
UNIT 7 QUALITY OF LIFE

Structure

7.1 Introduction

Aims and Objectives

7.2 What is Quality of Life?

7.3 Qualities of Good Society and Good Life

7.4 Approaches to Determine the Quality of Life

7.4.1 Characteristics of the Good Life

7.4.2 Good Life is Based on the Satisfaction of Preferences

7.4.3 Experience of Individual

7.5 Scientific Approaches to Measuring Quality of Life

7.6 Domains in Assessing Quality of Life

7.7 Measuring Quality of Life

7.7.1 Quantitative Measurement

7.7.2 Human Development Index

7.7.3 World Happiness Report

7.7.4 Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI)

7.7.5 The Happy Planet Index

7.7.6 Gross National Happiness

7.7.7 The Social Progress Index

7.8 Livability

7.8.1 Crimes

7.8.2 Popsicle Index

7.9 Quality of Life in Healthcare

7.10 International Development

7.11 Economic Growth and Wellbeing

7.12 Summary

7.13 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality of life (QOL) is the general well-being of individuals and societies. It is a ubiquitous concept that has different philosophical, international development, political, employment and health-related definitions. This term captures a specific condition, quality, which is derived from survival instinct as a basic human instinct in situations in which people occur, to protect themselves from threats and keep their own life and health, as well as the lives of their descendants. It is important not to mix up the concept of QOL

with a more recent growing area of health related QOL (HRQOL) (Bottomley, Andrew; 2002). When we look at HRQOL we in effect look at QOL and its relationship with health. The Compendium of OECD well-being indicators of economic and social progress clearly differentiates material conditions from quality of life. By material conditions of life it means economic welfare (economic well-being). Quality of life is defined as the set of non-financial, non-monetary attributes of individuals, which co-determines their life chances and opportunities in life and have value in different cultures and contexts (Compendium of Key Well-Being Indicators, OECD, 2011). There are authors who emphasize the intangible quality of life, for example English researcher and writer Amy Fontinelle, who believes that “quality of life is subjective and intangible.” In her opinion the Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948, provides an excellent list of factors to assess the quality of life (Fontinelle, 2011).

Aims and Objectives

After reading this unit, you would be able to understand:

- meaning and concept of Quality of life;
- approaches to determine Quality of life; and
- measuring of Quality of life.

7.2 WHAT IS QUALITY OF LIFE?

The term “quality of life” is extremely complex; it is affected by a number of factors, and in the literature is interpreted in different ways. It should be noted that the history of the term itself depends on the work of economists and sociologists including John Kenneth Galbraith, Denisa Riesman and Ronald Freedman, who were associated with the criticism of the consumer lifestyle in the USA. They criticized the orientation of American society on consumption and its emphasis on the quantity of produced and consumed goods negatively affects quality of life. Moreover, in such a lifestyle they saw wasted resources and a danger to humanity.

Quality of life should not be confused with the concept of standard of living, which is based primarily on income. Standard indicators of the quality of life include not only wealth and employment but also the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging (Gregery, Derek, et al., eds, 2009).

According to ecological economist Robert Costanza, while Quality of Life (QOL) has long been an explicit or implicit policy goal, adequate definition and measurement have been elusive. Diverse “objective” and “subjective” indicators across a range of disciplines and scales, and recent work on subjective well-being (SWB) surveys and the psychology of happiness have spurred renewed interest (Costanza, R. et al., 2008).

7.3 QUALITIES OF GOOD SOCIETY AND GOOD LIFE

The essential qualities of a good society and the good life have captured the minds of the greatest thinkers across time and cultures. For example, in Aristotle’s concept of *eudaimonia*, individuals were called on to realise their full potentialities in order to achieve a “good life.” In contrast, Eastern philosophers stressed the virtue of restraining individual

desires, and prescribed an ideology that encouraged the equal distribution of resources among people. In the categorical imperative, Emmanuel Kant called for individuals to achieve a good society by acting in a moral way such that their actions could be the basis of universal laws. A challenging agenda laid down by recent trends in the social and behavioural sciences is to design scientific ways of measuring human well-being.

7.4 APPROACHES TO DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

There are three major philosophical approaches to determining the quality of life (Brock, 1993).

7.4.1 Characteristics of the Good Life

The first approach describes characteristics of the good life that are dictated by normative ideals based on a religious, philosophical or other system. For example, we might believe that the good life must include helping others because this is dictated by our religious principles. Another example of this approach is that Kant believed that judgments about the correctness of behaviour, and therefore the good life, come from rational thought. These approaches to quality of life depend neither on the subjective experience of people nor on the fulfillment of their wishes. As we will see, this approach to quality of life is most clearly related to the social indicators tradition in the social sciences.

7.4.2 Good Life is Based on the Satisfaction of Preferences

The second approach to defining the good life is based on the satisfaction of preferences. Within the constraints of the resources they possess, the assumption is that people will select those things that will most enhance their quality of life. Thus, in this tradition the definition of the quality of life of a society is based on whether the citizens can obtain the things they desire. People select the best quality of life for themselves that is commensurate with their resources and their individual desires. This approach to utility or the good life based on people's choices undergirds much of modern economic thinking.

7.4.3 Experience of Individual

The third definition of quality of life is in terms of the experience of individuals. If a person experiences her life as good and desirable, it is assumed to be so. In this approach, factors such as feelings of joy, pleasure, contentment, and life satisfaction are paramount. Obviously, this approach to defining the quality of life is most associated with the subjective well-being tradition in the behavioural sciences.

These three approaches to defining quality of life have often competed in political and philosophical thought. Policy makers currently weigh choice utility most heavily, however, because of the preeminence they grant to economic considerations. Nevertheless, there are limitations to a definition of quality of life that rests solely on economics and people's ability to obtain the marketplace goods and services that they choose. In the first place, economic progress may not guarantee other important factors such as an absence of crime. In some cases, economic progress might even be thought to be inversely correlated with certain facets of quality of life such as leisure time or a healthy environment. In the second place, people's choices may not make them happy, or may be inconsistent with normative ideals. In other words, people might want things that are not good or that will not make them happy. Berridge (1996), for example, found that wanting and liking arise

from two different neural systems, and therefore wanting things may not be an accurate predictor of whether those things will increase subjective well-being.

In addition, measuring utility based on people's choices rests on a set of questionable assumptions about rationality and the transitivity of choices (Kahneman and Varey, 1991). Finally, the analyses of a good society only in terms of market factors clearly deemphasizes important elements that influence the quality of life such as love, self-development, and possessing meaning in life. Thus, researchers have increasingly turned to additional approaches to defining and measuring the quality of life.

7.5 SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE

During the last few decades, two new scientific approaches to measuring quality of life have been initiated – “objective” or social indicators, and the measurement of subjective well-being (SWB). Land provides a history of the social indicators and subjective well-being movements in the social sciences. The social indicators movement focuses its attention on measuring. The growth of the social indicators movement coincided with the questioning of economic growth in terms of whether more was always better (Land, 1996). Subjective well-being research, in contrast, is concerned with individuals' subjective experience of their lives. The underlying assumption is that well-being can be defined by people's conscious experiences – in terms of hedonic feelings or cognitive satisfactions. The field is built on the presumption that to understand the individuals' experiential quality of well-being, it is appropriate to directly examine how a person feels about life in the context of his or her own standards.

The empirical study of well-being is more than an intellectual exercise. The significance of this effort becomes obvious when we understand that findings in social indicator and subjective well-being research have direct relevance to the fundamental concerns of societies and individuals. For instance, to determine whether the quality of a society is improving or deteriorating, it is imperative to gain empirical evidence that is based on more than intuitions. Particularly, at a time when industrialisation is transforming the lifestyles and values of every society on earth, scientific knowledge regarding human well-being is vital in determining whether material affluence should be the dominant concern in attaining a desirable quality of life. In addition to informing policy, subjective well-being findings and social indicators can also assist individuals in their everyday life decisions, such as where and how to live.

7.6 DOMAINS IN ASSESSING QUALITY OF LIFE

One approach, called engaged theory, outlined in the journal of *Applied Research in the Quality of Life*, posits four domains in assessing quality of life: ecology, economics, politics and culture (Magee, Liam; James, Paul; 2012). In the domain of culture, for example, it includes the following sub-domains of quality of life:

- Identity and engagement
- Creativity and recreation
- Memory and projection

- Belief and ideas
- Gender and generations
- Enquiry and learning
- Well-being and health

Also frequently related are concepts such as freedom, human rights, and happiness. However, since happiness is subjective and difficult to measure, other measures are generally given priority. It has also been shown that happiness, as much as it can be measured, does not necessarily increase correspondingly with the comfort that results from increasing income. As a result, standard of living should not be taken to be a measure of happiness. Also sometimes considered related is the concept of human security, though the latter may be considered at a more basic level and for all people.

7.7 MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE

7.7.1 Quantitative Measurement

Unlike per capita GDP or standard of living, both of which can be measured in financial terms, it is harder to make objective or long-term measurements of the quality of life experienced by nations or other groups of people. Researchers have begun in recent times to distinguish two aspects of personal well-being: *Emotional well-being*, in which respondents are asked about the quality of their everyday emotional experiences—the frequency and intensity of their experiences of, for example, joy, stress, sadness, anger, and affection—and *life evaluation*, in which respondents are asked to think about their life in general and evaluate it against a scale. Such and other systems and scales of measurement have been in use for some time. Research has attempted to examine the relationship between quality of life and productivity.

7.7.2 Human Development Index

Perhaps the most commonly used international measure of development is the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines measures of life expectancy, education, and standard of living, in an attempt to quantify the options available to individuals within a given society. The HDI is used by the United Nations Development Programme in their Human Development Report.

7.7.3 World Happiness Report

Also developed by the United Nations and published recently along with the HDI, this report combines both objective and subjective measures to rank countries by happiness, which is deemed as the ultimate outcome of a high quality of life. It uses surveys from Gallup, real GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, and perceived freedom to make life choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity to derive the final score.

7.7.4 Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI)

The Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) is a measure developed by sociologist Morris David Morris in the 1970s, based on basic literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy. Although not as complex as other measures, and now essentially replaced by the Human Development Index, the PQLI is notable for Morris's attempt to show a "less fatalistic

pessimistic picture” by focusing on three areas where global quality of life was generally improving at the time, and ignoring gross national product and other possible indicators that were not improving.

7.7.5 The Happy Planet Index

Happy Planet Index, introduced in 2006, is unique among quality of life measures in that, in addition to standard determinants of well-being, it uses each country’s ecological footprint as an indicator. As a result, European and North American nations do not dominate this measure. The 2012 list is instead topped by Costa Rica, Vietnam and Colombia.

A 2010 study by two Princeton University professors looked at 1,000 randomly selected U.S. residents over an extended period. It concludes that their *life evaluations* - that is, their considered evaluations of their life against a stated scale of one to ten - rise steadily with income. On the other hand, their reported quality of *emotional daily experiences* (their reported experiences of joy, affection, stress, sadness, or anger) levels after a certain income level (approximately \$75,000 per year); income above \$75,000 does not lead to more experiences of happiness or to further relief of unhappiness or stress. Below this income level, respondents reported decreasing happiness and increasing sadness and stress, implying the pain of life’s misfortunes, including disease, divorce and being alone, are exacerbated by poverty. (PhysOrg.com. 7 September 2010)

7.7.6 Gross National Happiness

Gross national happiness and other subjective measures of happiness are being used by the governments of Bhutan and the United Kingdom. The World Happiness report, issued by Columbia University is a meta-analysis of happiness globally and provides an overview of countries and grassroots activists using GNH. The OECD issued a guide for the use of subjective well-being metrics in 2013. In the U.S., cities and communities are using a GNH metric at a grassroots level. (<http://www.gnhc.gov.bt/>)

7.7.7 The Social Progress Index

The Social Progress Index measures the extent to which countries provide for the social and environmental needs of their citizens. Fifty-two indicators in the areas of basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity show the relative performance of nations. The index uses outcome measures when there is sufficient data available or the closest possible proxies.

7.8 LIVABILITY

The term *quality of life* is also used by politicians and economists to measure the livability of a given city or nation. Two widely known measures of livability are the Economic Intelligence Unit’s Where-to-be-born Index and Mercer’s Quality of Living Reports. These two measures calculate the livability of countries and cities around the world, respectively, through a combination of subjective life-satisfaction surveys and objective determinants of quality of life such as divorce rates, safety, and infrastructure. Such measures relate more broadly to the population of a city, state, or country, not to individual quality of life. Livability has a long history and tradition in urban design, and neighborhoods design standards such as LEED-ND are often used in an attempt to influence livability (Boeing, et. al.; 2014).

7.8.1 Crimes

Some crimes against property (e.g., graffiti and vandalism) and some “victimless crimes” have been referred to as “quality-of-life crimes.” American Sociologist James Q. Wilson encapsulated this argument as the Broken Window Theory, which asserts that relatively minor problems left unattended (such as litter, graffiti, or public urination by homeless individuals) send a subliminal message that disorder in general is being tolerated, and as a result, more serious crimes will end up being committed (the analogy being that a broken window left broken shows an image of general dilapidation).

Wilson’s theories have been used to justify the implementation of zero tolerance policies by many prominent American mayors, most notably Oscar Goodman in Las Vegas, Richard Riordan in Los Angeles, Rudolph Angeles, Rudolph Giuliani, in New York City and Gavin Newsom in San Francisco. Such policies refuse to tolerate even minor crimes; proponents argue that this will improve the quality of life of local residents. However, critics of zero tolerance policies believe that such policies neglect investigation on a case-by-case basis and may lead to unreasonably harsh penalties for crimes.

7.8.2 Popsicle Index

The Popsicle Index is a quality of life measurement coined by Catherine Austin Fitts as the percentage of people - in a community who believe that a child in their community can safely leave their home, walk to the nearest possible location to buy a popsicle, and walk back home (Fitts, Catherine Austin; 2009).

7.9 QUALITY OF LIFE IN HEALTHCARE

Within the field of healthcare, quality of life is often regarded in terms of how a certain ailment affects a patient on an individual level. This may be a debilitating weakness that is not life-threatening, life-threatening illness that is not terminal, terminal illness, the predictable, natural decline in the health of an elder, an unforeseen mental/physical decline of a loved one, or chronic, end-stage disease processes. Researchers at the University of Toronto’s Quality of Life Research Unit define quality of life as “The degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life”. Their Quality of Life Model is based on the categories “being”, “belonging”, and “becoming”; respectively who one is, how one is not connected to one’s environment, and whether one achieves one’s personal goals, hopes, and aspirations (University of Toronto; 2009).

7.10 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Quality of life is an important concept in the field of international development, since it allows development to be analysed on a measure broader than standard of living. Within development theory, however, there are varying ideas concerning what constitutes desirable change for a particular society, and the different ways that quality of life is defined by institutions therefore shapes how these organisations work for its improvement as a whole.

Organisations such as the World Bank, for example, declare a goal of “working for a world free of poverty”, (World Bank; 2009) with poverty defined as a lack of basic human needs, such as food, water, shelter, freedom, access to education, healthcare, or employment. In other words, poverty is defined as a low quality of life. Using this definition, the World Bank works towards improving quality of life through neoliberal means, with the stated goal of lowering poverty and helping people afford a better quality of life.

Other organisations, however, may also work towards improved global quality of life using a slightly different definition and substantially different methods. Many NGOs do not focus at all on reducing poverty on a national or international scale, but rather attempt to improve quality of life for individuals or communities. One example would be sponsorship programmes that provide material aid for specific individuals. Although many organisations of this type may still talk about fighting poverty, the methods are significantly different.

Improving quality of life involves action not only by NGOs, but also by governments. Global health has the potential to achieve greater political presence if governments were to incorporate aspects of human security into foreign policy. Stressing individuals' basic rights to health, food, shelter, and freedom addresses prominent inter-sectoral problems negatively impacting today's society and may lead to greater action and resources. Integration of global health concerns into foreign policy may be hampered by approaches that are shaped by the overarching roles of defense and diplomacy.

7.11 ECONOMIC GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

Economic growth typically refers to an increase in the level of goods and services produced by an economy, as estimated by measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Whilst GDP and other similar measures reflect the value of goods and services provided through the market, they exclude many others that are not provided through the market but that nevertheless contribute to overall welfare. For example, voluntary and unpaid activities or work within the home, and many services provided by the natural environment in facilitating economic activity. As a result, GDP does not reflect many of the factors that affect the society's wellbeing (Layard R.; 2005).

Human well-being is a complex and diverse concept, determined by a wide-range of factors including levels of income (absolute and relative), health status, educational attainment, housing conditions and environmental quality.

It has sometimes been characterised in terms of self-reported or subjective happiness. Many studies have found that increases in GDP in high-income countries do not result in subsequent increases in levels of happiness (Easterlin, 1974). However, some others have found to the contrary; for example, Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) find a robust relationship between increases in GDP and increases in reported wellbeing for both developed and developing countries (Stevenson, 2008).

7.12 SUMMARY

In the absence of a clear-cut relationship between GDP and self-reported happiness, it is worth focusing on the range of factors affecting wellbeing. A recent report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress identifies a number of dimensions to well-being – material living standards, health, education, personal activities including work, political voice and governance, social connections and relationships, environment (present and future condition), and insecurity (of an economic as well as a physical nature).

However, while wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept, economic growth remains an important factor in driving or enabling improvements along many of these dimensions. It is vital for supporting continued improvements in material living standards, health, life expectancy, education and economic opportunity, and to help the government deliver on a range of economic, social and environmental objectives (HM Treasury; 2008).

7.13 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- 1) What is Quality of Life?
- 2) Discuss approaches to determine Quality of Life.
- 3) Write note on Measuring Quality Life.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Costanza, R., et. al., “An Integrative Approach to Quality of Life Measurement, Research and Policy”, *S.A.P.I.E.N.S.*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2008.

Fontinelle, A., “Standard of Living vs. Quality of Life”, *Investopedia*, 2011, <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/financial-theory/08/standard-of-living-quality-of-life.asp> (Accessed: 19.10.2013).

Gregory, Derek, Johnston, Ron; Pratt, Geraldine; Watts, Michael; et al., (eds.) “*Quality of Life*”. *Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell), 2009

Nussbaum, Martha and Amartya Sen (eds.), *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1993.

Bottomley, Andrew, “The Cancer Patient and Quality of Life”, *The Oncologist*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2002.

Liam, Magee, James, Paul, Scerri, Andy, “Measuring Social Sustainability: A Community-Centred Approach”, *Applied Research in the Quality of Life*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2012.

Fitts, Catherine Austin, “Understanding the Popsicle Index”, *Solari F. Retrieved 2009-06-10*.

“Quality of Life: How Good is your Life for You?” *University of Toronto Quality of Life Research Unit. Retrieved October 14, 2009*.

“The World Bank” (PDF), *The World Bank. 2009 Retrieved 2010-11-02*.

Becker, R. A., L. Denby, R. McGill and A. R. Wilks, “Analysis of Data from the Places Rated Almanac”, *The American Statistician*, Vol. 41, 1987.

Berridge, K. C., “Food Reward: Brain Substrates of Wanting and Liking”, *Neuroscience and Bio-behavioural Reviews*, Vol. 20, 1996.

Bradburn, N., *The Structure of Psychological Well-Being* (Chicago: Aldine), 1969.

Stevenson, B. and J. Wolfers, “Economic Growth and Subjective Wellbeing: Re-assessing the Easterlin Paradox”, *NBER Working Paper No.14282*, 2008.

Layard, R., *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London: Penguin), 2005.

Easterlin R. A., “Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot?” *Nations and Households in Economic Growth* (Academic Press), 1974.

HM Treasury, “Developments in the Economics of Wellbeing”, HMT, 2008.

Brickman, P., D. Coates and R. J. Janoff-Bulman, “Lottery Winners and Accident Victims:

Is Happiness Relative?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 36, 1978.

Brock, D., "Quality of Life in Health Care and Medical Ethics", in M. Nussbaum and A. Sen (eds.), *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1993.

Kahneman, D. and C. Varey, "Notes on the Psychology of Utility", in J. Roemer and J. Elster (eds.), *Interpersonal Comparisons of Well-Being* (New York: Cambridge Press), 1991.

Kasser, T. and R. M. Ryan, "A Dark Side of the American Dream: Correlates of Financial Success as a Central Life Aspiration", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 65, 1994.

Kruglanski, A. W. and O. Mayselless, "Classic and Current Social Comparison Research: Expanding the Perspective", *Psychological Bulletin* 108, 1990.

Land, K. C., "Social Indicators and the Quality of Life: Where do we Stand in the Mid-1990s?" *SINET*, Vol. 45, 1996.

Boeing; et al., "LEED-ND and Livability Revisited", *Berkeley Planning Journal*, Vol. 27, 2014.

"Higher Income Improves Life Rating but not Emotional Well-being" *PhysOrg.com*. 7 September 2010. Retrieved 20 September 2010.

OECD (2011), Compendium of Key Well-Being Indicators, <http://www.oecd.org/std/47917288.pdf> (Accessed: 18.10.2013). Paper, UNDP, New York, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDI_methodology.pdf, (Accessed: 12.10.2013)

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY