

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF STUDENTS' QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR CAREER PREFERENCES

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to analyse research on the relationship between students' quality of life and their career preferences. The author focuses on how the alignment between personal predispositions and career choice affects students' mental well-being, stress levels and overall life satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on a structured literature review conducted using databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The analysis included peer-reviewed publications from 2015-2025.

Findings: The results indicate a shift in students' career thinking from economically driven decisions towards value-based and well-being-oriented choices. Work-life balance, autonomy, and meaningful work are key predictors of quality of life.

Research limitations/implications: The study is based on a literature review, which limits direct empirical verification.

Practical implications: The shift in students' priorities has specific implications for three groups: higher education institutions, which must integrate professional psychological support with career guidance and develop in students such competencies as emotional intelligence and mental resilience; career counsellors, whose role should evolve from that of an expert to that of a coach who supports students in shaping their professional lives in line with their values; and employers, who must offer more than just a salary to attract talented people.

Social implications: The article highlights profound social implications, as changing students' priorities redefine the concept of success, shifting the emphasis from earnings to mental well-being and work-life balance. This forces a transformation of the labour market towards flexibility and meaningful work, whilst elevating the importance of mental health in public debate.

Originality/value: The value of this article lies in its synthesis of recent Polish and international research documenting a fundamental paradigm shift in career thinking. The article comprehensively analyses the psychological underpinnings of this change and presents its practical implications for education and the labour market.

Keywords: quality of life, career preferences, students, mental health, career guidance.

Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

A key stage in human development is the period of higher education, which is characterised by intensive social, intellectual and personal development. It is also a time to make fundamental decisions about a future career path. The period of study provides a solid professional foundation by equipping students with specialist knowledge essential to many professions. It is at university that young people develop the ability to think critically, analyse complex problems and seek creative solutions. The time spent on projects and in teamwork is an invaluable lesson in time management and collaboration – skills highly valued in today's job market. Through internship programmes and careers services, universities also serve as the first bridge between academia and the professional world, offering opportunities to gain valuable experience.

Equally important is the intensive personal development that takes place during this period. For many students, going to university means moving out of the family home for the first time, and consequently, a real lesson in independence. The need to manage one's own budget, organise one's day and make fully independent decisions accelerates the process of maturing. A university is also a space where different ideas, cultures and worldviews clash. Taking part in discussions, meeting people from different backgrounds, and engaging with new perspectives broaden horizons and help shape one's own identity. Involvement in academic societies or student organisations often allows students to discover passions that last a lifetime.

Nor should we forget the immense social capital that is built up during this time. Relationships formed at university, based on shared experiences of challenges, intensive study, and everyday concerns, often develop into lifelong friendships. Relationships with fellow students and lecturers, in turn, form an invaluable professional network that can pay dividends in the future. It is precisely in this diverse environment that a young person learns to function in society, communicate and collaborate with others.

Hence, the period of study is a kind of investment that shapes not only a specialist in a given field but, above all, a conscious, mature and well-rounded individual.

The quality of students' lives is a subject of growing interest in health psychology, educational psychology and occupational psychology alike. It cannot be denied that the period of study is a time of intense psychosocial and decision-making challenges for young people, which affect their quality of life, mental health and the shaping of their future career preferences, including professional identity, aspirations and adaptability to a dynamically changing labour market (Super, 1990; Holland, 1997; Lent, Brown, Hackett, 1994).

Students' quality of life, understood as a subjective assessment of their own life situation in physical, mental, social and environmental terms, is inextricably linked to the process of shaping their professional identity.

Choosing a career path is one of the key developmental tasks in early adulthood, and the decisions made at this time have a fundamental impact on an individual's subjective quality of life. Contemporary research, conducted both in Poland and internationally, increasingly focuses on analysing this relationship, emphasising that students' career preferences extend far beyond the traditional pursuit of financial stability. These include complex psychosocial factors, such as the need for meaning, work-life balance, and the alignment of work with personal values, which become key predictors of overall well-being.

The aim of this article is to analyse the relationship between students' quality of life and their career preferences in the context of current socio-economic changes.

The main research problem is formulated as follows: *What psychological factors determine the relationship between students' quality of life and their career preferences?*

The following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Alignment between personal values and career choice positively influences students' quality of life.

H2: High levels of academic stress negatively affect quality of life and modify career preferences.

H3: A sense of meaning in life serves as a protective factor for students' mental well-being.

The findings contribute to the development of contemporary models of career guidance and educational policy.

2. The concept of quality of life and career preferences in theoretical terms – literature review

Quality of life is one of the key concepts in contemporary health psychology, positive psychology and interdisciplinary research on human well-being. Despite its long-standing presence in the scientific literature, the concept remains conceptually ambiguous and multidimensional.

Classical approaches have emphasised that quality of life cannot be reduced solely to material or physical functioning but encompasses a subjective assessment of one's own life situation, embedded in cultural, axiological, and personal contexts (Sirgy, 2021). Quality of life is a construct that integrates physical, psychological, social, and environmental components, with the psychological component increasingly recognised as the most significant dimension (Haraldstad et al., 2019). Thus, quality of life encompasses both an individual's subjective experiences (e.g. emotional well-being, life satisfaction) and objective living conditions (e.g. health, social functioning, access to resources).

According to the World Health Organisation's definition, quality of life is "an individual's perception of their life situation in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations and concerns" (WHOQOL Group, 1995). This definition laid the foundations for modern, psychologically oriented research into quality of life, shifting the focus from objective indicators of well-being to the individual's subjective experience. Generally speaking, this definition emphasises three key elements. Firstly, subjectivity, quality of life is inherently subjective and based on individual assessment. What constitutes a high quality of life for one person may be of no significance to another. Secondly, multidimensionality encompasses various aspects of life, such as physical health, mental well-being, social relationships, and the environment. Thirdly, contextuality, which means that the assessment of quality of life is embedded in a specific cultural context and the individual's value system.

At this point, it is important to distinguish quality of life from related concepts, such as standard of living, which refers mainly to objective, material living conditions (income, housing conditions, access to services), and well-being, which often focuses on the psychological aspect, encompassing life satisfaction and affective balance (the predominance of positive emotions over negative ones). Quality of life is an overarching concept that integrates these and other dimensions.

The psychological dimension of quality of life encompasses a broad spectrum of intrapsychic processes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, self-esteem, a sense of meaning in life, emotional regulation, and the subjective perception of one's own worth and agency (Jones, Drummond, 2021).

Contemporary research on quality of life increasingly draws on the dual concept of psychological well-being, which distinguishes between the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of functioning (Ryan, Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being refers to a subjective sense of happiness, life satisfaction and the balance of positive and negative emotions, whereas eudaimonic well-being focuses on self-actualisation, a sense of meaning and the alignment of one's life with one's values. Empirical research confirms that both dimensions of well-being are significant predictors of quality of life, with the eudaimonic component showing stronger links to long-term assessments of quality of life (Gautam et al., 2024). This implies that momentary emotional satisfaction is less significant than a lasting sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Taking the above into account, an analysis of quality of life would be incomplete without considering the professional sphere, which for most adults, constitutes one of the central domains of life, absorbing a significant portion of their time and energy and serving as a key source of income, identity and social relationships. The relationship between quality of life and professional preferences is complex and bidirectional, and understanding it requires integrating theories from occupational psychology, career guidance, and well-being research.

In response to the growing importance of the professional sphere, the concept of quality of life at work or work-related quality of life has been identified in the literature. It is defined as a subdomain of overall quality of life, which refers to an employee's perception and evaluation of the full spectrum of experiences related to the work environment (Van Laar, Edwards, Easton, 2007). Quality of life at work is a multidimensional construct, encompassing aspects such as:

- Job satisfaction – the overall affective attitude towards one's work.
- Well-being at work – a sense of psychological comfort, absence of excessive stress and burnout.
- Work-life balance – the perceived ability to harmoniously combine professional demands with the responsibilities and pleasures of personal life.
- Control and autonomy at work – the extent to which an employee has influence over their tasks, pace and working methods.
- Career development and job security – opportunities for promotion, learning new skills and a sense of job stability.
- Working conditions – the physical and organisational aspects of the working environment.

Career preferences refer to individual career choices and priorities, which are shaped by personal values, abilities and external economic conditions. Based on their experiences and aspirations, each person develops a set of preferences that influence decisions regarding their career path.

Career preferences are an individual's relatively stable tendencies to choose specific types of professional activities, work environments, and professional roles. They encompass interests, values, beliefs and subjective assessments of one's own abilities and aptitudes, which guide decisions regarding career choice and career development. In the psychological literature, career preferences are regarded as an important element of personality structure, influencing how a person functions in both work and non-work life (Bajcar et al., 2006).

One of the most frequently cited concepts explaining the mechanism behind the formation of career preferences is John L. Holland's theory. The author posited that career choices are an expression of personality, and that people seek work environments that allow them to realise their dominant traits, interests and values. Holland identified six types of career preferences (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional), pointing out that a match between a person's type and their work environment promotes job satisfaction and career stability. A lack of such compatibility, however, can lead to frustration, reduced commitment and frequent job changes (Holland, 1992).

Career preferences also play a significant role in an individual's professional development, according to Donald E. Super. In his concept, career development is a lifelong process, and career preferences change with experience, successive life stages, and the formation of

one's self-image. Super emphasised that work fulfils not only an economic function, but also psychological and social ones – it enables self-actualisation and the development of a sense of meaning in one's own life (Super, 1990). For this reason, an accurate understanding of one's own career preferences facilitates the harmonious integration of professional and personal roles.

Career preferences are crucial to quality of life, as work not only provides financial stability but also enables the fulfilment of individual goals and aspirations. A career that aligns with personal preferences leads to increased life satisfaction and better mental health, as work fulfils not only material needs but also emotional and social ones (Ramawickrama, Opatha, Pushpakumari, 2017). Aligning work with career preferences increases motivation and commitment, which translates into lower work-related stress and has a positive impact on personal life and relationships with others. In this way, career preferences become an important element of work-life balance (Van der Doef, Maes, 1999).

Research on the quality of working life indicates that people working in line with their preferences are more likely to experience a sense of meaning in their work, autonomy and opportunities for development, which translates into overall life satisfaction. Conversely, long-term employment in a profession that does not align with one's preferences can reduce quality of life, increase stress levels and lead to burnout (Warr et al., 1979). Career preferences, therefore, serve a protective function, fostering a balance between work and personal life.

In summary, career preferences are a key factor determining educational and career choices, as well as an individual's performance at work. Taking them into account in the career planning process promotes not only professional effectiveness but also a high quality of life, understood as a subjective sense of well-being and satisfaction with one's life roles.

3. Students' career preferences and quality of life – a review of research

Students' career preferences currently constitute one of the key areas of research in the social sciences, as they reflect not only current labour market conditions but also profound changes in how younger generations perceive quality of life. It is becoming increasingly clear that students' career choices are not solely the result of rational economic calculation but the outcome of a complex interaction among structural conditions, cultural expectations, and the individual pursuit of psychological well-being, meaning, and autonomy (European Commission, 2023). In this context, work is seen as an integral part of quality of life, rather than its overriding determinant.

Research conducted in Poland indicates that financial security remains a key factor in students' positive assessment of their quality of life. The results of the EUROSTUDENT VIII survey show that students who report stable sources of income and prefer predictable forms of employment exhibit higher life satisfaction and lower levels of financial stress

(EUROSTUDENT, 2024). A lack of financial stability hinders future planning and reduces the sense of control over one's own life, which translates into more conservative career preferences. Similar correlations are evident in international studies, where post-COVID-19 employment uncertainty has been unequivocally linked to a decline in students' mental well-being and a tendency to choose safe, albeit less aspirational, career paths (Pshembayeva, Pfeyfer, Uaikhanova, Bubenchikova, 2022).

At the same time, the literature on the subject points to the ambivalent role of taking up work whilst studying. On the one hand, moderate employment helps build career capital and strengthens a sense of independence and agency. Research conducted in Poland shows that students who combine study with part-time work report higher levels of autonomy and a more positive assessment of their quality of life (Kunasz, 2022). On the other hand, an excessive workload leads to role conflict, chronic fatigue and reduced life satisfaction. This phenomenon has also been widely documented in international research, which highlights the negative impact of excessive work on mental well-being and a sense of purpose (Pham, Lam, Bui, 2024).

A common theme in both Polish and international research is the growing importance of work-life balance as a key criterion in students' career preferences. Polish studies have shown that flexible working hours, the possibility of remote work, and respect for free time are perceived as fundamental conditions for a high quality of life, often more important than pay levels (Skórska, 2022). Similar conclusions are drawn in international studies, where work that enables a balanced life is significantly correlated with higher levels of mental well-being and a lower risk of burnout (Hsu, Ye, Ling, 2022).

The axiological and existential dimensions of work are also playing an increasingly significant role in shaping students' career preferences. Polish research on the so-called Protean attitude indicates that students and young adults increasingly define their careers in terms of autonomy, personal development, and the integration of work with other spheres of life, thereby contributing to a higher subjective quality of life (Blachnicka, 2022). Similar conclusions emerge from European research, which has shown that students with strongly internalised prosocial and moral values are more likely to link quality of life to a sense of meaning and the social utility of their future work (Kuusisto, de Groot, de Ruyter, Schutte, Rissanen, 2023).

Systematic reviews of European research also emphasise the particular importance of meaning in life and work. They indicate that a sense of meaning serves a protective function for students' mental health, reducing anxiety and depression and enhancing life satisfaction (Ortega- Gómez, García- Barrena, Martínez-Álvarez, Baca-García, 2025). According to recent reports, approximately 30-40% of students experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, while a significant proportion report high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, which has a direct impact on both their quality of life and career decision-making processes (HMS 2024-2025). It has also been noted that self-efficacy in making career decisions is significantly associated with self-esteem, professional identity, peer support, expectations regarding outcomes, and uncertainty about future career paths (Wang D., Li, Wang G., 2024). Vashisht

and colleagues, however, confirmed that students with emotional control and certain personality traits (the Big Five) were better able to improve their career adaptation, based on a systematic review (Vashisht et al., 2021). It was also confirmed that emotional intelligence, measured by empathy, the use of emotions, coping with relationships and self-control factors, is positively associated with self-efficacy in making career decisions, and that the use of emotions and self-control factors was inversely associated with career exploration and engagement (Brown, George-Curran, Smith, 2003).

A Polish report compiled by a SWPS team on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education noted that the prevalence of depression, anxiety and burnout in the academic environment significantly reduces quality of life and hinders rational career planning, emphasising the need for systemic mental health support at universities (Report: Analysis of research on mental health and quality of life in the academic environment, 2024).

A lack of meaning in work, however, is associated with a negative assessment of one's future career and a lower quality of life, even when economic criteria are met. In this context, career preferences should be interpreted not only as a response to market conditions but also as a means of fulfilling the fundamental psychological and existential needs of young adults (Green, Lee, Zou, Zhou, 2024).

An integrated analysis of Polish and international research indicates that students' career preferences are increasingly linked to a holistic understanding of quality of life. In this context, work occupies an important but not dominant role, supporting well-being, autonomy, and a sense of purpose in life. This trend points to a lasting shift in the paradigm of career thinking, observed in both Poland and other countries.

Research conducted at Polish academic institutions indicates that students' career preferences and subjective quality of life are strongly influenced by structural, psychosocial, and cultural factors, particularly their field of study, material status, educational experiences, and perceived employment prospects. Analyses by Trzcionka and colleagues, conducted on students at three Polish universities, revealed significant differences in mental and social quality of life depending on the type of degree programme studied. Medical students reported a lower quality of mental life, but at the same time, more stable career preferences, which the authors attribute to a clearly defined career path (Trzcionka et al., 2022).

In turn, Skórska's research showed that students combining study with work are more likely to prefer flexible forms of employment in the future, whilst also rating their current quality of life lower in terms of leisure time and mental well-being (Skórska, 2022). This tendency is consistent across both Polish and international studies; however, research suggests that the importance attributed to work-life balance is particularly pronounced among students in developed European countries compared to other regions, where economic factors may still play a more dominant role.

In research on the career aspirations of Generation Z, Anisiewicz found that students are primarily guided by post-materialistic values, such as the meaning of work and work-life balance, which positively correlates with their reported overall quality of life, regardless of projected earnings (Anisiewicz, 2023).

In contrast, research by Paszkowska-Rogacz further demonstrated that students' life orientation and level of self-regulation differentiate their career adaptability; individuals with a higher promotional orientation not only chose dynamic career paths more frequently but also reported higher life satisfaction (Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2024). These findings are complemented by Czeranowska's analyses, which indicate that students' subjective understanding of professional success significantly influences their career preferences and assessments of quality of life, with students emphasising objective success (income, prestige) more frequently reporting stress and lower psychological well-being (Czeranowska, 2022).

In turn, international research confirms that these relationships are universal, though they are modulated by cultural and institutional contexts. Lipshits-Braziler, Arieli and Daniel, analysing a sample of young adults, including students, demonstrated that alignment between personal values and career preferences significantly predisposes individuals to higher levels of life satisfaction, whilst a lack of such alignment is associated with reduced quality of life as early as the undergraduate stage (Lipshits-Braziler, Arieli, Daniel, 2024).

From the perspective of job quality, Green and co-authors have demonstrated that students attach the greatest importance to job quality understood as autonomy and meaningfulness, and that these factors have a greater impact on well-being than financial expectations, which has a direct bearing on their career preferences (Green, Lee, Zou, Zhou, 2024).

Research by Pham and colleagues on Vietnamese students showed that exploration of the professional environment and social support significantly influence career choices, whilst indirectly enhancing perceived quality of life through an increased sense of agency (Pham, Lam, Bui, 2024).

From a systematic perspective, Abdullah, Zakaria and Zahoor indicated that the quality of professional life, which is already shaped during the study phase, is the result of the interaction between the university's organisational conditions, the academic workload and students' individual resources, which differentiates their attitudes towards their future careers (Abdullah, Zakaria, Zahoor, 2021).

Age and developmental stage also proved to be significant differentiating factors, as confirmed by the analyses of Alabbad, Cochrane and Mitchell, which show that younger students value the health and professional components of quality of life differently from older students, which translates into differing preferences regarding career stability and flexibility (Alabbad, Cochrane, Mitchell, 2025).

4. Methods

The present study is based on a structured review of the subject literature, the aim of which was to identify key relationships between students' quality of life and their career preferences.

The analysis was conducted on the basis of scientific publications available in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search process employed a set of keywords including, among others, "quality of life", "students", "career preferences", "mental health", and "work-life balance", which enabled the identification of the most relevant sources. Publications meeting specific criteria were included in the analysis, in particular peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025, focusing on student populations and issues related to quality of life and career choices. Based on the adopted criteria, the research material was selected, comprising several dozen high-quality scientific publications.

Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed publications, studies not focusing on student populations, articles not addressing quality of life or career preferences, and papers with insufficient methodological rigor.

To develop the results, qualitative content analysis and a synthetic approach were applied, which made it possible to identify the main research trends, relationships between variables, and the most important conclusions drawn from the analyzed studies.

5. Results

The conducted literature analysis made it possible to identify significant changes in the way students perceive professional careers, as well as to determine the key factors influencing their quality of life. In particular, a clear transformation in attitudes toward work can be observed, with work no longer regarded as the primary goal in life, but rather as one of many elements contributing to overall quality of life.

The findings indicate that, within the contemporary academic environment, psychological factors are gaining increasing importance, directly influencing career decision-making processes. High levels of stress, anxiety, and symptoms of burnout significantly reduce students' subjective quality of life, while simultaneously limiting their capacity for rational career planning. Conversely, factors such as a sense of meaning in life, a sense of agency, and emotional stability serve a protective function and foster more conscious and satisfying career choices.

The analysis also reveals a significant shift in the hierarchy of values determining students' career preferences. Although financial security remains an important element, it no longer constitutes the dominant decision-making factor. Increasing importance is attributed to work—

life balance, flexibility of employment forms, opportunities for remote work, as well as autonomy and the possibility of self-fulfilment at work. Particularly notable is the need to engage in work that aligns with one's values and provides a sense of meaning and purpose.

Furthermore, the results indicate that students' career preferences are shaped in close relation to their educational experiences, financial situation, and social context. These factors differentiate both the level of quality of life and expectations regarding future careers. At the same time, it is observed that the contemporary generation of students strives toward a more balanced model of functioning, in which professional work constitutes an important, yet not dominant, component of life.

In conclusion, the obtained results confirm the existence of a clear tendency toward redefining the role of work in young people's lives, as well as the growing importance of psychological and axiological factors in shaping career preferences and quality of life.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the relevant literature allows us to formulate a thesis about a fundamental reconfiguration of the priorities guiding students as they shape their career preferences. The observed process goes beyond a mere adjustment of expectations, as it bears witness to a profound paradigm shift – a transition from a model in which a career was the central axis of life and the main determinant of status, to a model where work is perceived as one of many, albeit significant, components of a holistically understood quality of life. In light of the data collected, young people's career choices appear less like a pursuit of maximising economic gains and more like a conscious strategy for building a life that is consistent with personal values, ensures psychological well-being, and enables self-fulfilment.

A key insight emerging from my analysis is the growing significance of the eudaimonic dimension of well-being. Classical theories, such as John Holland's concept of person-environment fit, remain relevant but require significant supplementation. The alignment of personality traits with the nature of work remains an important predictor of satisfaction; however, for contemporary students, the alignment of work with their value system, sense of meaning and life goals is becoming equally crucial. In this context, Donald Super's concept takes on new significance – students strive for the harmonious integration of their professional role with other life roles (family, social, personal), rather than subordinating their entire lives to the demands of their career. This shift is a response to broader socio-cultural trends, such as growing awareness of the importance of mental health, or the instability and unpredictability of the global labour market. The catalysts for these processes are undoubtedly advancing globalisation and the technological revolution, which operate in two ways. On the one hand, digital technologies and the global flow of information have removed the barrier of the physical

office, making remote and hybrid work not only possible but even desirable. This offers students a real prospect of achieving the much-valued flexibility and autonomy. On the other hand, these same forces generate a sense of uncertainty, in the face of which young people seek ‘anchors’ not in external guarantees of job stability, but in an internal sense of meaning and control over their own lives.

The identified trends carry far-reaching practical implications for, amongst others, higher education institutions, career counsellors and career psychologists, as well as employers and organisational leaders.

In addition to imparting specialist knowledge, universities face the urgent task of equipping students with the psychological resources necessary to navigate the complex labour market. The mere existence of careers offices is no longer sufficient. A systematic integration of career guidance with professional psychological support is essential. Furthermore, curricula should be enriched with modules that develop key future competencies, such as emotional intelligence, critical thinking, mental resilience and adaptability.

The role of the career counsellor must be redefined – from an expert pointing out optimal paths to a partner and coach who supports the student in designing their own professional life. This requires a shift away from diagnostic tools focused solely on aptitudes and interests towards methods that allow for deep reflection on values, needs and one’s personal definition of success. Guidance should become a process that strengthens self-efficacy and teaches flexibility in career planning.

To attract and retain the best talent, organisations must review their value proposition for employees. Salary and material benefits, whilst remaining the foundation, are becoming ‘hygiene factors’ – their absence is demotivating, but their mere presence is no longer sufficient to build engagement. It should be noted that this is no longer merely a proposal, but an observable market reality. The most innovative companies are already modifying their recruitment strategies. Communication in job advertisements is shifting from the language of requirements to the language of an invitation to jointly build a valuable future. Increasing emphasis is being placed on organisational culture, the company’s mission and opportunities for development. Key values in the labour market are becoming, amongst others: autonomy (influence over how, where and when work is performed), flexibility (a genuine, rather than superficial, ability to balance life roles), an organisational culture based on trust and psychological safety, and, most importantly, a sense of purpose (clear communication of the company’s mission and demonstrating the impact of an individual’s work on the fulfilment of that mission).

The findings confirm a fundamental transformation in students’ career orientation. Traditional models focusing primarily on economic factors are no longer sufficient.

Holland’s theory remains relevant but requires extension to include values and meaning. Similarly, Super’s concept of life roles gains new importance, as students strive for integration rather than dominance of professional life.

The growing importance of eudaimonic well-being reflects a shift toward more holistic life strategies. Students seek not only employment but also personal fulfilment, autonomy, and psychological comfort.

These results are consistent with contemporary international research highlighting the role of meaning, identity, and mental health in career development.

7. Conclusions

This article presents a synthetic analysis of the psychological aspects of students' quality of life, highlighting a fundamental shift in their approach to their professional careers. The principal thesis is the transition from a model in which a career was the central goal to the perception of work as one of many elements of a holistically understood quality of life. In this study, quality of life is defined as a subjective, multidimensional assessment of one's own situation, encompassing psychological well-being, social relationships and alignment with personal values. In turn, career preferences, based on the theories of Holland and Super, are presented as an expression of personality and a pursuit of self-actualisation.

The review of Polish and international research demonstrates that whilst economic security remains significant, it is no longer the main criterion for choosing a career path. New priorities are coming to the fore, such as work-life balance, the possibility of remote work, and the search for work that provides a sense of meaning and aligns with personal values. Autonomy and the opportunity for personal development are becoming equally important. The article also strongly emphasises the importance of mental health, pointing out that high levels of stress and anxiety among students negatively affect their well-being and ability to plan for the future, and that a sense of purpose serves a protective function in this context.

This shift in young people's priorities has specific practical implications. Universities face the task of integrating psychological support with career guidance. The role of counsellors should evolve towards coaching that helps shape lives in line with individual values. Employers, in turn, must offer more than just a salary to attract the best talent – flexibility, autonomy, an organisational culture based on trust, and a clearly communicated company mission are becoming key.

In summary, for contemporary students, work is ceasing to be a goal in itself and is becoming a tool for building a fulfilling, balanced and meaningful life.

It should be emphasized, however, that a limitation of the present study lies in its review-based character, relying on an analysis of the existing literature, which restricts the possibility of direct verification of the relationships presented within specific student populations.

The analysis also reveals several important research gaps that require further investigation. In particular, there is a need for more cross-cultural comparative studies, analyses of differences between fields of study, and longitudinal research examining how students' career preferences evolve over time.

Accordingly, further empirical research is recommended in order to enable a more in-depth examination of the identified relationships and their contextual determinants.

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