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**SOCIAL WELL-BEING RESEARCH PROBLEMS IN MODERN  
WORLD**

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**Abstract**

The paper reviews problems of the social well-being phenomenon research. It presents different approaches to interpretation of the term (ethical and philosophical, socio political, economic, psychological, medical, ecological, and social approaches). The authors make a point that term “well-being” is bipolar, its understanding stretches from unwellness sick to such positive feeling as happiness and enthusiasm. We review well-being components obtained during the research held in Gallup Institute (professional well-being, financial well-being, well-being in the living environment). The work also considers reasons for increase in the number of research on social well-being at the contemporary stage. Emphasis is placed upon the worldview component of social well-being. The pedagogical problem for study of the courses “Social Well-being” and “Modern Theories of Social Well-being” is outlined. Social indicators issues are reviewed as major tools for diagnostics of the state of a complex, multidimensional, dynamic society and a variety of social processes and conditions. The issue of a social well-being subjective aspect is addressed. Social indicators are viewed as main tools to diagnose complex, multidimensional, dynamic society, variety of social processes and phenomenon.

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## 1. Introduction

The rationale of the research consists in the necessity to study human adaptation mechanisms under global system changes conditions. The changes take place in all living environment areas of the human



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society and influence on the human idea of eternal characteristics – understanding of life purpose and life quality standards. Many foreign authors address the well-being issue (Hao, 1996; Hess, 1990; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002; Pavot, & Deiner, 1993; Sirgy, 2010).

Social well-being is a phenomenon which is in a greater degree dynamically effected by changes alongside with economic, financial, psychological and social-psychological well-being in a given environment. This problem aggravates under conditions of strong living standards differentiation both in one particular country and across the world in general.

In the current conditions, human development priorities, human investments, human potential quality are main factors of social progress directly related to the well-being phenomenon and serve as key country development indicators. Human development is considered as a goal and a social progress criterion through choice expansion due to growth of life span, the education level and income. Education is one of the main personal development factors enabling a person to navigate in a changing socio-economic situation, the world of system changes reflecting beliefs people have about their well-being.

## 2. Terminological diversity

In modern times characterized by many researchers as a stage of system changes, problems of the social well-being research become even more difficult due to a variety of reasons. The interpretation of the term “well-being” itself is ambiguous. There are some examples of that: “The calm, i.e. without misfortunes and ordeals, pace of work, life. Prosperity, wealth. Happy love and family life. Ordinary, i.e., without deviations and negative undesirable phenomena, state of anybody” (Efremova, 2005).

“Well-being is equal to happiness and is always subjectively perceived as achievement of all rewards people wish for. Furthermore, Aristotle in his work “Ethics” was true saying that in terms of well-being everyone agreed only with the name, but not with the content of the term. By grading those views, Aristotle, like many other Greek philosophers, was trying to explain that well-being is a state goal. Due to the fact that well-being itself is the highest good, and consequently, the human highest goal as well, it can be achieved only within a state. Here from eudemonia and related theories arose that were further developed in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century in Germany on the basis of Aristotle works and independently developed in England as theories which believed the goal of a state was to provide well-being for its people” (Brockhaus, & Efron, 1907).

Jones & Bright (2001) in their work view well-being as a broad term which includes many factors connected with a positive mental health. The term covers a wide range of conditions from ill-being including such negative states as psychological and physical illnesses or a bad mood to positive conditions. Therefore, the authors point out that the term “well-being” is bipolar, its understanding stretches from unwellness to such positive feelings as happiness and enthusiasm.

In Romanic languages, “well-being” is also characterized by means of words meaning “good” – “bien (e), bon (o), bene” (for instance, in Spanish) – “bienestar”, in Esperanto – “bonfarto”, in French – bien – erte, in Italian – “benessere”. In Russian, “well-being” is determined as a happy and calm state. From V. Dahl dictionary: “well-being, welfare, wealth, happiness, desirable state, soulful comfort, joy (Dahl, 1995). Rath & Harter (2011) in their work called “The Five Essential Elements” emphasized a slightly different aspect of the term “well-being”. “Well-being is a combination of love for something we do

daily, good relations with those who around us, a stable financial situation, good health and pride for our contribution to the society”. Examining this term, we find statements reducing well-being simply to some “benefit” that is understood as everything that has a positive meaning and value for a human. Therefore, the article considers the ability of a variety of things and events including public relations and human behavior, to satisfy human needs providing people with benefit and happiness and make them beneficial in people’s eyes.

Authors Tom Rath and Jim Harter described Gallup Institute research which have been studying requirements for well-being since the middle of the XX<sup>th</sup> century together with leading economists, psychologists and other scientists in order to understand what people mean by the term “well-being”.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Research of the well-being concept**

We have been studying the opinions of students studying in the Russian pedagogical university for six years (from 2010 to 2016) with the goal to reveal their ideas of well-being (570 students were covered). Virtually, their point of view is not very far from the scientific theory of well-being. Students consider people to have well-being if they are prosperous, healthy, and happy, have access to education, have mother and father in good health for as long as possible etc.

Let us cite some statements from the students’ questionnaires: “For me, a well-situated person is one who can afford everything...”, “a well-situated person is one who has a wide range of interests...”, “A well-situated person has a possibility to take care of his/her health and leisure as well as of health and leisure of his/her relatives...”, “A well-situated person is the one who lives to spare no expense for him- or herself and the relatives...”, “A well-situated person is happy with his/her life...”, “A well-situated person takes pleasure to do good to other people and the society...”. As we can see, the range of opinions is quite wide. However, the majority shares the notion of a financial well-being. These are the facts which prove existence of a problem of well-being phenomenon research as a theory as well as a day to day human life.

#### **3.2. Study approaches**

The problems hindering obtaining of a more specific and common understanding of the term “well-being” include diversity of focus areas, approaches (ethic and philosophical, socio political, psychological, medical, ecological, social) to this phenomenon. On the one hand, it enables us to obtain a broader field of ideas about the phenomenon. On the other hand, this makes specification of all these ideas more difficult. Ethics and philosophy consider well-being from a human spiritual existence point of view. Within this direction well-being is interpreted as a condition of spiritual harmony, ethical integrity, peace of mind, happiness and blissfulness. In the context of ethical and philosophical knowledge, well-being is understood by referring to the terms “good” and “virtue”. At this, good is considered as a main source, a major reason for well-being, and is connected to goodness.

Within the socio political direction, the emphasis is rather put on a social well-being than on a human personal well-being. “Commonwealth” is in the center of attention and considered as a social life condition when natural will of people to achieve good, social security, happy life for everybody is

possible within reasonable limits. Security of the commonwealth in the context of this direction is reviewed as a strategic goal of state politics.

The economic approach to well-being places emphasis on a financial aspect. Material benefits, their production and distribution are in the center of attention here. Within economic direction the term is associated with such words as “prosperity”, “material security”, “welfare” and “wealth”. These words more or less broadly reflect the real aspect of a well-being condition.

The psychological direction of well-being research is focused on the individual level of well-being and a subjective aspect which is identified as a positive psychological condition, emotional uplift and satisfaction.

The medical direction interprets well-being as good health which is placed on one of the highest levels of human values and is called the highest good, the most important human right. Within this direction well-being is reviewed from the point of view of individual and social health, efficiency of saving and growing mechanisms of physical, psychological, intelligence, cultural, social human and society potential.

If we took a more attentive look at those emphasis put on the “well-being” phenomenon within various directions, we could find some contradictions. For example, people with “special” health states would never be well-situated, happy even if they have some psychological comfort. Paralympic movement representatives talk about happiness and well-being when they receive prizes for successful performance during a competition, but the above-said means they would never be considered as truly happy and well-situated people. This fact simply underlines the complexity of a studied phenomenon of a human and society life.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Components of well-being**

Recently, researches are searching for identifying components (lines, types) of well-being. This is another problem of the well-being phenomenon study in the world. A multi-method research was made in Gallup Institute as a part of well-being components problems research. This research covered about 150 countries. Many questions on health, wealth, work, social and family relationships were asked to create an integrated criterion of a personal well-being. The institute was able to develop an evaluation system based on the most effective questions which have been asked for fifty years.

Five statistical factors, five main components of well-being were drawn as a result of the work. They certainly do not reflect everything what is important; however, those factors represent five wide categories important for most of the people. The factors include professional well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, well-being within a living environment. Hence, new problems appear: how to diagnose the level of well-being.

### **4.2. Indicators of well-being**

Sociological studies of social well-being are oriented not only toward theoretical knowledge, but their goal is also to solve practical problems as well. The problems of social indicators are their development, collection and interpretation in order to make an integrated evaluation of social well-being of social persons at different levels of their lives. Besides, the study is focused on generation, introduction and

development of efficient social controllers oriented toward overcoming of social life conflicts and social well-being level optimization.

Social indicators are viewed as main tools to diagnose a complex, multidimensional, dynamic society, a variety of social processes and phenomena. Social indicators are considered to be quality and quantity characteristics of conditions, trends and directions of action and development for social individuals, processes and phenomena at different levels. Many social indicators systems have been shaped in sociology recently. The systems are used for the social well-being level evaluation of the population.

The social security theory views social well-being as a high level of people social security against a variety of risks, threats and danger. Social indicators of this theory are characteristic of:

- demographic situation;
- maturity of the health care system;
- maturity of the general and professional education system;
- maturity of the social security system;
- occupational level and conditions of employment;
- living standards;
- housing security;
- information availability and cultural values;
- environment conditions;
- level of technogenic safety;
- law of enforcement efficiency;
- level of personal security.

Altogether, these indicators allow us to perform a comprehensive analysis of a social situation, evaluate a social risk degree and determine the state of social security and social well-being. The social feeling theory considers social well-being of population as a positive social feeling of social subjects. The indicators are oriented toward study of its subjective aspect. The subjective aspect of social well-being is studied according to the following indicators:

- people's evaluation of life satisfaction in general and satisfaction by its particular areas;
- opinions about the quality of future life and life perspectives;
- social concerns, disturbing social issues;
- evaluation (positive/negative) of changes in the society initiated by the government; also, we identify the state of readiness to overcome some difficulties caused by social reforms.

The following indicators are used in order to describe social well-being: uneasiness / calmness, tolerance / intolerance, optimism / pessimism, psychological discomfort / psychological comfort, sense of helplessness / belief in yourself and your success, disappointment / assurance, social tension/social stability.

Theory of social health explains social well-being as a high level of social health, social individuals and society in general. These indicators are fit in with due regard to presence of spiritual and moral, physical, psychological, intellectual, and social components of two groups' indicators. The first group is used for personal indicators evaluation at an individual level. The indicators are: physical, psychological,

social feeling of the intelligence level, the level of social culture acquisition, spiritual and moral beliefs, and personal characteristics.

The second group is used for a general society evaluation (macro and micro levels). The second group indicators are: demographic indicators, health care system development indicators, preventive, propaganda and educational work development indicators in relation to a healthy lifestyle culture development; social feeling and social tension indicators, personal security indicators, a criminal dynamic pattern. Indicators of social activity, social unity and support, indicators of social infrastructure development, presence of a strong ideology and a system of common values.

#### **4.3. Contemporary research of well-being**

Fast changing social situation conditions do not allow us to make conclusions regarding a “subjective component of social well-being” of people basing upon instantaneous research only.

A. Yastrebova (2009) in her work noticed that, taking in consideration views spreading within modern sociology on the impossibility to describe the transit society with any universal logic schemes, the above is also true of the well-being term. The author proposes a mix of three traditions as there search methodological grounds. The first tradition stipulates to rely on the “activity approach” towards study of the “living standard”, the “social well-being” and their subjective components. This allows to examine problems of interrelation between “own well-being evaluation” and “paternalistic paradigms” in a more integrated manner. This approach falls short on universal concepts use and directs study of social phenomena in dynamics which complies with basic principles of transit society reality study.

The second tradition does not exclude reliance on the “social space” concepts relating to the “activity approach” in a gnoseological and methodological way as well as reliance on the phenomenal interactionism and the “middle range theory” proposed by R. Merton. The latter is based on the adjustment approach of any macro sociological theories and explanations in respect to the specific nature of micro social phenomena and situations.

The third tradition is a concept of “Russian society ethocracy” and “Russian paternalism” (Radaev, 2000; Ionin, 2004). The combination of those three traditions let us be impartial to a greater degree while studying and evaluating the well-being phenomenon.

Besides, there is a pedagogical issue. Today the course entitled “Modern Theories of Social Well-being” has been introduced in curriculums. It is one thing when the course is specified within the sociology major directions. However, when the course became a part of psychology and pedagogics some problems arose:

- What didactic load does the course carry?
- What kind of content modules are the most reasonable to be included in the curriculum?
- How can students be involved into the research activity of various well-being issues?
- What should be the main result of the course study – understanding of the term “well-being”, “types of well-being”, “well-being research directions”, “knowledge of well-being evaluation criteria” etc.? Should we discuss the main problem of the course as a worldview problem which is to help students to open their eyes to importance of the “needs limitation” problem within reasonable social well-being under the global multipolarity and limitation of Earth resources?

## 5. Conclusion

Therefore, issues of social well-being study in the modern world are urgent due to their worldview significance and importance for determination of the social guiding points for the government policy and value guiding points in education and human development despite many problems related to their research.

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