Abstract

The area of undertaken study is the issue of the elderly and the notion of quality of life and overall welfare connected with socio-educational activity of senior citizens, which promotes the sense of life satisfaction. The inspiration for this study was, among others, the new social policy introduced in the countries of UE and in Poland, which underlines the importance of the policy of successful aging and promotes various forms of activity as well as actions aiming to improve health and provide security to the eldest members of society. Thanks to the execution of these policies the elderly of today have much more possibilities when it comes to using their physical, intellectual and social potential again, as well as higher chances to participate in social life in accordance with their own goals, needs and skills.

My thesis is traditionally divided into three parts: theoretical, methodological and study. The theoretical part consists of three chapters. The first chapter includes a systematized review of philosophical, psychological, sociological, pedagogical and economical models which explain when and why humans can be satisfied with their own lives. The second chapter has been dedicated to notions connected with the socio-economical situation of the Polish elderly and the needs of senior citizens. I have also noted the basis of the problem of protection of elderly people in Poland and introduced the principles of legal protection of the elderly and the modern social policy towards the elderly. I have also described the examples of social activation programmes executed in Poland and health-social protections of the elderly. The third chapter is concerned with the Universities of the Third Age, which attempt to create a better reality for the elderly through the adaptation of the elderly into old age by counselling, support, activation and education, all of which improve the quality of their lives. The second, methodological part is a description of the aim of study, research problems, hypotheses and factors of study. In that chapter I justified my choice of research strategy and enumerated the used methods, techniques and research tools. The part also includes a description of the study area and the research sample. In the last, empirical part I presented the results of studies according to the plan matching the attempt to solve the individual research problems. In the next parts of the analysis of research material I attempted to describe the understanding of the concept of life satisfaction by the elderly and their review of its elements i.e. the will of life, the feeling of control, meeting their own needs, the sense of meaning of life. The culmination of the study were questions concerning the rating

of life satisfaction in relation to activities undertaken by the respondents in the field of the University of the Third Age.

The study was meant to identify the concept of life satisfaction of the elderly listeners of the University of the Third Age in the context of its conditionalities as well as show the factors affecting and differentiating life satisfaction of the elderly, such as the sense of control over one's own life, the meaning of life, needs, social interaction, activity, lifestyle and sociodemographic traits. The main research problem in my paper was the question: Which factors determine life satisfaction of the elderly listeners of the University of the Third Age and which factors differentiate it?

During the study I adopted the quantitative model, as this model is more objective and allows to indicate various regularities and laws governing the phenomena and social processes. I chose the random quota sampling as a method of sampling. My research tool was a questionnaire that I created myself. I used it to probe the opinions and judgements of the elderly on the topic of individual fields of life satisfaction, i.e. activity, social interaction, lifestyle, methods of meeting one's needs, economical indicators of life satisfaction. To gather the data I used two more tools: "Test sensu życia – The Meaning in Life Questionnaire – MLQ (PL)" and Cantril's ladder, which allowed me to properly research the level of meaning of life and understand the temporal rating of life satisfaction of the elderly. The study involves 261 elderly citizens of seven Universities of the Third Age in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

The gathered material and analyses performed state that life satisfaction is described as an optimistic outlook on life and its elements as well as the struggle with what it entails (both positive and negative emotions, the sense of meaning of life, fulfilment of values, goals and philosophy of life). Life satisfaction is determined through the feeling of control over one's own life, fulfilling needs of the elderly, the sense of meaning of life, the practiced lifestyles, freetime activities, social interactions, material resources and physical condition. Life satisfaction of the elderly is shaped through the participation in classes offered by the UTA. It is also differentiated by socio-demographic traits. Thus its level and shape depends on both psychological, social, institutional, as well as biological and economical factors. These factors create a certain model, and the level of satisfaction of each factor decides whether the life satisfaction is higher or lower in a particular area.