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Measurement of holistic well-being among Japanese retirees in Malaysia: A framework

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Abstract

In this era of globalization and borderless world, the well-being of the community is given much prominence as a weapon in ensuring sustainable community development and a better livelihood for mankind. The focus of this paper is to identify the possible factors that could be used to evaluate on the well-being among Japanese retirees residing in Malaysia. A thorough search of the existing literature was used to collect data. The results showed that well-being is better measured if we could combine both the objective and subjective dimensions and the dimensions could vary based on the concerned community. Various factors were recognized to measure the holistic well-being among Japanese retirees in Malaysia and this could be a yardstick for future researchers that are embarking studies on retirees living away from the homeland.

Keywords: Objective Dimension, Subjective Dimension, Well-Being

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1. Introduction

Well-being is reaping much interest among policy makers and social scientists as it seen as a precursor towards the happiness of mankind. Since the time of Aristotle till today, well-being has been defined in an array of classification and many of these definitions portray well-being as the crux towards creating a better life and society. During the times of Aristotle, well-being is seen as the maximization of personal development in a number of areas ranging from acquired knowledge, wealth, health and social relationship. Then, in the 18th century, Bentham, refers well-being as the pursuit of happiness individuals experience in their quest towards life. Since then much work has been carried out on the subject of well-being and lately, Kahneman et al. (1999) recognized that two important determinants of individual's well-being are the subjective evaluation individuals' place on their emotions and quality of life.

Undeniably, the agenda of society's well-being has always been in the heart of United Nations since its inception. Significantly, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely, (1) no poverty, (2) zero hunger, (3) good health and well-being, (4) quality education, (5) gender equality, (6) clean water and sanitation, (7) affordable and clean energy, (8) decent work and economic growth, (9) industry, innovation and infrastructure, (10) reduced inequalities, (11) sustainable cities and communities, (12) responsible consumption and production, (13) climate action, (14) life below water, (15) life on land, (16) peace justice and strong institutions, and (17) partnerships for the goals, are the universal efforts to realize the globalization of human well-being. The importance placed by the United Nations to eradicate poverty and hunger, improve health and education systems, and protection of the environment from deforestation, climate change and misuse of oceans are indicators of the concerns and the need to enhance the well-being of every citizen living in this planet. Consequently, this has led to a greater awareness on the majority of countries to put the well-being of the society as the fundamental objective to be achieved in their development policies and programs.

One of the important communities in any nation is the community of retirees, people deemed to have stopped working or are working in a small number of hours after reaching a certain age. Usually, individuals who retire will possess a public or private pension benefits. Retirees normally spend more of their time doing leisure activities, housework and sleeping in their retirement residence, most probably in their own village. However, there is also a group of retirees that prefer to journey their retirement period of life in a foreign country. In Malaysia, a program called Malaysia My Second Home was launched since 2002 that enables foreigners that wish to retire in Malaysia with a ten-year renewable visa and other benefits. Based on the 2016 statistics, there are over 4,000 Japanese retirees living in Malaysia based on this program. Despite enjoying much of the benefits given by the host country, the holistic well-being of this community is yet to be determined. According to Ivkovic et al. (2014), there is no unification in the definition and measurement of well-being. The same applies on the measurement framework on the well-being of retirees. The measurement of the level of well-being of the Japanese retirees living in Malaysia will provide an impetus to further understand the complexities associated with community well-being particularly in the context of retirees living in foreign lands.

2. Measuring models of well-being

The appropriate measurement of well-being has always been an issue as new understanding on the dimension of well-being continues to emerge from time to time. Previously the common thought is that the measurement on the goodness of society is purely based on the element of wealth (Cummins et al., 2003). However, according to Gasper (2004), well-being appropriately is an umbrella concept that encompasses both objective well-being and subjective well-being. In fact, according to Tay et al. (2015), subjective well-being is a prominent target that people would like to achieve in their life.

The Overseas Development Council in 1979 developed the “Physical Quality of Life Index” using quality of life as an indicator to measure the achievement of well-being. In this index, there are three indicators, namely, (1) basic literacy rate, (2) infant mortality, and (3) life expectancy.

Then, in the 1990s, the Human Development Index (HDI) was generated whereby measurement of well-being is not solely based on economic dimension per se but importantly on the element of people and their capabilities. The rationale is that the economic dimension that is usually measured using the Gross Domestic Product does not usually a reflection of a holistic community well-being if there were no justice in the distribution of wealth. Thus, as in Figure 1, the HDI depicts the mean achievement in the major dimensions of human development, namely, on the attained education, life expectancy, and possessing a reasonable standard of living.

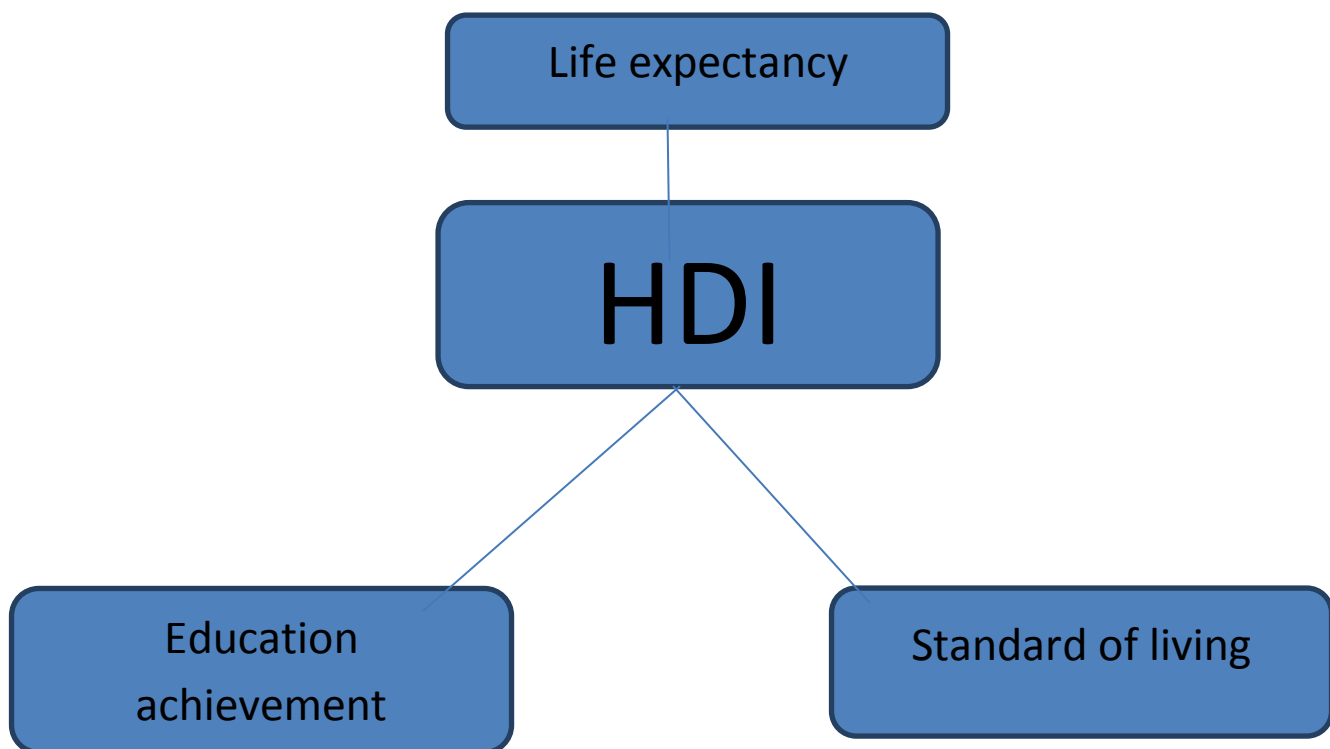


Figure 1. Dimensions in Human Development Index

Next, is the Diener Quality of Life Index (Diener and Suh, 1997; Diener et al., 1999) as in Table 1, whereby it consists of two different indices, namely, the Basic Quality of Life Index and the Advanced Quality of Life Index. The rationale in having two modes of indices is based on the fact that the requirements would differ in developing and developed countries. Despite the variations in the well-being measurement mechanism, the objective and the goal of measurement is the same.

Table 1. Basic and Advance Quality of Life Indicators

Value	Basic Index	Advanced Index
<i>Mastery</i>	Basic physical need fulfillment	Physicians per capita
<i>Affective autonomy</i>	Suicide rate	Subjective well-being
<i>Intellectual autonomy</i>	Literacy rate	University attendance
<i>Egalitarian commitment</i>	Gross human rights violations	Income inequality
<i>Harmony</i>	Deforestation	Environmental treaties
<i>Conservatism</i>	Savings rate	Savings rate
<i>Hierarchy</i>	Purchasing power parity	Per-capita income

Besides, the measurement of well-being is also carried out using the Social Development Index also known as Index of Social Progress that was developed by Estes. It has 46 different factors and is divided into 10 sub-indicators – (1) education, (2) defence, (3) health, (4) status of women, (5) economy, (6) demographics, (7) geography, (8) political participation, (9) cultural diversity, and (10) welfare.

Other models of well-being measurement are as in Table 2. The Well-being Deutsche Bank has four indicators to measure well-being, namely, (1) happiness, (2) living conditions, (3) economic prosperity, and (4) gross domestic product. On the other hand, the World Happiness Report uses six indicators, namely, (1) GDP per capita, (2) healthy life expectancy, (3) social support, (4) perceptions of corruption, (5) generosity, and (6) freedom to make life choices. Meanwhile, there are eight indicators, namely, (1) economy, (2) entrepreneurship and opportunity, (3) governance, (4) social capital, (5) education, (6) health, (7) safety and security, and (8) individual freedom. Besides, the Well-being New Economic Foundation evaluates well-being based on nine dimensions, namely, (1) environmental, (2) governance, (3) education and skill, (4) economy individual finance, (5) housing, (6) employment, (7) health, (8) social relationship, and (9) individual well-being. Moreover, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also developed a number of domains to measure well-being. The domains used by this international organization is as follows: (1) income, (2) employment, (3) housing, (4) environment, (5) education and skill, (6) health, (7) personal safety, (8) social relationship, (9) civic engagement, (10) work-life balance, and (11) subjective well-being. In

addition, there was also a measurement of well-being using the environment as the main criteria and this known as the Environmental Performance Index. There are two important dimensions in this index, namely, on the environmental health and ecosystem vitality.

Table 2. Models of well-being measurement

Organization/Institution	Domains of measurement
Well-being Deutsche Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Living conditions • Economic prosperity • Gross domestic product
World Happiness Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDP per capita • healthy life expectancy • social support • perceptions of corruption • generosity • freedom to make life choices
Legatum Prosperity Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy • Entrepreneurship and opportunity • Governance • Social capital • Education • Health • Safety and security • Individual freedom
Well-being New Economic Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental • Governance • Education and skill • Economy individual finance • Housing • Employment • Health • Social relationship • Individual well-being
Well-being OECD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income • Employment • Housing • Environment • Education and skill • Health • Personal safety • Social relationship

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement • Work-life balance • Subjective well-being
Environmental Performance Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental health – health impacts, air quality, water and sanitation • Ecosystem vitality – water resources, agriculture, forests, fisheries, biodiversity, and habitat, climate, and energy

Besides the organization's based measurement on well-being, there are also models of well-being generated from research work. Diaz and Bui (2017) explored the role of acculturation, ethnic identity, gender roles, and perceived social support towards life satisfaction. Helliwell (2002) attempted to combine both individual and national variables to explain subjective well-being. Cummins and Nistico (2002) mentioned that individuals that are satisfied with their self in terms of goodness and worthiness possess a better quality of life and well-being. In accordance with this, Yassin et al. (2015) as in Table 3 focussed on the importance of subjective well-being in the study of community well-being. In that study, 12 domains within the subjective well-being were considered in the measurement of well-being and happiness. The domains are (1) environmental, (2) work-life balance, (3) educational, (4) political, (5) physical health, (6) psychological, (7) cultural, (8) physical facilities, (9) safety, (10) social, and (11) economic. On the other hand, Western and Tomaszewski (2016) in their study identified eight variables to measure well-being, and these are as follows: (1) subjective well-being – life satisfaction, (2) income, (3) financial hardship, (4) material deprivation, (5) leisure time, (6) health, (7) contacts with families, and (8) contacts with friends. In addition, Verduyn et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of social networking as a tool to enhance subjective well-being.

Table 3. Models based on Research Work

Authors	Domains of measurement
Yassin et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Safety • Educational • Psychological • Physical Facilities • Economic • Cultural • Political • Environmental • Work-life balance • Physical health

Western and Tomaszewski (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective well-being – Life satisfaction • Income • Financial hardship • Material deprivation • Leisure time • Health • Contacts with families • Contacts with friends
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3. Constructing a well-being framework for Japanese retirees in Malaysia

Based on the existing literature, it is clear that the comprehensive measurement of well-being should encompass both the objective and subjective dimensions. In line with this, it is also evident that the sub-dimensions of the objective and subjective domains could vary according to the concerned community. This is because different communities might have different aspects that will contribute to their overall well-being. Undeniably for the Japanese retirees who have left their homeland to live in Malaysia, the components that contribute to their overall well-being would definitely have some unique units. For the objective measurement, it is proposed that the sub-dimensions could be on items that concern their current income and expenditure, acquired education and skills, type of residence, and items pertaining to their life-style in terms of health, sleeping patterns, participating in family-based activities, involvement in sports, recreational and volunteerism activities, and access to media.

Moreover, since subjective well-being is also gaining much prominence in the analysis of holistic well-being, thus the components of subjective well-being should be included in the measurement of well-being among Japanese retirees residing in Malaysia. Based on the existing literature, it is proposed that the dimensions of subjective well-being among the Japanese retirees living in Malaysia could be classified into three main thrusts of physical, social, and individual. Precisely, for the physical thrust, the well-being could be measured in the sub-dimensions of environmental, safety, and physical facilities. Furthermore, for the social thrusts the following dimensions, namely, social, political, and the economy could form the frame to depict the status of well-being in this thrust. Finally, for the individual thrust, there are five dimensions that could constitute this thrust and they are education, physical health, spiritual, and work-life balance.

4. Conclusion

This article provides an adequate input on the measurement of well-being among retirees who have made foreign countries as their preferred place to retire. The review justifies the importance of paying attention to both the objective and subjective dimensions as tools to measure the overall well-being of retirees. These dimensions could be examined empirically across different countries to see whether firm conclusions could

be made on the relevance of these dimensions and for identifying other dimensions that might have a significant influence on the well-being of retirees living in foreign countries.

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