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REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE AT OLDER AGE

Tamara Borisovna Sergeeva (a)*, Anna Aleksandrovna Pecherkina (b),
Natalia Stepanovna Glukhaniuk (c), Georgy Igorevitch Borisov (d)
*Corresponding author

- (a) Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, 19 Mira st., Yekaterinburg, Russia, tamara.2005@mail.ru
(b) Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, 19 Mira st., Yekaterinburg, Russia, 79apa@mail.ru
(c) Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, 19 Mira st., Yekaterinburg, Russia, profi.n@mail.ru
(d) Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, 19 Mira st., Yekaterinburg, Russia, georgy.borisov@urfu.ru

Abstract

The inconsistency in understanding the ambiguous role of reflection in developing personal mobility and maintaining professional health at older age determines the objective of the study: comparing the degree of manifestation of reflection types and the nature of their correlation with the assessment of life quality indicators among working and non-working pensioners. The empirical study involved 272 residents of Yekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk region (Russia) aged 55-80, divided into two comparison groups: working and non-working pensioners. The following methods were used: the “Differential type of reflection” questionnaire; a methodology for assessing the level of development of biographical reflection; the “Assessment of satisfaction with the quality of life” questionnaire; Riff’s scale of psychological well-being; comparative analysis using the Mann-Whitney U-test, and correlation analysis using the Spearman’s correlation coefficient. Differences in the degree of manifestation of reflection types were identified in the groups under study. The working pensioners demonstrated lower introspection, but higher indicators of biographical reflection. This group also showed higher satisfaction with the quality of life. However, the level of psychological well-being does not differ between the two groups. Introspection shows a negative correlation with the indicators of satisfaction with the quality of life and psychological well-being, whereas systemic reflection correlates positively with the components of biographical reflection.

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Keywords: Reflection, satisfaction with the quality of life, psychological well-being, older age, professional employment.



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1. Introduction

When studying personal mobility as a predictor of preserved professional health in the elderly, the question arises of the role and place of reflection in the contiguity model of these constructs. The ability and willingness to analyze and structure own experience is traditionally considered in psychology both as a normative objective and a developmental resource.

In the context of age, reflection is seen as a condition for successful aging that improves adaptation and socialization in the new role (Zavyalova, 2016), and also as a way of achieving wisdom (Bluck et al., 2014). It has been established that with age, biographical reflection is restructured, and its influence on meaningfulness and self-regulation increases (Klementyeva, 2016; 2019).

The role of reflection in self-regulation of professional activity is also a subject of research interest. Karpov and Klimontova (2016) and his colleagues define reflection as the process of projection by the subject of their own psyche, self-perception and regulation of mental processes, properties, and conditions. In Prokhorov (2020) model, reflection is a self-determining and self-regulating core of regulatory actions.

In a number of studies, reflection is considered not only as a positive, but also as a negative predictor of professional effectiveness. Cardador (2014) found that negative reflection in employees negatively affects only their professional performance, but not “work-life” conflicts. However, positive reflection has a weak positive effect on “work-life” conflicts, but does not affect the work efficiency activities (Cardador, 2014). German researchers found that positive reflection is a variable moderator of the cognitive enrichment between work-related and non-work-related experience (Daniel & Sonnentag, 2014). Dutch psychologists established that reflection in employees correlates with self-efficacy, but is not a mediator for emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Seggelen-Damen & Dam, 2016). The results of three diary studies showed that positive reflection on professional activity during leisure time leads to increased affective well-being, and this applies to both positive and negative moods (Meier et al., 2016).

Leontyev and Osin (2014) suggests that the disagreement in understanding reflection and evaluating its role in life regulation is largely due to the diversity of its forms. The concept of reflection has always been somewhat ambivalent: on the one hand, reflection is the most important mechanism of self-understanding. On the other hand, excessive reflection often acts as a negative predictor of achievements. This contradiction is successfully resolved in the differential model of reflection which describes both its “good” form (systemic reflection) and its “bad” form (quasi-reflection and introspection) (Leontyev & Osin, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

The psychological studies of various forms of reflection, the parameters of psychological well-being and satisfaction with life, and those aiming to determine their relationship either focus or do not focus on the old age specifics, and the research results indicate the inconsistency of the findings and their limited nature.

It was established that systemic reflection contributes to sustained personal development being a mediator of a person’s openness to experience and maturity. However, the mechanisms of maturity turned

out to be independent of unproductive forms of reflection (Kostenko & Leontyev, 2016). Systemic reflection helps maintain a balance in the system of emotional and personal positive components of subjective well-being. Unproductive reflection activates the mechanisms of psychological defense and adaptive resources of the personality, which causes a state of subjective ill-being (Karapetyan, 2020).

American psychologists found that subjects prone to self-reflection showed a higher level of authenticity, which subsequently led to increased life satisfaction and reduced distress. Subjects inclined to ruminate showed lower authenticity, which reduced satisfaction and increased distress (Boyras & Kuhl, 2015).

In this study, reflection is considered as a component of professional health (the ability to distance oneself and look at oneself from the outside: to see both the subject pole and the object pole) and as an indicator of readiness for mobile behaviour (the ability to analyze and share experience, openness to new experience) (Sergeeva et al., 2019). The inconsistency in concepts determines the research problem: identifying the role of reflection in developing personal mobility and maintaining professional health at older age.

3. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- Which types of reflection are connected with professional employment?
- What is the relationship between reflection and self-assessment of satisfaction with the quality of life and psychological well-being in working and non-working pensioners?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is comparing the degree of manifestation of reflection types and the nature of their correlation with the indicators of life quality assessment.

5. Research Methods

The empirical study involved 272 volunteers - residents of Yekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk region aged 55-80. They participants were divided into two comparison groups: non-working pensioners (144 people aged 55-80; average age - 67) and working pensioners (144 people aged 55-74; average age – 61). The following methods were used: the “Differential type of reflection” questionnaire (Leontyev & Osin, 2014); a methodology for assessing the level of development of biographical reflection by Klementyeva (2016); the “Assessment of satisfaction with the quality of life” questionnaire by Vodopyanova (2003); Ryff scales of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and the following statistical methods: comparative analysis using the Mann-Whitney U-test and correlation analysis using the Spearman’s correlation coefficient.

6. Findings

During the first stage of the study, the levels of different types of reflection were compared for working and non-working pensioners. Of the three forms of reflection described by Leontyev and Osin (2014), the differences were found only in introspection, which is significantly higher in non-working pensioners ($U = 7787$, $p = 0.014$). Working pensioners are less focused on their inner world and feelings. It is possible that employment slows down the manifestation of unfavorable forms of reflection which can impede performance. Systemic reflection, which allows one to adequately evaluate oneself and own activity, is not connected with employment. No differences were found in the parameters of quasi-reflection.

A number of differences were identified in the parameters of biographical reflection defined by Klementyeva (2016) as being aware of and analysing own life path. Thus, working pensioners demonstrate higher indicators of reflection on lives of others ($U = 10627$, $p = 0.047$) and their own lives ($U = 11428$, $p = 0.001$), in particular the cognitive ($U = 10982$, $p = 0.011$) and personality-related components ($U = 11085.5$, $p = 0.007$). They are more inclined to evaluate the events of their life from “extra-personal” perspectives, focusing on the existential criteria broadcast by society and culture.

Thus, it was established that older people who stayed in employment are more inclined to evaluate life events focusing on internal and external criteria, whereas non-working pensioners reflect on their experiences and feelings, and their causes.

The parameters of self-assessment of the quality of life (satisfaction and psychological well-being) are considered in the article as reflection correlates; therefore, their detailed description is beyond the scope of the study. Nevertheless, the comparison of the results revealed a higher level of satisfaction with the quality of life in working pensioners in terms of such parameters as work (career) ($U = 9938$, $p = 0.025$), personal achievements and aspirations ($U = 9868$, $p = 0.034$), health ($U = 10248$, $p = 0.006$), external and internal support ($U = 11148$, $p = 0.000$). Continuing professional activity not only allows an elderly person to maintain their social status and income, but also greatly contributes to the feeling of full life, social demand and success. This is consistent with the results obtained in the pilot study (Sergeeva & Borisov, 2020).

No differences were found between working and non-working pensioners in the level of psychological well-being. During the second stage of the study, a correlation analysis of the indicators of reflection and self-assessment of the quality of life was carried out in two groups (Table 1, 2). To increase the reliability of the conclusions, only correlations with the significance level of $p < 0.01$ were included in the analysis.

Some correlations are present in both groups: such indicators of psychological well-being as positive relationships with other people, personal growth, meaningfulness and purpose in life positively correlate with the reflection on own life and, in particular, with its personal component. The abovementioned types of biographical reflection encourage awareness of the meaning of life events, acceptance of responsibility for them, setting life goals. Therefore, we associate these results with the closely related content of the constructs rather than with the specifics of old age and the type of professional employment.

Table 1. The relationship between the indicators of reflection and the indicators of self-evaluation of quality of life in working pensioners

Indicators of self-evaluation of the quality of life	Indicators of reflection						
	Systemic reflection	Introspection	Reflection on others' life	Reflection on own life	Socio-perceptive component	Cognitive component	Personal component
Positive relationships with others			0.279	0.341	0.348		0.315
Autonomy		- 0.274					
Managing the surroundings							0.254
Personal growth	0.358			0.318	0.295	0.259	0.419
Life goal				0.355	0.266		0.413
Self-acceptance				0.272			
Psychological well-being			0.370		0.294		0.414
A sense of purpose in life							0.321
Evaluation of life satisfaction		- 0.251		0.260			
Personal achievements		- 0.325		0.475		0.398	0.331
Support				0.307		0.282	
Tension				0.261			

In both groups, positive correlations were found between satisfaction with the quality of life in the sphere of personal achievements and support, and the reflection on life and, in particular, its cognitive component. Elderly people who are capable of an impartial analysis of their lives, have a repertoire of biographical reflection skills, value their success and relationships with others more highly. This fact confirms the positive role of reflection in the self-assessment of the quality of life.

In both working and non-working pensioners, introspection negatively correlates with the indicators of satisfaction with the quality of life and psychological well-being, whereas systemic reflection positively correlates with these indicators, but the complexes of interacting parameters differ. For working pensioners, a holistic view of oneself in various situations (systemic reflection) is connected with personal growth (Table 1), for non-working pensioners - with the presence of goals and meanings in life (Table 2), and in both groups - with openness to new experience, the ability to take in new information.

Table 2. The relationship between the indicators of reflection and the indicators of self-evaluation of quality of life in non-working pensioners

Indicators of self-evaluation of the quality of life	Indicators of reflection					
	Systemic reflection	Introspection	Reflection on own life	Socio-perceptive component	Cognitive component	Personal component
Positive relationships with others			0.273			
Managing the		- 0.283	0.252			0.318

surroundings						
Personal growth			0.339		0.276	0.290
Life goal	0.252		0.466	0.254	0.372	0.382
Self-acceptance		- 0.259				
Psychological well-being			0.381		0.268	0.338
A sense of purpose in life	0.258		0.343		0.314	0.289
A person as an open system	0.317			0.281		
Personal achievements			0.255		0.240	
Support			0.314		0.246	

The working pensioners' inclination for introspection, for analysing their own experiences is connected with a dependence on the opinions and assessments of others, low satisfaction with life in general, and own achievements, in particular (Table 1). In non-working pensioners, introspection leads to disappointment in oneself and in the ability to organize own life (Table 2).

The psychological well-being of working pensioners and its individual indicators are connected with the inclination to reflect on the lives of other people and its socio-perceptive component (Table 1). The non-working pensioners' willingness to analyse other people's life experiences and focus on patterns broadcast by culture is not connected with psychological well-being, or these connections are weak and isolated (Table 2). This could be one of the mechanisms for adapting to reduced social ties and changed status that accompany retirement.

The results of our study do not give an unambiguous answer about the nature of the relationship between reflection and self-assessment of the quality of life. Firstly, the direction of correlation is determined by the form of reflection. Secondly, we can assume that this relationship is non-linear by nature. Thirdly, the moderator variable comes into play - professional employment (its presence or absence).

7. Conclusion

- Differences in the level of different types of reflection were identified in working and non-working pensioners. Working pensioners have lower introspection, but higher indicators of biographical reflection. No differences were found in indicators of systemic reflection and quasi-reflection.
- Working pensioners have higher levels of satisfaction with the life quality; the level of psychological well-being does not differ.
- Introspection negatively correlates with the indicators of satisfaction with the quality of life and psychological well-being, whereas systemic reflection and components of biographical reflection have a positive correlation. This trend is observed in both working and non-working pensioners, but the complexes of interacting parameters differ between the two groups.

- The obtained results substantiate the inclusion of reflection components in the constructs of personal mobility and professional health at older age and determine encouraging life experience analysis as one of the areas of psychological support.

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