

## Unique Nature of the Quality of Life in the Context of Extreme Climatic, Geographical and Specific Socio-Cultural Living Conditions

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a detailed empirical research, aimed at studying the quality of life in the context of extreme climatic, geographical and specific sociocultural living conditions. Our research is based on the methodological approach including social, economical, ecological and psychological characteristics and reflecting objective living conditions and processes as well as subjective assessments of individuals, social groups, the region and society in general. Various objective and subjective factors determining the unique nature of quality of life in severe weather conditions have been examined, leading to the conclusion that objective factors, such as age, place of residence, professional activities, income and particular conditions, have a significant impact on the quality of life and determine its content diversity and its overall integrated assessment. Control, positive self-perception, self-assertion and self-fulfillment opportunities, purposefulness and meaningfulness of specific time frames and emotional state balance are some of the issues that emerge as an impact target and, at the same time, the most probable “point of eventual fracture” when handling the situation in a destructive way. The study revealed that individual activity is one of the most important internal and external factors that affect how respondents representing different groups evaluate the quality of their own lives. In this regard, “internal” activity is treated as a resource for improving quality of life even in disadvantaged circumstances, while “external” activity is understood as an indirect indicator of satisfaction with the quality of life.

### KEYWORDS

quality of life, extreme living conditions, objective and subjective factors to evaluate the quality of life.

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## 1. Introduction

Extreme natural, climatic and specific socio-cultural living conditions and environment for professional activities have a significant influence on people's quality of life and determine the specific functioning of the “subject/environment” system. Therefore, there is a need to study patterns related to the personal development functioning in extreme living conditions and to select criteria by

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which to evaluate and forecast the quality of life, determined by peculiarities of people's assessment of their life and of their region's physical and social environment.

Being interdisciplinary, the "quality of life" category acquires different meaning and content. Modern researchers describe various factors that determine its level and distinguish the quality of life criteria and indicators (Almakaeva, 2007; Baranova, Khashtchenko, 2003; Belyakov, 2006; Zadenesets, Zarakovsky and Penova, 2010; Zarakovsky, 2009; Ivanov, 2007; Ilyina, Krom and Novichkova, 2011; Concise dictionary, 2009; Leontyev, Rasskazova, 2006; Luzhnyov, 2009; Minnigaleeva, 2012; Pankratova, 2009, Simakina, 2012, Fakhrudinova, 2010). Current psychological research has proved the importance of the place of residence (R. Barker, C. Lynch, R. Park, Y. G. Abramova, N. A. Dushkov, T. A. Lebedeva, V. I. Panov, etc.). While the notion of quality of life includes objective and subjective parameters, researchers have traditionally been focusing on objective indicators (health, demography, the presence or lack of social service centres, etc.), rather than subjective indicators that are, however, of no less importance (V. G. Gorshkov, A. Y. Zemchenkov, T. I. Ionova, L. I. Konch, Y. I. Kots, R. A. Libets, S. V. Kondurov, A. A. Novik, among others). Quality of life is examined as a system notion reflecting the unity of the following components: personality, life activities and livelihood conditions (E. V. Galazhinsky, V. E. Klochko, O. M. Krasnoryadtseva, etc.). Quality of life is also analysed as a specific indicator of satisfaction with personal self-fulfilment and of psychological health (L. A. Korostylyova). The structural elements of quality of life vary, since the specific living environment determines how objective and subjective parameters are related to each other. Finally, an individual's satisfaction with himself and the surrounding world, his emotional state and general health are the most important quality of life indicators (I. Y. Petrushina, Y. A. Kryuchkov, M. G. Choporova, etc.).

The significance of subjective criteria increases in the severe living conditions, when objective factors (natural and anthropogenic) lead to a decrease in the quality of life and an increase in the population's dissatisfaction with their living environment. In case of scarce personal resources, negative assessments of the quality of life are generalized, and very often, this involves people perceiving negatively even the neutral stimuli of their surroundings (Kondrashenkova, 2012; Surikova, 2012, Shiryaeva, Surikova and Kondrashenkova, 2013). As far as objective parameters are concerned, this is manifested in increasing indicators of migration flows and negative assessments of all fields of human activity, which threatens the achievement of development plans for regions with severe natural and climatic living conditions. Hence the relevance of the study of relations between climatic, geographical, sociocultural living conditions and the peculiarities of the quality of life.

## 2. Methodology

In 2012-2015, detailed empirical research was undertaken aiming to investigate the quality of life of people living in the Kamchatka Region of the Russian Federation according to a number of parameters: objective (related to the environment, age, gender, professional, economy, physical body, ethnography, culture, society, strata, etc.) and subjective (assessing the living environment, individual and psychological characteristics, personal resources, life satisfaction, etc.) (note 1). About 1000 respondents participated in the study.

The selection of diagnostic tools was based on the understanding of the quality of life as a result of interaction between objective features of life activities and subjective human capabilities in the “human/environment” system expressed through conformity of environment parameters and characteristics of life processes to people’s needs, interests, values and objectives.

For the purposes of this study, the following approaches have been adopted: “Quality of Life and Life Satisfaction Inventory” (“Q-Les-Q”), adapted by E. I. Rasskazova (Leontyev, Rasskazova, 2006); D. Galati’s “Galati, Changes” adapted by D. A. Leontyev and E. A. Rasskazova, supplemented with an expanded instruction sheet and interpretation technology (Rasskazova, 2012); Michael B. Frisch’s “Quality of Life Inventory”, translated by E. A. Rasskazova (the questionnaire is being adapted) (Frisch, 2007; Frisch, 2006); the guidebook by T. V. Dembo and S. Y. Rubinstein, modified by A. M. Prikhozhan (“emotional intensity of life”, “feeling of happiness”); “Resilience Test”, adapted by D. A. Leontyev and E. I. Rasskazova (Leontyev, Rasskazova, 2006); “The Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory”, adapted by A. Syrtsova, E. T. Sokolova, O. V. Mitina, etc. (Syrtsova, Sokolova and Mitina, 2007).

### 3. Results

The results of the empirical research studies can be roughly divided into two groups: those revealing the specificity of the subjective quality of life factors and those highlighting the specificity of the objective quality of life factors. Let us examine them in detail.

#### 3.1. The study of subjective quality of life factors.

##### **Peculiarities of meaning-related life attitudes of today’s youth with different levels of subjective quality of life assessments**

Subjective quality of life assessments in early adulthood are most closely linked to the degree of satisfaction with the present, the possibility to display independence directed at satisfying hedonistic needs. High subjective assessments of the quality of life correspond to the dominating hedonistic orientation subject to the propensity to be more active in comprehending and planning one’s own life. At the same time, while acknowledging the equal importance of basic life values, low subjective subjective assessments of the quality of life are more typical of a low degree of life’s being meaningful, manageable and giving a sense of satisfaction. Thus, life meaningfulness can act as an inner resource of positive assessment of the living environment, of compensation for its specific characteristics (for example, “it’s a trifle, but a pleasant one”, “one should take pleasure in what one has”), which is reflected in people’s attitudes towards the present, but also the future (drawing up plans, fatalism, i.e. belief in one’s own strength, etc.).

Specificity of the quality of life of people with different levels of meaning-related life attitudes and resilience

The study revealed that respondents with higher indicators of meaning-related life attitudes and resilience have a higher level of the subjective quality of life.

A comparative analysis of the data obtained in two research studies showed, for most respondents within the 25-35 age range, a decline in hedonistic needs and a commitment to “important values implementation” rather than “needs”, while preserving the importance of involvement into and emotional intensity of the present and the satisfaction of basic needs. Personal activity, issues of self-



assessment and self-fulfilment are still important. However, focus on self-development (importance of self-assessment and learning values) and interpersonal relations (children, home) relate to higher subjective assessments of the quality of life, while low quality of life assessments refer to an increasing priority of material values that were, initially, of a largely instrumental character; however, given the high degree of dissatisfaction with realization of the key personal values and a decrease in life meaningfulness and activity, they become dominant (“transition from reason to objective”).

The analysis of the research results shows that respondents within the 35-45 age range having a high level of life meaningfulness and resilience are more positive about their quality of life than respondents with low levels of the above-mentioned parameters, which confirms the previously obtained data. Of great importance is another parameter, “risk-taking”: its high rates are more typical of respondents with high quality of life assessments.

Interconnection between tolerance and uncertainty about and subjective assessment of the quality of life

According to the results of the empirical study, there exists a certain interconnection between the level of tolerance and uncertainty about and subjective assessment of the quality of life. It is easier for individuals with high level of tolerance to achieve the quality of life that satisfies them. In order to feel happy and satisfied, they do not need to attain all of their goals, and this makes their relations with the world around them much easier and harmonious and raises their subjective quality of life assessments.

Personal resources as a condition for the subjective quality of life (using the example of members of the military and civilian doctors)

The empirical research has shown that doctors in the military structures and doctors in national civil service have specific personal resources and subjective quality of life.

When assessing their own quality of life, medical officers give priority to personal resources, such as the possibility to keep control of the situation, work performance, self-satisfaction related to satisfaction with financial situation, while civilian doctors appreciate the possibility to help others, a feeling of importance, acceptance and favourable social surroundings (home, city).

Interconnection between life meaningfulness and resilience and the quality of life (using the example of policemen)

When assessing the quality of their own life, respondents having different levels of resilience give priority to the following factors:

- Specific perception of different periods of life: dreaming – pragmatism in relation to previous and future life experiences;
- Activity direction: focus on obstacles or on task-solving;
- Importance of situations of “excessive activity”, characterized by high emotional intensity, but lacking limits of necessity (for example, “why not” attitudes)

The postponed life scenario as a condition determining the specificity of the quality of life (using as example servicewomen)

Analysis of the available data shows that a leading role in the subjective assessment of the quality of life of servicewomen is played by the substance of

their professional activities, or, in other words, “limited” and “poor” motives, related to the very process or results of professional activities, focus on stability, maintenance of balance, financial security, avoidance of activity; there is no connection between the success in professional life and personal self-assessment and self-fulfilment (unlike military men). In its turn, all of this contributes to the emergence of the “postponed life” phenomenon, has a negative impact on the personality and determines an exceptional variety of this group in relation to gender and professional factors that, refracting through the “inner context”, become or not incentives to the immediate implementation of important values.

Subjective happiness in marriage as a condition of personal quality of life

Spouses in happy marriages show more satisfaction with themselves and their life, which determines their quality of life. The following factors are among the most important ones for the quality of life assessment: assessment of the degree of implementation of important values and the very possibility of such implementation; assessment of personal activities as efficient, fruitful, adequacy / “painfulness” of self-assessment; self-fulfilment strategies from the standpoint of their eventual efficiency in a given living environment (for respondents with lower subjective indicators of happiness in marriage and their quality of life) or based on their particularities, opportunities and living conditions (for respondents with higher subjective indicators of happiness in marriage and their quality of life).

Thus, the study of interconnections between the quality of life and subjective factors reveals the following variables that determine an optimal experience of the subjective quality of life:

- High level of tolerance towards uncertainty;
- Balanced time perspective;
- High level of resilience;
- Positive evaluation of the living environment from the perspective of the availability of resources for personal growth and development;
- Evaluation of the professional environment from the perspective of its meaningfulness, available opportunities for financial security, self-development, displaying activity and establishing harmonious relations with surrounding people;
- Positive assessment of relations in marriage.

The clear interconnection between life meaningfulness, assessment of control over life, risk-taking and personal activity in establishing interpersonal relations, in building career and in searching for resources necessary to implement important values is common to all research studies. This being said, higher subjective assessments of the quality of life relate to a more intense attitudinal and social activity, combination of tendencies directed at self-assertion, at establishing and maintaining social contacts, at focusing on the feeling of autonomy, independence and “subjectivity” in regard to one’s own life.

### **3.2. Study of objective factors of the quality of life. Specificities of time perspective and the quality of life of teachers of residential institutions**

Research confirms the assumption that the specific nature of professional activity is interrelated with specificities of time perspective and the subjective



quality of life. This said, the linkage between professional activity and assessments of the quality of life for the given group of professions can be traced on the basis of such parameters as emotional intensity of life, a feeling of satisfaction with the past, determination, the predetermination of events in life, focus on family and help to others, perceived as activity filled with emotions and feelings (love, above all).

#### Border guards' subjective quality of life

When determining factors that affect border guards' quality of life on a conscious level, of greatest importance are issues related to financial and social security, effectiveness and intensity of life, and, on an unconscious level, issues related to control of the environment and personal emotions, the feeling of being a successful person and motivational richness of life.

Interconnection between personal resources and the subjective quality of life of army conscripts

Respondents with high level of resilience recognize the importance of their social environment and of the opportunities for satisfying their need for strong emotions, creativeness, involvement and play, while respondents, who have a low level of resilience and recognize the major importance of assessing the environment around them as a factor affecting their quality of life, highlight the issue of self-assessment and the possibility to maintain their autonomy while using social resources (help from other people, interpersonal relations, etc.) and moving to another region and/or their environment. In general, the feelings of a well-lived life, satisfaction with self-fulfilment, the opportunity to realize personal plans, values and objectives are the common criteria for assessing one's own quality of life for respondent of both groups.

Subjective quality of life of people having extreme jobs (using the example of submariners)

Respondents indicate, as a basis for their assessment of the quality of life, the degree of life management, moral strength and optimism. The assessment of emotional intensity of life and aspiration toward "leisure" activity, not determined by external circumstances, is the indirect indication of a deeper life satisfaction.

Such indicators as a positive perception of the past, a feeling of being successful, a possibility to realize personal plans, objectives and aspirations are some of common parameters highlighted by the respondents working in the military, which allows to judge about the level of their quality of life.

#### Specificities of the subjective quality of life of people living in the countryside

Respondents living in the countryside tend to perceive their living environment as rather depriving (impossibility or major limitations to satisfying personal needs in safety, self-respect, self-fulfilment), and there is also a combination of an egocentric and hedonistic orientation with a heavy dependence on the social milieu, the focus on the importance of the positive self-perception, realization of personal projects of life, control over and management of life. The same situation has been observed in our research of the connection between the kind of living environment (city/countryside) and parameters of the quality of life.

Interconnection between the place of residence and parameters of the quality of life

The place of residence (city/countryside) exercises a considerable influence on such indicators of the quality of life as emotional intensity and availability of events, autonomy or dependency on others, the overall assessment of satisfaction with life. Despite this, rural residents tend to be more satisfied with their psychological and emotional state, to perceive their lifestyle as less stressful but rather limited from the perspective of available opportunities for realization of personal goals.

Besides, it has been shown that, depending on the place of residence, city residents assessed the quality of their life more positively than rural residents. The perception of factors affecting the assessment of the quality of life (specific weight of their importance, the satisfaction degree, connections with various indicators of the quality of life) also varies. All groups of respondents highlight the importance of such values as family, achievements, hobbies and the time factor when assessing the potential degree of satisfaction with the quality of life. At the same time, the perception of the following factors varies: the dynamics of life, specificities of interpersonal relations and extensive social contact, help/mutual help factors, attitudes toward work, the importance of influence on self-assessment and the degree of life satisfaction of such factors as control (main life management characteristic), respect, health and leisure infrastructure development of the region (typical of rural residents) and factors of social recognition and opportunities for career growth (typical of city residents).

#### Disabled people's perceptions of the quality of life

The most significant differences in hearing-impaired or deaf respondents' perceptions about the quality of life as compared to other groups of respondents have to do with a decrease in positive assessments of life satisfaction, negative perceptions of the society, a decrease in activities, life intensity and the feeling of involvement in everyday events. The domination of negative emotions along with insufficient diversity in the emotional sphere and a decrease in self-assessment of themselves makes the respondents behave as passive victims; when selecting objectives and values, preference is given not to the most important ones, but to those that are easier to implement. The persistent problem of controlling the quality of life while feeling helpless and less self-confident contributes, thus, to the activation of defence mechanisms related to escapism and avoidance of problems able to put additional stress on an individual's moral strength and, as a consequence, lead to a behavioural breakdown.

#### Subjective quality of life of mothers of large families with different income levels

Lower assessments of the quality of life are typical, in every respect, of the respondents with low income levels in comparison to mothers of large families with income levels above the subsistence minimum. This kind of mothers have a fatalistic approach to the future and life in general and are convinced that human life is beyond conscious control; they are less focused on the future than mothers of three or more children with income levels above the subsistence minimum. Thoughts about the lack of financial security must enhance these mothers' pessimistic attitudes about the future and lead to weak activity in the inner, psychological sphere, low potential, low level of self-fulfilment in various spheres of activity.

Mothers upbringing three or more children and having low income levels tend to focus on the importance of material values, while giving a negative and



pessimistic assessment of ways of changing this situation. Dissatisfaction with and disappointment in interpersonal relations, domination of a negative position on life leads to a general decrease in life activities and a loss of “subjectivity” in controlling their lives.

A comparative analysis of the subjective quality of life of the investigated groups shows that mothers of large families with low income levels show similarities with disabled respondents, differing from the latter in one point: they accept the fact that it is necessary to address difficult life circumstances and come up with hard decisions which can result from a greater objective responsibility (necessity to take care not only of themselves, but also of their children who are, a priori, in an even more helpless situation). This determines some differences in the indicators of the quality of life when describing the factors that influence it. In relation to this, it would be of particular interest to study the quality of life of other socially vulnerable groups, to highlight common and specific tendencies in assessing the quality of life of individuals, depending on the preponderant “impact target” of unfavourable factors and the lifestyle related to it.

#### Specificities of housewives’ and working women’s quality of life

The analysis of the data collected and the end results of the research have shown that, although the overall assessment of their quality of life by working women does not differ significantly from that by the housewives, there is a clear trend in the structure of the parameters. Thus, working women are more satisfied with their financial situation, assess their lives as more filled with various events, show more satisfaction in their social networks and tend to be optimistic when assessing various situations, which indirectly reflects their overall ability to handle stress. Thus, work is a significant factor that allows to make some assumptions about people’s values, personality and preferred self-fulfilment strategies.

#### Specificities of the quality of life of individuals registered at an employment office

The analysis of the data collected and the end results of the research have shown that absence of work reduces people’s satisfaction with life in general and with their current condition and emotional discomfort in all spheres of life activities. This situation is due to the fact that changes taking place in the professional life mean major changes in other spheres of life.

Thus, the results of the research of the specificities of the quality of life of working and unemployed people have shown that the situation related to an individual’s being unemployed contributes to the reconstruction of his hierarchy of the structural components of his quality of life and leads to the modification of the major factors and determinants defining the assessment of the satisfaction with his quality of life. The direction of these modifications depends on the combination of objective and subjective factors, the most important ones being material security/stability, personal directional thrust, goals in life, interests, aspirations expressed in the choice of a specific strategy of self-fulfilment and self-development, subjective assessment of the possible freedom of choice and maintenance of autonomy and of an optimal activity level, personal independence. Depending on their acceptance of the given situation, related to their professional life, as natural and manageable or, on the contrary, as enforced and abusive, people assess in different ways their inner well-being, – for unemployed people

who are presently looking for work and/or who are unsatisfied with their current situation, – and their exterior well-being, – for unemployed people who tend to perceive this lifestyle as an opportunity to realize their own plans, goals, aspirations, - and both their inner and exterior well-being - for working people.

## 1. Discussion

Summarizing the results of several research studies, we can conclude that objective factors (age, place of residence, professional activity, income level, physical health) exert a significant influence on the quality of life, determining its content variety and overall assessment. The common “impact target” (being, at the same time, the most probable “point of eventual fracture” when solving the situation in a destructive way) are the following issues: control, positive self-attitude, possibility of self-assertion and self-fulfilment, purposefulness and meaningfulness of time perspective, emotional balance.

This being said, it is possible to highlight a number of specific modifications appearing in case this or that factor affects the personality. Depending on the content and dynamics of impact/modification of objective factors (constant or situational impact, continuous nature of an impact or incidental with growing/stable/remitting effect, sudden or expected changes, etc.), the ratio of hedonistic orientation to the pragmatic one will change when defining the quality of life. Also, changes will affect the balance of dependency on the social milieu and autonomy expressed, above all, in relation to the social assistance and the use of interpersonal links; the attitude towards the situation of uncertainty or acceptance of risk; the correlation between the assessments of the past, the present and the future.

The most destructive changes involve individuals’ perceptions of a situation as violating their freedom of open expression and realization of important goals, values and meanings while having a low general self-evaluation of the ability to control and manage their lives.

Thus, when analyzing subjective and objective factors, one of the major factors affecting the assessment of the quality of their lives by respondents of different groups is personal activity. “Inner” activity can be perceived as a tool for improving the quality of life even in unfavourable conditions, and “exterior” activity, as an indirect indicator of satisfaction with the quality of life. Presence of situations unrelated to duties, responsibilities and logics of necessity, positive assessments of the personal moral strength, manageability and control of life, tendency to have an optimistic view of the world and of people, correspond to higher assessments of the respondents’ quality of life, regardless of unfavorable living conditions, professional activity, etc.

## 2. Conclusion

It should be noted that, regardless of what objective and subjective factors of the quality of life are being investigated, there exists a common understanding that an integrated impact of these factors establishes between them specific interrelations when one factor or a group of factors modifies (enhances, weakens, etc.), to some degree, the specific impacts on another factor/factors and provides enough instruments for compensation. This includes various motivational activity mechanisms of individual and specific groups aimed at achieving a certain quality of life, whereas objective factors, similar, by the character of their impact, to “stimulus responses”, oblige an individual to show an acute sense of responsibility



and influence, above all, an individual's activity indicators in various spheres, including its degree and effectiveness. Subjective factors determine the level of individuals' autonomy and independence in regard to exterior influences, condition the individual reaction ("what for?", "to what purpose?") and characterize an individual's reaction to transferring from the comfortable living zone to the risk zone. In order to explain and forecast the quality of life of individuals, specific social groups and the population of the region/country in general, consideration should be given to common patterns of the functioning of the individual, group and social conscience, as well as to the influence of individual behaviours and the degree of an individual's activity.

The results obtained can be the start of new theoretical and empirical research projects related to the study of the specificities of people's quality of life in various social groups, and they also make it possible to specify goals, challenges, directions and best ways of helping and supporting various population groups in order to enhance their subjective quality of life depending on the nature of external impact and on the subjective assessment of the environment.

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