

BASIC HOPE AND EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AMONG ADULTHOOD GENERATIONS

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Purpose. This study attempts to show the level of basic hope and existential anxiety among younger adults/emerging adulthood and middle adult generations. Basic hope is seen as a positive feeling playing a fundamental motivational role in the regulation of human behavior. It has been pointed out that hope is a prospective emotion that, contrary to fear/anxiety, is directed toward the future. Existential anxiety is thought to be inversely related with hope which means that existential anxiety is associated with unresolved intra-psychic conflicts.

Methods. A sample of 139 younger and adult participants from the general population was examined. They represented three stages of adulthood: emerging adulthood (59), early adulthood (28), middle adulthood (52). They completed two self-measure questionnaires focused on basic hope (Basic Hope Inventory – 12 by Trzebiński and Zięba) and existential anxiety (Existential Anxiety Questionnaire by Weems and associates).

Results. The results indicate that the younger generation/emerging adulthood displays a higher level of existential anxiety and lower level of basic hope than other adult generations. Young people who feel higher existential anxiety do not believe that their future will be positive. Adult women display a higher level of basic hope than men while the level of existential anxiety is similar in both women and men

Conclusions. The results document developmental characteristics of the stage named emerging adulthood. At this stage of development, people are particularly vulnerable, full of fear for their future, they have to make important decisions about their education, professional decisions, and close interpersonal relationships. As their hope is low and existential anxiety is high they do not perceive their future positively.

Keywords: basic hope; existential anxiety, emerging adulthood, early and middle adulthood.

Барбара Гавда. Базова надія та екзистенційна тривога у дорослому віці.

Мета. Це дослідження є спробою виявити рівень базової надії та

екзистенційної тривоги у період дорослості. Базова надія розглядається як позитивне почуття, що відіграє фундаментальну мотиваційну роль у регуляції поведінки людини. Надія розглядається як перспективна емоція, яка, на відміну від страху/тривоги, спрямована в майбутнє. Вважається, що екзистенційна тривога обернено пов'язана з надією та прямо пов'язана з невирішеними внутрішньопсихічними конфліктами.

Методи. Була досліджена вибірка з 139 дорослих учасників із загальної популяції. Вони представляли три стадії дорослості: доросле життя (59), раннє доросле життя (28), середнє доросле життя (52). Вони заповнили дві анкети самовимірювання, зосереджені на базовій надії (Опис базової надії – 12 Trzebiński and Zięba) та екзистенційній тривожності (Опитувальник екзистенційної тривоги Weems and associates).

Результати. Отримані дані демонструють, що у період ранньої дорослості життя опитані демонструють вищий рівень екзистенційної тривоги та нижчий рівень базової надії, ніж інші дорослі покоління. Молоді люди, які відчують вищу екзистенційну тривогу, не вірять, що їхнє майбутнє буде позитивним. Дорослі жінки демонструють вищий рівень базової надії, ніж чоловіки, тоді як рівень екзистенційної тривоги однаковий як у жінок, так і у чоловіків.

Висновки. Результати засвідчують особливості вікової стадії під назвою «настає дорослість». На цьому етапі розвитку люди особливо вразливі, сповнені страху за своє майбутнє, їм доводиться приймати важливі рішення щодо освіти, професійних рішень, тісних міжособистісних стосунків. Оскільки їхня надія перебуває на низькому рівні, а екзистенційна тривога висока, вони не сприймають своє майбутнє позитивно.

Ключові слова: базова надія; екзистенційна тривога, настання дорослості, рання та середня дорослість.

Introduction. The literature provides many different approaches to hope. On the one hand, hope is defined as a way of thinking, the motivational aspect of thinking (Snyder, 2002), a positive emotional experience (Fredrickson, 2009), on the other hand, as a trait of personality, or even strength of character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), but also a transcendental phenomenon (Emmons, 2005; Vaillant, 2008).

Hope as a motivational construct. Koziellecki (2006) points out that the attitude to hope and the viewpoints on it have evolved along with cultural and social changes. A fairly insightful model was proposed by Dufault and Martocchio (1985), who defined hope as a multidimensional life force including beliefs/expectations that a person will achieve goods in the future that is important to him, and that the achievement of these goods is real. They have identified six dimensions on which hope can be described (these dimensions can interact with each other): affective

dimension including emotions and feelings related to the hope process; cognitive dimension covering a wide range of thoughts, insights, cognitive strategies; behavioral dimension including physiological, psychological, social and spiritual activities, such as specific behaviors aimed at achieving the desired result; affiliation dimension relating to the interpersonal relations of a person and its connections with the environment; temporal dimension referring to the perception of time by a person in the sense of experiencing time in the context of a sense of hope; context dimension is formed based on the premises that the object of hope is defined and can be achieved in certain situations/conditions.

Schrank, Stanghellini and Slade (2008) found that there are 49 definitions of the concept of hope which can be grouped into seven dimensions: time, goals, probability of success, relationships, personal characteristics, locus of control, unwanted starting points. These dimensions allow to formulate an integrated definition of hope as a state aimed at the future for the achievement of an important goal for a person (although sometimes it may be accompanied by negative states), relationships or spirituality, where the process of achieving is defined, subjectively assessed as possible/realistic, depends on the activity of the subject or its properties (e.g. courage, resistance) or external factors (Schrank et al., 2008).

According to Snyder's (2002) concept of hope, the key to hope is the cognitive component, and affect is the result of hope. Snyder's cognitive concept of hope (2002) sees hope as a motivational phenomenon. Snyder (2000) defines hope as the sum of the anticipated abilities to develop ways to achieve the desired goals and a specific level of motivation accompanying it. According to Snyder, hope is a positive motivational process involving four main components: goal, agency, pathway, and barriers. Hope is therefore the interaction of willpower and the ability to find solutions and plan ways to achieve the goal and the adoption of specific strategies for achieving the goal. To some extent, barriers increase hope, but their high intensity has the opposite meaning. The constellation of purpose, strength, and path determines the level of motivation based on hope (Snyder et al., 2000).

Hope a personality trait. In addition to theories that recognize hope as a motivational and cognitive construct, there are concepts according to which hope is a specific personality disposition. The theory of basic hope by Erikson (2002) is an example of this type of defining hope. It creates

the 'basic hope' construct, which is a mental structure formed in early childhood and plays a key motivational role in regulating human behavior. Basic hope is a result of appropriate interactions between the child and the caregiver who provides the child with a sense of security and satisfies his need for love. According to Erikson, the basic hope is the belief that the world is orderly, meaningful, and favorable to people. In this understanding, hope is a personality component of key importance for human functioning and it plays an integrative role. Carver and Scheier (2002) believe that there is a dispositional hope / dispositional optimism that maintains positive beliefs about the feasibility of goals. Scioli and Biller (2009) similarly define fundamental hope. It is a future-oriented, four-channel network structure based on biological, psychological, and social factors. Its basic dimensions are four human needs: connection, competence, survival, and spirituality. Five-level networks create the structure of hope (Scioli et al., 2016).

Hope as an emotion. Among the psychological theories of hope, one can also find those that indicate that it belongs to emotions, has a positive valence, and has positive functions, e.g. Hope is a positive feeling, the opposite of fears which plays important motivational functions (Gawda, 2018). Hope was associated with freedom and love. Hope is a factor that builds a sense of meaning in life. Ricoeur (1991) believes that "hope is the joyful expectation that the desired good will come true, saves from despair and necrosis. Living in hope and living with hope makes sense". Within the framework of the cognitive-structural theory of emotions, hope is considered to be a prospective emotion, i.e. one that, unlike fear, is directed to the future (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1990). In his concept of hope as a cognitive style, Dispositional hope, i.e. as a trait, also correlates with positive emotions (Snyder, 2002). Mowrer (1960) regarded hope as an emotion related to the expectation of a positive stimulus and approaching such a stimulus. In turn, Lazarus (1999) regarded it as an emotion triggered by the expectation of achieving a goal. Positive emotions in such a situation not only affect the condition of the person but also make it easier to achieve the goal. Hope even triggers efforts to improve conditions, solve a problem, or search for remedial strategies. Fredrickson (2009) believes that hope occupies a special place among positive emotions because it is slightly different from them. While typical positive emotions allow for feelings of security and comfort, hope contains an element of uncertainty, because it is oriented towards the future, on

challenges and difficulties. Positive emotions fulfill constructive functions by broadening the spectrum of information processing and building a creative and plastic attitude towards reality. They are an important factor constituting human resources, based on which he can develop his abilities and problem-solving strategies.

Existential anxiety. Existential psychology defines fear as a basic component of human existence (Gawda, 2017). Existential anxiety was initially described by philosophers as the fear of nothingness because it was about death, which is the greatest unknown. According to this viewpoint, existential anxiety is a type of fear that arises from the awareness of various possibilities of life choices and the unpredictability of their consequences (Oleś, 2013). This is also linked to the discrepancy between belief in what is worth and worth accepting and implementing in life and acting (Gawda, 2017). Many people experience the kind of anxiety that occurs not only in severe crises but also in everyday life (Opoczyńska, 1999). According to P. Tillich (Opoczyńska, 1999), existential anxiety may refer to the following three types: fear of death (non-existence) which refers to unpredictable death from which man has no escape (it appears most often in a situation where our lives are at risk), the fear of nonsense occurs when a person does not find meaning in life, fear of condemnation defined as the lack of being responsible for one's existence (Opoczyńska, 1999). Existential anxiety can lead to despair, which can lead to symptoms such as senselessness, emptiness, and self-blame. In modern times, the suffering caused by a sense of emptiness and, at the same time, meaninglessness is an increasingly common problem. This state has been described as "existential emptiness" (Gawda, 2017). The problem comes down to a lack of happiness, contentment, and the belief that your existence is futile. People are aware that death is imminent and the thought of it is paralyzing. In such situations, they try to seek help and build a concept of reality that will allow them to understand the meaning of their existence in the world, the way they perceive the self, and define their place (Rusaczyk, 2008).

Hypothesis: We assume that the youngest adults being in the stage of development of their personality and identity can differ from other adults representing, for instance, middle adulthood in basic hope and existential anxiety. We do not formulate a specific hypothesis on the direction of these differences because all stages of adulthood challenge people.

Methods.

Participants. A total of 139 participants aged 18-60 years took part in the study (71 women and 68 men). The participants represented three stages of adulthood: 59 from emerging adulthood (aged 18-20), 28 from early adulthood (aged 21-35), and 52 from middle adulthood (over 35 years old). The respondents completed the questionnaires after giving their consent to participate in the study.

Measures.

1. Existential anxiety Questionnaire by C. F. Weems, N. M. Costa, C. Dehon, and S. L. Berman (2006). It measures existential anxiety which refers to the feeling of fear of death, loneliness, and emptiness. The questionnaire contains 13 statements related to opinions on the world and human life. The psychometric properties of these measures are good; reliability is appropriate Cronbach's alpha is 0,71 (Weems, Costa, Dehon, Berman, 2006).

2. Basic Hope Inventory - 12 (Trzebiński & Zieba, 2003). The questionnaire for measuring basic hope is a self-report tool that is used to test the basic hope BHI-12. The authors of the tool are J. Trzebiński and M. Zięba (2003). The psychometric research was carried out on a group of 592 high school students aged 17-20 living in cities such as Warsaw, Jarosław, and Poznań. The reliability of BHI-12 expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the group of older high school students ($N = 558$) was 0.70, while in individual studies it ranged between .60 and .81. The questionnaire consists of 12 statements concerning the basic hope present in human life (Trzebiński & Zięba, 2003).

Results. A two-way analysis of variance was performed to show whether there are differences between different adult generations and sex in the level of basic hope and existential anxiety. The dependent variables were basic hope and existential anxiety while independent variables were 3 generations (emerging adulthood, early adulthood, middle adulthood) and sex (male, female). The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. The distribution of variables was normal.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics				
	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Basic hope	16	44	30.46	5.38
Existential anxiety	9	57	27.83	11.13

M – means, *SD* – standard deviation

The results of the analysis of variance show that there is significant effect of sex on basic hope while no effect of sex on existential anxiety (Table 2). Women display a higher level of basic hope than men while the level of existential anxiety is similar in both women and men. The effect size for this difference is small. It has been also found that there are significant generation effects on basic hope and existential anxiety (Table 2). The effect size for existential anxiety is medium while for basic hope is small. To show the detailed differences between generations the *post hoc* comparisons were performed with the use of the Scheffé test (Table 3).

Table 2.

Two-way analysis of variance

Tests between-subjects effects					
Source	Dependent variables	Type III sum of squares	F	p	η ²
Sex (F, M)	Existential anxiety	143.148	2.092	.150	.015
	Basic hope	120.097	4.869	.029*	.035
Generations (Y, A)	Existential anxiety	7468.896	54.577	.000***	.451
	Basic hope	624.342	12.657	.000***	.160
Sex * Generations	Existential anxiety	324.294	2.370	.097	.034
	Basic hope	20.734	.420	.658	.006

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3.

Multiple comparisons between groups

Multiple comparisons					
Test Scheffe					
Variables	(I) generations	(J) generations	Difference between groups (I-J)	SE	p
Existential anxiety	18 - 20 years old	21 - 35 years old	15.76***	1.898	.000
		over 35 years old	14.45***	1.573	.000
	21 - 35 years old	18 - 20 years old	-15.76***	1.898	.000
		over 35 years old	-1.32	1.939	.794
	over 35 years old	18 - 20 years old	-14.45***	1.573	.000
		21 - 35 years old	1.32	1.939	.794
Basic hope	18 - 20 years old	21 - 35 years old	-5.43***	1.140	.000
		over 35 years old	-2.70*	.945	.019
	21 - 35 years old	18 - 20 years old	5.43***	1.140	.000
		over 35 years old	2.73	1.164	.068
	over 35 years old	18 - 20 years old	2.70*	.945	.019
		21 - 35 years old	-2.73	1.164	.068

SE – standard error, * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

The multiple comparisons revealed that there are significant differences in the level of existential anxiety between younger generation i.e. emerging adulthood and other generations i.e. early adulthood and middle adulthood (Table 3). Persons from emerging adulthood feel higher existential anxiety than other persons from adult generations (Fig. 1). The between-group comparisons of basic hope showed opposite results. Persons belonging to the emerging adulthood generation display lower levels basic hope than other adult generations (Table 3). Persons from the stages of early and middle adulthood generations feel higher hope than people from younger adults (Fig. 2).

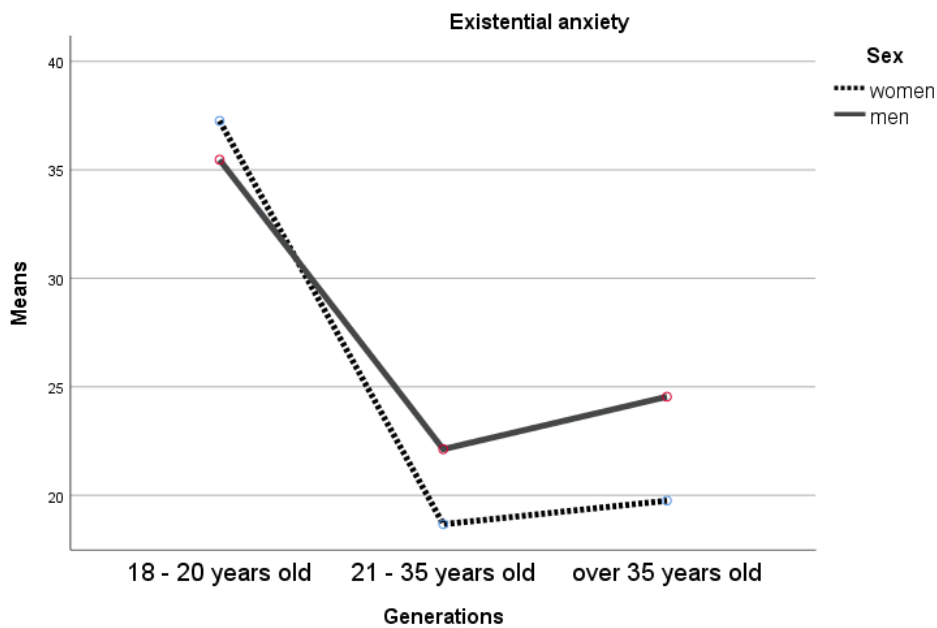


Fig. 1. Existential anxiety in generations

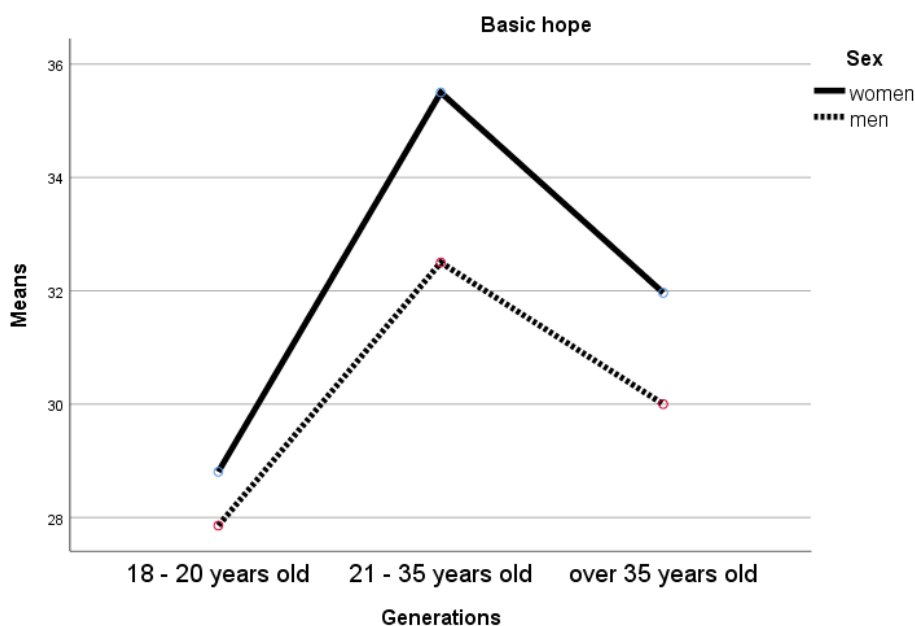


Fig. 2. Basic hope in generations

Discussion. The presented results showed important emotional characteristics of different stages of adulthood. The highest existential anxiety and lowest hope are felt by persons in emerging adulthood aged between 18 and 20 years. They are younger than other adult generations, they begin their adult life. Emerging adulthood is a novel stage in the development situated between adolescence and early adulthood. Typical for this stage is underlying a lot of social roles, social activities, social relationships, and different kinds of challenges such as decisions related to education, work activity, and relationships activity (Oleś, 2013). At this stage, there is an accumulation of decision-making. The life of such persons is particularly intense in terms of decision making, exploration of different social and personal possibilities, and investigations of the political and cultural environment (Erikson, 2002; Gawda, Kosacka & Banaszkiwicz, 2020). A person has to make many personal important decisions and commit to many areas/activities such as committing to close relationships, starting work, and so on (Oleś, 213). At this stage, one's identity is in the process of development. People formulate a lot of fundamental existential questions related to the future, death, and sense of life (Erikson, 2002). The results of the research described above show that life is a great challenge for younger people, they feel anxious about all these aspects. Their high existential anxiety is associated with religious dilemmas (Peters, 2019). Furthermore, they are not fulfilled by hope, they do not perceive their lives or their futures positively. Hope in terms of its functions, can play a crucial motivational role in various areas and stages of human life (Kozielecki, 2006). However, among younger adults, this positive role is not present. Hope may influence positive results in terms of school and academic achievements and impact self-esteem (Gawda, 2018). Hope may positively impact the healing process (Stanton, 2000). Hope can be a fundamental factor associated with coping with stress, depression, overcoming life difficulties, and undertaking effective coping strategies (Kaleta & Mróz, 2020; Kozielecki, 2006). In positive psychology, hope, next to wisdom, love, gratitude, spirituality, and a sense of meaning, is a psychological property that has a fundamental impact on mental well-being (the so-called good life) (Carr, 2009; Trzebiński & Zieba, 2003) These positive aspects of hope were not identified in younger adult persons. However, these aspects of hope are present in other adulthood stages. According to humanistic psychologists, hope is indispensable in the pursuit of self-realization and development, it makes it easier for a person

to form goals, increases faith in achieving them, and there is the essence of the need for self-realization (Maslow, 1986). Hope or optimism in various forms is associated with a high quality of life, protects against severe stress, has a positive impact on the achievement of life goals, promotes physical health, a healthy lifestyle, helps to adopt an active attitude towards the disease (Peterson & Steen, 2002; Trzebiński & Zięba, 2003; Sińska et al., 2021). Koziellecki (2006) believes that hope requires shaping due to its enormously constructive functions. The development of hope is integrated into the development of the personality. Self-education based on self-exploration aims to form mature hope / developed hope. Its attributes are specific properties: active, growing, conscious, expansive, realistic, regulating, and responsible for unique experiences (Koziellecki, 2006). Hope is related to wisdom in life. In general, therefore, the development of hope is to result in maturing in the area of emotional and personality attributes. Probably, at the stage of emerging adulthood, all these aspects of hope are not employed because that development of personality is not completed. Contrary to that other adults at middle adulthood present high basic hope that helps them in all life activities. The accumulation of decision processes and not completed development of identity among the youngest adults can also explain the highest level of existential anxiety. They are still in the process of forming their identity (Erikson, 2002). They are particularly sensitive to current social problems. They are exposed to various contemporary challenges. That is why they feel high existential anxiety.

Conclusions. The comparisons of basic hope and existential anxiety in persons from different stages of adulthood showed that younger adults aged between 18 and 20 years display higher existential anxiety and lower basic hope than other adults. At the stage of emerging adulthood people are particularly sensitive to problems and conflicts in the world/society. They are full of fear for their future, they do not positively perceive his life, and do not feel a sense of their activities. These emotional characteristics are associated with their not completed development of identity/personality and accumulation of decision making at this stage which is contrary to the next stages of adulthood, i.e. early and middle adulthood.

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