

## PROMOTING SELF-EFFICACY AS ONE OF THE BASIC SALUTOPROTECTIVE RESOURCES IN DEALING WITH CHALLENGING LIFE SITUATIONS WITH A FOCUS ON THE COVID PANDEMIC -19

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### Abstract

*The theoretical basis of the contribution is a literature search focused on the use of various salutoprotective resources in dealing with challenging life events, not only concerning the current situation but also within a historical context, and the author's experience of providing psychological intervention during the Covid-19 pandemic. The awareness of an individual's own self-efficacy can be considered as a crucial salutoprotective resource in coping with challenging life situations, while an essential factor influencing the quality of self-efficacy is the manner of family and school education and the degree of attention paid to its development in these environments.*

*The thrust of the contribution is to suggest ways to develop self-efficacy awareness as a fundamental salutoprotective source of wellbeing in the time of the pandemic, both in family and school education.*

### Keywords

*Psychological intervention; pandemic covid 19; mental health; quality of life.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

A crucial circumstance for the focus of the paper is the actual state of mental health of the current population as a result of the long-term adverse pandemic situation that has been ongoing since March 2020.

In this context, a working group of the Government Mental Health Council (GMHC) has initiated an inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the population. According to a study by the National Institute of Mental Health, the prevalence of current mental illness has increased from 20% to 30%. The risk of suicide has increased 3 times, depression has increased 3 times, and anxiety disorders have increased 2 times. The frequency of binge drinking, drinking large amounts of alcohol on one occasion, has also increased.

The survey also mapped psychological difficulties in children and adolescents. According to an investigation by the Czech School Inspectorate, 10 000 children were not involved in distance learning at all, so the mental health and development of these children may be at significant risk now and in the future.

Increased stress during an emergency, especially fear and concern for one's own health and the health of loved ones, or societal uncertainty and helplessness in relation to interventions, are common causes of mental illness symptoms in children and young people. This includes a lack of information and tools to deal with the situation. In children, sleep disruption, lack of stimulation, lack of sporting activities, little privacy, conflicts within the family, etc., can all lead to mental discomfort (Salomon, 2020). Also alarming is the data from the Safety Line, which registered during the COVID-19 epidemic in the Czech Republic up to 30% increase in calls with the topic of domestic violence, 30% increase in personal problems and psychological problems or 30% increase in the topic of Internet problems, including sexual abuse (Salomonová, 2020).

Health impacts have also been analysed for university teachers (processing of the RHS survey is still ongoing) and health professionals. The Ministry of Health has set up a collegiate psychological support line for health workers who were on the front line and often treated patients with infection, working overtime and

having to react and adapt quickly to changes in their working patterns. Experts on the other side of the line helped healthcare workers to manage these stressful situations (Vojtěch, 2020).

As already mentioned, the topic of mental health and the care of bio-psycho-social balance is taking on even greater importance in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic than it did before. It affects the entire population of the country, as it has major implications not only for the quality of life of individuals and their families or loved ones, but also for the functioning of the state and its economy.

The Ministry of Health, in accordance with the WHO, OECD and other supranational organizations, has perceived the seriousness of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the mental health of the Czech population from the very beginning and has been trying to mitigate the impact of the globally challenging situation through various support initiatives. Some of the support activities have included the establishment of a toll-free mental health first aid line, the creation of public referrals on the Ministry's website, and methodological support to psychiatric hospitals and outpatient clinics, both in terms of adapting care and human rights. An inter-ministerial working group was set up under the Council of Government to prepare comprehensive recommendations for measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, based on a mapping of the situation. It was also proposed to create a network of health crisis centres attached to hospitals so that there would be one in each region (Vojtěch, 2020).

However, we must also take care of our own mental health and balance on an individual level, each on our own. An important component of salutoprotective resources in this individual care is the promotion of healthy self-reflection and the development of personal competencies in self-efficacy.

Despite the fact that we already have a network of Mental Health Centres in the Czech Republic, which is being further developed, it is necessary to increase the availability of psychotherapeutic and psychosocial support services, to accelerate work on the legislative framework,

methodologies and reimbursement in the field of telemedicine, and to target the prevention funds of health insurance companies also to support psychological resilience. There is significant scope for wellness counselling (wellness coaching, personal development in wellness, quality of life support and bio-psycho-social harmony) in mental health promotion.

As can be expected, the negative impact of the pandemic will continue to affect the lives of individuals and society, so it is more than desirable to look for ways to support the mental balance of each individual.

## 2 OBJECTIVE

The aim of the text is to emphasize the importance of self-protective activities and self-management in the maintenance of health and mental harmony and to offer personal development techniques useful in wellness counselling to support the acquisition and maintenance of bio-psycho-social balance.

In this context, the text offers activities - techniques - to develop self-efficacy as an important component of salutoprotective resources and the promotion of mental balance.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

The basic methodological bases were data obtained from the survey of the working group of the RVDZ (Government Council for Mental Health) and the National Institute of Health, as well as the continuous analysis of the development of the mental state of long-term clients from the PPP Pelhřimov (Educational and Psychological Counselling), the Counselling Centre of the College Palestra, the Academy Palestra and the GYOA Pelhřimov.

The results of the COVID-19 survey, which was carried out in the period from spring to summer 2021 under the auspices of the Council of Universities (working group led by Mgr. Soukup, the author of the paper is a member of the working group), all universities in the Czech Republic were contacted (including private and two state universities), the results are still being processed, however, they show a clear trend speaking about the

more frequently reported subjective feeling of reduced quality of life, reduced frequency of physical activities, more frequent depressive emotional tuning, increase in work duties and lack of appreciation of teaching work in challenging conditions (both financially and in terms of verbal appreciation); there were also frequent responses talking about a reduction in salary, i.e. a deterioration in the overall standard of living.

A significant factor is the author's long experience with personal development projects and training in holistic coaching (e.g. Šauerová, 2011, Švamberk Šauerová, 2018, 2019).

The target recipients of the offered service/activities can be any clients in wellness services from adolescents to elderly seniors (the prerequisite is already developed abstract thinking in adolescents, adequate intellect and absence of significant cognitive difficulties in clients).

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The position of the self-efficacy component in the complex construct of well-being

The concept of quality of life and mental balance is often linked to the concept of well-being, which can be understood as personal well-being. Šolcová and Kebza (2004) state that personal well-being is "an assessment of the quality of life as a whole". Levin and Chatters (1998, cited in Kebza and Šolcová, 2003) state that personal well-being is often understood as part of quality of life. According to these authors, quality of life consists of two dimensions, namely subjective and objective personal well-being.

Subjective personal well-being consists of psychological personal well-being (life satisfaction, happiness, mood, positive and negative affectivity, etc.), self-esteem, self-validation and personal coping.

Under the term objective personal well-being we can imagine, for example, the state of health of the organism, socio-economic status, etc. (Kraivalová, 2012).

Šolcová and Kebza (2009, p. 129) emphasize that within the concept of well-being it is "a long-

term emotional state in which an individual's satisfaction with his or her life is reflected". At the same time, they agree that personal well-being should be measured through specific cognitive components (life satisfaction, morale) and emotional components (positive, negative emotions) and this construct is consistent across different situations and stable over the time (Šolcová, Kebza, 2005).

Thus, if we consider the self-efficacy component (the development of which we are interested in) as a part of the well-being construct in this context, then we must understand it as an interactive component - and one that affects not only the cognitive domain, but also the emotional part.

In terms of analysing the meaning of well-being, it is worth noting that we encounter two main theoretical approaches.

One is linked to the concept of subjective well-being (SWB) and is defined in terms of satisfaction with life and the balance of positive and negative emotional states, which in different concepts emphasize a different component of positive emotional state - e.g. concepts of Ikigai, Feng shui, Hygge (cf. Jandová, 2021).

The second is associated with the concept of psychological well-being (PWB) and is defined in terms of a person's engagement with the existential challenges and issues of life. The key concepts here are satisfaction with oneself, with one's life, perception of one's own meaning in life, and personal growth. Here, too, we can cite selected concepts emphasising human engagement - e.g. shinrin-yoku, tai-chi, chi-gong, yoga (cf. Jandová, 2021, Hřebíčková et al. 2010).

In terms of these two concepts, we would then classify the promotion of self-efficacy primarily in the area of psychological well-being, but we cannot neglect the importance of emotional balance.

Healthy lifestyle is undoubtedly important pillar in shaping well-being. A healthy lifestyle includes in particular a healthy regime, which according to Žaloudíková (2009) includes: regular daily routine, healthy diet, sufficient physical activity, adherence to personal hygiene, protection against contagious diseases,

responsible personal behaviour (sexual, work, partner, parental), psychological resistance to harmful influences and addictions (smoking, alcohol consumption, drug abuse), efforts for psychological well-being, efforts for well-being in interpersonal relationships, adequate adaptation techniques in stressful situations, protections against accidents, protection of the environment, minimum contact with unhealthy substances.

Kotulán (2002), for example, takes a similar approach to the definition of the issue, but ranks the individual components of a healthy lifestyle differently:

- health and its importance;
- healthy nutrition;
- sleep;
- physical movement;
- protection against diseases;
- protection from accidents and poisoning;
- environmental health care (Kotulán, 2002).

The deeper aspects of well-being are addressed, for example, by Carol Ryff's multidimensional theory (Ryff and Keyes, 1995), a model that includes six basic dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, meaning in life, and personal development. In this context, other authors (e.g., Kebza, Šolcová, 2004) have suggested that self-esteem and personal control (mastery) of challenging situations are important components of well-being.

If we summarize the results of a search of various scientific papers devoted to the issue of well-being, then we can agree on the most frequently emphasized factors contributing to the feeling of well-being, namely: self-acceptance, social relationships, autonomy and self-esteem, meaning of life (beliefs), personal experience. All of these factors are then overlaid, or if you like, underlined or accompanied, by the awareness of self-efficacy, in all these dimensions (both in the area of self-acceptance and in the area of establishing healthy social relationships without toxicity, etc.).

#### 4.2 Salutoprotective resources affecting bio-psycho-social balance

If we consider salutoprotective resources in the care of bio-psycho-social balance, then it is necessary to mention especially factors of psychological nature, especially positive thinking. Many stress factors cannot be changed in a significant way (e.g. air quality, exposure to a pandemic, a natural disaster).

In addition to positive thinking, we consider such dimensions of health as coping with stress and overexertion, relaxation, and preference for a positive life scenario (cf. Starý, 2008, Šauerová, 2012). Other important salutators include sufficient physical activity, a varied, balanced diet, sufficient rest (sleep), and adequate psychohygienic habits.

It is often mistakenly assumed that by providing people with information, they can already make the right choices and act in the interests of their health. The current situation and the frequent misinformation and hoaxes that have made it impossible to reflect on the whole situation in a healthy way have shown this.

With regard to the focus and goal of the paper - the proposal of methods to increase self-efficacy - the personal characteristics of a person are a decisive factor for the formation of mental balance. Temperament traits play an important role, and in times of pandemics, besides the dimension of emotional lability - stability, the dimension of extraversion - introversion plays a significant role (cf. Švamberk Šauerová, 2020, Diener, 2009). Similarly, this experience (that temperamental personality characteristics have a greater influence on a person's satisfaction compared to objective life events) has been reported, e.g., by Costa et al., 1987; Suh et al., 1996.

Other important personal characteristics are conscientiousness, friendliness and openness to new experiences, of which the closest relationships exist between personal well-being, emotional stability and conscientiousness, followed by personal well-being, extraversion and friendliness, and finally, the weakest relationship exists between personal well-being and openness to new experiences (Blatný, 2010).

Other personality characteristics that have an impact on the experience of personal well-being include self-esteem (higher values are associated with a better experience of personal well-being) or J. B. Rotter's locus of control (internal locus of control is associated with a positive impact on well-being), resilience and resilience to discomfort. In building personal well-being, it is necessary to consider, in addition to the already mentioned concept of self-efficacy (A. Bandura), the concept of hardiness by S. Kobas or the concept of Sense of coherence by A. Antonovsky.

#### 4.3 Techniques for promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy

Techniques for building healthy self-reflection, increasing self-efficacy and social and individual responsibility for each of us are an important part of salutoprotective resources for dealing with challenging life situations. In the following, we focus on describing techniques that can be used in wellness counselling for personal development of the client and for building mental balance.

##### 4.3.1 Who am I, exactly?

An important condition for increasing self-efficacy is especially adequate knowledge of oneself. Very simply, the Personality Profile technique can be used for this analysis (e.g.

Švamberk Šauerová, 2018); we can also use unfinished sentences (e.g. I am a parent... my child... my partner.... When my employer orders.... When a colleague does a well-done task...). Questions should be answered with the first thought that comes to the person's mind, without thinking too long. When thinking about the answer, the result would be influenced by "control mechanisms", so we emphasize spontaneous response. As part of developing self-knowledge, it is then useful to read and reflect on the answers at some distance and think about what the type of answer triggered in us. Another technique that can be used for this is Self-Monitoring.

##### 4.3.2 Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring means that one keeps a record of one's own actions and experiences. The records are kept in the form of a diary; a self-reflective diary can be a similar technique. We can record anything - feelings, how social interactions went, how well we are doing in keeping to our work schedule, our own resolutions to change our lifestyle, what situations made us feel good, what makes us feel guilty or weak. Simple recording charts can also be used to self-monitor a particular phenomenon (here, life attitude change) - see Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Record sheet**

Date	Time	Place	Other people present	Activity/thought/situation	Reaction of the surroundings / My thoughts, feelings	The following events after the reaction of the surroundings, thoughts, feelings	Notes

##### 4.3.3 Self-reflective diary

The self-reflective diary is in written form and can be very well used for the personal development of anyone. In it we write down our experiences, insights from the process of

our own personal development.

Self-reflective journals can serve us as a benchmark to monitor the effectiveness of our own self-efficacy enhancement.

Example

**Figure 2 Example of the components of a content analysis of an evaluation**

Components	Examples of questions
Rational	What I've accomplished? What I can do better? Where I have reserves?
Affective	What were my feelings about the activity? In what ways do I feel a change?
Psychosomatic	Do my feelings reflect into the somatic area? How do I breathe during the activity?
Evaluative/Assessing	How did the activity enrich me? Does it benefit me?

#### 4.3.4 SWOT analyses

Related to personal development and increasing self-efficacy competencies as an important salutoprotective resource in the search for psychological balance is a technique commonly encountered in project management. This is a SWOT analysis, which is very useful for both promoting self-reflection and increasing self-efficacy (in the sense of I can do it, I will overcome it).

The four quadrants are the basis of the technique:

- Strengths (what we are good at)
- Reserves (what we could "improve")
- Opportunities - anything in our external environment that can help us - e.g. good social relationships with colleagues, friends, quality leisure activities, interesting work.
- Threats - anything that can harm us from the external environment - e.g. toxic environment at work, negative social events, poor social relationships, etc.

**Fig. 3 SWOT analysis**

Strengths	Reserves
Opportunities	Threats

Closely related to the SWOT analysis is the use of time-management techniques, which help to better organize time, divide time for work and rest activities and help to find time resources for activities contributing to mental health (see e.g. Švamberk Šauerová, 2018).

#### 4.3.5 My achievements

The exercise leads to a natural acceptance of one's own success while strengthening the awareness of one's own self-efficacy, and builds appropriately on previous techniques (related to the attributional and cognitive styles already mentioned).

Plain paper and pencil will suffice. Let's try to list our achievements this week/month in 10

min. Let's try to write as many as possible. Next, we can try to write down the achievements we have made this year. Those who like graphically pleasing material can use the cards from the career diary - the Be creative cards.

After completing the list, it is possible to reflect on who else has contributed to our success, which achievement we are most happy about, and whether we have shared it with anyone. If someone else has participated in it, we can proceed to the technique of Sharing the Joy (more closely Švamberk Šauerová, 2018).

#### 4.3.6 Self-strengthening

Self-strengthening is applied as a common type of strengthening, with the difference that

the person himself determines when and with what the strengthening occurs. This method is usually used in the early stages of behaviour change. We reward ourselves for behaving in a desirable way. Of course, it is necessary for everyone to find their own particular way of rewarding. Such a reinforcer can be really

anything (an interesting film, a small thing we buy, a sticker with a smile on the mirror, on the PC monitor or on the fridge). For adolescents, using a weekly motivational calendar may be a good way of self-empowering - see Figure 4.

**Figure 4 Motivational planning calendar**



(foto Švamberk Šauerová, calendar made by Albi)

For some, the aforementioned "journaling" may be a booster.

Another kind of reinforcer can be self-evaluation. Despite the fact that Czechs have a reserved attitude towards self-praise, experience shows that it is very often an effective tool for change.

Graphical representation of our partial achievements on the way to the goal also seems to be a very effective reinforcer. It is possible to use one's own creative potential to create a graphic.

#### 4.3.7 Hardening as increasing resistance to discomfort

In addition to promoting self-efficacy awareness, the basic techniques to promote self-reflection include increasing resilience to discomfort, hardening to uncomfortable situations, and building confidence to achieve goals. Hardening can be addressed in family education, and is important not only on the physical level (cold, cold water, "pebble in the shoe", hunger, thirst), where we try to delay the satisfaction of the need briefly (with respect for the child's safety), but also on the psychological level (resistance to teasing in the group, etc.).

#### 4.3.8 Visualisation of a pleasant stimulus

Visualisation is an important part of many psychological techniques and coaching. It is about creating a specific idea (image) regarding our behaviour. The best way to do this is to visualize the goal we want to achieve (imagine exactly what it will look like when we reach the goal).

We can also visualize a pleasant stimulus that will currently evoke something positive in us, conjure up a mental smile. This floods the whole body with positive energy, leading to the skill of coping much better with the surrounding stimuli. However, a positive mental attitude most often leads to the fact that even "unpleasant" circumstances tend to be perceived positively and unhappily.

In order to make the best use of the visualization technique, it is advisable to prepare a "reservoir" of positive situations and stimuli where we purposefully "reach" whenever we naturally feel unwell. We should have these ideas placed somewhere where we then draw from that place. The place where we hide them is entirely up to us, we just have to remember initially where to "reach" for the source of positive thinking.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize our considerations, it can be stated that the basic characteristics of anyone who seeks to change their personal development, who is interested in increasing self-efficacy and who intends to increase their mental balance through the preventive choice of salutoprotective ways of behaviour, even in times of such an unusual and complex demanding life situation as the Covid 19 pandemic, are in particular: healthy self-reflection, adequate self-esteem, natural authority, adequate awareness of their own self-efficacy.

It is the consciousness of self-efficacy that can be considered a key salutoprotective factor in building mental well-being and the overall concept of bio-psycho-social balance in the current social situation. The possibilities of developing self-efficacy need careful attention, both at the level of various educational activities in the field of non-formal and informal education, but also at the level of guided educational projects at all levels of formal education.

It can be expected that promoting and developing everyone's awareness of their own self-efficacy will have a significant societal impact.

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