

STUDENTS' SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, VALUES, MEANINGFULNESS OF LIFE AND SELF- CONFIDENCE

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study was to develop and test a model that describes the relations between participation of students in social activities oriented toward helping others, their values, namely, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence. The sample consisted of 103 students aged from 18 to 41, 28.2 % were males and 71.8 % were females. In this research the M. Rokeach technique as modified by E. B. Fantalova, the Meaning-in-Life Orientations test (MOL) developed by D. A. Leontiev, the Self-confidence scale of the "Research of self-attitude" questionnaire (RS) developed by V. V. Stolin and S. R. Pantelejew, and questions from the third European Quality of Life Survey, which measure participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, were used. The first three instruments were translated into Latvian by S. Jirgena (now Mihailova). Validity and reliability of the Latvian versions of the MOL and the RS Self-confidence scale were evaluated, and the Latvian versions of both scales were modified. Correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used in order to test a theoretically developed model of students' participation in social activities oriented towards helping others/ discrepancy between importance and attainability of values and meaningfulness of life outcome, and meaningfulness of life and self-confidence outcome. Firstly, it was found that discrepancy between importance and attainability of students' values is not related to meaningfulness of life. In its turn, it was revealed that participation in such social activity as doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural and professional associations has a positive impact on meaningfulness of life and, in its turn, meaningfulness of life has a positive impact on self-confidence.*

Keywords: *social activities, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life, self-confidence.*

Introduction

Self-confidence is one of the positive aspects of self-attitude which is characterized by self-regard and by the attitude towards oneself as an independent,

strong-willed and reliable person (Столин & Пантелеев, 1988). It is the assurance in personal ability and power and the tendency to trust oneself. Self-confidence is an important purpose in personal development and a positive factor affecting other desirable outcomes. There is an empirical evidence that self-confidence is positively associated with subjective well-being (Fernandes et al., 2012; Hoffman, 2006), significantly and negatively related to anxiety (Keng & Liao, 2013) and suicidal ideation (Deeley & Love, 2013). The research of self-confidence and factors influencing it is especially topical in school years and in youth as it is found that self-confidence is a significant predictor of academic performance (Tavani & Losh, 2003).

Another important factor that affects subjective well-being is meaningfulness of life. Recently, it was found that meaninglessness is negatively related to and predicts low overall satisfaction with life and low general sense of happiness (Levina, Martinsone, & Kamerade, 2015; Levina & Mārtinsone, in press). Meaninglessness is experienced as a sense of terminal goal ambiguity, in other words, of life meanings, and a generalized sense of meaninglessness which psychological signs are a sense of a lack of control and freedom, a sense of boredom, a pessimism towards one's own future (Levina & Mārtinsone, in press; Levina, Mārtinsone, & Kamerāde, 2015). An individual's will to meaning can be frustrated, and existential frustration can result in noogenic neuroses (Frankl, 1963). In its turn, meaningfulness of life is a quantitative indicator of the degree and stability of an individual's orientation towards any life meaning (Леонтьев, 2003). According to Leontiev, meaningfulness of life can be empirically characterized as a total indicator of life meaning orientations, three of which describe time localization of meaning orientations (in present, past or future) and two of which describe the dominant locus of control (external or internal). Aspiration and searching for meaning is an important developmental task in youth – lifespan when young people search for their identity (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, the research of the problem of meaningfulness of life is topical in this developmental period of life.

The problem of meaningfulness of life and meaninglessness should be closely related to the problem of the structure of value system of personality. Values are enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973). An important characteristic of the structure of value system is the extent of the discrepancy between one's evaluation of importance of different values and attainability of them (Фанталова, 2001, 2013).

Youth and adulthood are the life periods when a person is socially active most of all. Social activities were classified into three categories: activities performed for oneself (doing an activity in preparation for connecting with others and being with others), activities performed with others (interacting with others without doing a specific activity with them and doing an activity with others), and activities performed for others (helping others and contributing to the society) (Levasseur et al., 2010). Social participation is recognized as an important determinant of successful and healthy functioning of society and an individual (Wilson, 2000; Wuthnow, 1991). It was found that social activities performed for others and oriented towards helping others, namely doing unpaid voluntary work, positively correlate to subjective well-being (Ļevina & Mārtinsonē, in press).

In the light of the great importance of self-confidence, meaningfulness, inconsistency of value system, and participation of social activities for psychological health and well-being the investigation of these aspects of human existence are significant. More over, the research of relations between them will be especially valuable.

Thus, **the main objective of this research** is to investigate what are relations between self-confidence of students, their meaningfulness of life, discrepancy between important and attainable values and their participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, and to develop and empirically to test a possible model which describes these relations (if it will be necessary, to modify the theoretically hypothesized model and to determine a model that better will describe the data).

Additional research question is: Do the Latvian versions of the Meaning-in-Life Orientations test (MOL) and the RS (RS) Self-confidence scale confirm to the requirements of psychometric criteria?

Relations between participation in social activities, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence

The results of previous studies give an evidence that positive self-esteem is related to meaningfulness of life (Kang, Kim, & Song, 2009; Rosová, Orosová, & Žiaková, 2015), presence of meaning and search for meaning significantly predict self-esteem (Asagba, Agberotimi, & Wimberly, 2017). Self-esteem is described as an attitude towards the self which is connected to personal beliefs about skills, abilities, social relationships, and future outcomes (Farid & Akhtar, 2013). In other words, two notions, namely, positive self-esteem and self-confidence, are used as synonyms. Previous findings allow us to assume that meaningfulness of life positively affect self-confidence of a person.

In previous studies it was also found that there were positive relations between active social life and meaningfulness. Thus, it was discovered that positive daily social events were related to greater daily meaning (Machell et al., 2014). Participation in social activities oriented towards helping others is a significant predictor of low level of a sense of meaninglessness (Levina & Mārtinsonē, in press). Individuals who engaged in such prosocial behaviors, as volunteering and spending money to benefit others, reported experiencing greater meaning in their lives (Klein, 2016). Such findings allow as to hypothesize that participation in social activities oriented towards helping others positively affect meaningfulness of life.

Empirically it was also investigated dependence of meaningfulness from life values, and it was found that personal values contribute to meaningfulness of life (Безумова & Капцов, 2009). Theoretically it was assumed that discrepancy between importance and attainability of values is experienced as a state of internal personal conflict or existential vacuum (Фанталова, 2001, 2013). This theoretical assumption allows us to hypothesize that the discrepancy between importance and attainability of values leads to meaninglessness, while consistency and harmony of value system positively affect an individual's sense of meaningfulness of life.

Summarizing above mentioned theoretical assumptions and empirical findings we developed a theoretical model of relations between participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence (see Figure 1).

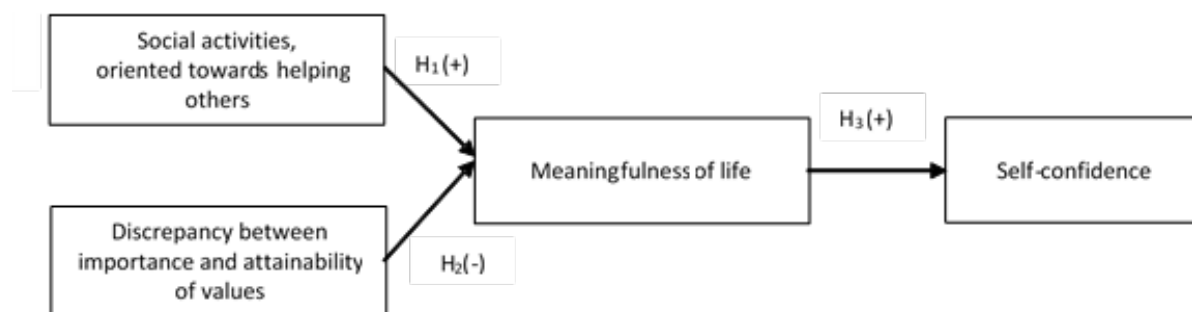


Figure 1. The conceptual model of relations between participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence

The hypothesized model indicates that (H₁) participation in social activities oriented towards helping others and (H₂) consistency of meaning-values system have a positive effect on meaningfulness of life; and (H₃) meaningfulness of life has a positive effect on self-confidence. Thus, further we will test empirically the hypothesized model, and if it will be necessary, we will modify it and will determine a model that better will describe the data.

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of 103 students aged from 18 to 41 ($M = 20.77$, $SD = 3.53$), 28.2 % were males and 71.8 % were females. All students live in Latvia. The largest percentage of students live in Riga (57.3 %) or other large city of Latvia such as Daugavpils, Liepaja, Jelgava (12.6 %) or other city (13.6 %). The largest percentage of participants of the research have unfinished higher education and are students of any bachelor's study programme (83.5 %). Mostly they have Latvian nationality (79.6 %) or Russian nationality (19.4 %). The main part of students do not work (72.8 %) and are not married (76.7 %).

Instruments

Participation in social activities oriented towards helping others. For measurement of students' participation in social activities oriented towards helping others five following questions from the third European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, 2012) were used: "How often did you do unpaid voluntary work through the following organisations in the last 12 months: (1) community and social services; (2) education, cultural, sports or professional associations; (3) social movements or charities; (4) political parties, trade unions; (5) other voluntary organisations?" Respondents have to response using 5-point Likert Scale where "0 – never", "less often", "1 – from one till three times a month", "2 – one time a week at least", "4 – each day or almost each day".

Discrepancy between importance and attainability of values. For measurement of the level of discrepancy between importance and attainability of values the M. Rokeach (Rokeach, 1973) technique modified by E. B. Fantalova (Фанталова, 2001) was used. The Latvian version of the instrument was developed by S. Jirgena (now Mihailova) (Jirgena, 1999). The participants of the research received the list of twelve terminal values. The list included the following values: active life, health, interesting job, beauty of nature and art, love, material welfare, good and reliable friends, self-confidence, cognition, freedom as independence in acts and actions, happy family life, creativity. Two tables of all possible pairs of values were formed. In the first table in each pair of values students had to mark the more important value. In the second table in each pair of values respondents were asked to mark the more attainable value. Importance scores (I) were computed as the number of cases when a value was chosen as a more important, and attainability (A) scores – as the number of cases when a certain value was marked as a more attainable. The index of discrepancy (R_{I-A}) between importance and attainability of values was computed as a total difference of importance and attainability for all values ($\Sigma[I-A]$).

Life Meaning Orientations. In order to measure life meaning orientations the Meaning-in-Life Orientations test (MOL) was used. MOL is an adapted

version of Purpose-in-Life Test PIL (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) and is developed by D. A. Leontiev (Леонтьев, 1992). The PIL (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) was created on the basis of Frankl's theory of logotherapy and man's aspiration for meaning (Frankl, 1963). Life Meaning Orientations Test was translated into Latvian by S. Jirgena (Jirgena, 1999).

Meaningfulness of life can be empirically characterized as a total indicator of life meaning orientations – purpose in life, process of life (interest and emotional intension of life), productivity of life (satisfaction with self-realization), locus of control-Self and locus of control-life. It consists of 20 items. Respondents are asked to mark their answer using a bipolar scale (3 2 1 0 1 2 3) where 1, 2 or 3 indicate different degrees of agreement with one or other statement of the bipolar pair of items.

Self-confidence. The Self-confidence scale of the method of “Research of self-attitude” (RS) was used. The RS was developed by V. V. Stolin and S. R. Pantileev (Столин & Пантелеев, 1988) and translated into Latvian by S. Jirgena (Jirgena, 1999). The respondents have to response whether they agree or disagree with a certain statement.

Procedure

Data were collected on a voluntary basis in small groups of students after their lectures in 2015. All participants filled out the questionnaires in a pen-and-paper format.

Statistical processing

Firstly, reliability and validity of the instruments selected for this research, namely, of the Latvian versions of the MOL and the RS Self-confidence scale were evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). For goodness-of-fit, comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were employed. References show that comparative fit index is $\geq .95$, and RMSEA $< .06$ to $.08$ with confidence interval (Schreiber et al., 2006). Additionally, Cronbach's α was calculated.

Secondly, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to explore correlations between participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence.

Thirdly, for inspection of the model of participation in social activities-discrepancy between importance and attainability of values and meaningfulness of life outcome, and meaningfulness of life and self-confidence outcome, the structural equation model (SEM) was adopted to conduct Confirmatory Factor Analysis to test the theoretically developed model within the data collected. For goodness-of-fit, CFI and RMSEA were employed.

For data processing SPSS Statistics 22.0 and SPSS AMOS 23.0 programs were used.

Results

Results of evaluation of reliability and validity of the Latvian version of the MOL

How it was mentioned above, in order to test reliability and validity of the Latvian version of the MOL, the CFA has been conducted and Cronbach's α has been computed.

Initially, the CFA has been performed on the 20 items from the original item pool of the Latvian version of the MOL. Unstandardized and standardized regression weights have been evaluated and 2 items which had P value lower than .05 and factor loading smaller than 0.3 were excluded. However, the model obtained in CFA, which was performed on the remaining 18 items of the Latvian version of the MOL, had no the acceptable fit. Therefore, we continued to exclude items with the lowest regression weights step-by-step until the modified model's goodness-of-fit reached an acceptable degree.

The newly established scale of the Latvian version of the MOL consists of 5 items that form one factor, and goodness-of-fit indicators are $\chi^2(5) = 3.640$, $p = .60$; RMSEA = .000 (LO90 = .000, HI90 = .017), CFI = 1.000). Unstandardized and standardized regression weights are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 **Results of the CFA performed on 5 items of the Latvian version of the MOL: Regression Weights (Group number 1 - Default model)**

Item			Regression Weights	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standardized Regression Weights
MOL16	<---	MOL	1				.664
MOL18	<---	MOL	.792	.150	5.280	***	.654
MOL3	<---	MOL	.963	.166	5.807	***	.773
MOL2	<---	MOL	.748	.148	5.039	***	.618
MOL1	<---	MOL	.691	.157	4.396	***	.522

Note: MOL - Life Meaning Orientation Test;

*** $p < .001$

Additionally, the reliability of the modified Latvian version of the MOL was evaluated using Cronbach's α . Cronbach's α was .81.

In further data processing we will use this modified version of the Latvian version of the MOL.

Results of evaluation of reliability and validity of the Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale

In order to test the reliability and validity of the Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale, as in the case of testing of reliability and validity of the Latvian version of the MOL, the CFA has been conducted and Cronbach's α has been computed.

Initially, the CFA has been performed on the 14 items from the original item pool of the Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale. Unstandardized and standardized regression weights have been evaluated and 6 items, which had P value lower than .05 and factor loading smaller than .30, were excluded. The CFA was performed on the remaining 8 items of the Latvian version of the SR Self-confidence scale, resulting in acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2(20) = 16.148$, $p = .71$; RMSEA = .000 (LO90 = .000, HI90 = .066), CFI = 1.000). Unstandardized and standardized regression weights are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of the CFA performed on 8 items of the Latvian version of the SR Self-confidence scale: Regression Weights (Group number 1 - Default model)

Item		Regression Weights	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standardized Regression Weights
RS103SC	<--- RSSC	1				.356
RS61SC	<--- RSSC	1.209	.440	2.744	.006	.540
RS52SC	<--- RSSC	1.477	.530	2.785	.005	.566
RS51SC	<--- RSSC	.988	.398	2.485	.013	.421
RS36SC	<--- RSSC	1.078	.428	2.517	.012	.433
RS35SC	<--- RSSC	1.493	.517	2.887	.004	.651
RS30SC	<--- RSSC	1.155	.439	2.633	.008	.482
RS24SC	<--- RSSC	.949	.423	2.242	.025	.345

Note: RS - the method of "Research of self-attitude"; SC - Self-confidence scale

The reliability of the modified Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale was evaluated using Cronbach's α . Cronbach's α was .69.

Thus, in further data processing we will use this modified version of the RS Self-confidence scale.

Results of the research of correlations between participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-attitude

In order to clarify what are relations between social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence Pearson's correlation analysis has been conducted (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and Pearson’s correlations coefficients for measures of social activities oriented towards helping others, discrepancy between importance and attainability of values, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	M	SD
1. Doing unpaid voluntary work in community and social services	-	.223*	.521**	.507**	.345**	-.021	.129	-.096	.48	.65
2. Doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations		-	.235*	.079	.236*	.040	.247*	.065	1.00	1.08
3. Doing unpaid voluntary work in social movements or charities			-	.231*	.371**	.132	.143	-.030	.44	.62
4. Doing unpaid voluntary work in political parties, trade unions				-	.146	.054	.163	-.045	.09	.35
5. Doing unpaid voluntary work in other voluntary organisations					-	-.208*	.160	-.053	.60	.89
6. Discrepancy between importance and attainability of values						-	.022	.129	52.12	14.18
7. MOL							-	.388**	26.89	5.78
8. RSSC								-	6.32	1.83

Note: MOL - the modified Latvian version of the MOL - total scale score;

RSSC - the modified version of the RS Self-confidence scale - total score;

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

In this research we found that doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations is statistically significantly positively related to meaningfulness of life ($p < .05$), and meaningfulness of life is statistically significantly related to self-confidence ($p < .01$). However, it was found that discrepancy between importance and attainability of values is not related to meaningfulness of life ($p > .05$). Therefore, in further data processing we will include in the structural equation model only correlated variables, namely, doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence. We will not include in the testing model discrepancy between importance and attainability of values as it is not related to meaningfulness of life. Thus, the hypothesis H₂, according to which consistency of meaning-values system has a positive effect on meaningfulness of life, is not supported in this research, and further we will test the modified model from which discrepancy between importance and attainability of values is excluded.

Results of testing of the model of Doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations – Meaningfulness of life – Self-confidence

After verifying that internal item consistency and validity of the modified Latvian versions of the MOL and the RS Self-confidence scale meets the requirements of model fit and such dimensions as doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations, meaningfulness of life

and Self-confidence have correlation, we used structural equation model to conduct data fitting, and we verified whether the hypotheses were established.

Responses to the question “How often did you unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations in the last 12 months?” and to the modified Latvian version of the MOL and the modified Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale were included into the model as observed variables. Respectively, MOL (meaningfulness of life) and RSSC (self-confidence) are unobserved variables. The obtained results are presented on the Figure 2 where unidirectional arrows are used for causal relationships (Byrne, 2009).

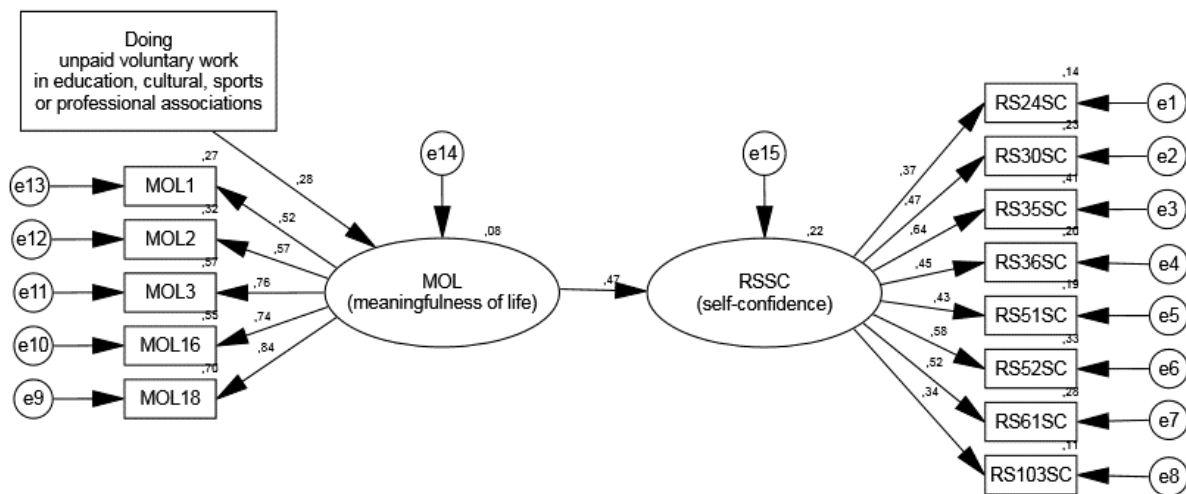


Figure 2. Structural equation model of Doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural, sports or professional associations – Meaningfulness of life – Self-confidence

Results show that the goodness-of-fit of the model is acceptable ($\chi^2(76) = 89.215, p = .14$; RMSEA = .041 (LO90 = .000, HI90 = .073), CFI = .951).

The paths of measurement model have significant loadings. All standardized regression weights for RSSC are above .30 and for MOL – above .50 and in both cases are significantly different from zero.

The standardized regression weight from observed variable doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural and professional associations to MOL (meaningfulness of life) is .28 ($p = .008$), and from latent variable MOL (meaningfulness of life) to RSSC (self-confidence) is .47 ($p = 0.47$).

Discussion and conclusions

Hypotheses of this research proposed that (a) participation in social activities oriented towards helping others and (b) consistency of meaning-values system have a positive effect on meaningfulness of life; and (c) meaningfulness of life has a positive effect on self-confidence.

Correlation analysis showed that discrepancy between importance and attainability of values is not related to meaningfulness of life. This finding is surprising and contradicts the assumption build on the base of Fantalova's (Фанталова, 2001, 2013) ideas, in accordance to which discrepancy between importance and attainability of values cause internal conflicts and vacuums. The state of internal conflict is a state of discrepancy between the need for achievement of internally significant values and probability of such achievement in reality, and the state of internal vacuum is an indicator of superfluosness of something in life or of the lack of interest in that, what is attainable. States of internal conflicts and vacuums are states of discrepancy between "I want" and "I have", as well as between "I want" and "I can". Taking into account that in accordance to the ideas of Fantalova the general index of discrepancy between importance and attainability of values can be treated as an indicator of blockade of units of value-meaning system, which function in motivational sphere of personality, and an indicator of internal conflicts as well, it was possible to suggest that the high level of this discrepancy will cause the sense of meaninglessness, while the internal consistency of importance and attainability of values, t.i. between the "desirable" and the "possible", will positively affect the sense of meaningfulness of life. The obtained results do not support this assumption. Probably, it can be explained by the use of mechanisms of psychological defense, which reduce the awareness of discrepancy in value-meaning system. As discrepancy between importance and attainability of values was not related to meaningfulness of life, this variable was not included in SEM. Thus we tested empirically the modified model that presented relations between participation of students in social activities oriented towards helping others, their meaningfulness of life, and their self-confidence.

Correlation and SEM analyses showed that such social activity as doing unpaid voluntary work in education, cultural and professional associations was positively related to meaningfulness of life and, in its turn, meaningfulness of life was positively related to self-confidence. These findings reveal one possible mechanism of development of self-confidence in youth. Participation in social social activities oriented towards helping others serve as a source of filling of meaningfulness of life. This conclusion is consistent with earlier findings (Ļevina & Mārtinsone, in press; Klein, 2016; Machell et al., 2014). Further, it is possible to conclude that meaningfulness of life increases self-confidence. Also in previous studies positive relations between meaningfulness of life and self-confidence were found (Asagba, Agberotimi, & Wimberly, 2017; Kang, Kim, & Song, 2009; Rosová, Orosová, & Žiaková, 2015).

The additional research question was about psychometric properties of the Latvian versions of the Meaning-in-Life Orientations test (MOL) and the RS (RS) Self-confidence scale.

While from the Latvian version of the RS Self-confidence scale consisted of 14 items only 6 items were excluded because of their low regression weights, the newly established scale of the Latvian version of the MOL consists only of five items (item 1, item 2, item 3, item 16, and item 18) that form one factor. Item 1 characterizes a sense of process of life (interest and emotional intension of life) and is an indicator of locus of control-Self. Item 2 characterizes a sense of process of life. Item 3 characterizes a sense of purpose in life. Item 16 is an indicator of a sense of purpose in life and of locus of control-Self, while item 18 is an indicator of a sense of purpose in life and of locus of control-life. A loss in an original factorial structure of the MOL allows us to conclude that meaningfulness of life in Leontiev's view as a total indicator of life meaning orientations – purpose in life, process of life (interest and emotional intension of life), productivity of life (satisfaction with self-realization), locus of control-Self and locus of control-life, is presented in our results only partially, as no one item of the newly established scale of the Latvian version of the MOL presents productivity of life (satisfaction with self-realization).

We have to discuss the limitations of this study. The main limitation of the study is the sample size. Taking into account that this research was conducted on the basis of one from Latvian universities and participation in this research was on a voluntary basis, we were limited in the sample size. The model of relations between participation in social activities oriented towards helping others, meaningfulness of life and self-confidence, which was obtained in this research, can be viewed as “a draft model” that should be tested in a more representative sample in future.

Secondly, the research design should be improved in future as in this research a cause and effect relationship can be viewed as “true” only for two variables, namely, participation in social activities oriented towards helping others and meaningfulness of life, as participants evaluated how often they did unpaid voluntary work through the number of organisations *in the last 12 months*, on the one hand, and their actual sense meaningfulness of life and actual level of self-confidence.

Thirdly, in this study helping others is presented in a context of formalized social activities while informal help is not included. Respectively, in future the role of helping others for a sense of meaningfulness of life and self-confidence in a context of informal social activities can be studied.

Despite of the limitations, this research contributes to understanding of sources and factors important for an individual's self-confidence. We showed the role of social participation for meaningfulness, which, in its turn, serves as a factor increasing self-confidence. This finding is important for practical issues. Namely, practitioners, whose efforts are oriented towards the enhancement of a sense of

meaningfulness and consequently self-confidence of young people, should provide for them an opportunity to participate in social activities, e.g. voluntary work in in education, cultural and professional associations. Nevertheless, in future it will be valuable to investigate other important sources and factors of self-confidence, such as, for example, childhood experiences, social-support, actual achievements in personally important life areas.

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