

## SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OF JAPANESE RETIREES IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Development efforts lately have put much emphasis on the concept of community well-being and the well-being of every segment of society is pertinent towards the attainment of sustainable development goals. One of the important segments of society is the retirees especially retirees who are residing in foreign countries. The aim of this study is to examine the subjective well-being of Japanese retirees residing in Malaysia. Data were collected among 200 retirees via a pick-and-drop method. The findings showed that 90% perceive their subjective well-being as at the moderate level. Further investigations revealed that the three highest mean scores were the social, spiritual and economic dimensions. On the other hand, the bottom two dimensions were political and physical facilities. The study proposes some recommendations to further boost the subjective well-being of Japanese retirees staying in Malaysia.*

**Field of Research:** *Well-being, objective dimension, subjective dimension*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years the subject of well-being has continuously gained great interests among scholars and policy-makers and till today many are still grasping to precisely measure well-being. Historically, during the era 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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, the issue of subjective well-being comes into the picture and it is recognized that the two important determinants of individual's well-being are the subjective evaluation individuals' place on their emotions and quality of life (Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz, 1999).

The well-being of people who have either stopped working or are working for limited hours after attaining a certain age or commonly known as retirees is pertinent since the advancement of medical technology has allowed people to live a longer period of life. It is not unusual for individuals that retire to 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. 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

Measurement appropriateness of well-being has always been an issue as new consideration 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, there is another concept that states that well-being appropriately is an umbrella concept that encompasses both objective well-being and subjective well-being (Gasper, 2004). In fact, according to other scholars, subjective well-being is an important goal that people would like to achieve in their life (Tay, Kuykendall & Diener, 2015).

Meanwhile, in the past, there were studies that explored the role of acculturation, ethnic identity, gender roles, and perceived social support towards life satisfaction (Diaz & Bui, 2017). Besides, there were also attempts to combine both individual and national variables to explain subjective well-being (Helliwell, 2002). Moreover, previously the common notion is that individuals that are satisfied with their self in terms of goodness and worthiness possess a better quality of life and well-being (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). In the Malaysian context, there were also a few studies that focussed on the importance of subjective well-being in the study of community well-being (Yassin, et al., 2015). In these studies, 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, other dimensions identified in recent studies on well-being investigated the impact of the following variables: (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 (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016). In addition, Verduyn et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of social networking as a tool to enhance subjective well-being<sup>11</sup>.

Since subjective well-being is 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.

## 3. METHOD

This study used a quantitative methodology whereby the instrument was derived from a number of established measurement indicators such as the Well-being Deutsche Bank (Deutsche Bank, 2006), Legatum Prosperity Index (Legatum Institute, 2013), Well-being New Economic Foundation (NEF) (New Economic Foundation, 2013), Well-being OECD (OECD, 2013), Malaysian Well-being Index, and Yassin et al. (2015). The data were obtained from 200 Japanese respondents and the data collection was assisted by a number of Japanese societies and Japanese-speaking enumerators. SPSS software was used in the process of analyzing the data.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the outcome of the study. Table 1 depicts that the mean score on subjective well-being obtained by the Japanese retirees in Malaysia was 3.31 (SD=.29). In comparison, the study on Malaysian police retirees showed that the mean score obtained for subjective well-being was 3.74 (SD=.36) (Yassin et al., 2015).

**Table 1: Subjective Well-being of Japanese Retirees in Malaysia**

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjective Well-being	200	2.36	4.06	3.3082	.29509
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Further analysis as in Table 2 revealed that 90% of these retirees are at the moderate level in terms of subjective well-being and only a marginal number of them are experiencing a high level of subjective well-being. Comparatively, 59.3% of police retirees were at a high level in terms of subjective well-being and 40.7% were at the moderate level (Yassin et al., 2015).

**Table 2: Subjective Well-being of Japanese Retirees in Malaysia Based on Categories**

Subjective Well-being Category					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Moderate	180	90.0	90.0	90.0
	High	20	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Following is the detailed analysis on the contributing dimensions toward the subjective well-being of Japanese retirees in Malaysia. As in Table 3, the three dimensions that contributed immensely to the subjective well-being of Japanese retirees in Malaysia are the social, spiritual and economic. On the other hand, the two least contributing dimensions are political and physical facilities. The similarity between the current study and the study carried out by Yassin et al. (2015) showed that both these groups placed social dimension at the top. However, in terms of differences, the study showed that economic well-being was among the top among the Japanese retirees while the same dimension was among the bottom two for the police retirees. Besides, political well-being was not a great issue for the police retirees compared to the Japanese retirees that placed political well-being as their major concern in relation to their subjective well-being.

**Table 3: Analysis of the Dimensions of Subjective Well-being of Japanese Retirees in Malaysia**

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social	200	2.40	4.40	3.8650	.43140
Spiritual	200	2.25	5.00	3.6062	.50090
Education	200	2.50	4.50	3.4587	.40239
Political	200	1.67	3.67	2.4700	.62266
Physical_Health	200	2.00	4.33	2.8117	.58986
Economic	200	2.50	5.00	3.6025	.70852
Public safety	200	2.00	4.67	3.5383	.50423
Physical facilities	200	1.50	4.00	2.7850	.55820
Environment	200	1.00	4.67	3.1883	.66631
Communication technology	200	2.00	5.00	3.3117	.50467
Valid N (listwise)	200				

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study showed that the subjective well-being of the Japanese retirees in Malaysia is mainly at the moderate level. Thus, more concrete efforts are needed to further strengthen the subjective well-being of these retirees. While it is noted that the economic dimension is not a major issue concerning the subjective well-being of Japanese retirees, the areas that needed attention as displayed in the above findings are related to political and physical facilities. The Japanese retirees in Malaysia are very much concerned about the political situation in Malaysia that they perceive as being unstable and has much negative impact on their subjective well-being as well as their stay in Malaysia. Besides, the Japanese retirees in Malaysia also expressed their anxiety on the public transportation to move around from one place to another. They feel that more could be done to improve the public transportation that will ease their movement from one destination to another. The findings of this study to a certain extent give some ideas on the steps that the relevant parties from both the public and private sector could do to further boost the promotion of long-stay tourism among retirees from Japan as well as other countries.

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