

The Effects on Personal and Family Health of not Living a Purpose-Driven Life

Anthony Hadeed, M. Sc., PCC (ICF)

CEO, Life & Career Coach at YourLifePurpose Limited

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1 Introduction

A survey carried out by Harris Interactive (2006) on behalf of CareerBuilder.com showed that 84% of working people in the US do not have their “dream jobs”. This means that most people are in careers that they are not passionate about, and thus are not fulfilling what they consider their “life purposes”. The present research seeks to determine what effects this has on the personal and family health of such people, and how this problem can be tackled at the root level. From a survey carried out by the author (Hadeed, 2012), in which people answered questions pertaining to this wide-spread and important issue, over 60% of respondents said that they were not living their life purpose(s) through their careers. Of these, 2/3 of them believed that this has had negative effects on their personal and/or family health. This means that roughly three out of ten people are experiencing personal and/or family health problems because of careers that they are not passionate about, and probably not in line with their strengths and long-term visions! This is because not living a purpose-driven life through one’s career leads to unmanageable levels of stress, and according to the Biopsychosocial (BSP) model of health, this stress is directly and indirectly linked to poorer health. Thus, offering life and career coaching on a personal and group level, as well as consistent and sustained career guidance courses at the secondary school level and beyond, especially to adolescents and young adults as they endeavour to discern their vocational career paths in life, can assist them in proactively living healthier, happier, and more fulfilled lives.

2 Biopsychosocial Model vs. Biophysical Model of Health

The traditional Biophysical model of health focuses primarily on the physical and pathological causes of diseases in humans, and the treatment of such diseases by the use of medications and therapy. In recent years, the medical profession has undergone an evolution toward a more holistic view of health, with the Biopsychosocial model being proposed by Engel in 1977. It focuses on the biological, psychological and social aspects of human beings, and how these three important areas interplay in determining overall health, as shown in the following diagram ^[1]:

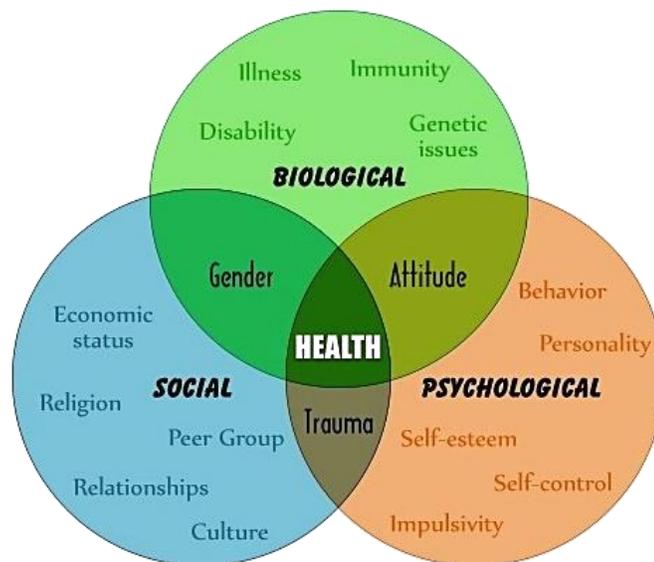


Figure 1: The Biopsychosocial Model of Health – Venn Diagram

Unfortunately, the promotion of health through the understanding of the Biopsychosocial model in the early periods of life is not emphasized in most countries, and this contributes to long-term health problems and overall family instabilities.

3 Career Choice, Life Purpose and Effects on Self-Efficacy

There are few other decisions that have such a major influence on people's lives as the choice of a vocation and subsequent career, which is ultimately linked to their perceived "life purpose". Most people spend considerably more time on the job than in any other single activity, and the choice of one's career significantly affects one's lifestyle. Adjustment to work is closely linked to mental health and physical well-being (Hackett & Betz, in press). According to Bandura, 1995, "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave." Thus, if people are assisted in discovering the vocational careers that match their interests, intelligence types, values, and work-styles, they are much more likely to develop better self-efficacy. This in turn will lead to better coping mechanisms for stress in their careers, and thus better overall health according to the Biopsychosocial model.

Young adulthood is definitely a time when individuals must learn how to deal with numerous new expectations, especially work-related careers. A strong feeling of self-efficacy is a vital factor for the achievement of additional abilities as well as successfulness. People who go into their adult years inadequately armed with proper abilities and suffering from self-doubts realize that many elements of their adulthood are stress-filled and discouraging. In many ways self-efficacy helps lead to success in vocational career selection and development. Values concerning a person's abilities influence the vocational careers that they often select. Psychosocial abilities have more to do with career success as compared to one's technical abilities. Choosing the appropriate vocational career early in a person's life

leads to better self-efficacy or beliefs in one's abilities which in turn greatly enhances confidence in living one's perceived life purpose. This ultimately leads to better overall health and family dynamics.

Conversely, people in careers that they perceive themselves lacking self-efficacy for, often under-perform in their jobs. According to Bandura, 1995, such people "view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude, and it does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities. They fall easy victim to stress and depression." Thus, a career that is not purpose-driven and fulfilling often leads to unhealthy amounts of stress.

4 Effects of Prolonged Stress from not Living a Purpose-Driven Life

Excessive and sustained amounts of stress that plague an individual due to psychological and social factors have been shown to weaken the immune system and lead to compromised health (Krantz, Grunberg, & Baum, 1985; O'Leary, 1990). Many of the biological effects of one's perceived abilities arise in the context of coping with high levels of stress in the many issues and tasks of daily life. "Exposure to stressors without perceived efficacy to control them activates autonomic, catecholamine, and endogenous opioid systems. After people's perceived coping efficacy is strengthened, they manage the same stressors without experiencing any distress, visceral agitation, or activation of stress-related hormones" (Bandura, 1995). The kinds of biochemical responses which have been proven to be associated with inadequate coping abilities take part in regulating the body's defense mechanisms. Hence, experiencing unmanageable stress has a tendency to weaken the body's defense mechanisms, which can lead to compromised health. (Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1987; Maier, Laudenslager, & Ryan, 1985; Shavit & Martin, 1987).

There is also an indirect correlation between not living a purpose-driven life and one's health in that the feeling of living an unfulfilled life can lead to unhealthy habits such as excessive alcohol consumption, drug abuse and other addictions, lethargy leading to lack of exercise, frustration and displaced anger. These behaviours often affect one's family life as well.

A survey was carried out by the author (Hadeed, 2012), in which people answered questions pertaining to the important issue about their careers, life purposes and the effects on their personal and family health. Here are the questions asked in the survey and the results:

Question 1: Do you believe that every person has a main purpose in life which should be lived out through his or her career?

- Yes, I believe that each person has a specific overall purpose in life which should be lived out through his or her career: 38.89%
- Yes, but there can be a broad range of purposes and careers for each person: 50.00%
- No, I do not believe that each person has a specific purpose in life: 11.11%

Question 2: If you believe that people have specific purposes in life with regard to their careers, are you currently living your life purpose in your career?

- Yes: 37.50%
- No: 62.50%

Question 3: If you are not living your life purpose through your career, has this had a negative effect on your personal health and/or your family's health?

- Yes: 46.15%
- No: 15.38%
- I'm not sure: 38.46%

The above results imply that roughly three out of ten people experience personal and/or family health problems because of careers that are not to their liking, probably not in line with their strengths and passions, and thus not aligned with their perceived life purposes!

As we have seen above, not being fulfilled in one's career (i.e. the feeling of not living a purpose-driven life) leads to unhealthy levels of stress, and if left unresolved for many years, can lead to feelings of inadequacy, depression, mid-life crises, nervous breakdowns, physical health problems, family problems, and even marriage breakdowns. These were the various health and family related problems reported by some of the people in the above survey (Hadeed, 2012).

5 Examples of Purpose-Driven Lives

There are many people in history who have lead extremely purpose-driven lives and certain ones stand out as models for the rest of society. They show what the human spirit is capable of achieving when a clear life purpose is understood and followed to the end. The effects that these three men (and others, of course) have had on our world have been nothing short of remarkable and life-altering.

5.1 *Jesus Christ*

The most famous example in the author's opinion is that of the life of Jesus Christ, who lived from the year 4 BC to 30 AD. He spent forty days and forty nights in the desert at the start of his public ministry at the age of thirty. During this time, he prayed and fasted about his mission or "life purpose" in the world. When he returned from the desert, nothing could stop him from accomplishing his mission, not even his own prophesy about how and when he would die. One of his disciples Peter tried to convince him not to go to Jerusalem where his public execution awaited him. This was Jesus' response to Peter: "Get behind

me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man”, (Matthew 16:23 Revised Standard Edition). After the completion of his public ministry at the age of 33, he was forced to carry a heavy wooden cross to Calvary hill. He was nailed to the cross and left there until he died, thus accomplishing the salvation he came to bring the world.

5.2 Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi lived from October 2, 1869 to January 30, 1948. He was the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement. Pioneering the use of non-violent resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience, a tool to fight for civil rights and freedom, he founded his doctrine of nonviolent protest to achieve political and social progress based upon total nonviolence for which he is internationally renowned.^{[2][3]} Gandhi led India to its independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

5.3 Martin Luther-King

Another example is that of the life of Martin Luther-King who lived from January 15, 1929 to April 4, 1968. He was an American clergyman, activist, and prominent leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement.^[4] He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights in the United States and around the world, using nonviolent methods following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.^[5]

6 How Life & Career Coaching Can Help Build Purpose-Driven Lives

Career *development* has not received a lot of attention in the mainstream literature (Osipow, 1986). “Career development, as opposed to training for job skills (e.g., vocational education), can be defined as the preparation for, choice of, entry into, and adjustment to work throughout the life span” (Super, 1990). Although the demand for career guidance has long been high among adolescents and young adults, career counseling has not received the attention it warrants from most applied psychologists (Hackett, 1993; Spokane, 1991). In today's rapidly changing job markets the need for career services has never been greater. The US Department of Labour in 2010 listed over 820 various types of careers from which people can choose!

Thus, if people are assisted in discovering the vocational careers that match their interests, intelligence types, values, and work-styles, they are much more likely to develop better self-efficacy. As demonstrated in this research, this would lead to better overall health. Psychometric testing within the context of life and career coaching is one important tool that can assist in this often-difficult task. Two such Psychometric assessments used by the author in his career and life coaching practice are (i) the “Vocational Style & Personality Assessment or VoSPA”, and (ii) the “Multi-Dimensional Emotional Intelligence Quotient or MEIQ”. Both of these assessments are licensed from PsychTests, Inc. The VoSPA assessment produces a report that lists the interests, intelligence types, values, and work-styles of the client in descending order of scores, and then lists six to ten careers that match the client’s strengths. These careers are retrieved from the most up-to-date US Department of Labour’s O*Net career database. The report can then be used in a career coaching relationship as a starting point for the client’s self-discovery regarding their career path and consequent “life purpose.”

Similarly, the MEIQ assessment produces a report that lists the client's strengths and limitations in five key categories, namely, (i) Emotional Identification, Perception, and Expression, (ii) Emotional Facilitation of Thought, (iii) Emotional Understanding, (iv) Emotional Management, and (v) Moderating Emotional Intelligence Factors. The report then provides concrete advice as to what areas within the five categories the client needs to work on to improve his or her EIQ. Again, this report can be used in a life coaching relationship as a starting point for the client's self-discovery regarding their emotional health and intelligence. This in turn can assist clients in asserting themselves more when it comes to the choice of their vocational careers, and subsequently in dealing more effectively with the challenges surrounding this important aspect of their lives, namely, their life purpose!

7 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to show the negative effects on personal and family health of not living a purpose-driven life, and how life and career coaching, and sustained career guidance courses can assist in this very important area. Based on the Biopsychosocial (BSP) model of health, biological, psychological, and social factors all play important roles in the overall health of individuals. The survey conducted by the author (Hadeed, 2012) showed that three out of ten people reported experiencing negative effects on their personal and/or family health because they were not living their "life purpose" through their careers. Departments of Health in countries around the world would do well to pay attention to this correlation and to the profound social and economic consequences of a lack of consistent and sustained career guidance in most educational systems. The introduction of a mandatory career guidance course for all students beginning in the first year of secondary school (approximately at age 13), and continuing until the completion of secondary school, would benefit all students immensely.

Parents willing to supplement this career guidance should seriously consider engaging the services of a life and career coach for additional one-on-one assistance in the life altering choice of their children's vocational careers. They owe it to their children's future health and family well-being, as well as to the overall socioeconomic health of society.

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9 Footnotes

¹ The Biopsychosocial Model of Health and Illness. Module by: Dr. Shaheen E Lakhan

² Gandhi, M. K. (1982) [10 November 1921]. "[The Momentous Issue](#)". *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. 25 (electronic ed.). New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India. pp. 76–78. Retrieved 11 January 2012. "*Complete civil disobedience is rebellion without the element of violence in it. An out and out civil resister simply ignores the authority of the state. He becomes an outlaw claiming to disregard every unmoral state law. ...In doing all this he never uses force and never resists force when it is used against him. In fact, he invites imprisonment and other uses of force against himself...*"

³ Gandhi, M. K. (1976) [10 September 1935]. "Letter to P. Kodanda Rao". *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. 67 (1st April- 1st October 1938) (electronic ed.). New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India. p. 400. Retrieved 11 January 2012. "*But I found that even civil disobedience failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase civil resistance. Non-violence was always an integral part of our struggle.*"

⁴ Schlesinger, Arthur M. (2002) [1965], *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, p. xiv.

⁵ D'Souza, Placido P. (January 20, 2003). "Commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.: Gandhi's influence on King". *San Francisco Chronicle*.

10 Figure Captions

Figure 1. The Biopsychosocial Model of Health – Venn Diagram