

IKIGAI AMONG THE PEOPLE OF LANGKAWI ISLAND

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Abstract: *This research has proposed to determine how Langkawi Island people perceived worthwhile life in (ikigai) the face of pandemic challenges. To assess their level of ikigai (energy or strength to continue living or moving forward), current research employs three constructs: satisfaction, significance, and happiness. A combination of modified Q-method, the Time-use Survey based on the Questionnaire A of the 2021 Survey on Time-use and Leisure Activities, the English version of Ikigai-9, and the elements of the Ikigai Venn Diagram were used to build the research instruments. The five-page Q-data sheet was distributed to 24 participants which were selected using stratified sampling. The outcome implies that not all the locals' ikigai were affected during the pandemic. Some of them even experienced an increase in ikigai during the period. Overall, the study also confirms that being able to do what we want to do is linked with an increase in life satisfaction, significance and happiness and eventually linked to an increase in well-being.*

Keywords: life hardship, *ikigai*, satisfaction, significance, happiness

INTRODUCTION

Since the Heian era (794 – 1185), the Japanese have been using the term '*ikigai*' as one of the concepts in their life. '*Iki*' (生き) stands for life and '*kai*' (甲斐)— changes to '*gai*' when combined with '*iki*' to form a compound word — refers to when expectations and hopes are realised. In a nutshell, *ikigai* can be described as a sense of joy and well-being for being able to live and realise the value of life³.

Ikigai is something that can be pursued and for this, García and Miralles⁴ have listed ten rules to be followed when pursuing an *ikigai*. The ten rules consist of staying active, taking it slow, do not fill your stomach, surrounding yourself with good friends, getting in shape for your next birthday, smiling, reconnecting with nature, giving thanks, living in the moment, and following your *ikigai*. The basic guidelines provided by García and Miralles⁵ clearly illustrate the association of one's health and social connections with his/her *ikigai*. But, how do these so-called rules

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³ Mori, Kentaro, Yu Kaiho, Yasutake Tomata, Mamoru Narita, Fumiya Tanji, Kemmyo Sugiyama, Yumi Sugawara, and Ichiro Tsuji. "Sense of life worth living (ikigai) and incident functional disability in elderly Japanese: The Tsurugaya Project." *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 95 (2017): 62-67.

⁴ Hector, Garcia. Francesc, Miralles. *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*, (New York, Penguin Publishing Group, 2017a).

⁵ Garcia, Miralles. *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*.

eventually help people achieve an *ikigai*? And, how can someone follow the final rule, ‘follow your *ikigai*’ if he/she does not even know what his/her *ikigai* is?

Before we can answer these questions, it is crucial to understand what *ikigai* is. Is it a sense of feeling that someone experiences after going through something as described in the definition by Mori *et al.*?⁶ Or is it a passion inside someone which can be followed as suggested by García and Miralles?⁷ According to Mogi, *ikigai* acts as a driving force that helps boost happiness among the Japanese⁸. The author of *Blue Zones: Lessons on Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest*, Dan Buettner believes that the concept of *ikigai* contributes to longevity in Japan, especially among the Okinawans⁹.

The lack of *ikigai* is related to the mortality of older people as it is associated with poor general health and is an independent risk factor for intellectual dysfunctioning¹⁰. Moreover, the presence of *ikigai* can help in reducing the risk of suicide¹¹. *Ikigai* has been found to be a protective factor in overcoming stress, depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems¹². Based on these findings, it can also be concluded that *ikigai* is an energy or a strength that drives people to face the challenges of life.

In Japanese, there are two *ikigai*-related concepts; *ikigai* kan and *ikigai* taisho where *ikigai* kan is the feeling that one’s life is worth living and *ikigai* taisho is the entity in the world that makes one’s life worth living¹³. Consequently, to say for example “a dominant *ikigai* of men is work; the dominant *ikigai* of women is family and children”¹⁴ (will only create ambiguity as there is a remaining question of whether the work, family and children act as the source of the feeling of joy, the source of motivation, or combination of the both?

HAPPINESS AMONG MALAYSIAN AND JAPANESE

A previous study identified that family contributes to 30% of Malaysian happiness¹⁵. Besides family, other factors that positively influence happiness among Malaysians are career, interpersonal and social interactions, self-growth or self-autonomy, money, leisure, needs, education, lack of negative emotions, national prosperity, health, religion, and basic necessities¹⁶.

⁶ Mori, Kaiho, Tomata, Narita, Tanji, Sugiyama, Sugawara, and Tsuji. 62-67.

⁷ Garcia, Miralles. *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*.

⁸ Kenichirō, Mogi, *The Little Book of Ikigai: Live A Happy and Long Life the Japanese Way*. (Great Britain: Quercus Editions Ltd, 2018)

⁹ Yukari, Mitsuhasi, “*Ikigai: A Japanese Concept to Improve Work and Life*”, 2017,

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170807-ikigai-a-japanese-concept-to-improve-work-and-life>.

¹⁰ Nakanishi, Noriyuki. ‘*Ikigai*’ in *Older Japanese People. Age and Ageing*, 28 no. 3 (1999): 323–324.

¹¹ Sone, Toshimasa, Naoki Nakaya, Kaori Ohmori, Taichi Shimazu, Mizuka Higashiguchi, Masako Kakizaki, Nobutaka Kikuchi, Shinichi Kuriyama, and Ichiro Tsuji. “Sense of life worth living (*ikigai*) and mortality in Japan: Ohsaki Study.” *Psychosomatic medicine* 70, no. 6 (2008): 709-715.

¹² Kotera, Yasuhiro, Greta Kaluzeviciute, Gulcan Garip, K. McEwank, and K. J. Chamberlain. “Health benefits of *Ikigai*: a review of literature.” *New York: Current Psychology*. [Google Scholar] (2021).

¹³ Gordon, Mathews, “The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: *Ikigai* and” *The Japanese Self*”. *Ethos* 24, no. 4 (1996): 718-747.

¹⁴ Mathews, “The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: *Ikigai* and” *The Japanese Self*”. 728.

¹⁵ Jaafar, Jas Laile, Mohd Awang Idris, Jamal Ismuni, Yoo Fei, Salinah Jaafar, Zahir Ahmad, Muhammad Raduan Mohd Ariff, Bagus Takwin, and Yogi Suprayogi Sugandi. “The sources of happiness to the Malaysians and Indonesians: data from a smaller nation.” *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 65 (2012): 549-556.

¹⁶ Jaafar, Jas Laile, Mohd Awang Idris, Jamal Ismuni, Yoo Fei, Salinah Jaafar, Zahir Ahmad, Muhammad Raduan Mohd Ariff, Bagus Takwin, and Yogi Suprayogi Sugandi. “The sources of happiness to the Malaysians and Indonesians: data from a smaller nation.” 65: 549-556.

In more specific findings, Malaysians aged between 15 and 24 years old tend to find their happiness through family, friends and having specific goals in life, while females are said to be happier when those around them are happy¹⁷. However, it is worth to be noted that previous studies about Malaysians mentioned above were focusing on happiness while this research is stressing about *ikigai*, a Japanese concept which is difficult to translate.

The data from the World Happiness Report shows that the Japanese ranked 54th in terms of happiness based on a three-year-average score for 2019-2021. It is slightly higher compared to the period of 2016-2018 when Japan was placed 58th in the world ranking. The happiness score for Japan was 5.886 in 2016-2018, then increased to 6.039 in 2019-2021. On the other hand, Malaysia was placed 80th with a score of 5.339 for the period of 2016-2018 and increased to 70th with a score of 5.711 during the 2019-2021 survey. Interestingly, the period 2019-2021 is when the whole world was shaken by the pandemic of COVID-19 which witnessed the disruption of people's daily life. Yet, based on the findings of the World Happiness Report, the situation did not seem to affect how people evaluate their life. Nonetheless, this is understandable as the variables used to measure people's happiness are based on GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption¹⁸. In other words, the happiness of the people was measured using macro-level factors which do not necessarily influence by individual feelings.

Whereas people need more reasons to feel happy and to live happily. People's happiness could not be determined and should not be measured by external factors only. Because two components could determine whether or not a person is happy; the state of mind (one's satisfaction in assessing the life lived) and inner atmosphere (feeling happy, romantic, and likes)¹⁹. Associations have also been found between happiness and significant personal relationships; the quality of the environment in which people live; their involvement in physical activities; work practices; and involvement in certain recreational activities²⁰. For example, Zaremohzzabieh *et al.* found that education, economic opportunities, and family and social environments had a direct effect on happiness among Malaysian youth²¹. On the contrary, the findings of Shah *et al.*'s study showed that 79.2% of the Malaysian elderly who participated in their study were happy and the factors that contributed to their happiness were significantly associated with their locality, comorbidities, social engagement with the community, handgrip strength and receiving any emotional support²².

¹⁷ Kok, Jin K., Lee Y. Goh, and Chin C. Gan. "Meaningful life and happiness: Perspective from Malaysian Youth." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 69-77.

¹⁸ World Happiness Report. 2022. World Happiness Report. <https://worldhappiness.report/>.

¹⁹ Totok, Wahyu Abadi, Usrotin Choiriyah Ilmi, Sukmana Hendra, and Hatta Kurniawan Mohamad. "Factors affecting of lifes happiness." In *In Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (ANCOSH 2018)-Revitalization of Local Wisdom in Global and Competitive Era*, pp. 41-45. Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang (UNIKAMA), 2018.

²⁰ Alan, Carr, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*. (Hove & NewYork: Brunner – Routledge Taylor& Francis Group, 2004)

²¹ Zaremohzzabieh, Zeinab, Asnarulkhadi Abu Samah, Bahaman Abu Samah, and Hayrol Azril Mohamed Shaffril. "Determinants of happiness among youth in Malaysia." *International Journal of Happiness and Development* 5, no. 4 (2019): 352-370.

²² Shah, Shamsul Azhar, Nazarudin Safian, Saharuddin Ahmad, Wan Abdul Hannan Wan Ibadullah, Zulkefley bin Mohammad, Siti Rohani Nurumal, Juliana Mansor, Mohd Fairuz Addnan, and Yugo Shobugawa. "Factors associated with happiness among Malaysian elderly." *International journal of environmental research and public health* 18, no. 7 (2021): 3831.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The question is, how can people feel happy or be happy when they are bound by restrictions that eventually become part of their ‘obstacles to happiness’²³? The implementation of a series of Movement Control Orders (MCO) to curb the spread of COVID-19 has seen the lives of the community change 360 degrees. The residents of Langkawi Island, Malaysia were not exempt from receiving the effects of the pandemic. Even though the statistics of COVID-19 instances in Langkawi from January 2020 to September 2021 provided by the Langkawi District Health Office on January 24, 2022, indicate that there are fewer local COVID-19 cases in Langkawi, the containment measures undertaken following the outbreak have had a detrimental influence on Langkawi's tourism industry, particularly in 2020 and 2021, which has resulted in employment losses for the majority of residents.

Ironically, and thankfully, there were not many sad incidents that happened during that period. As shown in Table 1, there were only two suicide cases reported during the year 2020 with one of them directly related to the impact of MCO. In the year 2021, there were six cases reported including two cases involving non-Malaysian citizens. Out of the four local cases, there were no cases documented as directly related to the impact of COVID-19 or MCO. This raises the question of how the people of Langkawi adapt themselves to a situation where daily economic activities cannot be carried out as usual. The beaches and resorts, which are usually never quiet from tourists, were deserted. Rental cars that used to never stop accepting bookings, were abandoned. More importantly, the access to the mainland was completely cut, giving the residents and villagers some sort of feeling of being confined.

Table 1: Official Statistics on Suicide Cases in Langkawi from 2019 until 2021

No.	Date of Report	Age	Gender	Nationality/Race	Reasons
1	03/04/2019	53	M	Malay	depression/ debt problem
2	22/04/2019	30	M	Malay	stress
3	13/11/2019	58	M	Malay	work stress
4	01/12/2019	49	M	Chinese	suspected paranormal disturbance
5	31/03/2020	12	M	Malay	stress
6	20/07/2020	32	F	Malay	laid off from work due to MCO/ depression
7	02/01/2021	25	M	Malay	depression
8	18/03/2021	40	M	Non-Malaysian	stress/ financial problem
9	24/05/2021	45	M	Non-Malaysian	cannot go back to the home country due to MCO
10	12/06/2021	42	M	Malay	Stress
11	25/06/2021	57	M	Malay	sick/ bankrupt
12	09/08/2021	36	M	Malay	marriage crisis

Source: Langkawi District Police Headquarters.

Surely, there is a force that drives the people of Langkawi to persevere in facing the situation. For example, as discovered by Kleiman and Beaver, having a meaningful life is linked to a decrease in suicidal thoughts over time and a lower lifetime risk of attempting suicide²⁴. In a mixed-mode study, Kok *et al.* (2015) investigated how Malaysian youth perceived the concept of

²³ Alan, Carr, Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths.

²⁴ Kleiman, Evan M., and Jenna K. Beaver. "A meaningful life is worth living: Meaning in life as a suicide resiliency factor." *Psychiatry research* 210, no. 3 (2013): 934-939.

a meaningful life and its connection to “life is defined by me.”²⁵ The findings indicate that young people in Malaysia will perceive their lives to be meaningful when they are happy, have meaningful relationships, and can pursue their goals. Females experience meaningful lives when the people around them are happy, whereas males experience meaningful lives when they have good relationships with the people around them, and both believe that having goals in life makes life meaningful²⁶ (Kok *et al.*, 2015). These findings by Kok *et al.*, however only reveal the truth about a small segment of the Malaysian population which is the youth aged between 15-24 years old²⁷. However, according to the data in Table 1, there are prominent instances among those aged over 30 years old who committed suicide in Langkawi.

Feeling happy, having meaningful relationships and being able to pursue own goals are said to be the factors leading to a meaningful life. Kok *et al.* suggested that meaningfulness in life is not a pure individual effect or personal construct, instead, it is a relational concept related to the meaningful activities in which young people engaged²⁸. Again, how can people gain a meaningful life when they are being obstructed from conducting the meaningful activities they like? Baumeister *et al.* suggested that there are some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life, where happiness is mainly about getting what one wants and needs, while, in contrast, meaningfulness was linked to doing things that express and reflect the self and in particular to doing positive things for others²⁹. Hence, in a situation where people could not go out and do whatever activities they regularly do, does it affect their happiness or meaningfulness? Regardless of which aspect of their life was affected, what were the alternative activities that they do to overcome the issue? A close observation on this matter needs to be conducted before we can identify the sense of *ikigai* among the people.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study attempts to discover the sense of *ikigai* among the people of Langkawi Island, which may have assisted them in remaining strong in the face of pandemic challenges. In particular, this study sought to answer the question of how someone’s PIL can determine his/her sense of *ikigai* and eventually contribute to his/her well-being.

According to Mathews, *ikigai* can offer a window into how well-being is shaped culturally, socially, and institutionally in many countries³⁰. Mathews (2009) gave an example of a person who has good physical health, lives in a humane and just society, is financially well off, and has reasonably good human relationships, yet still does not experience a sense of well-being because

²⁵ Kok, Lee, and Chin. "Meaningful life and happiness: Perspective from Malaysian Youth." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 69-77.

²⁶ Kok, Lee, and Chin. "Meaningful life and happiness: Perspective from Malaysian Youth." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 69-77.

²⁷ Kok, Lee, and Chin. "Meaningful life and happiness: Perspective from Malaysian Youth." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 69-77.

²⁸ Kok, Lee, and Chin. "Meaningful life and happiness: Perspective from Malaysian Youth." *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 69-77.

²⁹ Baumeister, Roy F., Kathleen D. Vohs, Jennifer L. Aaker, and Emily N. Garbinsky. "Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life." *The journal of positive psychology* 8, no. 6 (2013): 505-516.

³⁰ Gordon, Mathews, "Finding and keeping a purpose in life: Well-being and Ikigai in Japan and elsewhere." *Pursuits of happiness: Well-being in anthropological perspective* (2009): 167-85.

he/she lacks “something more” required for well-being³¹. Mathews suggested that, that “something more” consists of a sense of the purpose and significance of one’s life³².

It may be easier to simply ask “What is your (source of) *ikigai*?” to someone who understands the meaning of the word *ikigai*. But, for this study which is targeting the people in Langkawi Island who most probably never heard the word *ikigai* itself, the task is not easy. However, that does not mean that we should not take this challenge, for *ikigai* and its related concepts such as happiness and well-being are supposed to be universal concepts. Moreover, from a cross-cultural perspective, *ikigai* may serve as a way to compare individuals in different societies as to how they are linked to their societies³³.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It has been confirmed that there are relationships between PIL and *ikigai*, and also between *ikigai* and well-being. But how are they co-related to each other? How do the formers influence the latter? This study suggests that three embedded constructs co-exist along with the concepts of PIL, *ikigai*, and well-being. These three constructs consist of satisfaction, significance, and happiness. At this juncture, it can be assumed that, while *ikigai* acts as a moderator that affects the strength and direction of the relationship between PIL and well-being, the three constructs act as a mediator that explains the relationships between PIL, *ikigai*, and well-being.

Studies suggest that PIL holds a role as a protective mechanism against various types of psychological threats. Ishida considers PIL and *ikigai* as two interchangeable concepts which provide people with the ability to integrate stressful psychological events from the past, present, and future with less conflict or confusion³⁴. Ishida (2012) hypothesises that a mixture of positive experiences, such as being in beautiful natural surroundings and having warm human relationships contribute to the development of PIL/*ikigai* as an effective technique of coping with stress³⁵. Regardless of occupation, age, sex, or surroundings, people without PIL/*ikigai* experience emptiness and anxiety, while those with PIL/*ikigai* retain satisfaction, pleasure, and ambition even in harsh environments³⁶. This is possible because people with PIL/*ikigai* are believed to have traits such as the ability to delay gratification, appreciate another’s point of view, trust in a higher power, accept personal limitations, and count personal blessings.

Heisel *et al.* use the term reasons for living (RFL) instead of PIL but similarly proposed the role of RFL as a protective mechanism³⁷. According to Heisel *et al.*, RFL may promote a wish to continue living and protect against contemplations of suicide by fostering a deeper recognition of potential and actual sources of life’s meaning.³⁸ Previously, Heisel and Flett found specifically that older adults who endorse significantly greater meaning in life report better health, more life

³¹ Mathews. "Finding and keeping a purpose in life: Well-being and Ikigai in Japan and elsewhere." 167-168.

³² Mathews. "Finding and keeping a purpose in life: Well-being and Ikigai in Japan and elsewhere." 168.

³³ Mathews. "Finding and keeping a purpose in life: Well-being and Ikigai in Japan and elsewhere." 173.

³⁴ Riichiro, Ishida, "Purpose in life (ikigai), a frontal lobe function, is a natural." *Psychology* 3, no. 03 (2012): 272-276.

³⁵ Ishida, "Purpose in life (ikigai), a frontal lobe function, is a natural. 274.

³⁶ Ishida, "Purpose in life (ikigai), a frontal lobe function, is a natural. 273.

³⁷ Heisel, Marnin J., Eva Neufeld, and Gordon L. Flett. "Reasons for living, meaning in life, and suicide ideation: investigating the roles of key positive psychological factors in reducing suicide risk in community-residing older adults." *Aging & Mental Health* 20, no. 2 (2016): 195-207.

³⁸ Heisel, Neufeld and Flett. "Reasons for living, meaning in life, and suicide ideation: investigating the roles of key positive psychological factors in reducing suicide risk in community-residing older adults." 195-207.

satisfaction, psychological well-being, social support, and PIL, and less depression, hopelessness, and suicide ideation³⁹.

Schippers and Ziegler also agree with the importance of finding PIL and meaning in life because it will not only give far-reaching consequences for individual happiness and performance but also the well-being and happiness of people around them⁴⁰. Schippers and Ziegler have suggested life crafting as a way to find PIL and meaning in life, especially for those who do not have a clear sense of PIL or know what they value in life and why⁴¹. This can be done by writing down their thoughts and formulating a strategy for their life. There are seven elements covered in the life crafting intervention⁴² proposed by Schippers and Ziegler (2019) namely (1) discovering values and passion, (2) reflecting on current and desired competencies and habits, (3) reflecting on present and future social life and (4) future career, (5) writing about the ideal future, (6) goal attainment plans, and finally (7) public commitment to goals.

Meanwhile, Wong confirmed that belief in the intrinsic meaning and value of life, regardless of circumstances contributes to well-being and that a “meaning mindset,” as compared to a “success mindset,” leads to greater eudaimonic happiness and resilience⁴³. Wong suggests that the pursuit of meaning may entail personal sacrifice and suffering for a worthy cause; however, in terms of the larger picture, such a pursuit yields a greater good and a higher level of satisfaction⁴⁴. Therefore, it can be assumed that someone who has a sense of PIL (knowing what he/she values in life) will develop a sense of *ikigai* (a sense of joy and well-being for being able to live, and realising the value of life), and this will eventually contribute to the well-being of that person. All in all, this relationship could be explained by the feelings of satisfaction, significance, and happiness that appear during the process.

Being able to do what is valuable or meaningful to ourselves will provide us with a sense of satisfaction, significance, and happiness. Usually, something is considered valuable or meaningful when it involves things that are good for us to do, things that we like or want to do, things that we are capable of or good at, and/or things that other people hope or need us to do. When no obstacle hinders someone from doing things that he/she wants, there is no reason for him/her to feel dissatisfied, insignificant and/or unhappy. It is important to note, however, that something valuable or meaningful to someone is not necessarily fun or enjoyable. Here comes the mechanism of *ikigai* that equips a person with traits that protect him/her from any threat that accompanies adversity.

Therefore, it can be concluded that *ikigai* is neither a feeling nor an entity alone because it is a combination of both that forms an energy or strength mechanism that motivates people to continue living even during hard times. When Kotera *et al.* mentioned that *ikigai* functions as a protective factor in overcoming stress, depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems⁴⁵, this can be further explained by unscrambling the embedded constructs behind it, which are the sense of satisfaction, significance, and happiness.

³⁹ Heisel, Neufeld and Flett. "Reasons for living, meaning in life, and suicide ideation: investigating the roles of key positive psychological factors in reducing suicide risk in community-residing older adults." 195-207.

⁴⁰ Schippers, Michaéla C., and Niklas Ziegler. "Life crafting as a way to find purpose and meaning in life." *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 2778.

⁴¹ Schippers and Ziegler. "Life crafting as a way to find purpose and meaning in life.": 2778.

⁴² Schippers and Ziegler. "Life crafting as a way to find purpose and meaning in life.": 2778.

⁴³ Wong, Paul TP. "Viktor Frankl's meaning-seeking model and positive psychology." *Meaning in positive and existential psychology* (2014): 149-184.

⁴⁴ Wong "Viktor Fra nkl's meaning-seeking model and positive psychology." 149-184.

⁴⁵ Kotera, Kaluzeviciute, McEwank, and Chamberlain. "Heath benefits of Ikigai: a review of literature."

One way to achieve *ikigai* is to have a clear PIL. But the PIL of each individual will generally change according to their age. Misawa and Minami (1989) mentioned that “young people live for their future; middle-aged people are expected to live for their work or families. But old people have no such burden. Freed from their social obligations, they can live as they desire”⁴⁶. Kashdan and McKnight defined PIL as a self-centred and self-organized life goal. Every human being must have certain life goals and will try and make the best decisions to achieve their respective life goals⁴⁷. To do so, ‘purpose’ is one of the important things that act as a motivation for someone. This is because purpose can help individuals to be more resilient against any obstacles, pressure, stress, and tension⁴⁸. Failure to find purpose leads to feelings of emptiness and anxiety⁴⁹, which interfere with feelings of subjective well-being, i.e., happiness.

Viktor Frankl has created a logotherapy system to help individuals build and maintain meaning in life through three possible sources⁵⁰: in work (by doing something significant, by creating work, by doing a deed), in love (by caring for another person, by experiencing something such as goodness, truth and beauty, by experiencing nature and culture), and in courage during difficult times (by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering). Frankl proposed a key theory that addresses why a sense of purpose helps individuals live longer: higher purpose provides individuals with a greater will to live, and this enables people to bear more short-term discomfort since they can appreciate why discomfort is worth enduring⁵¹.

Here, *ikigai* not only features psychological factors such as well-being or hope but also an awareness of the motivation to live or in other terms, having PIL or a reason to live⁵². Greater PIL is associated with several psychological outcomes, including a more positive outlook on life, happiness, satisfaction, and self-esteem⁵³. Greater PIL is also associated with better ability to perform day-to-day activities and less mobility disability in the future⁵⁴. Overall, PIL describes a person’s tendency to achieve the meaning of life through various experiences, and at the same time, it creates a sense of intentionality and purpose towards a goal that guides a person’s behaviour⁵⁵.

METHODOLOGY

⁴⁶ Mathews, "The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: Ikigai and" The Japanese Self". 739

⁴⁷ Kashdan, Todd B., and Patrick E. McKnight. "Origins of purpose in life: Refining our understanding of a life well lived." *Psihologijske teme* 18, no. 2 (2009): 303-313.

⁴⁸ Ishida "Purpose in life (ikigai), a frontal lobe function, is a natural."272-276.

⁴⁹ Ishida "Purpose in life (ikigai), a frontal lobe function, is a natural."272.

⁵⁰ Viktor, Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006)

⁵¹ Kim, Eric S., Koichiro Shiba, Julia K. Boehm, and Laura D. Kubzansky. "Sense of purpose in life and five health behaviors in older adults." *Preventive Medicine* 139 (2020): 106172.

⁵² Mori, Kaiho, Tomata, Narita, Tanji, Sugiyama, Sugawara, and Tsuji. "Sense of life worth living (ikigai) and incident functional disability in elderly Japanese: The Tsurugaya Project."62-67.

⁵³ Boyle, Patricia A., Lisa L. Barnes, Aron S. Buchman, and David A. Bennett. "Purpose in life is associated with mortality among community-dwelling older persons." *Psychosomatic medicine* 71, no. 5 (2009): 574.

⁵⁴ Schaefer, Stacey M., Jennifer Morozink Boylan, Carien M. Van Reekum, Regina C. Lapate, Catherine J. Norris, Carol D. Ryff, and Richard J. Davidson. "Purpose in life predicts better emotional recovery from negative stimuli." *PloS one* 8, no. 11 (2013): e80329.

⁵⁵ DeWitz, S. Joseph, M. Lynn Woolsey, and W. Bruce Walsh. "College student retention: An exploration of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and purpose in life among college students." *Journal of college student development* 50, no. 1 (2009): 19-34.

This study employs constructivism as its research paradigm. As a philosophical paradigm, constructivism asserts that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. The constructivist philosophical paradigm is associated with the qualitative research approach because it seeks to understand a phenomenon under study from the experiences or angles of the participants using different data collecting agents. Constructivists claim that reality is subjective because it is from the individual perspectives of participants engaged in the study and is thus multiple or varied. Research grounded in the constructivist philosophical paradigm mostly begins with an open-ended inquiry through research questions. Tentative or valid conclusions are then constructed from the findings of the study ⁵⁶.

This study chooses inductive reasoning as its research approach for the absence of the *ikigai* theory. To obtain a representative sample that can support the generalisation effort, this study implies the stratified sampling method by age group and gender. In addition to that, this study also utilises the random and diversity sampling method to increase the chances of getting a representative sample. Table 2 shows the sampling technique utilised in this study.

Table 2: Sampling Technique

Gender	Age (years old)	No. of the population ('000)	Percentage (%)	Sample size (person)
Male	20 – 39	16.3	27	6
	40 – 59	9.9	17	4
	60 – 79	5.0	8	2
Female	20 – 39	14.1	24	6
	40 – 59	9.3	16	4
	60 – 79	5.0	8	2
Total		59.6	100	24

A five-page Q-data sheet comprising five sections namely demographics, daily routines for weekdays, daily routines for weekends, evaluation of well-being, and open-ended questions was created for the data collection purpose. For the daily routine sections, this study adopts the combination of the Q-method⁵⁷, Survey on Time-use and Leisure Activities⁵⁸, and Likert scale questionnaires. Normally, Q-sort is done by arranging the statements according to the participants' preferences. But for this study, the participants were required to colour the slots depending on which category the particular activity that had been carried out belongs to, according to their interpretations. Yellow, green, and blue signify *atari mae*, *shikata ga nai*, and *jiko jitsugen*, respectively. According to the three-tier model built by Mathews, the individual's self is culturally shaped at three levels⁵⁹; taken-for-granted (*atari mae*), cannot be helped (*shikata ga nai*), and cultural supermarket (self-realisation/*jiko jitsugen*). The *atari mae* category brings together the things that people do without realising it or based on the things that have been done for generations since the time of their ancestors. Regarding *shikata ga nai*, this category refers to things where people are aware of social practices and cultural norms but have limited power to control them.

⁵⁶Adom, Dickson, Akwasi Yeboah, and Attah Kusi Ankrah. "Constructivism philosophical paradigm: Implication for research, teaching and learning." *Global journal of arts humanities and social sciences* 4, no. 10 (2016): 1-9.

⁵⁷ Brown. *A Primer on Q Methodology*.

⁵⁸ Statistics Bureau Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. "Outline of the 2021 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities"

⁵⁹ Mathews, "The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: Ikigai and" *The Japanese Self*". 718-747

Under the *jiko jitsugen* category, humans are said to be fully conscious and have the power to control what they do.

Besides showing the category of the activities, the participants were also required to show how much time they spent on them. Next, the 11-point Likert scale, ranging from -5 to 5 is used to find out how those activities have influenced the participants' sense of satisfaction, significance, and happiness in their daily life. The open-ended questions section was based on the English version of Ikigai-9⁶⁰ and the elements from the Ikigai Venn Diagram⁶¹. The analysis was conducted in three stages: individual, group inclinations, and generalisation.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

There are three main findings from the research results. First, it was obvious from the results that the majority of the people were affected by the pandemic of COVID-19 and the implementation of MCO. Out of 24 participants, 13 showed a decrease in life satisfaction, significance, and happiness during the pandemic. Only four participants showed an increase in satisfaction, significance, and happiness while seven participants showed no or almost no difference in those three aspects. Second, there are no specific tendencies between the age and gender of participants in terms of PIL and *ikigai*. Third, being able to do what one wants to do is the key to pursuing *ikigai* and well-being. Below is the result of the analysis according to the level of *ikigai*.

Group 1: *Ikigai* Level Was Maintained

Looking closely into the reasons why some people were able to maintain their level of satisfaction, significance and happiness, this study found that those whose PIL was not affected or changed during the pandemic tend to feel similarly satisfied, significant and happy. Three participants belonging to this group maintained their PIL which falls under the category of *jiko jitsugen*. Participant #5 (female, 51 years old) was able to continue her daily activities such as listening to the radio, watching television, going to the beach, getting together with family, listening to religious talks, and doing online shopping. Participant #6 (Male, 68 years old) spent most of his time watching television and news, listening to the radio, reading newspapers, relaxing alone and jogging, before and during the pandemic. Participant #19 (female, 75 years old) was able to continue her daily routines of reciting the Quran, watching television, reading newspapers, gardening, relaxing alone and attending a senior citizen club even during the pandemic. Participant #19 used to go to the nearby restaurant and have a chat with her friends before the pandemic, but this was changed to communicate using the WhatsApp app.

Three other participants, Participant #10 (male, 33 years old), Participant #15 (male, 40 years old) and Participant #17 (female, 55 years old) maintained their PIL which falls under the category of *atari mae*. They allocated a majority of their time before and during the pandemic for sleep, meals and personal care. The last participant who belongs to this group, Participant #23 (female, 39 years old) maintained her PIL which falls under the category of *shikata ga nai*. As someone who is working full time, she considers taking two hours of sleep right after work as something that cannot be helped.

Group 2: *Ikigai* Level Was Increased

⁶⁰ Fido, Kotera and Asano. "English Translation and Validation of the Ikigai-9 in a UK Sample.": 1352 - 1359

⁶¹ Marc, Winn, "What is Your Ikigai?", 14 May 2014, <https://theviewinside.me/what-is-your-ikigai/>.

This study found that people whose PIL had shifted from doing mainly the *shikata ga nai* activities to *jiko jitsugen* activities tend to feel happier, more satisfied, and more significant. Participant #3 (female, 26 years old) had her daily life changed during the pandemic because she received a new job, and no longer needs to go to work on the weekend. Before the pandemic, she lived with her family and felt the burden of being the first child. During the pandemic, she lived by herself and felt happier because she has a flexible schedule. Since her new job offers a better wage, she feels happier because she can spend the money all she wants. She also enjoys going out to buy food while looking at the scenery, different from before the pandemic when she spent most of her time in her job place. Not only that, with the new living space she obtained, she can have enough time to catch up with the current issues, talk with friends, work out or jog, and do other things that she was never able to do previously due to tiredness of work.

Contrary to that, Participant #7 (male, 25 years old) had his PIL shifted from working 12 hours per day to playing games and drawing almost 11 hours every day. During the pandemic, he stopped working at his previous job and only worked part-time managing his family's homestay business. Since tourists were not allowed to visit Langkawi, the homestay rarely received guests. Therefore, he had more free time than before the pandemic. He had enough time to enjoy his meal and did not have to worry about the cost. He became happier when he could spend time with his mother and listen to her problems. He finally managed to exercise at home because he felt the need to do so following his weight gain during the pandemic. Although before the pandemic he was able to go out socialising with friends, that doesn't mean he is satisfied with the matter because usually, the topic of their conversation is about work. During the pandemic, he was unable to do the activity and it made him develop anxiety. Overall, the socialising activity never gave him a sense of satisfaction, significance, and happiness and did not influence his increased *ikigai*.

Participant #14 (male, 76 years old) also stopped working during the pandemic. His daily activities changed to relaxing with the family, sending the children to work, cleaning the house, and relaxing alone. He had a lot of time to watch television and felt happier when he was updated on current issues. During the pandemic, he started having an idea to help the less fortunate. With the help of his friends, he managed to help the less fortunate and this made him feel happier.

Among the four participants whose *ikigai* level had increased, only one participant (Participant #22, female, 27 years old) had her PIL maintained in the *shikata ga nai* category. But it is understood that the source of her increased *ikigai* level is her new job that offers a better wage and gives her more space to do various things at home. For example, before the pandemic, with her previous job, she did not have enough time to sleep, take care of herself, have meals, do the house chores, watch television, and spend time with family and friends due to work. During the pandemic, her sense of satisfaction especially increased because she now has her transport to go to places. Her sense of significance also increased as she works as a team in her new job. She even had a little bit of extra time for her hobby. She felt happier because she felt healthy.

From the four instances in Group 2, we can see how increasing the space or opportunity to do the things one wants to do will increase a person's level of *ikigai*. There is no specific pattern that can be seen in terms of participants' views on the meaning of life. This suggests that each individual has a different approach to fostering well-being.

Group 3: *Ikigai* Level Was Decreased

As for the people whose level of satisfaction, significance and happiness decreased, it can be concluded that the main reason for this is either their PIL was retained or shifted to a lower level. Among the participants belonging to this group, there are two persons whose PIL was retained in

the *jiko jitsugen* category, two persons maintained in the *shikata ga nai* category, and three persons had their PIL retained in the *atari mae* category. On the other hand, two persons had their PIL shifted from the *jiko jitsugen* to the *shikata ga nai* category, and five persons had their daily routines changed from mainly doing the *shikata ga nai* activities to the *atari mae* activities.

The first participant who remained to do the *jiko jitsugen* activities, Participant #8 (female, 30 years old) spent most of her time doing various things that she considered as something that she wanted to do, including taking care of the children on the weekends, relaxing with family or siblings, watching movies at home, having late supper, online shopping, and managing her part-time business. However, something that made her less happy and dissatisfied was the fact that she could not go for travel as planned due to the pandemic and MCO. Meanwhile, Participant #18 (female, 47 years old) while working full time, managed to spend a lot of time doing online shopping and watching tv dramas. But these did not guarantee her happiness as well as satisfaction since she feels as if she lost the freedom to go out due to the MCO.

Participant #1 (female, 25 years old) and Participant #16 (male, 52 years old) had their PIL retained in the *shikata ga nai* category. Participant #1 is a student who spends the majority of her time attending classes and doing assignments. She found it difficult to do online learning for her major courses since she did not have enough equipment at home. Consequently, her happiness decreased because she felt online learning is tiring and not practical. She also felt frustrated as she became physically less active than before. Besides that, she felt lonely during the pandemic because she could not go out and socialise with her friends. On the other hand, Participant #16 whose work involved going to the jetty and checking the boat etc. found it difficult to do so because of the strict standard operating procedures imposed by the authorities during the MCO.

The third type of people who belong to this group is those whose PIL remained in the *atari mae* category. Participant #4 (female, 43 years old) spent almost half of her day doing basic things in life such as sleep, self-care and meals which could not be directly disrupted by the pandemic or MCO. However, her level of *ikigai* has decreased due to the restrictions that hinder her from going out sightseeing and meeting friends. Participant #20 (male, 34 years old) who is self-employed also spent the majority of his time doing the three basic activities in life. The reasons for his decreased level of *ikigai* are the inability to do his business at night and to do outdoor activities with his family like previously before the pandemic.

The next type of people under this group is those whose life had shifted from the *jiko jitsugen* to the *shikata ga nai* category. For Participant #11 (female, 67 years old), the only thing that made her feel dissatisfied during the pandemic was the fact that she cannot receive and entertain her neighbours daily as she used to do before the pandemic. Meanwhile, for Participant #21 (male, 28 years old), even though he is satisfied with his new workplace which is a big company that will not be affected by the pandemic, his *ikigai* had decreased because he can no longer do activities such as watching television, spending quality time with family and take care of his pets due to fatigue because of work.

Lastly, five participants had their PIL shifted from the *shikata ga nai* to the *atari mae* category. During the MCO, Participant #2 (male, 25 years old) spent a long time on sleep and that is what made his PIL shift. But apparently, the activities that influenced his sense of *ikigai* are doing outdoor activities such as playing futsal and hanging out with friends. The inability to do such activities has made him feel stressed and unhappy. As for Participant #9 (male, 54 years old), his overall PIL shifted from the *shikata ga nai* to the *atari mae* category not because he spent more time on sleep, personal care or meal. Instead, his allotted time to do the *shikata ga nai* activities had decreased as he began to spend more time on the *jiko jitsugen* activities such as relaxing with

the family. This change however did not influence his *ikigai* level. What made his *ikigai* level decrease during the pandemic is the fact that he could not go out and play football on weekends. Besides that, he also felt less significant as he could not play his role as a father who sent and fetched the children to and from the school due to school closure.

Participant #12 (female, 39 years old) also retained her *atari mae* activities, but they became prominent because she spent a shorter time doing the *shikata ga nai* activities during the pandemic. She spent the available time relaxing with her family, but this no longer gave her a sense of happiness since it was too much. She also felt very dissatisfied because she could not do shopping during the pandemic due to financial constraints caused by her husband's job loss. Participant #13 (male, 46 years old) who runs a car rental business could not continue his daily routines because of the pandemic. He ends up spending more time on sleep, doing house chores and relaxing with his family. He showed an increase in happiness by spending more time with the family, but the inability to go out for work has contributed so much to his decreased *ikigai*. Lastly, for Participant #24 (male, 34 years old), the percentage of time he spent on doing the *atari mae* category activities increased since he reduced the time doing activities under the *jiko jitsugen* category. He could no longer spend money on online shopping due to financial constraints and he could not go out exercising due to the MCO. These restrictions gave him a feeling of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

DISCUSSION

As suggested by DeWitz *et al.*, one way to understand a person's tendency to achieve the meaning of life is through analysing his/her PIL because PIL creates a sense of intentionality and purpose towards a goal that guides a person's behaviour⁶². It was obvious from the research results that some people in Langkawi felt less happy when they were bound by the restrictions that followed the pandemic of COVID-19. But how did they face the 'obstacles to happiness' and remain calm? This study found that there are some understandings about the meaning of life among the people of Langkawi Island that prevent them from focusing too much on hardship.

When asked their opinion about why humans were created, three answers were prominent. First, it is a natural human process (giving birth and being born). Second, to learn the meaning of life by experiencing good and bad things. Third, to feel grateful and glorify the greatness of God. With regards to the question of how to achieve well-being, the answers can be concluded into three types. First, to have knowledge and religion. Second, to work hard and then be content with what you get. Third, to always think positively.

However, this study found no consistency in terms of the source of participants' satisfaction, significance, and happiness. In other words, each individual has different reasons to feel happy, satisfied, and significant. But what is clear, the sources are generally made up of things that belong to the *jiko jitsugen* category i.e. things that people consciously do and have the power to control⁶³.

Being able to do what we want to do has proven to be linked with an increase in life satisfaction, significance and happiness and eventually linked to an increase in well-being. Being confined or restricted to go out does not necessarily mean our road to well-being is disrupted, especially when we realise that the sources of our satisfaction, significance and happiness exist

⁶² DeWitz, Joseph, Woolsey, and Walsh. "College student retention: An exploration of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and purpose in life among college students." 19-34.

⁶³ Mathews, "The Stuff of Dreams, Fading: Ikigai and" The Japanese Self", 718-747.

surrounding us. For the people in Langkawi Island, their sense of *ikigai* comes mainly from the ability to do activities with family and friends.

Another thing that this study also discovered is that the amount of time we spend doing certain things does not relate to the amount of satisfaction, significance, and happiness we gain. In other words, we cannot simply conclude that if someone spends most of his time doing work means his *ikigai* is work. Similarly, it is too ambiguous to say that someone who spends the majority of her time taking care of the family has family as her *ikigai*. This is because their true sense of *ikigai* may come from the small things that accompany his/her main daily routines which are beyond their control.

It is interesting to look at how supposedly increased *ikigai* due to an increase in time doing the *jiko jitsugen* activities did not necessarily happen that way. As in the example of five participants whose *ikigai* decreased while their PIL shifted from the *shikata ga nai* to the *atari mae* category, the ability to do something that someone enjoys in life, even the smallest one, is the source of his/her *ikigai*. This further confirms the importance of a “meaning mindset” as opposed to a “success mindset”⁶⁴ as suggested by Wong in fostering well-being. There is so much time that has been spent on doing something that someone feels difficult, challenging or dislikes will not give him/her meaning if he/she could not taste the reward of doing it.

Because well-being and the opposite of it are situations or states where individuals can be in, as a protective mechanism, PIL helps to prevent someone from entering a state that is considered not well. This mechanism can do its function when people do things that contribute to feelings of satisfaction, significance, and happiness. Always, those things consist of something that a particular individual wants to do in his/her life. Therefore, finding a PIL or doing what we value in life is very crucial to gain energy or strength to continue living or moving forward, or *ikigai*, especially during hard times.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study explain why someone who has a sense of PIL tends to develop a sense of *ikigai*. In general, someone who knows what he/she values in life can decide how much time they want to spend doing those activities besides doing things that are taken-for-granted and/or cannot-be-helped. It is important to note here that sleep, for example, does not always fall under the category of taken for granted, just as how work cannot always be categorised as a thing that cannot be helped. Therefore, it is crucial to let the research participants decide which category an activity belongs to, according to their interpretation when conducting future research. Because, after all, only we understand the reasons why we do certain things in life and the meanings of the things that we do in life.

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⁶⁴ Wong, "Viktor Frankl's meaning-seeking model and positive psychology.", 149-184.

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