

Exploring Meaning and Purpose in life among retirees

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Highlights

- This study represents a synthesis of current research on meaning and purpose in life among the retired population.
- Meaning and purpose in life can be associated with retirement adaptation
- Meaning and purpose in life are different concepts that could provide important outcomes in adaptability to retirement in research

Abstract

Background: Retirement marks a crucial life transition that often prompts individuals to reassess their identity and life's purpose. This transition can lead to an intensified search for meaning and purpose in life.

Objective: This scoping review aims to elucidate the current state of research on meaning in life (MIL) and purpose in life (PIL) in the retirement population. It addresses three key questions: 1) What is the current state of research on MIL and PIL in retirees? 2) What are the prevalent research practices and themes in exploring MIL and PIL during retirement? 3) What methodologies are commonly employed in this field of study?

Method: Following the framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley and refined by Levac et al., this review was conducted through a search of electronic databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Scopus. The search included studies published in English and Spanish from 1995 to the present. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts, followed by full-text assessments. Data was systematically charted and categorized in line with the research questions.

Results: The review included 33 studies reporting qualitative (n=25), quantitative (n=6), a systematic review (n=1), and a mixed method study (n=1) involving more than 10.369

participants. 17 studies investigated meaning in life in retirement, 10 analysed purpose in life, and the remaining 6 studies meaning and purpose interchangeably.

Conclusion: This scoping review offers a comprehensive overview of the existing research on MIL and PIL in the retirement transition, underscoring its significance in understanding the retirement experience.

Keywords: Meaning in life, Purpose in life, retirement.

1. Introduction

“Meaning” and “purpose” in life are different constructs. Meaning in life (MIL) consists of sense, or coherence in life. Yalom (1980) describes this term as what is intended to express with an action. Therefore, searching for meaning implies a search for coherence in one’s life. In addition, finding meaning in life involves the process of searching for and discovering the significance and purpose of one's existence (Steger et al., 2006). Purpose in life (PIL) describes a role or a function, it refers to the intention that something has (Yalom, 1980). Kang and colleagues (2021) describe PIL as having a sense that one's life has meaning, a sense of direction, and a set of goals derived from personal values. This differentiation is crucial as MIL relates to deriving significance from life experiences, whereas PIL often involves setting and striving towards future-oriented goals.

The first author to draw attention to both terms was Viktor Frankl (1984, 2014) in his seminal work, “Man’s Search for Meaning”. In his book, Frankl highlights the principal concepts of logotherapy, which include meaning and purpose in life. The author considers the search for meaning in one’s life as the primary motivation of our existence. Purpose in life is also addressed in his psychological theory, and it’s considered similar to the first term. However, different authors highlight the differences between both terms (Yalom, 1980). Ryff and Keyes (1995) further emphasize the contrast among MIL and PIL defining purpose as the life goals that direct one’s decisions and choices. To better understand these differences, further discussion or a visual representation could help clarify how these constructs interplay and diverge, particularly in the context of significant life changes such as retirement.

While purpose in life and finding meaning are distinct concepts, they are often used interchangeably in research and literature (Ghazanfari et al., 2023). Both concepts are concerned with understanding the deeper significance and value of one's life. They involve reflecting on one's values, goals, and beliefs, and aligning one's actions and choices with these aspects (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). This exploration becomes especially pertinent during the retirement phase, a critical period for reassessing or redefining one's identity and life goals.

Retirement marks the end of one’s career and the beginning of a new phase in life. This transition brings increased free time, as people are no longer bound by the demands of a full-time job. Retirement usually involves a shift in priorities. After many years of focusing on climbing the corporate ladder or meeting work-related goals, people find themselves no longer having to deal

with the conditions, the time management, the identity, and the activities related to the workplace. Instead, they may start to prioritize personal relationships, leisure, or even volunteer activities (Ulrich & Brott, 2005). The significant changes in daily routines and social roles during this period highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how retirees navigate shifts in identity and life's meaning.

Various authors have studied the effects of this transition, stating the complexity behind retirement, and how it affects the way individuals perceive themselves (Nadobnik et al., 2021). This transition, along with the changes in activities, time management, and identity, may prompt individuals to reflect upon their purpose, leading to a deeper search for meaning (Kristesen et al., 2023). It is not uncommon to have this introspection during this period of significant change, as it displays the necessity to align one's life with the shifting circumstances.

Both meaning and purpose in life are important in the context of retirement. Subjective wellbeing on retired population is associated with levels of meaning in life (Gruszczyńska et al., 2020). The transition to retirement has causal impact on sense of purpose (Yemiscigil et al., 2021). In addition, studies have shown how there is a change in purpose and meaning when leaving the workforce (van den Hoonaard, 2015; Chan et al., 2015)

Acknowledging the impact of meaning in life in retirement, it is necessary to meticulously analyze how meaning and purpose in life are represented in the retirement transition. Up to now, the constructs of meaning in life (MIL) and purpose in life (PIL), and how they contribute to successful retirement adjustment has not been sufficiently explored. This review aims to fill this gap by examining how these constructs influence retirees' adjustments to post-work life, addressing an overlooked but crucial aspect of aging studies.

A preliminary search of JBI Evidence Synthesis was conducted and no current or underway scoping review on the topic was identified. The reason behind the decision to conduct a scoping review instead of a systematic review relies on emerging evidence on the topic (Munn et al., 2018). It is unclear which more specific questions could be posed and valuably addressed by a more precise systematic review when examining MIL and PIL.

The objective of this scoping review was a) to elucidate the current state of research on meaning in life (MIL) and purpose in life (PIL) in the retirement population; b) to identify diverse

methodologies and theoretical approaches in the study of this constructs in retirees; c) and to highlight the importance of MIL and PIL in facilitating a positive transition into retirement.

2. Methods

The proposed scoping review followed the framework suggested by Arksey and O'Malley, refined by Levac et al., and was conducted in accordance with the methodology established by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for scoping reviews (Aromataris & Munn, 2021; Peters et al. 2022). The Arksey and O'Malley groundwork involves five stages, including: 1) Formulating research question, which is based on the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) model; 2) Defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) Conducting literature research, identifying relevant studies; 4) Extracting and organizing the data; and 5) Contrasting and reporting the findings. The protocol is available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) (<https://osf.io/d2x75>)

2.1. Eligibility criteria

Studies that followed the criteria were selected: 1) investigating samples of were adults who were either transitioning into retirement, on the verge of retiring, had recently retired (within the last five years), or were pre-retirees; 2) involving retirees without specific clinical conditions or terminal illnesses; 3) with qualitative and quantitative research approaches (peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers), to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic; 4) published in English or Spanish. The following types of publications were excluded: opinion papers, letters to the editor, editorial articles, books, book chapters, meetings, abstracts, patents, letters, reference material, biography, news, dissertations, retracted publications, and any articles that are not available internationally.

2.2. Search Strategy

The search strategy aimed to locate published studies on MIL and PIL in retirees. In this review a three-step search strategy was used. First, an initial limited search of PsycINFO was conducted to identify relevant articles. The textual words from the titles and abstracts of these articles, along with the keywords used to describe them, such as “retirement”, “meaning in life”, “purpose in life”, were used then to develop a comprehensive search strategy in databases such as Psycinfo, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy, which encompasses all identified

keywords and index terms, was adapted to each database to account for differences in indexing terms and search functionalities (Supplementary Material 1). This number of databases is treated as suitable since the use of more databases would not expand the number of results significantly.

Published studies in English and Spanish since 1995 were included, as these languages are pertinent to the review's audience and the selected time frame from 1995 onwards captures significant methodological advancements and shifts in theoretical approaches in the study of aging and retirement.

Towards the end of the review process, an updated bibliographic search was conducted across all included databases using the same keywords to ensure the inclusion of studies published up to the end of the review period, December 2023.

2.3. Data selection

The screening of articles was performed in two steps with Covidence, an internet-based bibliographic management software. Firstly, the title and abstract of the articles were screened to assess initial relevance based on predefined inclusion criteria. Subsequently, the articles selected in the first step underwent a full-text screening to confirm eligibility based on a detailed review against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each article in both screening processes was independently evaluated at least by two reviewers. To ensure the integrity of the review process, this was conducted in a double-blind manner, where neither of the reviewers was aware of the other's identity or their assessments. Any disagreement that arose between the reviewers at each stage of the selection process was initially attempted to be resolved through discussion within the team of two reviewers. If a consensus could not be reached, a third reviewer was consulted to make a final decision.

The process and records of study eligibility, including the number of articles screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, along with reasons for exclusions at each stage, are meticulously summarized in the PRISMA flow chart, ensuring transparency and replicability of the research methodology.

2.4. Data extraction

Data selected from eligible studies was extracted through a meticulously designed process to gather comprehensive and relevant information from each study included in the scoping review. To ensure the uniformity and accuracy of the data extraction, a standardized data extraction form was utilized. The data extraction form included information regarding article details, the study aims, study characteristics details, population characteristics and established criteria, methodology and study design, outcomes and measures, and findings for each outcome. Additionally, for qualitative studies, the following information was extracted: sample strategy, data collection methods, and results.

Data extraction was made by at least two reviewers, who were aware of the publication details to facilitate a thorough evaluation of the data in its appropriate context. Discrepancies during the data extraction process were resolved through a structured consensus meeting between the initial reviewers. If consensus could not be reached, a third, senior reviewer was consulted to make a final decision. In cases of missing data, we did not contact authors to request it.

Risk of bias Assessment

Although a quality assessment is not typically required in a scoping review, the review team recognized the importance of assessing the methodological rigor and quality of the included studies to inform future research directions and recommendations. Hence, our risk of bias assessment was conducted systematically by at least two independent reviewers, with procedures in place to ensure the reliability of evaluations. In the event of disagreement, a reviewer was consulted to adjudicate and ensure an impartial decision.

To comprehensively assess the risk of bias across diverse study types, various critical appraisal tools were employed. These included AMSTAR 2 for systematic reviews and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies. This multi-tool approach facilitated a nuanced and thorough evaluation of study quality, enhancing our ability to critically analyse and compare the robustness of the findings across different research designs. This comprehensive evaluation helped in determining the strength and reliability of the evidence, providing a robust foundation for the conclusions drawn in the review.

2.5. Data analysis and presentation

The review is reported using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA- ScR) guidelines, ensuring a comprehensive and transparent account of the methodologies and findings. The findings are presented in a structured format that aligns with the objectives of this scoping review. To enhance clarity and facilitate comprehension, data is systematically organized and displayed using tables and charts, where appropriate. These visual aids effectively summarize study characteristics, methodologies, outcomes, and other pertinent data.

A detailed discussion section elaborates on the implications of the findings for future research, policy, and practice in the field of gerontological psychology. Of the implications of the findings for future research, policy, and practice in the field of gerontological psychology. This includes a critical examination of areas where the data are lacking or where there is need for further research, thus providing direction for future research. Additionally, the review highlights how the methodological diversity and quality of the included studies enrich our understanding of meaning and purpose in life among retirees. This reflection considers the various approaches and their contributions to the broader context of gerontological research, offering insights into how different research methodologies impact the interpretation and application of the findings.

3. Results

The search generated 4333 citations. 979 duplicates were removed. The remaining 3354 were screened by title and abstract, searching for studies that answered the research question and fulfilled the inclusion criteria. In this phase, 3179 were excluded, leaving 175 for full-text screening. After applying the eligibility criteria, only 33 studies remained (Figure 1).

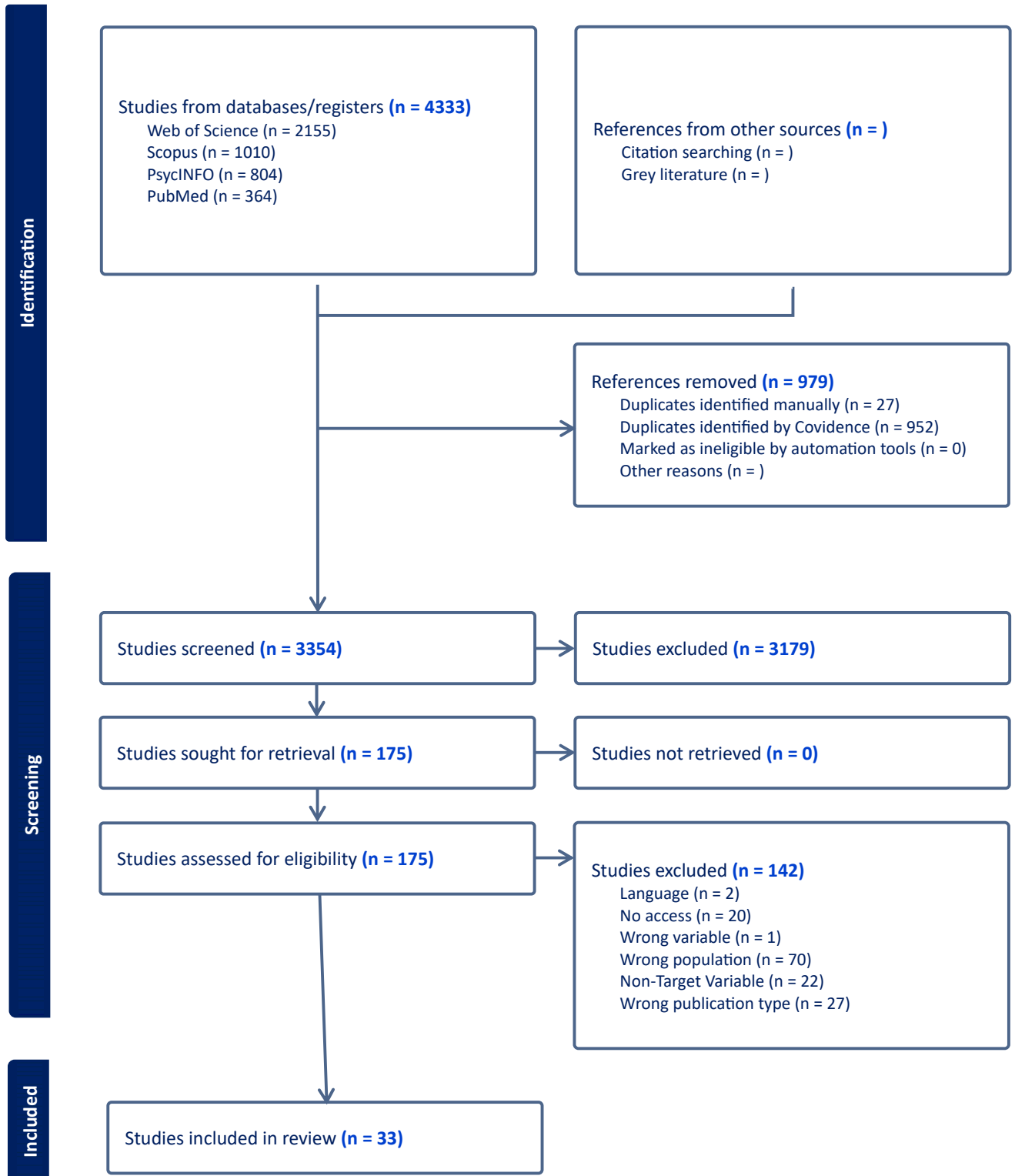


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of the literature research

3.1. Study characteristics

The final literature included 18 were cross-sectional, 13 longitudinal, 1 was a review study, and 1 a meta-analysis. Geographically, the studies were conducted in the USA (6), United Kingdom (6), Canada (5), Australia (1), Poland (3), Denmark (2), Slovakia (2), Ireland (2), Sweden (2), Brazil (1), South Korea (1), Greece (1), and Singapore (1). Regarding the language, all the articles included were published in English. The studies were published between 1999 and 2023.

The definitions of meaning and purpose in life, along with how it manifests in retirement are outlined below. The basic characteristics of the review, and the relation to meaning and purpose in life are portrayed in Table 1. (A complete table with the characteristics, and key outcomes of each study is depicted in Appendix B)

Table 1. *Characteristics of selected studies*

Conceptual discussion	Source of MIL and PIL	Design	(N) studies
Meaning in life	Social support	Qualitative study	4
	Subjective Well-being	Qualitative study	7
		Quantitative study	5
		Mixed method study	1
Purpose in life	Physical activity	Systematic review	1
		Qualitative study	1
	Feeling useful and competent	Qualitative study	5
	Negotiation	Qualitative study	1
	Pre-retirement work	Qualitative study	1
		Quantitative study	1
Meaning and purpose in life as interchangeable	Subjective Well-being	Qualitative study	4
	Feeling useful and competent	Qualitative study	2

3.2. Population characteristics

Out of the studies included in the review, 30 specified the sample, covering a total of 10,369 participants. In these studies, there were 33% females, 16,6% males, and up to 53,3% mixed sexes represented in their sample. Again, 30 studies specified the nationality of the participants in the studies, six studies represented participants from the USA, and eight represented UK and Canada in equal parts. Sweden, Slovakia, Poland Ireland, and Denmark represented different participants

in two studies each. Countries with less representation were Australia, Brazil, Japan, Poland and Germany, Singapore, and South Korea, with one study each. Only 19 studies provided sufficient data on the mean age of their participants, out of these studies, the mean age was 62.38 years. Finally, the time in retirement ranges from months prior to retirement to five years.

3.3. Meaning in life: concept and changes in retirement

Meaning in life does not have a unanimous definition among researcher, varying according to the discipline it could be understood differently. Kristensen and colleagues (2023) consider that the psychological definition of MIL refers to consistency in the comprehension of one's own life, one's actions and goals, as well as having purpose in life. Retirement is an ambivalent transition. While it can be presented as an opportunity to discover new pursuits, the uncertainty it brings can negatively impact individuals' subjective wellbeing (Ramos & Lopez, 2018). Furthermore, retirement makes existential issues more noticeable (Bengtsson & Flisbäck, 2021).

Meaning in life was mostly studied with qualitative methods. Individual semi-structured interviews were used in 13 studies (Kristensen et al., 2023; Cahill et al., 2022; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Halama et al., 2021; Gettings, 2019; Liechty et al., 2012; Betlej, 2023; Round & Burke, 2018; Nascimento & Polia, 2019; Cousineau & Misener, 2019; Borrero & Kruger, 2015; Cahill et al., 2021), in four of them focus groups were also included at the end to collect data (Kristensen et al., 2023; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Liechty et al., 2012; Round & Burke, 2018). While only one study relied on unstructured interviews (Murakami, 2021). Two studies did not specify the type of interviews conducted (Kristensen et al., 2023; Bengtsson & Flisbäck, 2021). Additionally, one study used historical and societal analysis of the concept and the changes in the retirement patterns (Sargent et al., 2013). The preoccupation to accomplish meaningful activities during retirement was a the most frequently discussed topic (Kristensen et al., 2023; Cahill et al., 2022; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Murakami, 2021; Liechty et al., 2012; Betlej, 2023; Round & Burke, 2018, Nascimento & Polia, 2019; Cousineau & Misener, 2019; Borrero & Kruger, 2015; Cahill et al., 2021). MIL was also a term that was reflected upon, how it changes in retirement, how is shaped, and what brought meaning to people's life (Kristensen et al., 2023; Halama et al., 2021; Gettings, 2019; Sargent et al., 2013; Bengtsson & Flisbäck, 2021). Only one study reflected on retirement as being meaningless (Chan et al., 2015).

Quantitative methods were only used in five studies. Four of them used the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) to assess meaning in life in retired population (Ramos & López, 2018; Kim et al., 2015; Gruszczyńska et al., 2020; Bačová & Halama, 2020). While only one used the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (SOC-29) (Finogenow, 2013). In all the quantitative studies, meaning in life was associated with psychological health, and subjective wellbeing.

Only one study used mixed methods to address meaning in life. Heisel and colleagues (2020) measured positive and negative psychological factors before and after the intervention (Self-Rated Health; EQ5D Health; MMSE-2 BV; IADL; PSMS; GSIS-Screen; SBQ5; AUDIT; DAST; SWLS; EMIL; Retirement Feelings), as well as using semi-structured interviews at the post-group assessment. These authors reported that after completing an intervention designed to encourage support among older men, participants showed a significant increase in their orientation towards finding meaning in every experience.

Lastly, among the studies analysed, meaning in life in the retirement transition was associated with engagement in group and social activities (Kristensen et al., 2023a; Kristensen et al., 2023b; Kim et al., 2015; Halama et al., 2021; Heisel et al., 2020; Sargent et al., 2013; Betjel, 2023; Borrero & Kruger, 2015). Spending time and sharing experiences was an aspect of meaningfulness among retired people. Kim and colleagues (2015) even stated that having social interest shows to be positively related to meaning in life. Meaning was also related to subjective well-being, highlighting the impact of personality (Finogenow, 2013; Round & Burke, 2018; Steiner & Amabile, 2022; Gruszczyńska et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015; Ramos & Lopez, 2018; Jonsson et al., 2000) and pleasure in meaningful activities and occupations (Kristensen et al., 2023b; Cahill et al., 2022; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Murakami, 2021; Chan et al., 2015; Nascimento & Polia, 2019; Liechty et al., 2012; Cousineau & Misener, 2019; Cahill et al., 2021; Jonsson et al., 2000). Bačová and Halama (2020) associate the type of retirement, and the perception of pleasure at the pre-retirement work with the presence of meaning in life in retirement. In addition, Bengtsson and Flisbäck (2021) reflected on retirement as a process of continuous shaping of meaning in life.

3.4. Purpose in life: concept and changes in retirement

Purpose in life captures the degree in which people meaningfully engage in goals, daily activities in life, and existential concerns (Yemiscigil et al., 2021). With retirement, an essential source of

purpose in life is lost, people lose their roles, goals, and structure that work provided them (Sargent et al., 2011).

Most of the studies that assessed purpose in life in retirement population followed a qualitative design. 10 studies used semi-structured interviews to collect data (Pettican & Prior, 2011; Sargent et al., 2011; Beck et al., 2010; Jonsson et al., 2000; Steiner & Amabile, 2022; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Bentlej, 2023; Round & Burke, 2018; Gettings, 2019). Two of them also conducted discussion groups (Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Round & Burke, 2018). While one employed unstructured interview (Murakami, 2021). Two studies did not mention what type of interview was used to assess purpose (Lo & Brown, 1999; Kostopoulos et al., 2018), and one study consisted of a description of courses (Barratt, 2012). Engaging in meaningful activities where participants could feel self-competent was the most deliberated topic (Lo & Brown, 1999; Pettican & Prior, 2011; Sargent et al., 2011; Beck et al., 2010; Kostopoulos et al., 2018; Bentlej, 2023; Round & Burke, 2018; Gettings, 2019; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Murakami, 2021). Negotiation on retirement, whether is perceived as an opportunity or as a source of personal crisis was brought up in three studies (Steiner & Amabile, 2022; Jonsson et al., 2000; Barratt, 2012; Chan et al., 2015).

Only one study used a quantitative design to address purpose in life, using the psychological well-being scale revised, which includes in its factors the term purpose (Yemiscigil et al.,). These authors found a positive causal impact of retirement on sense of purpose among retirees dissatisfied with their jobs. Also, one systematic review included 39 studies and tackled purpose in life. This review used the following databases: Ovid Medline, Ovid Embase, Ovid PsycINFO, CINAHL, and Web of Science. The authors concluded that physical activity contributed to sense of purpose by providing routine, discipline, and meaningful social interactions (Morgan et al., 2019).

In the various studies reviewed, purpose was most associated with feeling useful and competent. Retirement brings a loss of work roles and responsibilities, which for older adults was a source of purpose in life. This transition can be seen as an opportunity to find new activities that bring purpose to life, or as a threat to the source that provided purpose (Kostopoulos et al., 2018; Pettican & Prior, 2011; Sargent et al., 2011; van den Hoonaard, 2015; Murakami, 2021; Chan et al., 2014; Lo & Brown, 1999; Steiner & Amabile, 2022; Betlej, 2023; Jonsson et al., 2000). Satisfaction with

pre-retirement job has a positive causal impact on sense on purpose in retirement (Yemiscigil et al., 2021). Physical activity was considered to contribute to sense of purpose by providing routine and structure to the daily life of retirees (Morgan et al., 2019; Beck et al., 2010). Subjective wellbeing was associated with PIL in retirement in one study (Roud & Burke, 2018). Final, two studies focus on the importance of negotiating and actively seeking purpose after retirement (Barrat, 2012; Gettings, 2019).

3.5. Meaning and purpose as interchangeable

Some authors use the terms MIL and PIL interchangeably (Murakami, 2021; Gettings, 2019; van den Hoonaard, 2015; Chan et al., 2015), and are use as synonyms without further differentiation. Murakami (2021), for instance, relies to both terms following Viktor Franks theory of Logotherapy, regarding meaning and purpose as very similar concepts. Meanwhile, Round and Burke (2018) understand purpose in life as one of the eudemonic related factors they studied in retired population. For these authors, “eudaimonia” and “meaning” are broadly similar, using them as synonymous in their study. This association of terms prompted them to use purpose as a constituent element of meaning in life. For another author, both PIL and MIL were terms integrated in the existential paradigm, giving no further explanation of the interchangeable use (Betlej, 2023).

Regarding the associations made with PIL and MIL sources, two categories can be distinguished: subjective wellbeing and feeling useful. The pleasure of engagement in meaningful activities an occupation was associated with both PIL and MIL (Murakami, 2021; Gettings, 2019; Betlej, 2023; Round & Burke, 2018). In addition, the loss of the work role, the structure, and the accomplishment that Labor work provided was negatively correlated with purpose in life (van den Hoonaard, 2015; Chan et al., 2015).

4. Discussion

The scoping review aimed to understand the influence meaning and purpose in life has on the adaptation and wellbeing of individuals in the retirement process. We identified 33 studies with a wide variety of retirees from different cultural backgrounds, using different research methods, and published over the past twenty-four years. The studies were carried out mostly in Europe and the Americas, with a smaller representation in Asia. The review points out the necessity of research in

the influence MIL and PIL could have on the adaptation and well-being of individuals in retirement.

4.1. Meaning in life in retirement

The concept of meaning in life involves the process of searching and discovering the purpose and significance of one's existence (Steger et al., 2006). Meaning in life is a complex concept that spans in different literatures including religion, psychology, and sociology. Therefore, a variety of definitions can be found for this construct. For Frankl (1984, 2014), meaning in life differs in every person, and can change in given moments of someone's life. The author does not provide a specific definition for the construct, but he does points out that the most important aspect is to recognise that meaning in life is an active response given by every person, becoming responsible to answer about their own life. Although he is considered the pioneer in defining meaning in life in the literature, the definition has evolved throughout the years.

More recently, Garcia-Alandete and colleagues (2013) propose that the "meaning" variable includes two dimensions: cognitive and motivational. Cognitive aspects refer to life satisfaction and sense of life, whereas motivational aspects refer to goals and purposes in life. Within this framework, Steger (2012) considers meaning as an overarching construct composed by two aspects equivalents to the dimensions proposed by Garcia-Alandete et al. (2013). The first aspect is comprehension, referring to the ability to understand one's life. The second aspect is purpose, which refers to achieving long-term aspirations or goals that motivates one's activity.

Meaning in life is usually measured with the Meaning in life Questionnaire (MLQ) proposed by Steger and colleagues (2006). With 10 items, it measures both presence of, and search for, meaning in life. The MLQ is evidenced to have internal consistency, temporal stability, factor structure and validity, making it an ideal instrument not only for researcher but also for counselling purposes (Steger et al., 2006). Most of the studies in the present review trying to quantify MIL use this questionnaire to measure it, associating presence and search for meaning in life with personality traits, perceptions, and subjective well-being (Ramos & López, 2018; Kim et al., 2015; Gruszczyńska et al., 2020; Bačová & Halama, 2020). The Sense of coherence scale (SOC) proposed by Antonovsky (1993) is an alternative to measure MIL differently. This scale is composed of three elements: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Meaningfulness is represented in only 8 of the 29 items in the scale. The limited representation of

this element may diminish its efficacy in measuring meaning compared to the MLQ. In the present review, this scale was only used once, proposing meaningfulness as a mediator in subjective health in retirement (Finogenow, 2013).

Regarding the sources of meaning in life, it appears to be a consensus among the different researchers. Frank (1984, 2014) proposes three ways in which life can become meaningful: 1) by performing actions or creating; 2) by finding someone or experiencing something; and 3) by the attitude we have towards unavoidable suffering. In this line, Golovchanova and colleagues (2021) affirmed the major sources of meaning in older men and women as being: engagement in social support relationships and subjective well-being and health. Cohen (2004) understands social support as any social relationships which promotes health. The author distinguished two types of social support. One type offers emotional, informational, or instrumental responses when in need of such aid. The other type focuses on the beneficial responses (cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and biological) created by interactions which first intention is not an explicit exchange of help. Both types of social support are addressed in the studies of the present review. Diener (2000) describes that the predictors of subjective wellbeing are: personality, and bottom-up situational influences. Personality includes temperament, traits, cognitive dispositions, goals, and adaptation culture. Bottom-up situational influences consist of the perception of pleasure in external events or situations. Similar to the understanding of these authors, engagement in group and social activities were sources of meaning to people in the transition to retirement (Kristensen et al., 2023a; Kristensen et al., 2023b; Kim et al., 2015; Halama et al., 2021; Heisel et al., 2020; Sargent et al., 2013; Betjel, 2023; Borrero & Kruger, 2015), as well as subjective wellbeing (Finogenow, 2013; Round & Burke, 2018; Steiner & Amabile, 2022; Gruszczyńska et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015; Ramos & Lopez, 2018; Jonsson et al., 2000; Kristensen et al., 2023b; Cahill et al., 2022; Van den Hoonaard, 2015; Murakami, 2021; Chan et al., 2015; Nascimento & Polia, 2019; Liechty et al., 2012; Cousineau & Misener, 2019; Cahill et al., 2021; Jonsson et al., 2000).

4.2. Purpose in life in retirement

The purpose concept, similar to meaning in life, was also introduced by Frankl (1984, 2014). This author understood purpose in life as a means to attain meaning in life. However, he did not make a clear delineation between PIL and MIL. Ryff and Keyes (1995), analysing the structure of psychological well-being, suggested purpose in life as one of the dimensions of well-being. They

understood PIL as the presence of goals, direction, presence of meaning in life, and holding beliefs that provided objectives for living. Pertaining this understanding of PIL, Baumeister (1991) defines purpose as a construct divided into two categories distinguishing extrinsic and intrinsic motivations: goals, and fulfillment. While goals refer to external concepts of desire and possible future circumstances. Fulfillment is viewed as something inherently good, feeling proud and satisfied, feeling loved...a subjective state that is better than the present state, more akin to an existential concept.

Purpose in life can be measured with the psychological well-being scale revised by Ryff and Keyes (1995). This scale includes 6 dimensions of wellness: autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relations with other, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. In the assessment of purpose, this instrument includes up to seven items and is rated on a scale from 1 to 6, capturing the engagement of purpose on goals, daily activities, and life in general (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In the review, one study used this scale to examine the causal impact of retirement in purpose in life, and concluded a positive causal impact (Yemiscigil et al., 2021)

Regarding the sources of purpose in life, literature indicates subjective wellbeing, perceived social support, spirituality, and personality can promote purpose (AshaRani et al., 2022; Joshanloo, 2023; Schnell, 2009). Social integration as in perceived social engagement, marital status, retirement, socioeconomic status, feeling useful and competent in the completion of activities, educational level, physical health, and subjective wellbeing are sources that predict purpose in life among older adults (Pinquart, 2002).

Bronk (2013) suggests that purpose is consistent across the lifespan, the way of pursuing it and establishing those purposes, however, change over time. In childhood, purpose is concrete and present-oriented. In adolescence and emerging adulthood people begin to reflect on future states and goals. At the end of this stage, purpose is at its peak. Going from midlife to adulthood, the author explains that PIL decreases, as opportunities to pursue that goals decline. For older adults, feeling useful and having purpose can protect them from health problems.

Purpose in life has been associated with mental and physical health in older adults. Sense of purpose is related to a better physical health and greater cognitive function (Irving et al., 2017). Moreover, purpose is associated with lower incidence of pathologies like depression, and Alzheimer's disease (Pinquart, 2002; Irving et al., 2017). Pinquart (2002) proposes that the

connection with depression could be explained by the fact that the same variables that show a positive correlation with PIL are also indicators of happiness and subjective well-being.

4.3. Meaning and purpose in life in literature

In literature, MIL and PIL have been used as interchangeable (Kim et al., 2012). Meaning in life is often understood as a searching for and discovering the significance and purpose in one's existence (Steger et al., 2006). Whilst purpose is presented as a means to attain meaning in life (Frankl, 2014). Purpose is explicit in the definition of meaning, and vice versa, explaining why in literature these terms may be used interchangeably. In the articles reviewed, this term has been used as synonyms in very few studies, often rationalizing its usage based on the relationship of purpose as a component or a means to achieve meaning.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This was the first review synthesizing the current evidence on MIL and PIL among retirees. We used and reported a comprehensive search across different databases and screening was undertaken independently by two judges. A limitation was that the studies included were only published in English. The inclusion criteria included studies published in Spanish or English, potentially omitting contributions in other languages, and affecting the representativeness of the findings. Future research could benefit from including different languages in the review. A further limitation of the review may have been the lack of studies that compare MIL and PIL between males and females. This differentiation could highlight different experiences concerning retirement, and how MIL and PIL change in this life transition. Only two studies were undertaken in Asia, the likely cultural differences and perception on the experience of retirement with western countries may influence the generalizability of the findings. Future reviews could enrich from including studies with participants from different cultural backgrounds.

Considering the studies reviewed, up to three qualitative studies did not mention the type of interview conducted in order to obtain the information, limiting the interpretation and reliability of the results (Bengtsson & Flisbäck, 2021; Kostopoulos et al., 2018; Lo & Brown, 1999). Also, one study used the SOC-29 to examine purpose in life and its relationship with subjective health and personality in retired population (Finogenow, 2013). This instrument is not capable of generating distinctive scores for its constituent aspects, including meaningfulness (Antonovsky,

1993). Therefore, we cannot guarantee that the obtained scores are attributable to that variable, limiting the interpretations of the results.

5. Conclusion

This scoping review sought to gain knowledge about the influence meaning and purpose in life has on the adaptation and wellbeing of individuals who are in the retirement process, to identify the existing studies, and the possible knowledge gaps that exist on the field. The results of this scoping review showed that MIL and PIL are associated with diverse factors that mediate in the experience of this life transition. Generally, MIL and PIL can either be gained or lost, and the same factors are distinguished in both. For instance, pre-retirement work experience is associated with gaining and losing MIL and PIL after retirement. The results imply that further scoping reviews could possibly focus on Meaning and purpose separately, trying to isolate the construct from other factors. This review also underlines the need for future research to gain a more profound understanding of the influence MIL and PIL could have in the adaptation to retirement.

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Supplementary material

Appendix A. Database Search strategy

PsyINFO

# 1	(DE "Retirement" OR DE "Personnel Termination" OR DE "Retirement Communities" OR "retire")	
# 2	(DE "Meaning" OR DE "Meaningfulness" OR "meaninglessness" OR "Meaning of life" OR "Meaning in life" OR "sense of meaning" OR "search of meaning" or "Sense of life" OR "Purpose in life" OR "Purpose of life" OR "PIL" OR "purpose*" OR "life purpose" OR "Sense of purpose")	
Time	([1995-2023]/py)	
F2	([english]/lim OR [spanish]/lim)	
F3	NOT animals	
#1 AND #2		804

Pubmed

#1	("Retirement"[Mesh] Or "retirement" [All fields] OR "pensions" [MeSH] OR "pensions" [All Fields] OR "pension" [All Fields] OR "retir*")	
#2	("Logotherapy"[Mesh] OR "meaning" [All fields] OR "Meaningfulness" [All fields] OR "meaninglessness" [All fields] OR "Meaning of life" [All fields] OR "Meaning in life" [All fields] OR "sense of meaning" [All fields] OR "search of meaning" OR "Sense of life" [All fields] OR "Purpose in life" [All fields] OR "Purpose of life" [All fields] OR "PIL" [All fields] OR "life purpose" [All fields] OR "Sense of purpose" [All fields])	
Time	([1995-2023]/py)	
F2	([english]/lim OR [spanish]/lim)	
F3	NOT animals	
#1 AND #2		364

WebofScience

#1	TS= ("Retire*" OR "retir*" OR "pension*")	
#2	TS= ("meaning*" OR "Meaningfulness" OR "meaninglessness" OR "Meaning of life" OR "Meaning in life" OR "sense of meaning" OR "search of meaning" OR "Sense of life" OR "Purpose in life" OR "Purpose of life" OR "PIL" OR "life purpose" OR "Sense of purpose")	
Time	([1995-2023]/py)	
F2	([english]/lim OR [spanish]/lim)	
F3	NOT animals	
	Exclude: Meeting, book, abstract, editorial material, letter, news, biography, patent, retracted publication, art and literature, correction, legislation data paper	
#1 AND #2		2.169

Scopus

#1	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Retire*" OR "retir*" OR "pension*")	
#2	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("meaning" OR "Meaningfulness" OR "meaninglessness" OR "Meaning of life" OR "Meaning in life" OR "sense of meaning" OR "search of	

meaning” OR “Sense of life” OR “Purpose in life” OR “Purpose of life” OR "PIL" OR
 “life purpose” OR “Sense of purpose”)
 Time ([1995-2023]/py)
 F2 ([english]/lim OR [spanish]/lim)
 F3 NOT animals
 #1 AND 1.010
 #2

Appendix C. Selected studies detailed characteristics

Author/year	Country	Design	Conceptual discussion	Key findings
Kristensen et al. (2023)	Denmark	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Engaging in something that holds value for other is an important aspect of meaningfulness among newly retired men.
Morgan et al., (2019)	UK	Systematic review	Purpose in life as an existential manner	Physical activity contributes to sense of purpose by providing routine, discipline, and meaningful social interactions.
Kristensen et al., (2023)	Denmark	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Dominant themes in the reflection on meaning in life: family ties, social connectedness, structure of everyday life, contribution, engagement, and time.
Ramos & López (2018)	USA	Quantitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Retirement, associated with attachment security, has a significant impact on perception of meaning in life.
Cahill et al., (2022)	Ireland	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Continuing meaningful professional activities after retirement as a means of finding meaning in life.
Barratt (2012)	UK	Qualitative study	Purpose in life in an existential manner	Retirement as a personal process where individuals have to negotiate purpose in their lives.
Kim et al., (2015)	South Korea	Quantitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Meaning in life partially mediates the relation between activity and depression, and social interest is positively related to meaning in life
Kostopoulos et al., (2018)	Greece	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	Working on a voluntary basis as an opportunity for future occupation to maintain purpose in life.
Pettican & Prior (2011)	UK	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	Engaging in meaningful activities provide retirees purpose in life.
Yemiscigil et al., (2021)	USA	Quantitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	There is a positive causal impact of retirement on sense of purpose among retirees dissatisfied with their jobs.
Sargent et al., (2011)	Canada	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	Retirement is a threat when work is considered a source of purpose.

Van den Hoonard (2015)	Canada	Qualitative study	Meaning and purpose as synonymous, both in a goal directed manner	Some retirees refer loss of purpose and meaning in the unstructured retirement life, not having something to accomplish.
Murakami (2021)	UK	Qualitative study	Meaning and purpose as synonymous, both in an existential manner	Pursuing a passion for life-writing as a way of questioning meaning and purpose in life.
Chan et al., (2015)	Singapore	Qualitative study	Purpose and meaning in life as synonymous, both in a goal directed manner	Mandatory retirement as a stressful transition viewed as purposeless and meaningless.
Halama et al., (2021)	Slovakia	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	. The transition to retirement involved actively reconstructing previous sources of meaning in life.
Beck et al., (2010)	UK	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life.	For active retirees, having an exercise routine provided a daily sense of purpose.
Heisel et al., (2020)	Canada	Mixed methods study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Participants in the MCMG showed a significant increase in their orientation toward finding meaning in both adversity and positive experiences.
Gettings (2019)	USA	Qualitative study	Purpose and meaning in life as synonymous, both in an existential manner	The discourse underscores the importance of actively seeking purpose and meaning in life.
Nascimento & Polia (2019)	Brazil	Qualitative study	Goal directed meaning in life	Work can be a source of meaning and purpose closely tied to the identity as professors. Some retirees, experience retirement as a loss of both.
Sargent et al., (2013)	Australia & Canada	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Social expectations and support systems can influence how people perceive and experience retirement, affecting their perception of meaning in life.
Liechty et al., (2012)	USA	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Leisure innovation contributes to the sense of meaning in the lives of retired women, it made them believe "they are part of something bigger".
Cousineau & Misener (2019)	Canada	Qualitative study	Goal directed meaning in life	The roles and involvement in personal challenges that volunteering provided them, helped retirees give meaning to their lives.
Gruszczyńska et al., (2020)	Germany & Poland	Quantitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Levels of meaning in life differed significantly between the lowest well-being group, and the highest well-being group, reporting the first group lower meaning in life.
Borrero & Kruger (2015)	USA	Qualitative study	Goal directed meaning in life	Retirees valued spending time with others as an aspect that contributes to the meaning of retirement. Also, they mentioned feeling fulfilled by helping others.

Cahill et al., (2021)	Ireland	Qualitative study	Goal directed meaning in life	One participant expressed that retirement deprived her from the things which gave her meaning in life, work.
Jonsson et al., (2000)	Sweden	Qualitative study	Purpose in an existential manner	Participants perceive the time in retirement as freedom and the opportunity of having control over one's time and deciding for oneself.
Báčová & Halama (2020)	Slovakia	Quantitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	The type of retirement affected the presence of meaning in life. Accepting this disruption was related to the highest meaning in life.
Betlej (2023)	Poland	Qualitative study	Meaning and purpose as synonymous, both in an existential manner	The participants shared the things, experiences, and events that constituted a meaningful and purposeful life. Work and family being the main topics.
Lo & Brown (1999)	Australia	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	Retirement prompts a search for new purpose beyond work roles. Strategies such as pre-retirement planning and engagement in activities like volunteerism offer avenues for fulfillment and search for purpose.
Bengtsson & Flisbäck (2021)	Sweden	Qualitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Retirement is a complex and multifaceted process where meaning is continuously shaped and reshaped.
Steiner & Amabile (2022)	USA	Qualitative study	Goal directed purpose in life	Retirement is perceived for some like an opportunity to discover meaning after a dissatisfying work life; for others, it is a continuation of the search for purpose akin to their previous employment.
Round & Burke (2018)	UK	Qualitative study	Meaning and purpose in life as synonymous, both in a goal directed manner	Participants of the BPSG intervention felt that finding meaning helped to be more at ease with retirement, becoming more proactive setting and achieving goals, leading to a more purposeful approach to retirement life.
Finogonow (2013)	Poland	Quantitative study	Meaning in life in an existential manner	Sense of meaningfulness was a significant mediator for various personality traits, affecting subjective health in retirement.