

The Influence of Positivity on the Meaning of Life among Malaysian Frontliners during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic

Kalaivanan Syasyila¹, Lim L. Gin², Zhooriyati S.M.^{3*}

^{1,2} Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University Kuala Lumpur, 1, Jalan Menara Gading, UCSI Heights, Taman Connaught, 56000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

³ School of Psychology, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU), Technology Park Malaysia, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur 57000 Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: zhooriyati.sehu@apu.edu.my; yati_2386@yahoo.com
<https://doi.org/10.61211/mjqr090103>

ABSTRACT

The fight against COVID-19 is far from reaching an end. It implies Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners, unfortunately, lose their purpose to strive for a better future. Under that hypothetical situation, this study aims to scrutinize the positivity during the global pandemic with the sensibility of meaning in life among COVID-19 frontliners. The method of qualitative data collection was employed in this study. The purposive and snowball sampling techniques were in an alliance in recruiting 18 frontliners from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a series of open-ended questions that were based on the topics the researchers aimed to cover. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data that was gathered. Findings show that Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners' drive to overcome adversity using their meaning in life. It gave them a sense of life satisfaction with a human connection emphasizing the need to support one another. Most frontliners in Malaysia also have a charitable nature to uphold social welfare since their dedication aids their personal development. Like all humans, frontliners occasionally experience overwhelming situations, which forces them to turn to spiritualism since their religious literacy and personal devotion give them life purpose. This study can be further enhanced by incorporating possible psychological interventions, such as psychoeducation, that can strengthen the positivity of healthcare workers. By providing self-help techniques to cultivate positivity and motivation, the meaning of life for individual healthcare workers can be increased. This would be a valuable addition to the current focus on establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to safeguard frontliners and flatten the curve of virus spread. While awareness among Malaysian citizens through the MySejahtera application is crucial, strengthening the positivity and resilience of healthcare workers is equally important. By implementing such interventions, healthcare workers can feel supported and empowered, ultimately improving their well-being and ability to provide quality care.

Keywords: Meaning in Life; COVID-19 Pandemic; Frontliners; Malaysia; Qualitative Study

Article Info:

Received 18 Jan 2023

Accepted 28 March 2023

Published 31 May 2023

INTRODUCTION

The perception of meaning in life has changed for many individuals due to the recent astounding COVID-19 pandemic (Grossman, 2020). The high mortality rate caused by this virus drives the general public to begin re-evaluating the meaning of life that involves the future world (Tamiolaki & Kalaitzaki, 2020). As the majority of people around the world are facing a similar situation of the lockdown that calls for everyone to stay at home, Sulkowski (2020) acknowledged that these affected individuals tend to utilize their leisure time to rethink what truly their life holds and mean in terms of education and business to make a living.

On the grounds of the COVID-19 outbreak, the element of meaning in life that the front liners acquire enables them to foresee their future brilliantly, although there is a dramatic expansion of death due to the infection (Kelvin & Halperin, 2020). The COVID-19 frontliners, however, frequently put up with insomnia due to the depression

and anxiety that stems from their job responsibility. Pappa et al. (2020) pointed out that it will directly influence their performance as a profession to fight against the virus. That being the case, this study explored the meaning in life for COVID-19 frontliners, and notably, this group of people can favourably overcome this global pandemic with the comprehension of the citizens.

The number of positive COVID-19 cases and the mortality rate has increased. And it stern the meaning in the life of frontliners to subside (Fukuti et al., 2020). For this reason, Malaysian frontliners hold the obligation to perform their duty, which signifies a lifelong journey they have to adhere to as medical staff. According to Gavin et al. (2020), with family support, the frontliners occupational stress can be intact as long as they perpetuate their psychological well-being during a critical period like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic that has taken place worldwide, frontliners are obligated to their province and have had their meaning in life take a toll on them. Talidong and Toquero (2020) pointed out that the general public and frontliners are grievously affected by the outbreak. They then developed fear and anxiety solely by losing their loved ones, which gave them the space to rethink their meaning in life. On the contrary, with overwhelming anxiousness and distress, frontliners are inclined to doubt their self-value. It drives them to diminish their perception of a meaningful life (Lysaker et al., 2020).

Every frontliners performing their responsibility has a very diplomatic meaning in life due to the daily phenomenon they encounter, especially healthcare workers (Agom et al., 2019). In the case of medical frontliners, who come across their patients' passing in either a peaceful or dramatic way after medicating them for some time, they tend to be compassionate about the death of someone while taking it as a heads up for their meaning in life (Childers & Arnold, 2019). Despite that, Vohs et al. (2019) noticed a lifestyle of ease differs among these individuals, as negative experiences can fuel the approach to their meaning in life.

Well-being theory can be explained by the PERMA model, which appraises positive emotions and great pleasure (Seligman, 2012). The five elements that contribute to one's well-being are Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. In the current research, meaning in life is explained by the model's fourth element, Meaning. In terms of the meaning in life for COVID-19 frontliners, the sense of meaningfulness has activated their mental strength to resist the disparity that the outbreak brought to look back at these milestones as a development process. The element of Meaning is described as the journey of looking for happiness in life besides having it correlate with self-esteem, self-acceptance, and emotional regulation on the involvement of behaviour that avoids suffering.

The Present Study

Meaning in life is loosely described as specific events that have left a meaningful mark on an individual, as Vess et al. (2017) revealed that mental processes in those times mould their thought of essential life, which will increase subjective well-being. To emphasize, meaning in life opens the opportunity for a different sense of coherency derived from various events that take place in an individual's life. It is because coherence links to the consistency that constructs meaning in life (Winger et al., 2015). Recently, the global pandemic has led up to different events occurring in every individual's life, especially the COVID-19 frontliners' life, driving them to experience diverse meanings in life.

COVID-19 frontliners must embrace having meaning in life while performing their job. For example, healthcare workers are resilient in performing their job, which includes interacting with child protection professionals. Although the pandemic has an adverse impact, having meaning in life is vital for their well-being (Priolo Filho et al., 2020). Unfortunately, resilient doctors with meaning in life have begun losing their lives to dreadful infections (Day, 2020). To prevent illegality from arising, Häyry (2020) has stated that police, who are also the frontliners, are performing their utmost best in preserving the general public's rights, especially during the global pandemic.

Occupation is influential in an individual's life as it is a lifelong journey and develops a sense of responsibility to carry on with their day. The well-being of COVID-19 frontliners may be preserved as long as family support is present due to their need to protect themselves from occupational stress (Gavin et al., 2020). Conversely, due to social distancing and isolation, working individuals, especially the COVID-19 frontliners who typically meet and interact with their colleagues, are unable to do so, causing them to have distinct socialization and experience a gradual loss of meaning in life (Park et al., 2020). In addition to that, the heavy workload of frontliners does not do justice as the number of positive COVID-19 cases and mortality rate increases as the day goes by. Hence, the meaning in the life of frontliners is continually decreasing (Fukuti et al., 2020), calling for this research to be

conducted. Therefore, this study’s objective is to explore how COVID-19 frontliners’ found positivity during the outbreak with their meaning in life through their occupation engagement.

METHOD

This phenomenological qualitative research was conducted between July 2021 and December 2021 during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. , which has significantly impacted frontliners. The study aimed to explore and determine the COVID-19 frontliners’ perspective of the ongoing pandemic they experienced, through in-depth interviews. This is believed to allow for the identification of intangible factors that shape their societal norms. Shanmugam et al. (2020) noted that using open-ended interview questions in this type of qualitative study design enabled a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners. This interview was preferred to be used in the current research as it implies the credibility needed to carry out the research besides having the peer debriefing take place for practical research. Conversely, due to the restricted social interaction from social distancing imposed for the COVID-19 pandemic, the online platform was put into use together with the face-to-face in-depth interview with the right precautions taken.

RESEARCH SITE

According to Elengoe (2020), the state of Selangor accommodates the highest number of positive COVID-19 cases throughout the year 2020. Also, Hospital Sungai Buloh, the main Malaysian tertiary hospital for COVID-19, is located in Selangor, reflecting that frontliners would cumulate around that state (Ping et al., 2021). Kuala Lumpur, correspondingly, is a capital city and the centre point for the medical tourism industry area with sophisticated operating rooms and surgical instruments (Cham et al., 2020). It contributed to selecting and interviewing the COVID-19 frontliners. In the context of location, all participants were recruited from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

Sampling

This study recruited participants according to the inclusion criteria. A sum of eighteen (18) Malaysian frontliners with diverse job scopes was selected. The reason being the interpretative phenomenology research design could explore their insights and perspicacity about this outbreak with their personal experience (Golightley & Holloway, 2020). These 18 Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners participants were healthcare workers that work either in clinics or hospitals under private-based or public-based (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic background of participants.

Malaysian COVID-19 Frontliners’ Characteristics	Number of Participants
Age Range	
21-30	5
31-40	7
41-50	2
51-60	4
Religion	
Islam	5
Buddhist	5
Hindu	4
Christian	3
Others	1
Occupation	
Dentist	1
Hospital Officer	5
Medical Lab Scientist	1
Medical Officer	4
Nurse	2
Pharmacist	2
Primary Care Physician	2
Tissue Banker	1

They were performing their job throughout the outbreak and, at the same time, gave direct care to the general public for curbing the virus. The exclusion criteria for this study were frontliners who were not healthcare workers, did not work in clinics or hospitals, and did not provide direct care to the general public during the COVID-19 outbreak. The frontliners were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling techniques during the COVID-19 pandemic between July 2021 to December 2021. Notably, it was within the declaration of the Movement Control Order (MCO), Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), and Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) by the Malaysian government in the same year.

DATA COLLECTION

In a semi-structured interview, the eighteen (18) participants are asked open-ended questions before being asked follow-up questions to delve further into their answers and the research topic. The session was recorded by the researchers with the participant's consent, and notes were taken as necessary to later transcribe the data. For the semi-structured interview in the current study, it is often desirable to adapt a questionnaire for several reasons. It is not necessary for the researchers to gather the validity since once the instrument is adopted, the reliability and validity of research studies that have been completed on it may be utilized in the present study. Additionally, adapting the existing instrument avoids the need to create a new psychometrically sound questionnaire.

The researchers have emphasised in the manuscript that they adapted an existing quantitative questionnaire as a guide, incorporating insights from the literature review and making necessary modifications to ensure a robust and contextually appropriate qualitative interview guide. By using the quantitative tool as a starting point, the researchers ensured the comprehensive coverage of relevant topics and questions while benefiting from the reliability and validity established in previous research.

Furthermore, using a quantitative questionnaire as a basis for developing the qualitative tool guide has been justified in the literature. According to Collins et al. (2006), a quantitative questionnaire can provide a useful starting point for developing a qualitative interview guide, particularly in cases where there is a limited understanding of the topic being explored. By using a quantitative questionnaire as a guide, researchers can ensure that the topics and questions covered in the qualitative interviews are comprehensive and relevant to the research aims. In the current study, the researchers used the English language to conduct the interviews.

A qualitative research expert was appointed to perform the validity and reliability test, in terms of the language and connection, of the interview questions. In that performance, the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1994) was adopted and restructured into a qualitative version. Before the actual study, two pilot test participants were recruited from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, respectively. It can recognize the research instrumentation's potential obstacles while making adjustments to presume it fits the study context (Almuklass et al., 2019).

To assure the COVID-19 frontliners understood this study's concerns completely, the information sheet comprising the framework of the study was presented right after they agreed to participate. Informed consent was given and explained to address the privacy and confidentiality of the participants throughout this study. The frontliners were more than encouraged to terminate themselves from the study provided they carried the feeling of embarrassment or threats physically or emotionally.

In order to comprehend the circumstances behind why specific events happened, a debriefing session is implemented. During this session, researchers had the opportunity to discuss with the experienced COVID-19 frontliners about the interview that had taken place. Regardless, after the debriefing session, clarification was done when there were further questions that the researchers had during the process of data interpretation. As a result, the researchers notified them and secured their consent before directly contacting them.

DATA ANALYSIS

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, the interviews were recorded using a reliable digital recorder, and the recordings were then transcribed by the researcher. Transcription is a crucial step in the research process as it allows for a detailed analysis of the data collected during the interviews. In the current study, the transcriptions were verbatim, capturing every spoken word during the interviews. The researchers reviewed the transcripts to

identify and select relevant quotations and anecdotes that were used to support the findings of the study. Additionally, the transcripts were evaluated to determine if there were any non-verbal cues or vocalizations that could provide insight into the nature and informational content of the conversations, which would not be captured by written text alone.

The application of thematic analysis revolves around six steps in employment after data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It could then provide a flexible approach by exploring the perception of meaning in life among Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners to generate positivity during the global pandemic. Data familiarization is the inception step before transcribing the collected data. To code and keep track of themes in the qualitative data, the researchers utilized Excel. They added new themes and sub-themes in expanded columns, making it apparent which themes each participant's answers connect to. By forming the initial code, the standardized theme can classify and undergo validity and reliability procedure. There will be a process of organizing potential themes, and subsequently, it was reviewed by a professional qualitative researcher. The concept of meaning in life from the Malaysian frontliners is interpreted with the critical evaluation to name the themes. Ultimately, the paper on positivity during the global pandemic among the frontliners is reportable by employing conclusive data interpretation.

The researchers ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study by taking into account the study's authenticity. The degree to which researchers accurately and thoroughly depict a wide range of different realities and authentically portray participants' experiences is referred to as authenticity. The researchers address this objective by choosing suitable individuals for the study sample and by providing a thorough, in-depth explanation. To enhance the credibility and transferability of the study, the researchers used a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that participants were diverse in terms of their age, gender, and work experience. To improve dependability and confirmability, the researchers used rigorous data analysis techniques, including coding and member checking, and provided a clear and transparent description of their methods and procedures.

Ethical Consideration

The ethical approval was taken from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of UCSI University (Reference code: IEC-2020-FoSSLA-051) before conducting the study. Private information regarding the identity of human subjects may ascertain directly through a coding system. The data for which accumulated through the interview was encrypted by pseudonyms and not be made public. This study may affect the emotion of the COVID-19 frontliners, as the recent outbreak had a dramatic effect on the infection rate. Therefore, the 18 frontliners had a justifiable exemption to preserve the human subjects, as affirmed in the IEC, reflecting that they could withdraw from the research without consequences.

RESULTS

This research ultimately aims to explore both the positive effects of COVID-19 frontliners on the community and how the act of helping the community contributes to the meaning of life of frontliners through their occupational engagement. The findings of the study represent emergent themes derived from 18 Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners. The study yielded six main themes that describe the details of their meaning in life, which are discussed below. The act of being able to contribute to society by involving in social welfare in the community was found to lead to more meaningful insights for the frontliners.

Altruism

With the initiative to give back to the community, the social welfare conducive to the meaning in the life of COVID-19 frontliners stems from their generous heart. Social inclusivity manner drives the frontliners to pay back to civilization besides influencing their positivity during the global pandemic, as it leads them to depend on secondary effort. With empathetic and prosocial behaviour, the Malaysian frontliners tend to put in their enthusiasm in contributing to the nation as they try to educate and enlighten the illiterate about the dreadful virus. While in earlier times, the healthcare system was taken for granted, hence by utilizing collective reinforcement, the evolution has been put into proper use. It sequentially provides them with a sense of meaning in life when investing in their effort, especially during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"You see a lot of people . . . does not have the opportunity that I have when it comes to dealing directly with the society...some people often go to orphanages or donate money to certain place or serve people food to the homeless and stuff like for me it's easy, I don't have to do . . . I don't have to go looking for it, I have it at my work, I'm always serving at my work so that's one of it

[meaning in life] . . . Therefore, I make sure I'm healthy and to make sure I am always ready to serve." (Participant 12)

Peer Support

Comprehending compassion is vital for a frontliner, especially in times of an outbreak where everyone faces their battles. Emotional support involving the nobility of their friends or family inclusivity is essential for the Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners. Being family-oriented can grant the frontliners a sense of belongingness, where they tend to have an inherent desire to belong and be a significant part of their family members by placing them beyond themselves. They will ultimately generate positivity, as they are aware that they must successfully fight against the virus for the members who anticipate their presence at home. Having one another's back with insightful communication could make a difference for the frontliners. It is particularly amidst a pandemic that they can notice what brings and adds meaning to their life, be it a meaningful conversation or compensation for themselves.

"That's why I tell with my experiences in life, that's why I tell because kita jumpa orang [we meet people], jumpa kawan [meet friends] . . . I got one friend every morning I'll call chat, happy. Lepastu ada orang kedua [then there is another person], waktu pergi kerja [when I'm going to work] lah meaningful life you know. So what you feel wah betul lah dia ini cakap [it's right what this person said]. You see we make other people's life so meaningful." (Participant 08)

Self-Help

When life satisfaction reaches its peak, every individual, including COVID-19 frontliners, often perceives it as attaining meaning in life. The desire for acknowledgment, in a way, acts as a contributing factor to the life satisfaction of COVID-19 frontliners. They anticipate an increment in salary on top of recognition from higher authorities due to the boundless contribution to impede the COVID-19 infection spread. The moment frontliners walk into the healthcare field, undeniably, their life purpose revolves around contemplating for the better when it comes to their patients or even themselves instead of materialistic subjects. Therefore, COVID-19 frontliners are impelled to look after themselves by implementing social and individual transformation. It is doable through the use of self-reflection as well as self-motivation approaches during their leisure time.

"We are one human race, we must care for each other, my role in society is to ensure that we strive to become better people . . . social and individual transformation is important so you need to focus on yourself, and focus on your community so these two things are important and it goes hand in hand because if I don't transform individually, then I cannot transform the society so both are very important." (Participant 14)

Self-Acceptance

Meaning in life for Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners comes in the form of the commitment they hold during the pandemic. For this reason, their progression in life leaves them feeling committed toward themselves and the people they bear close to their hearts, including family and friends. With such thoughts, they tend to hold the principle of lifelong learning as self-motivation to pursue their essential growth, not only for personal practice but also for professional purposes. As frontliner, their role is to contribute to society for the sake of the future. It can intensify social embodiment and activate reciprocal citizenship on top of their self-evolution with their self-sustainability. With the social pressure put on the coming generations, the frontliners recognized that blooming children give them a life purpose. In due time, the individuals wandering around will be able to combat the virus globally because of the tireless effort and responsibility the frontliners contribute.

"To me in pharmacist uhh it's the work that I do I enjoy lah because I did chose this career lah then I feel like uhh even though that is much difficulty now is okay lah because you learn from it lah challenges are there for you to learn from it lah. So all this things are just minor setback only loh so as long as you overcome it, you learn from it then is okay lah, the most important thing is uhhh just have to keep continuing loh whatever it is. Uhhh I wouldn't say that I find my meaning in life through my job, meaning of life for me is more like you accept what is happening around you." (Participant 11)

Philosophical Religious Affiliation

Religiosity literary is vital in seeking meaning in life for COVID-19 frontliners. It is, especially during a global pandemic where the mortality rate has fluctuated. The moment where a decision of theirs ends with a fruitful outcome, it urges them to believe in God to fulfill their life purpose to contribute to society for the sake of the community. However, frontliners have to put faith and depend on God out of choice because their responsibility

lies in the means to save human lives from the death blow. Yet, to a certain extent, they fail to do so, provided they are incapable of counteracting the power of the almighty. Spiritualism, as a result, impels the COVID-19 frontliners' devotion. It is, specifically, when the frontliners hold the spiritual belief that leads them towards the emphasis of life after life. The Malaysian frontliners pointed out that the current life is temporary, unlike the afterlife, and it is essential to flourish the existential viability for the better.

"My meaning of life is actually related with my life after life so I more involve with spiritual but but coping mechanism I didn't inform you that I do focus on spiritual part as well so uhh I'm not a religious person as I was to be in the past but I do I mean like uhh a bit believer of universe and also God so no matter what happen I do believe that there's an arrangement from universe for that so coping mechanism, spiritualism is the one that I'm more focusing towards meaning of life." (Participant 04)

Positive Affirmation

An individual's characteristic is essential to determine whether or not they ought to experience meaning in life. Having a capitalistic mindset drives a small amount of frontliner one step closer to achieving a meaningful life. The practice of counting on blessings is crucial for it to contribute to the meaning in life of the COVID-19 frontliners. Frontliners will later achieve internal peace with their gratefulness and genuineness. Besides, knowing how to be considerate of one's actions enables the COVID-19 frontliners to be concerned about their patients. They will strive to contribute their professionalism towards the needy, as there is a highlight of the empathy element during the treatment period. With constructive anticipations, the Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners carry as a characteristic they tend to have high adaptability and positive thinking to deal with the inevitable pandemic with the concept of try and error and the theory of happiness set-point. Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners would then be active happiness seekers, as they take the rough with the smooth, which can provide them contentment in their journey of insightful exploration of the world.

"Everyday . . . what do you call . . . we live by the day lah and think positive lah. For me is once you start thinking negatively, it will bring you down haa then you cannot...after that all your whole day is gone. So for me ah, I always . . . I mean I . . . if . . . if something bad happens it's a lesson haa it's a lesson we learn, move forward...we move forward so for me I don't wanna think that oh this is gonna be bad. Live life to the fullest best... Future also let it come . . . we handle one by one, for me day by day handle it." (Participant 09)

In conclusion, through the use of eidetic reduction, essential components that make this phenomenon special have been identified, including compassion, emotional support, religiosity, and adaptability. The hermeneutic approach has been utilized to interpret the data, and the findings have shown that commitment to society, lifelong learning, and spiritualism are crucial for Malaysian frontliners to find meaning in life. The study emphasizes the importance of social inclusivity, empathy, and constructive anticipation for frontliners to achieve life satisfaction and internal peace.

DISCUSSION

It is important to note that while the profession may play a significant role in shaping an individual's sense of purpose, it is only one aspect of their life. Meaning in life is derived from a variety of factors, including past events and personal values. Additionally, external factors such as a supportive working environment, peer support, or family support can also have a significant impact on an individual's overall sense of purpose. Hence, it can be inferred that COVID-19 frontliners' sense of purpose and fulfillment is not solely derived from their profession. Although they may find meaning in their chosen occupation, other factors are likely to play a significant role in shaping their overall life purpose. For instance, the commitment to caring for vulnerable patients through collective reinforcement can promote social inclusivity and transformation, ultimately providing frontliners with a greater sense of fulfillment and purpose beyond their professional roles. FioRito et al. (2021) revealed that an individual who begins to seek meaning in life must obtain self-worth foremostly. The form of social welfare that the frontliners hold reflects their self-worth, and in other ways, it could contribute to their meaning in life since they have the generous heart to give back to society. Notwithstanding, an intention to persuade a remarkable thing can catalyze an individual life meaningfully, and therefore it needs to be emphasized by every individual (Maree, 2019). It evolves from an optimistic interpersonal dynamic, as frontliners require to satisfy their necessary and basic psychological needs of independence to bring down the COVID-19 curve.

Besides, family responsibility that can extend to family inclusivity is vital for COVID-19 frontliners' life. External factors such as a supportive working environment, peer support, or family support can also have a significant impact on an individual's overall sense of purpose. Human connections through the family or loved ones, in particular, can provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, and a source of motivation for COVID-19 frontliners. These connections can grant them the opportunity to experience a meaningful life, not only through their profession but also through their relationships with their loved ones. They would gain positive outcomes where there is an understanding of compassion, especially during their employment circumstances where they encounter a dreadful outbreak. According to Tian et al. (2021), having one another's back in the occupational setting could award work engagement and provide job satisfaction. There are various interpretations of that context, whereby the coronavirus stress from the career environment is significant for the frontliners since their psychological flexibility has an association with their meaning in life (Arslan & Allen, 2021). For this reason, Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners must effectively accommodate their demographic to put themselves with their parents and colleagues or patients from distinctive backgrounds.

Be that as it may, during the hectic period, COVID-19 frontliners manage to have a sense of contentment while also using their leisure time to perform their hobby appropriately. They look after themselves by conducting beneficial activities that could gather their passion through self-motivation and self-reflection to contemplate a better future. An individual tends to make judgments about their meaning in life before comparing the existential matter with their personality (Costin & Vignoles, 2020). Thereupon, there is a desire for acknowledgment among the Malaysian frontliners, either before or after joining the healthcare system. The healthcare systems in Malaysia have reached their peak because of the pandemic. On that note, the component of significance, purpose, and coherence of life function as a foundation of a meaningful life for any individual, including Malaysian frontliners. Womick et al. (2020) pointed out that with those elements, ordinary people can explore their existence in this world through their meaning in life with subjective well-being.

Progression is made by frontliners when they involve in saving the lives of others, as they graciously are granted the opportunity to contribute to society. As healthcare workers, the career responsibility they possess, along with the sense of professional personality or occupation environment, provide an insight into their meaning in life since the job they indulge in is chosen by themselves without external influence (Pordelan et al., 2021). COVID-19 frontliners can distinguish what delivers meaning to their life, specifically through the critical period when human life is priceless and when they begin losing it. In other words, frontliners who endure various roles of the character of life undergo a comprehensive reflection of what they think could bring meaning to their life. On the condition of frontliners who are also parents to children, the responsibility to bring up the upcoming generation is crucial, as the multi-dimension of the relationship shifts them into being reliable parents (Fosco et al., 2020).

For this reason, job satisfaction gives authorization to COVID-19 frontliners' meaning in life as laborers. Li and Xie (2020) acknowledged that Chinese health practitioners undergo a professional quality of life (ProQOL) with stable mental health that could prevent them from emotional exhaustion, such as burnout or work-related traumatic stress. COVID-19 frontliners, who had to experience a stressful situation, will have to consider this episode of a hurdle as a lifelong journey to prevent losing their meaning in life while they in their employment. With meaning in life, it reduces depressive symptoms and reinforces the positive effect while buffering stress (Park et al., 2020). Malaysian frontliners tend to comprehend the challenges of continuing on the daily hassle and working towards their meaningful life.

COVID-19 has brought many lives to an end besides creating a traumatizing effect, especially on the frontliners, who were directly involved in flattening the curve. Malaysian frontliners, who belong to a somewhat orthodox country, would frequently associate spiritualism and personal devotion with their deeds. According to Aglozo et al. (2019), spirituality not only could accommodate subjective well-being and optimism towards an individual, but it could plant the notion of a meaningful life in an individual's cognitive system. However, meaning in life varies for everybody since searching for a purpose is an interpersonal process that could provide freedom and responsibility concurrently while holding meaning in life as a central component (Jiménez & Desfilis, 2020). In that sense, it will influence the cognitive operation of Malaysian frontliners, and ultimately they will find a life mission with the contribution of the religiosity literary they utilize to undergo the displeasing situation, such as the terrific deaths daily.

Although this may be true, COVID-19 frontliners acquire a life purpose as long as they have optimistic anticipation of their future, even amidst a pandemic that calls for quarantine in Malaysia. Notwithstanding, no evidence shows the detection of meaning in life among the COVID-19 frontliners, as they understand their

personal history of mental health challenges to perform their job (Lysaker et al., 2020). Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners barely had the opportunity to evaluate what exactly brings joy to their life. And at the same time, it stimulates a sense of meaning toward themselves. Therefore, they tend to doubt their self-value during the outbreak (Sulkowski, 2020). By counting on blessings, COVID-19 frontliners could structurize their happiness set-point while using their constricted time to contribute their effort to society with an adjustment of self-value towards their occupation.

Surprisingly, a small quantity of COVID-19 frontliners implies that the capitalism characteristic redeems them meaning in life. As an illustration, they are willing to spend money on others as opposed to themselves to promote purpose in their life (Fiorito et al., 2020). It could be due to this form of behavior that gives them a sense of security. Malaysian frontliners also determine their meaning in life by the working experience, as healthcare workers often come across adverse occurrences, such as clients passing peacefully or dramatically. Based on Liu et al. (2020), meaning in life for a person is determinable by the characteristic of dignity that they perceive during the last moment of their life, on top of the death acceptance that they consider. In this condition, Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners, who need to handle a fluctuation of mortality among their patients, would take their actions into account. They will eventually practice the habit of try and error to provide the best service for their patients in granting them healthy psychological well-being.

Ultimately, this study has shed light on the various factors that contribute to the meaning in life of Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners. It is evident from the study that the commitment and dedication shown by the frontliners towards their profession, as well as their family and friends, plays a crucial role in providing them with a sense of meaning in life. Additionally, their empathetic and prosocial behavior, as well as their spiritual beliefs, are also significant contributors. It is essential to note that this study has explored individual cases in detail and highlighted the characteristics of the Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners that contribute to their meaning in life. However, an idiographic commitment comparing and contrasting the output of each subject, showing similarities and differences, is not observed in the current output, which could be an area for future research.

Implication

The results of the current study have both practical and theoretical implications that will enable the COVID-19 frontliners to maintain their resiliency while establishing meaning in life throughout the pandemic. In particular, the current study has demonstrated that the public commonly interacts directly with the frontlines, or more generally, the healthcare personnel, before and after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has an influence on their sense of meaning in life. The online health education is targeted to the public in order to raise their knowledge of COVID-19 and promote appropriate social distancing, which can help to reduce the spread of the virus and protect healthcare workers and vulnerable populations. It is critical to consider that there is a possibility that individuals may disregard SOPs should governments not take into consideration the implications of current research. This is the case due to the MCO's restrictions on their mobility and difficulties with their ability to tolerate domestication. The long-term care of the COVID-19 frontliners should thus be a top policy priority since their well-being will continue to deteriorate as a result of the general public's indifference to the need for appropriate social distance. The frontliners' sense of meaning in life throughout the pandemic tends to decline due to the diminutive action from the illiterate general public, which brings the importance of the practical implication.

Based on the present research findings, it is crucial to consider one's meaning in life, particularly while looking at the COVID-19 frontliners. In that case, the theoretical implications of the current research stress the meaning in life. Initial findings of the COVID-19 frontliners' studies revealed that there could be a connection only between well-being, whether it be emotional or physical. The results of this study thus have various significant consequences for current and future practices. It has the potential to advance existing fields of study, particularly concerning the meaning in life for COVID-19 frontliners in addition to their psychological health. The rationale is that this component is essential for frontliners to perform their responsibilities. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will develop empathy for the COVID-19 frontliners, and since they want to help them, they may be able to use the current study results as guidelines on how to value them.

Limitation

The use of online platforms as an alternative to face-to-face interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic has become increasingly popular. While this approach allows for continued data collection while maintaining social distancing, it can also present certain limitations that may affect the internal validity of the study.

One limitation is the potential for technical issues or connectivity problems during online interviews, which could lead to incomplete or missing data. Additionally, online interviews may not capture nonverbal cues or body language, which can provide important context and meaning to the responses given by participants.

Another limitation is the potential for response bias. Participants may feel more comfortable expressing themselves in the online format, which could lead to more honest responses, but they may also feel less connected or engaged compared to face-to-face interviews. Conversely, participants may feel more pressure to respond in a certain way during face-to-face interviews, which could limit the validity of their responses.

Overall, the use of an online platform as an alternative to face-to-face interviews can have both advantages and disadvantages. While precautions were taken to ensure the validity of the data, it is important to acknowledge that this approach may have limitations that could affect the outcomes and internal validity of the study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Meaning in life is a term frequently used in the literature, but to date, there is no consensus correlating it with the Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners. After the data analysis revolving around the COVID-19 frontliners data, it was able to unleash the meaning in life of the COVID-19 frontliners. It is feasible to discover through establishing a human connection, comprehending commitment, spiritualism approach, social welfare, development of characteristics, and achieving life satisfaction.

It seems that all this research not only benefits the COVID-19 frontliners but it serves a purpose for the practitioners, the public, and the research field. The evidence from this study implies that outreach programmes concerning positive reinforcement techniques are necessary to maintain the well-being of frontliners. The mental state of Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners was impacted negatively during the pandemic. Several courses of action can be implemented by the government and NGOs during the period, specifically when the number of cases spiked abruptly, which perhaps directly diminishes the COVID-19 frontliners' meaning in life.

By conducting the webinars, for instance, there would be an increase in awareness of the virus among the general public, while the kind-hearted NGOs could be a helping hand to the frontliners. NGOs can provide medical supplies to hospitals and succor the frontliners who are unable to return to their home to see their loved ones by sending their regards to their family. With the effort put in by all affiliations, including the responsible authorities and generous society, Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners will be able to savour the positivity during the global pandemic with the extensive parties through preserving their meaning in life, assuring that they are protected.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

The authors of this manuscript hereby declare that the work presented is their own and has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. The data and information in this manuscript are a result of their own research and analysis. They attest to having acknowledged all contributors to the work and sources of funding for the research. Furthermore, they affirm that they have no competing interests with regard to this manuscript and have followed all ethical standards outlined by their institutional review board.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the Malaysian COVID-19 frontliners who participated in this study. Their invaluable contribution and willingness to share their experiences were crucial to the success of this research. Additionally, the authors extend their heartfelt thanks to the Qualitative Research Association Malaysia (QRAM) for providing the research grant to conduct this study. The authors are deeply appreciative of the support provided by the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of UCSI University for granting ethical approval.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this study.

REFERENCES

- Aglozo, E. Y., Akotia, C. S., Osei-Tutu, A., & Annor, F. (2019). Spirituality and subjective well-being among Ghanaian older adults: Optimism and meaning in life as mediators. *Aging & Mental Health*, 25(2), 306–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2019.1697203>
- Agom, D. A., Neill, S., Allen, S., Poole, H., Sixsmith, J., Onyeka, T. C., & Ominyi, J. (2019). Construction of meanings during life-limiting illnesses and its impacts on palliative care: Ethnographic study in an African context. *Psycho-Oncology*, 28(11), 2201–2209. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.5208>
- Almuklass, A. M., Capobianco, R. A., Feeney, D. F., Alvarez, E., & Enoka, R. M. (2019). Sensory nerve stimulation causes an immediate improvement in motor function of persons with multiple sclerosis: A pilot study. *Multiple Sclerosis and Related Disorders*, 38, Article e101508. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.msard.2019.101508>
- Arslan, G., & Allen, K. A. (2021). Exploring the association between coronavirus stress, meaning in life, psychological flexibility, and subjective well-being. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 27(4), 803–814. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2021.1876892>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Cham, T. H., Lim, Y. M., Sia, B. C., Cheah, J. H., & Ting, H. (2020). Medical tourism destination image and its relationship with the intention to revisit: A study of Chinese medical tourists in Malaysia. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 17(2), 163–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2020.1734514>
- Childers, J., & Arnold, B. (2019). The inner lives of doctors: Physician emotion in the care of the seriously ill. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 19(12), 29–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2019.1674409>
- Collins, K., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Jiao, Q. G. (2006). Prevalence of mixed-methods sampling designs in social science research. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 19(2), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.2167/eri421.0>
- Costin, V., & Vignoles, V. L. (2020). Meaning is about mattering: Evaluating coherence, purpose, and existential mattering as precursors of meaning in life judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 118(4), 864–884. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000225>
- Day, M. (2020). Covid-19: Identifying and isolating asymptomatic people helped eliminate virus in Italian village. *British Medical Journal*, 368, Article e1165. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1165>
- Elengoe, A. (2020). COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia. *Osong Public Health and Research Perspectives*, 11(3), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.24171%2Fj.phrp.2020.11.3.08>
- Fiorito, T. A., Routledge, C., & Jackson, J. (2020). Meaning-motivated community action: The need for meaning and prosocial goals and behavior. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 171, Article e110462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110462>
- Fosco, G. M., Brinberg, M., & Ram, N. (2020). Day-to-day changes in parent-adolescent connectedness: Relations with daily subjective well-being and eudaimonia differ for parents and adolescents. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 16(5), 640–650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1791945>
- Fukuti, P., Uchôa, C. L. M., Mazzoco, M. F., Corchs, F., Kamitsuji, C. S., Rossi, L. D., Rios, I. C., Lancman, S., Bonfa, E., de Barros-Filho, T. E. P., & Miguel, E. C. (2020). How institutions can protect the mental health and psychosocial well-being of their healthcare workers in the current COVID-19 pandemic. *Clinics*, 75, Article e1963. <https://doi.org/10.6061/clinics/2020/e1963>
- Gavin, B., Hayden, J., Adamis, D., & McNicholas, F. (2020). Caring for the psychological well-being of healthcare professionals in the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. *Irish Medical Journal*, 113(4), 51–53.
- Golightley, M., & Holloway, M. (2020). Social work in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic: All in this together? *The British Journal of Social Work*, 50(3), 637–641. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa036>
- Grossman, S. A. (2020). The day after COVID-19. *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 44, 328–329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajem.2020.04.029>
- Häyry, M. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Month of Bioethics in Finland. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 30(1), 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0963180120000432>
- Jiménez, M. S. R., & Desfilis, E. S. (2020). Does Christian spirituality enhance psychological interventions on forgiveness, gratitude, and the meaning of life? A quasi-experimental intervention with the elderly and youth. *Nursing Reports*, 10(2), 182–206. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nursrep10020022>
- Kelvin, A. A., & Halperin, S. (2020). COVID-19 in children: The link in the transmission chain. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 20(6), 633–634. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099\(20\)30236-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1473-3099(20)30236-x)
- Li, W. W., & Xie, G. (2020). Personality and job satisfaction among Chinese health practitioners: The mediating role of professional quality of life. *Health Psychology Open*, 7(2), Article e205510292096505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102920965053>

- Liu, X., Liu, Z., Cheng, Q., Xu, N., Liu, H., & Ying, W. (2020). Effects of meaning in life and individual characteristics on dignity in patients with advanced cancer in China: A cross-sectional study. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 29(5), 2319–2326. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-020-05732-2>
- Lysaker, P. H., Hillis, J. D., Zalzal, A. B., & Gagen, E. C. (2020). Reflection and recovery from psychosis during the time of COVID-19: Adaptation in psychotherapy in the United States. *Clinica y Salud*, 31(2), 99–103. <https://doi.org/10.5093/clysa2020a16>
- Maree, J. G. (2019). Career construction counselling aimed at enhancing the narratability and career resilience of a young girl with a poor sense of self-worth. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(16), 2646–2662. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1622536>
- Pappa, S., Ntella, V., Giannakas, T., Giannakoulis, V. G., Papoutsis, E., & Katsaounou, P. (2020). Prevalence of depression, anxiety, and insomnia among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 88, 901–907. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.05.026>
- Park, C. L., Knott, C. L., Williams, R. M., Clark, E. M., Williams, B. R., & Schulz, E. (2020). Meaning in life predicts decreased depressive symptoms and increased positive affect over time but does not buffer stress effects in a national sample of African-Americans. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(8), 3037–3049. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00212-9>
- Ping, N. P. T., Kamu, A., Kassim, M. A. M., & Mun, H. C. (2021). Analyses of the effectiveness of movement control order (MCO) in reducing the COVID-19 confirmed cases in Malaysia. *Journal of Health and Translational Medicine*, 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.22452/jumec.sp2020no1.4>
- Pordelan, N., Hosseinian, S., & Lashaki, A. B. (2021). Digital storytelling: A tool for life design career intervention. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(3), 3445–3457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10403-0>
- Priolo Filho, S. R., Goldfarb, D., Zibetti, M. R., & Aznar-Blefari, C. (2020). Brazilian child protection professionals' resilient behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 110, Article e104701. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104701>
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A reevaluation of the life orientation test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 1063–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.1063>
- Seligman, M. E. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Simon and Schuster.
- Shanmugam, H., Juhari, J. A., Nair, P., Ken, C. S., & Guan, N. C. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in Malaysia: A single thread of hope. *Malaysian Journal of Psychiatry*, 29(1), 1–7. <http://www.mjpsychiatry.org/index.php/mjp/article/view/536>
- Sulkowski, A. J. (2020). COVID-19: What's next? Future of work, business, and law: Automation, transparency, blockchain, education, and inspiration. *Law Review*, 65(17), 17–55. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3580019>
- Talidong, K. J. B., & Toquero, C. M. D. (2020). Philippine teachers' practices to deal with anxiety amid COVID-19. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 25(6-7), 573–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1759225>
- Tamiolaki, A., & Kalaitzaki, A. E. (2020). "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger": COVID-19 and posttraumatic growth. *Psychiatry Research*, 289, Article e113044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113044>
- Tian, W., Wang, H., & Rispens, S. (2021). How and when job crafting relates to employee creativity: The important roles of work engagement and perceived work group status diversity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(1), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010291>
- Vess, M., Hoeldtke, R., Leal, S. A., Sanders, C. S., & Hicks, J. A. (2017). The subjective quality of episodic future thought and the experience of meaning in life. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13(4), 419–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2017.1291851>
- Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Catapano, R. (2019). It's not going to be that fun: Negative experiences can add meaning to life. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 26, 11–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.04.014>
- Winger, J. G., Adams, R. N., & Mosher, C. E. (2015). Relations of meaning in life and sense of coherence to distress in cancer patients: A meta-analysis. *Psycho-Oncology*, 25(1), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.3798>
- Womick, J., Atherton, B., & King, L. A. (2020). Lives of significance (and purpose and coherence): Subclinical narcissism, meaning in life, and subjective well-being. *Heliyon*, 6(5), Article e03982. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e03982>