

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE WITH ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR¹

O. PALADI² B. VOICU³

Abstract: *Addiction affects multiple areas of life and its overall quality. Previous research has shown that the Quality of life of individuals with substance and behavioral addictions is significantly lower compared to the average of the general population. The aim of the paper was to identify the gender differences in the quality of life of individuals with substance and behavioral addictions. The sample consisted of 118 participants, aged 18-42 years. Quality of life was assessed using the Quality of Life Inventory by B. Frisch. Results show gender differences within the studied group that present various forms of addiction. The results are consistent with the scientific literature.*

Key words: *quality of life, addiction, behavior.*

1. Introduction

Addictive behaviors or behavioral addictions have become increasingly present and widespread in contemporary society, posing significant challenges to the well-being and quality of life of individuals (Calado & Griffiths, 2016). As research progresses in this direction, it has become apparent that gender plays an important role in shaping the experience of addiction and its consequences on different areas of life (Fattore et al., 2014). This paper aims to highlight gender differences in the quality of life of people with behavioral addictions. Quality of life, a multifaceted concept that encompasses physical, psychological, family and social well-being, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of addictive behaviors beyond mere symptomatology (World Health Organization, 2018). Research on behavioral addictions is particularly relevant, given their increasing prevalence, which also determines their increasingly frequent research, but also their recognition, and increasing validation in specialized diagnostic systems (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

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² State University of Moldova, Republic of Moldova. oxana.paladi@usm.md, corresponding author

³ State University of Moldova, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, voicubogdancristian@gmail.com

2. Gender Differences in Addiction Prevalence and Patterns

Research in the scientific literature reveals gender differences in the prevalence and patterns of behavioral addictions. In terms of gambling addiction, men participate and engage in this type of gambling more frequently compared to women (Calado & Griffiths, 2016). However, the gender gap appears to be narrowing, especially for online gambling (McCormack et al., 2014). Regarding behavioral addictions, if we refer to addiction to the internet and computer games, the gender differences are obvious: men are more likely to develop this type of addiction, while women are more likely to develop addictions to social networks and online shopping (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Becker et al., 2017). These differences in patterns of addiction can be attributed to societal norms, gender roles, and different personal motivations for engaging in these types of behaviors (González-Bueso et al., 2018; Zakiniaez & Potenza, 2018).

3. Dimensions of Quality of Life

At the basis of the perception of life satisfaction, according to Lazarus (1991), there are fundamentally cognitive reasoning; thus, the connection between subjective well-being and affectivity arises from this reasoning. There are several areas that are empirically associated with what is known as total satisfaction with life and happiness, these being: health, self-esteem, goals and values, money, work, play, learning, creativity, help, love, friends, children, relatives, home, neighborhood and community (Frisch, 2014). The health dimension refers to the person from a physical perspective, the absence of pain, the presence of an illness, or any form of disability. The *self-esteem* dimension refers to the way in which an individual respects himself/herself as a person in relation to personal strengths and weaknesses, taking into account successes and failures, and the ability to manage his/her problems. The *goals* dimension refers to beliefs about how the life should be lived, how people should live their lives both in the present and in the future, along with personal goals. The *money* dimension is composed of three aspects: the financial income earned by a person, the assets that a person has, and the person's optimistic outlook on the future and that they will have the money or goods they need then. The *work* dimension is viewed from the perspective of time and the nature of the professional activity, of how a person spends most of his or her time performing an activity in a workplace or as a student. The *game* dimension refers to how a person spends their free time to relax, engage in pleasant activities or personal development, from hobbies to visits, to socializing or individual activities. The *learning* dimension refers to the acquisition of a series of new information or skills regarding areas of interest; regardless of the nature of the activity, this varies according to preferences. The *creativity* dimension encompasses the products of the imagination, whether it is a hobby or a novel and ingenious way to solve a problem. The *help* dimension refers to helping people who are not close or related, and the action of supporting them both individually and as a member of an organization. The *love* dimension refers to relationships that are very close to a romantic nature with another person, encompassing a whole series of feelings. The

friends dimension refers to people who care and who are not related to the individual, who have several things in common, know each other, communicate, and offer each other help. The *child* dimension refers to a person's relationships with possible children and the nature of the dynamics between them. The *relative* dimension refers to the interactions that a person has with family members, such as parents, grandparents, brothers/sisters, but also uncles/aunts or more distant/by marriage relatives; this dimension highlights certain interactions and how the person feels with these family members. The *home* refers to the locative situation, where a person resides; it is important to take into account the size, maintenance and appearance of the locative space. The *neighborhood dimension* is delimited by the perimeter around the house, the general appearance, the crime rate and the relationship with the people who live around. The *community* dimension brings a broader perspective at the area where a person lives; more than the neighborhood, the city or even the region where the person lives are considered. This dimension includes all attractions, entertainment spaces, education, crime, taxes, pollution, or the financial standard of living (Frisch, 2014).

Starting from the analysis of the literature, the objective of this research is to explore gender differences in quality of life among people who present at least one addictive behavior.

4. Methods

4.1. Measurements

Quality of life was measured using the Quality of Life Inventory, elaborated by Michael B. Frisch (2014). It assesses how satisfied a person is with certain aspects of life, such as work or health. The areas of life measured are: *health, self-esteem, goals and values, money, work, play, learning, creativity, help, love, friends, children, relatives, home, neighborhood and community*. The participants are asked to state how important certain aspects of life are and how satisfied they are with them. Psychometric properties of the Quality of life scale on the sample of the study were computed and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 was obtained.

4.2. Participants

The sample consists of 118 respondents. Out of the total, 51 of them are male, representing 43.2%, and 67 respondents are female, representing 56.8%. The participants were diagnosed, before the data collection, by a psychiatrist or psychologist, depending on the case, with an addiction (or several). Most of the participants are enrolled or in the process of being enrolled in a psychotherapy process for addiction management. For this study, the participants were picked randomly from the pool of clients of different offices of psychology that offer addiction management psychotherapy.

The data was analyzed using the SPSS 21 program. Descriptive statistics and t-test for independent samples for used for data analysis.

5. Results

Data analysis revealed significant gender differences in several dimensions of quality of life. Table 1 presents the results of the t-test for independent samples.

<i>Independent Samples t test</i>					Table 1		
Variables	Male		Female		<i>t</i> (115)	<i>p</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Health	-1.098	4.784	1.417	4.314	-2.952	.004	.552
Self-esteem	-1.176	4.727	1.373	3.651	-3.194	.002	.603
Goals	0.000	4.054	3.014	3.603	-4.196	.001	.786
Money	-2.098	4.129	0.029	3.472	-2.967	.004	.558
Work	0.019	3.107	2.388	2.917	-4.210	.001	.786
Game	1.568	2.147	1.567	2.950	.003	.998	.001
Learning	0.196	2.953	2.149	3.081	-3.473	.001	.647
Creativity	0.705	1.803	2.626	2.673	-4.653	.001	.842
Friends	2.666	1.840	1.447	3.928	2.238	.027	.397
Help	0.313	3.397	1.641	5.032	-1.708	.090	.309
Love	-0.078	3.588	2.582	3.770	-3.877	.001	.723
Children	1.529	2.928	1.522	3.164	.012	.990	.002
Relatives	2.235	2.267	1.403	2.486	1.870	.064	.350
At home	2.784	2.594	1.925	3.874	1.440	.153	.261
District	0.607	1.588	1.985	2.299	-3.844	.001	.697
Community	-1.882	3.647	1.626	2.248	-6.051	.001	1.158

1. Health dimension: Women in the sample report a significantly higher quality of life in terms of health dimension than men ($t_{(115)} = -2.952$, $p = .004$). This result contrasts with some of the previous research. In the research of Nolte et al. (2016) in which data from 15,386 participants from 13 European countries were analyzed, it was found that men usually report a better quality of health, especially in areas related to physical functioning. On the same note, Kim et al. (2015) reveal in their longitudinal study of 2,347 adults that women reported lower quality of life scores in terms of the health dimension, especially in the areas of physical health.
2. Self-esteem dimension: Within the analyzed sample, significantly higher scores of self-esteem among women than men were obtained ($t_{(115)} = -3.194$, $p = .002$). The results on the Self-Esteem dimension of Quality of Life align with the findings of the study led by Andreassen (2017), in which they studied social media addiction in 23,532 participants, and the results reveal that lower self-esteem is correlated with a higher risk of addiction, especially in women.
3. Goal dimension: The value of the t-test is significant ($t_{(115)} = -4.196$, $p < .001$), thus, a significantly higher satisfaction was reported by women, with a substantial mean difference. The results are consistent with previous studies in which women showed greater involvement in goal-setting and adaptation in life domains (Heckhausen et al., 2019). At the same time, women demonstrated higher persistence and adaptability in the direction of goals (Holding et al., 2017).

4. Money dimension: Our findings showed a significant difference towards greater financial satisfaction for women ($t_{(115)} = -2.967$, $p = .004$), in contrast to traditional models and some studies, but congruent with other current research that has revealed significant gender-based differences in how young adults perceive and manage financial well-being. Female participants consistently reported lower levels of financial satisfaction compared to male participants; this difference was statistically significant and can be attributed to financial literacy, which played a crucial role in a previous study where a strong significant correlation was found between financial knowledge and satisfaction levels (Henchoz et al., 2019).
5. Work dimension: There were significant gender differences in job satisfaction and importance for respondents ($t_{(115)} = -4.210$, $p < .001$), with women reporting higher satisfaction as well as giving greater importance to the work dimension. Clark's (2020) meta-analysis of 223 studies provided different results from the classical perspectives on the evolution of gender differences in job satisfaction, suggesting that traditional gender differences in job satisfaction have changed. Differences in job satisfaction align with addiction research, with work addiction being a behavioral addiction.
6. Game dimension: Although our results did not show significant gender differences ($p = .998$), extensive research on gambling addiction reveals different results. Thus, the results of a study showed that male participants have significantly higher rates of problem gambling compared to women (Kuss et al., 2017; López-Fernández, 2018).
7. Learning dimension: Results revealed significant differences ($t_{(115)} = -3.473$, $p = .001$). Thus, female participants indicated significantly higher satisfaction and importance in terms of learning experiences compared to male respondents. A study revealed that general intelligence and self-discipline, the most important predictors of academic performance, vary between genders. No significant differences were found for intelligence; instead, the strongest predictor of academic performance was self-discipline. Significant differences were found in favor of the females (Spinath et al., 2014).
8. Creativity dimension: The results showed that there are differences between the genders ($t_{(115)} = -4.653$, $p < .001$), with women giving significantly greater importance and satisfaction to the creativity dimension. A study that explains the differences between men's and women's creativity lists among the results that men are better at divergent thinking, and women seem to show more in-depth thinking, towards purpose, connections and perspective. The results of the study indicate that both genders have their relative strengths and weaknesses in terms of creative thinking (He et al., 2019).
9. Help Dimension: The results of the statistical analysis indicate that men attach importance to and report greater satisfaction than women in terms of help-giving behaviours ($t_{(115)} = 2.238$, $p = .027$). The study conducted by Einolf (2011) proposes interesting hypotheses for this type of result, namely that men have more income and resources that can be used to donate to charity.
10. Love dimension: No significant differences were found ($p = .090$); the results of the t-test analysis did not show significant differences between the two gender groups.

11. Friendship dimension: The results of the statistical analysis revealed significant differences ($t_{(115)} = -3.877, p < .001$). Women reported significantly higher interest and satisfaction with this dimension. The results obtained are consistent with those in the literature. Previous studies have shown that women report deeper social connections, also indicating that satisfaction with friendship relationships is a good predictor for satisfaction with their own life (Gillespie, 2014; Amati et al., 2018).
12. Children dimension: The results did not show significant gender differences within this dimension ($p = .990$).
13. Dimension regarding *relatives*: The data do not reveal statistically significant differences, although ($p = .064$) the result is only marginally above the threshold.
14. Home dimension: The results do not indicate statistically significant differences between the two groups analyzed ($p = .153$).
15. Neighborhood dimension: Concerning this dimension of Quality of Life, women reported significantly higher satisfaction with the pleasantness of the neighborhood in which they live ($t_{(115)} = -3.844, p < .001$).
16. Community dimension: The analysis of this dimension of Quality of Life reveals a strongly significant difference between the two groups analyzed ($t_{(115)} = -6.051, p < .001$). Thus, women give a very high importance compared to men to community experiences. These results are supported by the literature, which approaches the developments of the concept of social community. Thus, the study of McCulloch (2003) argues that women are more likely to feel the impact of residential fluctuation on the ability to develop informal ties and local friendship networks (McCulloch, 2003; Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008).

6. Conclusions

The present study revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups, men and women, in terms of the dimensions of Quality of Life: health, self-esteem, goals and values, money, work, play, learning, creativity, help, love, friends, children, relatives, home, neighborhood and community. It should be noted that, according to the results obtained, women generally report greater satisfaction in several areas. At the same time, the strongest differences were identified in *community engagement*, *creativity* and *job satisfaction*. These findings bring several important insights to the existing literature on gender-based differences in quality of life. In this context, we consider it necessary to study the particularities of the relationship between quality of life dimensions and other personality factors, which we will refer to in subsequent studies.

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