



Focus on Subjective Well-Being and “Ikigai” As Reason for Living or “Eudaimonia”

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Received date: 13 February 2023; **Accepted date:** 11 March 2023; **Published date:** 18 March 2023

Citation: Yoshioka A, Bando H, Nishikiori Y. Focus on Subjective Well-Being and “Ikigai” As Reason for Living or “Eudaimonia”. J Health Care and Research. 2023 Mar 18;4(1):21-24.

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Abstract

Research on the meaning of life has shown that the value and worth of each individual's life hold significant importance, and this is closely associated with the concept of "eudaimonia" from ancient Greek philosophy. More recently, the Japanese word "ikigai" has gained attention as a similar concept, referring to one's sense of well-being, reason for living, or purpose in life. Through various studies, it has been discovered that ikigai is closely related to factors such as happiness, anxiety, depression, stress, and employment status. In fact, it has been identified as a key predictor of both psychological well-being and physical health. As such, the research on ikigai has important implications for preventative medicine and positive psychology, as it can help individuals lead more fulfilling, successful, and responsible lives on a daily basis.

Keywords

Eudaimonia, Ikigai, Well-Being, Purpose in Life, Hinohara-Isim

Two types of characteristic minds are found among people. One is a success-oriented culture, where individuals seek higher extrinsic motivation such as fame or money, which can sometimes compromise well-being. The other is a quality-oriented culture, where individuals seek higher intrinsic motivation, such as inherent curiosity and joy from the activity itself, which is associated with higher well-being [1]. In recent trends, the concept of "ikigai" has gained popularity in Western countries through self-help books or journals. Among them, readers seek to find more fulfillment in their ordinary lives through ikigai and well-being [2].

[3]. While discussions have centered on the purpose or coherence of life, the crucial meaning of each significant life has not yet been investigated. The value and worth of each life hold significance and are associated with the concept of "eudaimonia" from ancient Greek philosophy, which means a successful, responsible, and better daily life. Research on eudaimonia can help individuals lead lives worth living, while the concept of significance is related to each individual's previous experiences [3]. This perspective is specifically described as a reason for living or purpose in life in Japanese culture and language [4].

Recent research has focused on the meaning of life

In the research of the ikigai concept, self-regulated

motivation was studied, including health situation, well-being in daily life, and better behavior change [5]. These factors are related to eudaemonic well-being in Western culture, which contributes greatly to maintaining our health. The study involved 622 participants aged 20-59 years who answered a questionnaire on Ikigai well-being, social support, sense of coherence, exercise motivation for health (EMH), and motivation for healthy eating (MHE). The results showed that ikigai well-being had a positive relationship with EMH and MHE through relative autonomy index (RAI) calculation, with other factors influencing the level of ikigai well-being. As ikigai well-being is a mediating factor, sense of coherence and social support play a role in promoting EMH and MHE.

Until now, the concept of ikigai has been understood from both emotional and rational points of view. These include i) desire for a purpose in life, ii) sense of feeling for purpose in life, and iii) certain human or professional objects associated with pursuing the purpose. Furthermore, such instinctive desires of individuals have been supported by creative affirmation perspectives within the body. The concept of ikigai has gained remarkable attention in preventative medicine and positive psychology [6]. Among them, ikigai is considered a key predictor of psychological well-being and physical health [4]. Specifically, the preservation of ikigai is significantly associated with a decreased incidence of cerebral vascular accident (CVA) and cardiovascular disease (CVD) for a 13-year follow-up period [7].

In various Japanese fields, possessing the feeling of ikigai has been linked to psychosomatic well-being [4]. However, until recently, few studies on ikigai in Western countries were conducted [8]. As a result, it was found that the feeling of ikigai is a predictive factor for depression and well-being, but not anxiety. There was no relationship between ikigai and sex, student situation, or employment situation. It has been studied whether ikigai status correlates with measures of mental health. Among them, findings showed that age, gender, employment or student status are related to depression, anxiety, and happiness [9]. Furthermore, the following three correlations were examined: i) ikigai vs depression scale, ii) ikigai vs well-being, and iii) ikigai vs anxiety scale. As a result, a

well-known hypothesis exists [10]: people with a high sense of purpose consciousness have lower depression scores and higher happiness scores than those with a low sense of purpose consciousness. However, a sense of ikigai does not appear to be a predictor of anxiety scores. The concept of ikigai exists in the philosophy of Hinohara-ism, where the renowned Dr. Shigeaki Hinohara established it and authors have been developing the movement for a long time [11].

Ikigai has been evaluated as a predictive factor for both depression and well-being [8]. However, the variance in ikigai accounted for more than 16% for well-being and over 19% for depression. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major global issue over the past three years and has had a significant impact on people's sense of purpose in life and their overall quality of life [12]. A recent study investigated the relationship between purpose in life, well-being outcomes, and improved health conditions. The study involved 14,000 participants from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and evaluated 61 different check items [13]. The results indicated that several behaviors were associated with subsequent purpose, including physical activity, health conditions, stroke, and psychosocial factors.

A study was conducted in Germany to investigate the relationship between purpose in life and healthcare use (HCU). Data was obtained from a large investigation project called the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) study [14]. The number of HCU visits over a period of 6 months was analyzed along with 6 subscales, including 'purpose in life', using a well-being model. The results of the incidence rate ratio (IRR) showed that the average score for purpose in life was 4.5 (SD 0.8, ranging from 1 to 6), where higher values indicated a higher sense of purpose. Higher purpose was found to be associated with frequent visits for females (IRR 1.16), but not for males (IRR 0.96). In contrast, a higher sense of purpose was observed for hospitalization for men (OR 1.40), but not for women (OR 1.03) [14].

Another important factor would be exercise or sport, as it has a positive influence on ikigai during childhood and adulthood [15,16]. As individuals become more familiar with ikigai, they may notice an improvement

in their mental health. This is beneficial for both individuals and society from a bio-psycho-social and financial perspective. It is suggested that the cost of mental health issues has decreased by approximately 2.5 trillion USD a year [17]. Consequently, interventions that are cost-effective can be expected to provide a beneficial influence on mental health problems.

When investigating the relationship between ikigai and the COVID-19 pandemic, several related factors were found, including gender, age, and current employment situation [18,19]. Therefore, COVID-19 is not likely the main contributing cause. However, anxiety may be more influenced during the COVID-19 period [20], and the anxiety level may be different when the same study is repeated in other situations. In summary, this commentary discusses ikigai and related matters, and it is hoped that it will contribute to solving psychosomatic problems in the future.

Funding

There was no funding received for this paper.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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