special needs has become an action of a national level, in recent years. An evidence of this fact is "Education Development Guidelines for 2007 – 2013" which asserts inclusive education (including caring of children with special needs at the place of education) as one of the priorities (Izglītības attīstības..., 2007). Several European Economic Area Financial Instrument projects with an aim to promote QoL of children with special needs are being implemented currently, yet family education is not being carried out. Basic Guidelines of the Family State Policy for the 2011 – 2017 emphasize protection of family interests and defines five goals of family policy, including family stability and support for carrying out parent responsibility (Ģimenes valsts..., 2011). Family is defined as those people that consider themselves a family, and support and care for each other on a regular basis (Turnbull, Summers, 2007).

The concept of QoL has been explained by several disciplines and each of them has given an additional meaning to the term. The structure and content of FQoL does not vary from QoL of an individual but the indicators are different – FQoL is measured and determined for family as a whole, not for each family member separately. A family of child with special needs has additional responsibilities and a need for additional resources. FQoL can be to a large extent individual for each family depending on its values which are initially inherited but might change in accordance with the living conditions, needs and expectations, over the years. Values – spiritual, material, social – characterize the things that a family considers to be necessary, useful and good in a certain situation; values are among the most important factors determining principles and criteria of choosing a lifestyle. QoL displays the extent to which families are able to meet their needs and fulfil their expectations in accordance with the lifestyle. Family characteristics and dynamics interact with individual characteristics to influence FQOL outcomes (Zuna, Summers, 2010). Family becomes both an object, and a subject of research. The aim of the research is to identify the resources which promote FQoL in families of children with special needs. The Paper shows the difference between families having children with special needs and families having children with no special needs.

Methodology

The study is based on a multifactorial approach to the interpretation of QoL and the concept of family education, derived from a theoretical analysis of studies by N.Zuna, J.Summers, A.Turnbull (Zuna, Summers, 2010), R.Veenhoven (Veenhoven, 2007; Veenhoven, 2008). The Paper describes various ideas substantiated by R. McPherson (McPherson, 1998) whose works include theories on obtaining knowledge and skills to overcome disabilities in the most successful way. The amount of studies on correlation between education and quality of life in families of children with special needs is far too small to predict an improvement of FQoL of children with special needs. To solve the wide spectrum of unique problems which families of children with special needs have to face to, the necessary resources for improving FQoL shall not be ignored. Each family may need different resources to meet the special needs of the child. The analysis of studies on correlation between families of children with special needs and QoL shows that FQoL can be improved by minimizing the impact of special needs which a child has; different kinds of support is needed, both socioeconomic resources, and inclusive social actions. At the moment, not many studies relate to the correlation between family education and QoL, therefore an analysis of differences between comprehension of FQoL in families of children with special needs and families having children with no special needs is going to be made. The future perspective of families of children with special needs is related not only to an ability to adapt the environment, but also to an ability to change their environment themselves.

Results and discussions

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggests using both constructivism, and structuralism approach to explain the concept of QoL. Constructivism emphasizes the role of a subjectively made choice when analysing the actions of an individual; structuralism describes a system that is not dependent on one's will. Only by integrating both theories, the conditions that influence family and define the choices family makes, thus determining FQoL, can be investigated. Bourdieu uses the concept *habitos* to characterize one's skills of socializing, including accumulation of, combining and taking advantage of social, cultural, or other resources to gain a more favourable position in the society (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1996). In accordance with *habitos* theory, a good FQoL is achieved by families that take an active participation, try to find new possibilities, interact with the society – a successful cooperation can be developed by mutual communication. A family of children with special needs may or may not tend to interact with others, depending on the resources of the family. One's behaviour enables to achieve a favourable social position and accumulate a capital, as a result, only an individual who aims to achieve a prosperous life can succeed (Dzīves kvalitāte..., 2006).

QoL is an indicator of the prosperity of an individual, a family, a group of persons, or a society. It includes physical and mental health, leisure activities, occupation and communication with the society, chances to get an education, rights to make and fulfil individual decisions, as well as financial means corresponding to the social status which is also defined by the indicators of QoL. Researcher Ruut Veenhoven defines QoL as the positive and the negative experience of life. The experience that an individual gets whether by taking the chances of life, or by refusing of them, constitutes the combination of feelings that characterize satisfaction of one's life. R.Veenhoven describes a connection between QoL and the level of contentment (Grūnfelde, 2010). R.Veenhoven has established a matrix of QoL which is determined by the inside and the outside features of QoL.

Table 1.

Matrix of QoL (Veenhoven, 2007,16)

	Outside features	Inside features
Life chances	Environment suitability	Life chances
Life results	Life efficiency	Comprehension of Life

Chance to get an experience depends on the individual resources and the resources of one's family. If a family must use all the resources to meet the requirements of the child with special needs, the family has small chances to get an experience, according to R.Veenhoven's theory. FQoL is closely related to the quality of the whole society. Life chances mean possibility for a family to solve their problems;

this feature of QoL is also related to the functional defects of one's body because a good life means a functionally healthy body and mind (Veenhoven, 2007; Veenhoven, 2008).

QoL has many synonyms: life level, good life, standard of life, happy life, satisfaction/contentment with one's life etc. From an objective point of view, QoL is often related only with the material aspects, from the subjective point of view – with a happy or unhappy life, contentment or discontentment with one's life.

The indicators of QoL standard include both well-being and employment, and development, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure activities, and social identity.

In philosophy, one of the features of quality is definiteness of objects and phenomena, which allows to differentiate between them (Filozofijas vārdnīca, 1974). In accordance with the previously mentioned explanations, quality is related to a combination of certain features, QoL – life which can be assessed by a certain, particular characterization.

Finnish sociologist Eric Allardt describes a relation between QoL and meeting the social needs, and separates level of life from QoL, because level of life, from his point of view, is related to objective parameters, but QoL includes subjective assessment (Allardt, 2002). David Phillips defines QoL as a state of life in which basic and social needs give an opportunity to ensure an individually good life, expand a high level of social integration, carry out social communication, join various organisations, and fulfil other integrative standards, thus ensuring all the physical and social chances that arise from the global development (Phillips, 2006).

QoL has been precisely defined also by state laws and regulations, for example, in Latvian National Development Plan 2007-2013 and in Reports of Commission of Strategic Analysis, a multidimensional meaning has been allocated to the concept of QoL, and it consists of the most important aspects of human life – well-being, safety, sustainability (Stratēģiskās analīzes..., 2007), (Nacionālās attīstības..., 2006).

Latvian Law on Social Services and Social Assistance defines QoL as an indicator of well-being, having an impact on physical and mental health, leisure activities, occupation and communication with the society, rights to make and fulfil individual decisions, and financial independence (Sociālo pakalpojumu..., 2002).

Evaluation of different author's characterizations of QoL leads to a conclusion that the basic statements of different theories are needed to create a full percept of the multidimensional nature of QoL. According to the idea that theories of QoL are still being on their development stage, by Josef Sirgy and D. Philips, studies on education role in QoL are limited, because they do not reflect all the factors that have an impact on QoL (Sirgy, Michalos, 2006; Philips, 2006).

From the author's point of view, QoL is the level of an individual's needs being met in compliance with the personal values. Author considers that, in the course of time, QoL can be promoted and developed in accordance with the personal experience and the level of needs.

Life might be considered to be of high quality if it can give an idea to follow – even a false idea is better than boredom. Human beings are capable of creating material and spiritual assets. A part of one's energy is used to enhance material benefit and take part into the competition to gain prosperity. However, if an individual cares only for material assets, brain soon becomes dull and the result is very often an unhappy state of mind. Only people who are able to combine both material, and spiritual values, those who care about their freedom and who are able to create new ideas might reach a true quality of life (Dzīves kvalitāte..., 2006).

A concept of QoL mainly arises when the existing QoL comes into contact with the desired one, in situations when an individual gets a chance to compare different models of life and get an insight into life of other families. In this case, the *desired* QoL arises, because family has lived into their *existing* QoL till that moment. Different thoughts, conclusions and aims to reach the desired QoL are developed.

To identify the resources promoting FQoL of children with disabilities, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. 40 families having children, from which 20 have children with disabilities, gave answers to questions on QoL; the answers were summarized and analysed.

The average age of the respondents is 26.32. 22 respondents have high school education, 18 – university degree (SD=0.504).

During the research, a model of QoL, developed by E. Allard, was used. The results were structured using three dimensions:

- 1) *Possess* – related to the necessary economic and social resources including not only material assets, but also education, employment, health etc.;
- 2) *Be* – related to the social adaptation into micro- and macro-environment (family, small groups, society); this dimension is also connected to belonging to a certain environment and place, as well as taking part into political processes and organisations, and leisure activities;
- 3) *Love* – related to one's self-realisation, evaluation, intimacy, family and closest group relationship, as well as the overall satisfaction of life.

The research was carried out into two groups to identify the urgency of QoL matters and the differences in understanding of QoL between families having a child with special needs and families with children but having no child with special needs. For the quantitative analysis, IBM SPSS 20 was used. Descriptive statistics' indicators were identified; the statistic criteria were calculated by analysing the understanding of FQoL and family resources (Fig.1). The findings were compared, and integrated conclusions were drawn, thus creating a concept of the resources which might improve the QoL and the level of understanding of QoL. Comparing the answers of families taken part into the research with the approaches to the concept of QoL and its relation to family education by E. Alardt, P. Bourdieu, A. Turnbull, N. Zuna, J. Summers, R. Veenhoven, R. McPherson and others, an analogical view derives. The respondents' understanding of QoL is concentrating to the economic and social resources. Mostly the needs of possess dimension are mentioned: economic resources (52.8%), social resources (47.2. %). This dimension fulfils meets the basic needs of a family and characterizes the factors influencing the use of life chances.

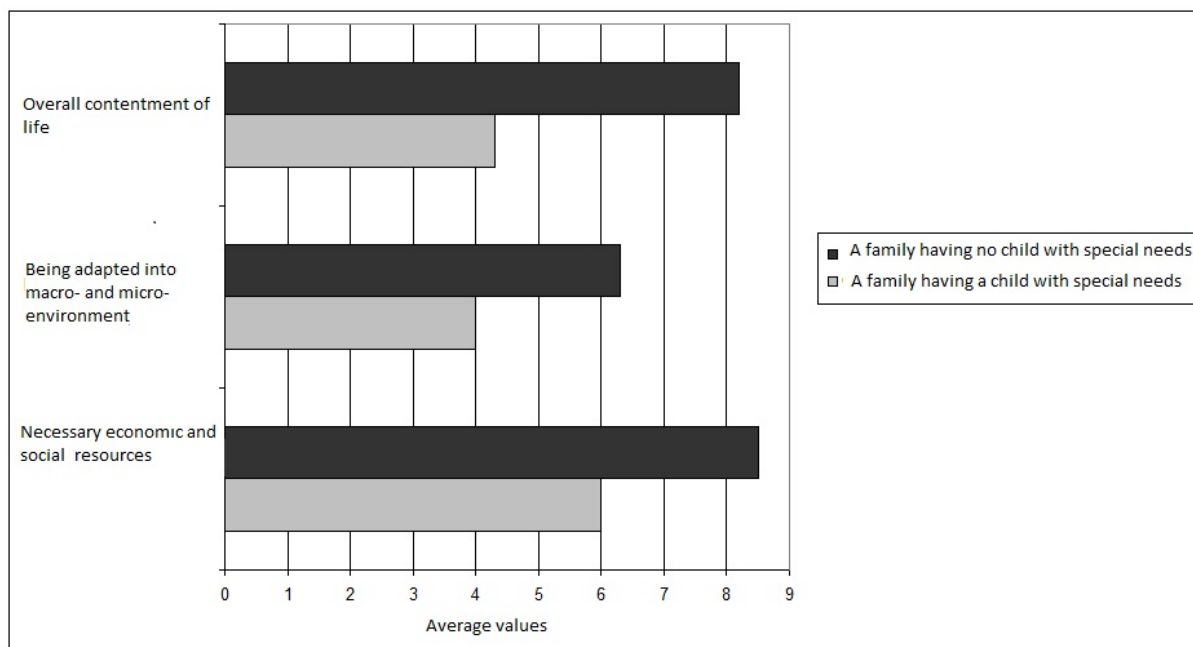


Figure 1. Assessment of FQoL family having a child with special needs and family having no child with special needs.

Statistically evaluating the economic and social resources in families with/without children with special needs, a huge difference among the opinions was not found; the calculated two-sided level of importance 0.99 greater than 0.05.

Respondents' understanding of QoL related to self-realisation and family relationships concentrates to the overall satisfaction of life. Family relationships (64.1%) and self-realisation (35.9%) are the most common answers. Overall satisfaction of life aspect characterizes the concept of a good life.

QoL displays the level to which both individuals and families are able to meet their needs and fulfil their dreams within the chosen lifestyle.

Conclusions

- In recent years, several studies have been developed to display a multidimensional view on QoL, which incorporates not only social and physical content to the actions of family politics, but also the emotional aspects of a family and the meaning of self-realisation.
- FQoL is usually higher in families who have children with no special needs, because such families do not have to spend their resources to meet the special requirements of a child with special needs. Families who have no children with special needs are more satisfied with their lives. FQoL is influenced by the social system and structure of the society, as well as cultural values.
- QoL is determined by subjective and objective conditions.
- Physical resources are influenced by social contacts; emotional resources are influenced by family relationship and support.
- Material resources only partly determine the QoL in families having children with special needs.
- Education is not as much a component of QoL, rather an instrument to promote it.

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