

## PART IV

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## Meaning in life and its significance in emerging adulthood - literature review and preliminary study results

### Sens w życiu i jego znaczenie w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości – przegląd literatury i wstępne wyniki badań własnych

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**Abstract:** Transition from adolescence to adulthood and the challenges it entails are often accompanied by a feeling of anxiety and confusion. As research has shown, emerging adults may be particularly vulnerable to various mental disorders. Meaning in life is one of the protective factors that is of great importance both for the mental health and well-being of an individual. The issue of the sense of meaning in life is particularly important in emerging adulthood, as searching for meaning in life may be treated as one of the developmental tasks of this period. The aim of the article is both to review the literature on meaning in life, with particular emphasis on its two dimensions: presence of and search for, and to present the preliminary results of research. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between the sense of meaning in life, perceived stress and mental health among emerging adults in Poland. 120 emerging adults (between 18 and 29 years of age) participated in the study. Participants completed three questionnaires: the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), the General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28), and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). There was a negative relationship between presence of meaning in life and somatic and depressive symptoms and perceived stress. Among emerging adults, the search for meaning in life was significantly higher than the presence of meaning. The role of the search for meaning in the period of emerging adulthood as well as further research directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** emerging adulthood; meaning in life; mental health; presence of meaning; search for meaning

**Abstrakt:** Przechodzeniu z adolescencji w dorosłość i wiążącymi się z tym wyzwaniem niejednokrotnie towarzyszy poczucie niepokoju i zagubienia. Jak pokazują wyniki badań wschodzący dorośli są szczególnie narażeni na różnego rodzaju problemy natury psychicznej (w tym zaburzenia psychiczne). Poczucie sensu w życiu jest jednym z czynników ochronnych, który ma duże znaczenie zarówno dla zdrowia psychicznego jak i dobrostanu jednostki. Problematyka poczucia sensu w życiu jest szczególnie istotna w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości, gdyż poszukiwanie sensu w życiu może być traktowane jako jedno z zadań rozwojowych tego okresu. Celem artykułu jest zarówno przegląd literatury dotyczącej sensu w życiu, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dwóch jego wymiarów: obecności sensu w życiu i poszukiwania sensu w życiu jak i prezentacja wstępnych wyników badań eksplorujących związek pomiędzy poczuciem sensu w życiu, zdrowiem psychicznym i postrzeganym stresem wśród wschodzących dorosłych w Polsce. W badaniu wzięło udział 120 wschodzących dorosłych (między 18 a 29 rokiem życia). Badani wypełniali trzy kwestionariusze:

polską wersję kwestionariusza MQL (Meaning in Life Questionnaire), Kwestionariusz Ogólnego Stanu Zdrowia D. Goldberga (GHQ-28) oraz Skalę Postrzeganego Stresu (PSS-10). Przeprowadzone analizy wykazały, iż istnieje negatywny związek między obecnością sensu w życiu a objawami somatycznymi, objawami depresji i postrzeganym stresem. Wśród wschodzących dorosłych poszukiwanie sensu w życiu było wyższe niż obecność sensu. Omówiona została rola poszukiwania sensu w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości oraz wskazane zostały dalsze kierunki badań.

**Słowa kluczowe:** poszukiwanie sensu w życiu; sens w życiu; wyłaniająca się dorosłość; zdrowie psychiczne

## Introduction

Emerging adulthood is the developmental period between adolescence and early adulthood, focusing on the age of 18-29. It was proposed by J. Arnett (2000), who pointed out that in industrialized societies the age of getting married and undertaking parental roles is delayed, while for most young people it is a time of intense changes and the exploration of various possibilities. People in their twenties no longer identify with adolescents due to the fact that they are much more independent and free from parental control, but at the same time they do not feel fully adult because they do not assume responsibilities characteristic of adulthood, such as long-term job or parenthood. This developmental period is therefore characterized by the feeling of "being in between", which is also related to what essential criteria emerging adults consider to be indicative of being an adult, such as: independent decision making, taking responsibility for oneself and one's actions, being financially independent. All of these criteria are achieved gradually, not through a single event, so becoming an adult is a gradual and extended process (Arnett, 2014; Arnett, 2018). It is also a time of intense search for an answer to the question "who am I", "what I want from life", and thus the formation of identity. Although the exploration of identity occurs already in adolescence, as mentioned by Erikson (1950) in his theory of lifespan development, contemporary researchers point out that it is much more intense in emerging adulthood (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, Richie, 2013; Lapsley, Hardy, 2017). Searching for answers to an important question regarding one's own identity and choice of life path, as well as checking various options, and thus frequent changes in the area of close relationships, work and education, make emerging adulthood one of the most unstable periods of life (Arnett, 2014; Wood, Crapnell, Lau et al. 2018). As researchers point out, life transition from adolescence to adulthood and the accompanying numerous changes and feelings of uncertainty may be of significance for mental health (Schulenberg, Sameroff, Cicchetti, 2004). In recent years, the issue of mental health and psychological well-being of emerging adults has become the subject of greater interest both to researchers and clinicians because, as research has shown, people in this period of life are particularly vulnerable to various mental disorders (Kessler, Berglund, Demler et al. 2005; Schwartz, Petrova, 2019), especially mood disorders and substance misuse (Blanco, Ocuda, Wright et al. 2008; Wagner, Spadola, Davis, 2020). Various difficulties may increase, especially when the occurring

changes are perceived as unwanted (Arnett, Žukauskienė, Sugimura, 2014). Epidemiological data from the United States indicated that in the 18-29 age group, over a 12-month period prevalence of any mental disorder was over 40%, which was higher than in any other age group (Kessler, Birnbaum, Demler et al., 2005). Research carried out in Japan also showed that in the 18-34 age group the odds ratio of the occurrence of mental disorders was higher than in other age groups (Ishikawa, Tachimori, Takeshima et al., 2018). It is estimated that almost 19% of emerging adults meet the diagnostic criteria for anxiety disorders, 7% for alcohol abuse disorder and 4% for drug abuse disorder (Tanner, 2016). In a survey of over 1,000 emerging adults, 32% somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement: "I often feel depressed", and more than half (56%) identified themselves with the statement: "I often feel anxious" (Arnett, Schwabb, 2012).

Considering the challenges faced by emerging adults and the mental problems that arise in this age group, it is worth looking at protective factors that would minimize the risk of mental disorders and promote well-being. One such protective factor that can help emerging adults cope with the insecurity of transition from adolescence to adulthood is meaning in life (Maysless, Keren, 2014). Research results show that there is a negative relationship between meaning in life and depression (Disabato, Kashdan, Short, Jarden, 2017; Hedayati, Khazaei, 2014; Li, Wong, Chao, 2019) or anxiety (Shiah, Chang, Chiang, Lin, Tam, 2015), and a positive relationship between meaning in life and mental health and well-being (Garcia-Alandete, 2015; García-Alandete, Martínez, Sellés Nohales, Soucase Lozano, 2018; Heintzelman, King, 2014a). People who see their life as meaningful are happier and experience more positive emotions (Diener, 2009). Sense of meaning in life also promotes self-realization and personal growth (Krok, 2011; Krok, 2018). A higher sense of meaning in life is associated with better coping with stress and a lower tendency to use avoidant coping strategies (Halama, Bakosova, 2009; Hooker, Masters, Park, 2018). This factor seems extremely important because finding a sense of meaning in life is also one of the developmental tasks that emerging adults face. Researchers emphasize that this is one of the developmental tasks proposed by Havighurst (1948) - its successful realization, i.e. finding meaning in life, facilitates success in the implementation of subsequent developmental tasks, while failure may pose difficulties at later stages of development (Maysless, Keren, 2014). Searching for meaning in life can give young people's direction in life and motivation (Schnell, 2009), and what's more, seeing one's life as meaningful at this stage of development, is the foundation for investing in one's future (Lanz, Tagliabue, 2007). Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the issue of the meaning in life.

## 1. Meaning in life - models and definitions

At the beginning it seems worthy to make a distinction between meaning *of* life and meaning *in* life, which is an area of research in contemporary psychology. The question of the meaning of life is a more philosophical question, an attempt to look at the universe and life as a whole and to find out why and why it exists. However, due to the metaphysical nature of this question, contemporary scientific methodology is unable to answer it (Debats, Drost, Hansen, 1995). Some researchers point out that the question of the meaning of life, and especially the ultimate meaning of life, may be „too deep and complex to be fully understood by human beings“ (Wong, 2012a, p. xxxii). Psychological research therefore focuses on the subjective experience of a sense of meaning by individuals and exploring what makes people perceive their life as meaningful and significant (Martela, Steger, 2016). However, some researchers believe that in the context of scientific research it is permissible to use the two terms interchangeably (Wong, 2012b).

Although the question of the meaning of life has been the subject of interest of philosophers since the earliest times, Victor Frankl is considered its precursor in the context of psychology and psychotherapy. He wrote about "will of meaning" - which, in his opinion, is the most basic and primal human motivation. Searching the meaning and significance of one's life accompanies man constantly and is possible even in the most difficult situations (Frankl, 1963). Meaning of life is unique, which means that it can be different for every person and every situation. The meaning must be discovered by the person himself, it cannot be assigned by someone else. According to Frankl, meaning can change from day to day or even from hour to hour, so it is not constant, but it fluctuates (1969). Frankl argued that there are three paths that can lead individuals to discover or create meaning. The first path involves using your own resources and skills to contribute to society and fulfill your calling. It concentrates on what an individuals can give to the world. The second path focuses on what individuals can receive from the world through various experiences (e.g. relationships with other people, art, nature). The last path is about how an individual reacts to difficult situations and experiencing suffering in their life (Frankl, 1963). Frankl believed that facing traumatic experiences and presenting a positive, optimistic attitude about what happened to us could strengthen a sense of meaning. Suffering is an inevitable element of human life, however, it is worth emphasizing, that Frankl did not see meaning in suffering itself (it is not the source of meaning), but pointed out that a person can find meaning in spite of the suffering he or her experiences.

Over the last several decades, the interest in the issue of meaning in life has increased significantly, and therefore we can find many theoretical and empirical approaches in the literature. Reker and Wong (2012) distinguish two aspects within meaning in life: *global*

*meaning* and *situational meaning*. Global meaning refers to one's existential belief that life has a purpose, which makes a person try to embed what happens to them in a broader context, while situational meaning, sometimes also referred to as provisional meaning, focuses on trying to understand the purpose and value of specific daily events and situations which the individuals encounter. This distinction is similar to Fabry's (1980) proposition to separate "meaning of the moment", including everyday situations in which individuals can build meaning through one's decisions, actions, and experiences, and "universal meaning" that relates to belief that there is some order in the world, even if it is not completely understandable. Reker and Wong (1988) are also authors of the three-component model of the structure of personal meaning, which consists of: the cognitive component (worldview, values, beliefs), the affective component (happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction) and the motivational component (needs, wants, striving for goals). Cognitive component makes it possible to give meaning to life experiences and guides the choice of goals, while the pursuit and achievement of these goals allow the individual to experience a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction (Reker, Wong, 2012).

The Meaning Making Model (Park, Blake, 2020; Park, Folkman, 1997) also refers to two levels of meaning: global and situational. Global meaning focuses on beliefs about self-identity, God, justice, and the order of the universe, includes the ideals held by an individual and the states they aspire to as well as the sense of purpose. Situational meaning concerns specific events, includes an initial assessment of the situation, the revision of global meanings, and an assessment of the effects of these processes. The Meaning Making Model is based on the discrepancy between the meaning assessed by a person in a specific situation and their global meaning, i.e. what that person believes and wants. The existence of such discrepancies causes anxiety and suffering in the individual, and thus motivates them to take some action to eliminate these discrepancies (Park, 2010). Meaning-making, understood as a deliberate intrapsychic effort to reduce discrepancies, seems to be particularly adaptive in difficult and traumatic situations, such as disasters, serious illness or the loss of a loved one, over which the individual has no direct control (Park, Blake, 2020; Park, Folkman, Bostrom, 2001). Meaning making often takes the form of looking for a more favorable understanding of the situation and its consequences (Park, 2013), however, it may also involve revising one's global beliefs (about themselves and the world), goals (Wrosch, 2010) and questioning and reformulating the current sense of meaning in life. Reframing situational meaning so that it matches global meaning is called assimilation, while, in a situation in which an individual has to revise their global meaning, we speak of accommodation (Park, 2010).

In addition to the Meaning Making Model, in the literature on meaning in life, we can also find the Meaning Maintenance Model (Heine, Proulx, Vohs, 2006; Proulx, & Inzlicht, 2012), the basic three assumptions of which are described below. First, meaning is a relation. People can create associations between objects, places, and ideas, and moreover, they need to



organize their experiences through mental representations that describe the expected relationships between different elements that bring order to their perception of the world. Secondly, people, as self-aware beings, are able to reflect on their representations and feel stress and anxiety in situations in which they are confronted with meaninglessness. Third, violating the sense of meaning is related to the need to reconstruct it. The greater disruption of meaning the more urgent the reconstruction. The violation of meaning in one area will lead to the affirmation of other areas that have remained unthreatened and untouched. The Meaning Maintenance Model refers here to the fluid compensation mechanism. As research shows, people in situations where their meaning framework has been compromised affirm values and other areas of meaning such as self-worth or autonomy (Hicks, King, 2007; Hicks, Schlegel, King, 2010; Zhang, Sang, Chan, Schlegel, 2019). Research in the field of social psychology provides us with a lot of evidence confirming the presence of this mechanism in various situations. If an individual's sense of control (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, Laurin, 2008), their sense of belonging (Baumeister, Leary, 1995) or their worldview (Jost, Banaji, Nosek, 2004) is threatened to some extent, they will try to affirm in some other way what has been disrupted.

One of the most commonly used definitions of meaning in life today is Steger's definition (2009), which describes meaning in life as the extent to which an individual understands their life, perceives it as significant and meaningful, and sees themselves as having a purpose/aim in life. Although in his earlier works Steger (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, Kaler, 2006; Steger, 2012) distinguished two dimensions of meaning in life: comprehension and purpose, later, like other researchers (King, Heintzelman, Ward, 2016; Leontiev, 2005), was inclined to distinguish three facets (Martela et al., 2016): coherence, purpose and significance. Coherence is defined as understanding what happens to the individual and the ability to make sense of one's experiences (Heintzelman, King, 2014b). Life can be considered coherent when an individual can find in it certain patterns and regularities that make life as a whole understandable to them. Purpose is understood as having goals oriented towards the future and direction in life. Some researchers define it as a supreme and central aim that manages the behavior of an individual and organizes other life goals and tasks (McKnight, Kashdan, 2009). The last distinguished dimension of meaning in life – significance – refers to importance, value and worthwhileness of life. Individuals, evaluating their life, experience it as important and valuable (George, Park, 2014) and, what is worth emphasizing, this feeling cannot be reduced to feeling happiness or joy (Wolf, 2010). In this context, significance of life is akin to eudaimonia, an idea that dates back to Ancient Greece for living a good, worthwhile and responsible life (Martela et al. 2016; Steger, Shin, Shim, Fitch-Martin, 2013).

## 2. Presence of meaning versus search for meaning

Researchers point out that having meaning in life is different from seeking it, and thus presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life should be treated as two separate constructs, which was confirmed by empirical research (Park, Park, Peterson, 2010; Steger, Oishi, Kashdan, 2009). Presence of meaning refers to perceiving one's life as valuable and purposeful, understanding both themselves and the world around them, individuals believe that their life is meaningful. Search for meaning, on the other hand, focuses on the efforts that individuals make to understand their life and strengthen or develop a sense of meaning, it is the process of finding answers to the question of what can I do to make my life more meaningful (Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, Otake, 2008). Previous research have shown that the correlates of having meaning in life and searching for it are different (Dezutter, Waterman, Schwartz, Luyckx, Beyers et al., 2014) and have indicated that the presence of meaning is more beneficial for mental health and well-being (Li, Dou, Liang, 2021; Steger et al. 2006; Brassai, Piko, Steger, 2011) than searching of it (Schwartz, Beyers, Luyckx, Soenens, Zamboanga et al., 2011; Steger, Kasdan, Sullivan, Lorentz, 2008). However, the relationship between the search for meaning in life and well-being is not entirely clear. There are concepts in which the search for meaning in life is perceived rather negatively - as a process that occurs only in people whose needs remain unmet, and thus they experience frustration (Baumaister, 1991; Klinger, 1998). On the other hand, we have theories that describe the search for meaning as the primary human motivation, which is natural and healthy (Frankl, 1963; Maddi, 1970). Reker (2000) tries to combine these two approaches, pointing out that the search for meaning may result from both healthy motives, such as affirmation of life, and unhealthy ones, which arise from deficits and frustration. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between happiness, positive affect, and life satisfaction, and having meaning in life, and a negative relationship between depression, negative affect and presence of meaning. Opposite relationships were observed for the search for meaning (Park et al., 2010; Soucase, García-Alandete, Rubio-Belmonte, 2021). Also, in research conducted on a group of Australian adults, a negative relationship between the search for meaning and subjective well-being has been confirmed (Cohen, Cairns, 2012).

However, it seems that searching for meaning may be related to lower levels of well-being in later life stages, while in earlier stages of development, such as emerging adulthood, it may be rather adaptive and normative, and thus not associated with well-being (Steger et al. 2014). If finding meaning in life is one of the developmental tasks faced by emerging adults, it seems natural that in this age group the search for meaning in life will be higher. Still, there is little research that focuses on this developmental period in terms of meaning in life. Research on emerging adults showed that both presence of meaning and searching for it

were positively correlated with overall wisdom. Moreover, there was also a positive relationship between search for meaning in life and the two aspects of wisdom: reflexivity and openness. As emphasized authors of the study, the obtained results indicate that searching for meaning in life can bring positive results (Webster, Weststrate, Ferrari, Munroe, Pierce, 2018). Search for meaning in life is associated with an open and active exploration of existential problems, which can be of great importance in emerging adulthood. Dezzuter et al. (2014), in research on the sense of meaning in life among emerging adults, used a person-oriented approach<sup>1</sup>, which allowed them to identify specific profiles based on two dimensions of the sense of meaning in life: presence and search. As a result,

4 clusters were distinguished: High Presence - Low Search, High Presence - High Search, Low Presence - Low Search and Low Presence - High Search. The conducted analyzes showed that the highest level of positive psychosocial functioning (including psychological well-being, life satisfaction and self-esteem) as well as the lowest level of negative psychosocial functioning (including depressive symptoms, anxiety and externalizing behaviors) was presented by the participants in the High Presence - Low Search cluster. Emerging adults in the High Presence - High Search cluster obtained lower results in terms of positive functioning and higher results in negative functioning compared to the aforementioned group, but their results were higher than individuals in the other two clusters (Low Presence - High Search and Low Presence - Low Search). Individuals in Low Presence - Low Search cluster obtained the most maladaptive results from all groups. Presence of meaning in life, therefore, promotes better functioning and adaptation, while its absence entails negative consequences.

### 3. Our study

Due to the fact that there is still little research on the presence of meaning in life, search for meaning and their relationships with various areas of functioning in emerging adulthood, the aim of our pilot study is to explore the relationship between the sense of meaning in life, perceived stress and mental health among emerging adults in Poland.

#### 3.1. Participants

One hundred twenty emerging adults (88 women and 32 men,  $M = 20.71$ ;  $SD = 1.73$ ) participated in the study. None of the respondents had children or was married, but 45% declared having a partner. 69% of the respondents lived in large or medium-sized cities, and

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<sup>1</sup> Person-oriented approach focuses on identifying groups of people within the sample who have specific features or similar relations between attributes, obtain similar results in the variables of interest. This approach is often used to study differences in development patterns between groups (Laursen, Hoff, 2006).



31% in small towns or villages. All respondents had higher education or were students at the time of the study. Participation in the study was anonymous, the respondents could resign at any time.

### 3.2. Measures

The study used Polish versions of three scales: the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Kossakowska, Kwiatek, Stefaniak, 2013), the General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) (Makowska, Merecz, 2001), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2009). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al., 2006) consists of two subscales (5 items each): presence of meaning and search of meaning. The respondents assess on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 to 7) to what extent a given statement describes them. Questionnaire responses are summed up for each subscale. It is also possible to get an overall score by summing up the scores on both subscales. The General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) (Goldberg, 1978) consists of 28 questions that are answered on a four-point scale. The questionnaire consists of four scales (7 questions each). Scale A refers to somatic symptoms, scale B anxiety and insomnia, scale C functional disorders, and scale D is for assessing the symptoms of depression. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarch, Mermelstein, 1983) consists of 10 items regarding subjective feelings related to experiencing difficulties to which the respondents respond on a 5-point scale (from 0 to 4). The overall score is obtained by summing up all items. All scales are widely used in scientific research and have sufficient psychometric values.

### 3.3. Results

The analysis of the results showed a relationship between meaning in life, general health and perceived stress. Due to the lack of normal distribution of some variables (somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, functional disorder and depressive symptoms), a non-parametric Spearman correlation was performed. Presence of meaning negatively correlated with somatic ( $r = -0.22$ ) and depressive symptoms ( $r = -0.19$ ) as well as with perceived stress ( $r = -0.37$ ). No positive relationships were observed between the search for meaning in life and general health or perceived stress. Detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Spearman R correlations among meaning in life, general health and perceived stress (n=120)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Meaning in life (MLQ)	1. Total result	-							
	2. Presence of meaning in life	0.82***	-						
	3. Search for meaning in	0.54***	0.02	-					

	life								
General Health (GHQ-28)	4. Somatic symptoms	-0.20*	-0.22**	0.05	-				
	5. Anxiety and insomnia	-0.07	-0.03	0.09	0.51***	-			
	6. Functional disorder	-0.19*	-0.11	-0.17*	0.38***	0.40***	-		
	7. Depression symptoms	-0.09	-0.19*	0.11	0.37***	0.56***	0.39***	-	
Perceived stress (PSS)	8. Total result	-0.21**	-0.37***	0.13	0.53***	0.55***	0.41***	0.64***	-

\* $p < 0,05$ ; \*\* $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0,001$

To check whether the search for meaning in life in emerging adulthood is higher than its presence, a Student’s t-test was carried out. The results indicate that the respondents obtained significantly higher results in the search for meaning subscale than in the presence of meaning subscale (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in the levels of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life among emerging adults (n=120)

	Presence of meaning in life		Search for meaning in life		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
	21.39	5.29	26.01	3.79	-8.26	0.0001

#### 4. Discussion

The negative correlation between presence of meaning in life and somatic and depressive symptoms and perceived stress is consistent with the results of other studies (Abu-Raiya, Sasson, Russo-Netzer, 2021; Park et al., 2010; Park, Baumaister, 2017), although it should be remembered that they were conducted on groups of adults of different ages. Interestingly, the relationship between depressive symptoms, anxiety and perceived stress and search for meaning was not observed, which is in contradiction with the results of the above-mentioned studies. Moreover, no correlation was observed between presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life - in the previously conducted research these two dimensions were negatively correlated with each other (Steger et al., 2006; Park et al. 2010). This may indicate that due to the fact that in emerging adulthood search for meaning plays a specific role in the development of an individual, certain relationships observed in other age groups do not apply here. The conducted analyzes showed that among emerging

adults, the search for meaning in life is higher than its presence, which should be characteristic of this development period. The studies of Steger et al. (2009) indicated that at later stages of life (over 45 years of age) a higher level of presence of meaning was noted, while for younger people higher levels of searching for meaning were characteristic. Well-being deficits were correlated with higher levels of finding meaning, especially among older respondents. This allows us to suppose that in the case of emerging adults search of meaning does not entail such negative consequences as in other age groups, and on the contrary, it may be treated as adaptive and desirable, thus allowing for the implementation of important developmental tasks.

It should be noted that the study was preliminary and the study group was rather small, so the results must be interpreted with caution. So far, there is little research on this issue, and the results are partially contradictory, so this is an area that requires further research. Longitudinal studies could provide important data on this developmental period and its characteristic dependencies, which would allow observation of how the sense of meaning in life and its search for it change over the years. Research comparing different age groups with each other, with particular emphasis on specific factors characteristic for their developmental periods, could also be useful.

### **Conclusion**

Emerging adults who wonder intensely what their adult life should be like and make their first important choices often feel confused and overwhelmed in these new circumstances. That is why it is so important to look at the issue of meaning in life in this developmental period. Sense of meaning in life is related to the better functioning of individuals, contributes to their personal growth and self-realization, while its lack has negative consequences and may promote development of mental health problems. Although the relationship between the presence of meaning in life and the search for it is not yet fully clear and requires further research, there is no doubt that enhancing the sense of meaning in life can bring many benefits to individuals. It is therefore worth considering designing preventive interventions and programs that could strengthen the sense of meaning in life, and thus also improve the functioning of emerging adults.

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