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Exploring the Correlates of IKIGAI

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Your life's purpose is derived from the goals that inspire you and the reasons that wake you up each morning. It gives your activities a direction, sets goals, gives meaning and purpose to your existence. Many people discover that their purpose is entwined with their occupation, discovering contentment and significance in their labour. In its broadest definition, the Japanese notion or philosophy of life, "*IKIGAI*", refers to "a reason for living" or "a purpose of life". *Ikigai* contributes to improving human well-being and general quality of life, including life longevity, according to phenomenological and empirical perspectives. The idea became widely recognized with Garcia and Miralles's (2016) book "IKIGAI – The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life", outlining the five key elements which contribute towards finding one's purpose, and living a long and happy life. Since this theoretical assertion has not been empirically established, it becomes imperative for the research. The present study tries to comprehend and investigate the relationship of the five factors - physical activity, social support, loneliness, stress, and mindfulness with *'Ikigai',* and to explore and identify the predictors of *Ikigai*.

Keywords: Ikigai, longevity, loneliness; mindfulness; physical activity; social support; stress

Life's purpose is shaped by the objectives and inspirations that propel individuals through their daily lives. Much like a compass, it provides direction, organize thoughts, guide our choices, and influence behaviour across different milieu. For some, purpose is rooted in meaningful work and professional fulfilment; for others, it emerges through personal responsibilities, nurturing relationships, or spiritual commitments. Though its sources may vary, a sense of purpose anchors life with coherence, motivation, and a deeper sense of significance.

In recent years, the pursuit of meaning and purpose in life has emerged as a central concern in psychological research, particularly in the context of well-being, mental health, quality of life, and optimal functioning (Ryff, 1989; Steger, 2012). Among the various conceptualizations of purpose, the Japanese concept of *Ikigai* has gained increasing scholarly and popular attention as a holistic framework for understanding what makes life worth living. The word "*ikigai*" (uM02u 5, pronounced "ee-kee-guy") translates into "reason for being" and is an ideology that encourages individuals to find purpose and joy in life. It creates a philosophy that embodies the meaning of existence by fusing *'iki'* (life) with *'gai'* (value). Hasegawa (2001) suggests that the word *Ikigai* originated during Japan's Heian period (794-1185). The component of '*gai*' is derived from the word '*kai*', meaning 'shell'. The root appears in other Japanese terms such as *"hatarakiga"* and *"yarigai"* denoting the value of work and action, respectively. While several Japanese texts explore Ikigai, the most influential is psychiatrist Mieko Kamiya's 1966 work *Ikigai-ni-Tsuite* (On the Meaning of Life), widely regarded as foundational in the field (Hasegawa et al., 2001). Ikigai refers to a deeply personal sense of meaning that motivates individuals to engage with life, persevere through challenges, and

experience contentment in everyday existence. Unlike purely hedonic notions of happiness, Ikigai emphasizes sustained fulfilment derived from purposeful engagement with oneself, others, and society (Mitsuhashi, 2018).

Conceptually, Ikigai is commonly described as arising from the intersection of four domains: what one loves, what one is good at, what the world needs, and what one can be rewarded for. Passion, mission, vocation, and profession all come together at the junction of these four pillars to form true Ikigai. A deeply ingrained feeling of purpose that serves the individual as well as the world is produced when these factors come together. This integrative model highlights the balance between personal fulfilment, competence, social contribution, and practical sustainability, positioning Ikigai as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond hedonic happiness to encompass eudaimonic well-being (Kumano, 2017). Empirical research has demonstrated that individuals with a strong sense of Ikigai report better mental health, higher life satisfaction, and improved quality of life (Tanno et al., 2009; Alimujiang et al., 2019).

Although Ikigai has been extensively linked with positive psychological outcomes such as happiness, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and longevity, considerably less attention has been devoted to examining the factors that actively contribute to the development and enhancement of Ikigai. Existing research has predominantly focused on Ikigai as an outcome variable rather than as a construct shaped by modifiable psychological and behavioural antecedents. For instance, empirical studies have demonstrated that higher levels of Ikigai are associated with better mental health, reduced mortality risk, and improved quality of life, particularly among older adults (Alimujiang et al., 2019; Tanno et al., 2009). However, these studies largely emphasize the benefits of Ikigai, offering limited insight into the mechanisms through which Ikigai is cultivated.

Emerging evidence suggests that certain psychological and social factors may play a role in enhancing Ikigai, though this body of research remains fragmented and underdeveloped. Mindfulness, defined as purposeful and non-judgmental awareness of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), has been shown to foster meaning and purpose in life by enhancing present-moment awareness and alignment with personal values, which may indirectly support the experience of Ikigai (Allan et al., 2014; Creswell, 2017). Individuals who exhibit higher levels of mindfulness are more likely to experience a greater presence of meaning in life, partly due to improved emotional regulation and self-congruence.

Social support represents another critical factor associated with Ikigai. Defined as processes through which social relationships promote health and well-being (Cohen et al., 2000), social support provides emotional reassurance, validation, and a sense of belonging. Empirical studies among older adults have shown that meaningful interpersonal engagement significantly enhances Ikigai and encourages continued social participation, indicating that relational connectedness may serve as a key contributor to purpose in life (Seko & Hirano, 2021). Physical activity has also been identified as an important contributor to Ikigai and overall well-being. Extensive evidence indicates that regular physical activity enhances both physical and mental health, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety while promoting psychological resilience (Warburton et al., 2006; Saxena et al., 2005). Longitudinal research has further demonstrated a positive association between physical activity and Ikigai, particularly among older adults, suggesting that active engagement in daily life reinforces

vitality and life purpose (Zhang & Chen, 2021).

Conversely, psychosocial stressors such as loneliness and perceived stress have been shown to undermine meaning and purpose in life by eroding emotional resilience and diminishing one's sense of being. Loneliness, defined as the distress resulting from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981), has been consistently linked to lower well-being and diminished life meaning. Recent studies indicate that loneliness mediates the relationship between psychological distress and purpose in life, highlighting its detrimental impact on existential well-being (Brown et al., 2023), suggesting that social disconnection may inhibit the development of Ikigai. Similarly, stress, conceptualized as a transaction between individuals and their environment that exceeds coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), has been found to negatively affect psychological functioning. Individuals experiencing high levels of stress tend to report lower psychological well-being and weakened life meaning, whereas those with a stronger sense of purpose demonstrate greater resilience under stress (Ostafin & Proulx, 2020). Despite these indications, few studies have systematically examined these variables together to determine their relative or combined contribution to Ikigai.

Moreover, despite substantial evidence supporting the role of Ikigai in promoting well-being, existing research has largely been conducted within Japanese and Western cultural contexts, limiting the cultural generalizability of their findings. As Ikigai is inherently subjective and culturally embedded, cultural norms, social structures, and belief systems play a crucial role in shaping how individuals conceptualize and pursue meaning in life (Kumano, 2017). Given the culturally nuanced nature of Ikigai, there is a critical need to investigate its antecedents within diverse sociocultural settings, such as India, where meaning in life is shaped by unique social, familial, and spiritual frameworks.

India's sociocultural landscape, characterized by collectivistic values, strong relational orientations, and evolving life aspirations, offers a unique context for examining Ikigai. Young adults in particular face increasing academic, occupational, and psychosocial demands, making the study of purpose and well-being especially relevant. By situating Ikigai within an Indian cultural framework, this study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on the meaning in life and inform culturally grounded well-being interventions. Therefore, the present research aims to boost the relationship between Ikigai and overall well-being among young adults, by focussing on the role of mindfulness, physical activity, social support, perceived stress, and loneliness in fostering Ikigai.

Taken together, the literature reveals a significant gap in understanding the predictors of Ikigai. While Ikigai is widely acknowledged as an important indicator of well-being, there is a paucity of empirical studies exploring the psychological and behavioural factors that enhance or inhibit its development, particularly among young adults. By shifting the analytical focus from outcomes of Ikigai to its antecedents, this research aims to advance theoretical understanding and provide practical insights for designing targeted interventions to enhance purpose and well-being among young adults. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by identifying key psychological and behavioural predictors of Ikigai, with specific focus on mindfulness, physical activity, perceived stress, loneliness, and social support.

Objectives:

The present study aims to examine the role of Ikigai in relation to selected psychological and behavioural factors among young adults. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the relationships between Ikigai and mindfulness, social support, perceived stress, loneliness, and physical activity.
2. To determine whether mindfulness, social support, perceived stress, loneliness, and physical activity are predictors of Ikigai among young adults.

Hypotheses:

Based on existing theoretical frameworks and review of literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Ikigai would positively correlate with mindfulness, social support, and physical activity, and negatively associated with perceived stress and loneliness.

H2a: Mindfulness, social support, and physical activity would positively predict Ikigai.

H2b: Perceived stress and loneliness would negatively predict Ikigai.

Method

Design

The research design used in this study was correlational analysis. The normal distribution of variables and linear relationships were assessed of the scores. Descriptive statistics were used for the summary and analysis of data. Pearson coefficient of correlation and multiple regression techniques were applied for the statistical analysis of the data to assess the relationship of Ikigai with the variables under study.

Sample

The study comprised a sample of 100 adults aged between 21 to 30 years, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were briefed about the objective of the research and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Upon providing informed consent, each participant was administered a selected set of standardized questionnaires relevant to the study.

Tools

1. Ikigai-9 Questionnaire by Imai, Osada, and Nishimura (2012). The scale consists of 9 items that capture key dimensions of Ikigai, including positive emotions toward life, active engagement, and future-oriented purpose. Respondents rate each item on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger sense of Ikigai. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and construct validity in previous research and has been widely used in studies examining psychological well-being across diverse populations.

2. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): Developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), this scale assesses the perception of stress over the past one month on a Likert scale. The PSS is one of the most widely used measures of perceived stress in psychological research and has demonstrated good reliability and validity across diverse populations.

3. Rapid Assessment of Physical Activity (RAPA): Designed by the University of Washington Health Promotion Research Center (UW HPRC) (2006), the RAPA measures physical activity levels in adults, including strength and flexibility components, allowing for a comprehensive classification of physical activity behaviour.

4. Revised UCLA Loneliness scale (R-UCLA). Originally developed by Russell,

Peplau, and Ferguson (1978) and later revised to improve psychometric properties, the scale measures the extent to which individuals feel disconnected from others, lack companionship, or experience relational dissatisfaction rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale.

5. *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)*: Developed by Brown and Ryan (2003), MAAS is used to assess the individual's dispositional mindfulness. The scale consists of 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores reflect greater levels of mindfulness.

6. *Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ):* Developed by Sarson et al. (1987), SSQ-shorter version consists of 6 items. It assesses perceived social support availability, reflecting support in various domains such as affective, economic, labour, familial, entertainment and advice/guidance needs.

Procedure

After being chosen at random, participants who satisfied the inclusion requirements were provided with a Google Form that included the study title, questions about their personal information (name, age, gender), and details on their informed consent. They received information on the study's goals, methods, and participant rights in addition to a guarantee of confidentiality. Following their agreement, they filled out the primary questionnaire, which included written instructions and urged them to be truthful and thorough in their responses. Forms that were submitted were examined for missing or conflicting data, and the researcher was on hand to provide clarification. After scoring, the data were analysed for correlational and multiple regression analyses using SPSS software (version 23.0) to test the hypothesis of the study.

Results

The relationship between Ikigai and physical activity, stress, loneliness, social support, and mindfulness was investigated using Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. The relationships between these variables are shown in the correlation matrix in Table 1.

Ikigai demonstrated a significant positive correlation with mindfulness ($r = .34$, $p < .01$) and social support ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of mindfulness and perceived social support were associated with a stronger sense of Ikigai. Conversely, Ikigai was significantly negatively correlated with loneliness ($r = -.40$, $p < .01$) and perceived stress ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$), suggesting that individuals experiencing greater loneliness and stress reported lower levels of Ikigai. The correlation between Ikigai and physical activity was positive but not statistically significant ($r = .18$, $p > .05$).

Mindfulness was significantly negatively correlated with loneliness and perceived stress, and positively correlated with social support. Loneliness showed a strong positive correlation with perceived stress and a strong negative correlation with social support, indicating that individuals who reported higher loneliness also experienced higher stress and lower social support. Perceived stress was significantly negatively correlated with physical activity and social support. Physical activity did not show significant correlations with mindfulness, loneliness, or social support. Social support demonstrated consistent significant associations with multiple variables, including Ikigai, mindfulness, loneliness, and perceived stress.

Overall, the correlational findings partially support H1, as Ikigai was significantly associated with mindfulness, social support, loneliness, and perceived stress in the expected directions, while its association with physical activity was not statistically significant.

Table 1. Inter-correlation for study variables

Variables	IKIGAI	MI	LO	PS	PA	SS
Ikigai Mindfulness (MI)	1.00.339**	1.00				
Loneliness (LO)	-.404**	-.294**	1.00			
Stress (PS)	-.264**	-.343**	.521**	1.00		
Physical Activity (PA)	.181	.027	-.089	-.213*	1.00	
Social Support (SS)	.389**	.264**	-.775**	-.448**	.090	1.00

*p< .05, **p< .01

Examining if mindfulness, social support, exercise, loneliness, and stress are predictors of Ikigai was the study's final goal. Multiple linear regression analysis was done conducted to examine the independent variables and identify and highlight the Ikigai predictors amongst them. Table 2 and 3 present the regression model and summary of predictors estimate analysis. The overall regression model was statistically significant and demonstrated a moderate level of explanatory power, R =.50, R^2=.25, adjusted R^2=.21. This indicates that approximately 24.8% of the variance in Ikigai was explained by the combined set of predictors. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.10, suggesting that the assumption of independence of residuals was met.

Examination of the regression coefficients in Table 3 revealed that mindfulness emerged as the only significant predictor of Ikigai (â = .24, t = 2.51, p = .014). This indicates that higher levels of mindfulness were associated with higher Ikigai scores, controlling for the other variables in the model. Loneliness, perceived stress, physical activity, and social support did not significantly predict Ikigai when all predictors were included simultaneously in the model (Table 3)

Table 2. Multiple regression for criterion variable Ikigai

Model Summary					
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.498[a]	.248	.208	4.828	2.099

a.Predictors: (Constant), SS, PA, MI, PS, LOb. Dependent Variable: IKIGAI

Table 3. Beta coefficients of the predictors of Ikigai

	Unstandardized Coefficients		StandardizedCoefficients			
Sr. No.	Variable	B	Std. error	Beta	t - value	p - value
123456	(constant)	28.143	7.363		3.882	<.001
	MI	.094	.038	.242	2.506	<.014
	LO	-.109	.078	-.209	-1.400	.165
	PS	.031	.102	.034	.305	.761
	PA	.281	.174	.148	1.613	.110
	SS	.120	.104	.165	1.161	.249

Thus H-2 was partially supported, as mindfulness significantly predicted Ikigai, whereas loneliness, perceived stress, physical activity, and social support did not emerge as significant predictors in the multivariate model.

Discussion

Originating in Okinawa and with roots in Japanese culture, Ikigai provides a comprehensive method for discovering meaning and fulfilment in life. It represents the meeting point of what one loves, is good at, what the world needs, and what one can get paid for. It combines passion, vocation, mission, and profession. Deep fulfilment and a distinct purpose are fostered by this equilibrium.

By focusing on harmony and balance, Ikigai transcends personal significance and connects environmental preservation, community service, and personal well-being. Ikigai offers timeless advice for leading an authentic and meaningful life, particularly during periods of fast change and uncertainty. The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychological factors and correlates of Ikigai in young adults. Physical activity, social support, loneliness, stress, and mindfulness were the factors that were explored.

Results showed that Ikigai was significantly positively correlated with mindfulness, social support, and physical activity, and significantly negatively correlated with loneliness and stress (Table 1), supporting the H1. Practicing mindfulness helps individuals become more aware of their values and aspirations, key to discovering Ikigai. Likewise, Ikigai encourages engagement in meaningful activities that naturally promote mindfulness by attuning individuals to the present and the positive effects of their actions. This study also found a positive correlation between Ikigai and social support, confirming H1. While social support involves emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal assistance from others, Ikigai represents a deeper sense of purpose and fulfilment aligned with one's passions and values. These concepts are interrelated: social support nurtures belonging and connection, which fosters the pursuit of Ikigai, while Ikigai strengthens social bonds and the ability to give and receive support. Understanding this relationship helps explain how individuals build resilience, find meaning, and thrive. A positive correlation between Ikigai and physical activity also confirmed H1. Ikigai, meaning "a reason for being," aligns closely with physical activity, which not only boosts physical health but also nurtures a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Research also highlights physical activity's positive effects on mental health, including improved mood, self-confidence, cognitive function, and stress reduction. Exercise influences neurochemical production and supports hormonal balance, contributing to overall psychological and physical well-being. Kabasawa et al. (2021) reported in a study that both men and women who spent more time farming reported feeling happier and having a stronger sense of ikigai (life purpose). On the other hand, women who spent more time clearing snow reported feeling less happy and having less ikigai. Curiously, the study also revealed a negative correlation between ikigai and not taking part in snow removal for both sexes. These results provide a unique perspective on how physical activity in rural areas influences men's and women's well-being in different ways. In essence, physical activity and Ikigai are deeply intertwined, each reinforcing the other to foster a joyful, purposeful, and meaningful life.

The study found a significant negative correlation between Ikigai and loneliness, supporting H1. Ikigai, the Japanese concept of life's purpose, provides direction and meaning, reducing feelings of loneliness. In

cross-sectional research, purpose in life fully explained the relationship between loneliness and reduced protective behaviour involvement. Furthermore, pre-pandemic loneliness was predictive of a gradual loss of life's purpose. On the other hand, a strong feeling of purpose before to the pandemic was associated with less loneliness and increased participation in protective actions over time (Ma et al., 2023). A significant negative correlation between Ikigai and stress, also proved H1 true. Ikigai, a "reason for being", helps individuals find fulfilment and harmony, which can reduce stress levels. When people feel disconnected from their Ikigai, they may experience increased stress and emotional exhaustion. Ikigai supports stress management by promoting alignment with personal values and meaningful activities, enhancing resilience and overall well-being. Stress often signals that one's life is out of balance, encouraging reflection and realignment with Ikigai. Effective stress management techniques include cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness, biofeedback, relaxation exercises, yoga, and *Tai Chi*, all of which can complement the pursuit of Ikigai. Overall, cultivating Ikigai plays a vital role in mitigating stress and promoting holistic flourishing, emphasizing the importance of purpose in maintaining health and happiness.

In the regression analysis, Mindfulness emerged as the only significant predictor of Ikigai, partially supporting the H2. Individuals with higher mindfulness tend to have a stronger sense of Ikigai. This is because mindfulness fosters a deeper connection with the inner self, enhanced self-awareness about what truly matters, clarity regarding passions, values, and strengths, an ability to discern one's purpose and meaning by living fully in the present moment and mindfulness thus acts as a crucial gateway to discovering and embodying one's Ikigai. By practicing mindfulness, people may be able to pinpoint and improve the principles that direct their life and discover what really matters. They can find significance and their purpose with the help of this increased consciousness. The results demonstrated that those who reported higher levels of mindfulness also had a better sense of life purpose, which is consistent with previous research (Crego et al., 2021).

The other variables - social support, physical activity, loneliness, and stress - although correlated with Ikigai, but did not emerge as significant predictors of Ikigai in the regression model. Yet these variables are important as they may influence Ikigai indirectly as mediators or moderators. They should not be dismissed; instead, they could play a supporting role in the complex relationship network surrounding Ikigai. For example, in a study it was discovered that a person's ikigai is influenced by their (SOC) of coherence and the social support they receive from significant persons. Thus, a person's perception of ikigai may be improved by bolstering their SOC and, more specifically, their support from close relationships (Kojima & Kato, 2017). In another study the results showed that there is a close and reciprocal relationship between meaningful work and work-related stress that has the potential to either strengthen or weaken wellbeing. While stress can either increase or decrease a sense of meaningfulness, experiencing meaningfulness at work can both reduce and increase stress. People's perceptions of these two experiences may occasionally be influenced by how they interpret and comprehend their work environments (Annison & Davidson, 2023). Across populations in North America, South America, Europe, and the Middle East, a sense of purpose is consistently associated with reduced levels of loneliness and provides protection against loneliness over time (Sutin et al., 2022). Therefore, encouraging a feeling of purpose may be a useful

intervention technique to avoid or lessen loneliness, especially for people who are going through psychological discomfort. Thus, these studies showcase how other variables hold importance while looking for the correlates of Ikigai.

The study looked at Ikigai-related elements and discovered strong relationships with stress and loneliness (negative) and mindfulness, social support, and physical activity (positive). The fact that mindfulness was the only significant predictor among them suggests that it is important for developing self-awareness and purpose. Even if Ikigai wasn't directly predicted by other factors, they are nonetheless significant and could have an indirect impact. The results emphasize the importance of awareness in Ikigai, with other elements supporting its growth and upkeep.

The current study advances knowledge about Ikigai and its relationship to potential influencing factors. Nevertheless, several restrictions were observed. Generalizability is limited because the sample was restricted to city of Chandigarh only. For more comprehensive views, future research should involve people from many cultures.

Additionally, the sample size was small of just 100 subjects. Because larger samples more accurately reflect population characteristics, it is suggested to use a larger sample to increase the reliability and generalizability of results (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001).

The omission of sociodemographic factors like age and gender was another drawback. Since the emphasis was on modifiable factors impacting Ikigai, these were not taken into consideration. Future studies could examine the impact of these demographics on Ikigai.

The study also took a quantitative approach. Although helpful, it might not go far enough in comprehending Ikigai, a subjective concept. Qualitative approaches might be used in future studies to gain more profound understanding.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the study offers a starting point for additional research on Ikigai. It draws attention to important elements that could improve a person's feeling of purpose and, consequently, their wellbeing. For a more thorough understanding of Ikigai, future studies should look more closely at these characteristics and think about incorporating other pertinent elements.

Conclusion

It is essential to comprehend Ikigai and its correlates to cultivate a long, fulfilling, and purposeful existence. Exploring the complexities of Ikigai helps people understand how passion, mission, vocation, and career intersect and directs them into worthwhile pursuits that are highly compatible with their goals and values. Studying Ikigai also provides a comprehensive approach to wellbeing, including social connections, psychological resilience, personal fulfilment, and professional success. Ikigai offers a timeless framework for overcoming life's obstacles with clarity, resiliency, and a sense of direction in a world marked by rapid change and growing complexity. In the end, adopting Ikigai enables people to live meaningful lives in which each day is filled with joy, purpose, and a profound sense of fulfilment.

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