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Life purpose among workers in the career-to-retirement transition: a qualitative perspective

Propósito de vida dos trabalhadores em transição carreira-aposentadoria: uma perspectiva qualitativa

Propósito de vida de los trabajadores en transición de la carrera profesional a la jubilación: una perspectiva cualitativa

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Abstract:
Objective: to identify and understand perceptions regarding the purpose of life among older workers transitioning from their careers into retirement. **Methods:** a qualitative, exploratory study conducted in 2022 within an organization in the energy sector in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, using semi-structured individual interviews. Thematic content analysis was applied to the textual data, supported by the software IRAMUTEQ for organizing and exploring the textual *corpus*, utilizing Descending Hierarchical Classification. **Results:** the study involved 24 workers, mostly men with high income levels. The textual *corpus*, labeled "Meaning of Life," allowed for the identification of two lexical classes, subsequently interpreted as *Purpose* and *Coherence*. The dimension of *Mattering* – a component of the Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life – did not emerge as an independent lexical class in the software analysis; however, it was identified through the qualitative interpretation of the participants' accounts, highlighting aspects related to contribution, caring for others, and the significance attributed to one's own life trajectory. **Conclusion:** a sense of purpose in life serves as a significant element during the career-to-retirement transition, fostering reflection on past trajectories and future goals, as well as the mobilization of personal resources. This contributes to a broader understanding of the subjective aspects involved in retirement preparation and underscores the importance of incorporating reflection on one's purpose in life into institutional programs focused on active and healthy aging.
Keywords: Retirement; Career choice; Decision making.

Resumo:
Objetivo: identificar e compreender as percepções sobre o propósito de vida entre trabalhadores mais velhos em transição da carreira para a aposentadoria. **Método**: estudo qualitativo, exploratório, realizado em 2022 numa organização do setor de energia do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, por meio de entrevistas individuais semiestruturadas. Para os dados textuais utilizou-se a análise de conteúdo temática, com apoio do software IRAMUTEQ para organização e exploração do corpus textual, utilizando-se a Classificação Hierárquica Descendente. **Resultados**: participaram 24 trabalhadores, na sua maioria homens, com renda elevada. O corpus textual, denominado "Sentido de Vida", possibilitou a identificação de duas classes lexicais, posteriormente interpretadas como *Propósito* e *Compreensão*. A dimensão *Valorização*, integrante do Modelo Tripartite de Sentido da Vida, não constituiu uma classe lexical independente na análise do software, mas foi identificada na interpretação qualitativa dos discursos dos participantes, evidenciando aspectos relacionados à contribuição, ao cuidado com o outro e ao significado atribuído à própria trajetória. **Conclusão**: o propósito de vida constituiu elemento relevante na transição carreira-aposentadoria, favorecendo a reflexão sobre trajetórias, metas futuras e mobilização de recursos pessoais, contribuindo para ampliar a compreensão dos aspectos subjetivos envolvidos na preparação para a aposentadoria e reforçando a importância de incluir a reflexão sobre propósito de vida em programas institucionais voltados ao envelhecimento ativo e saudável.
Palavras-chave: Aposentadoria; Escolha da profissão; Tomada de decisões.

Resumen:
Objetivo: identificar y comprender las percepciones sobre el propósito de vida entre trabajadores de mayor edad en transición de la carrera profesional a la jubilación. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, exploratorio, realizado en 2022 en una organización del sector energético del estado de Río de Janeiro, mediante entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas. Para los datos textuales se utilizó el análisis de contenido temático, con el apoyo del software IRAMUTEQ para la organización y exploración del corpus textual, mediante la Clasificación Jerárquica Descendente. **Resultados:** participaron 24 trabajadores, en su mayoría hombres, con ingresos elevados. El corpus textual, denominado «Sentido de la vida», permitió identificar dos clases léxicas, posteriormente interpretadas como Propósito y Comprensión. La dimensión Valoración, integrante del Modelo Tripartito del Sentido de la Vida, no constituyó una clase léxica independiente en el análisis del software, pero fue identificada en la interpretación cualitativa de los discursos de los participantes, evidenciando aspectos relacionados con la contribución, el cuidado de los demás y el significado atribuido a la propia trayectoria. **Conclusión:** el propósito de vida constituyó un elemento relevante en la transición de la carrera profesional a la jubilación, favoreciendo la reflexión sobre las trayectorias, las metas futuras y la movilización de recursos personales, contribuyendo a ampliar la comprensión de los aspectos subjetivos implicados en la preparación para la jubilación y reforzando la importancia de incluir la reflexión sobre el propósito de vida en programas institucionales orientados al envejecimiento activo y saludable.
Palabras clave: Jubilación; Selección de profesión; Toma de decisiones.

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INTRODUCTION

In countries characterized by social inequality, challenges within healthcare service networks, and low levels of education and income among the population, as is the case in Brazil[1,2], reflecting on one's purpose in life and the factors that influence retirement decisions among older workers becomes particularly relevant. On one hand, low quality of life and inequalities accumulated over the course of a lifetime can exacerbate the adversities associated with aging[1,2]. On the other hand, retirement planning facilitates adaptation to the changes inherent in this transition, strengthening resources for coping with losses and promoting well-being[3-5]. In this context, reflecting on one's life purpose can contribute to more conscious decisions regarding retirement and foster a more positive adjustment to this stage of life.

While there are various definitions of life purpose, there is a consensus that it encompasses the direction, intentionality, and meaning that guide the setting of goals and shape choices throughout one's life[6-9]. Studies show that older individuals with a strong sense of purpose have clear goals, a sense of direction, and an understanding that their past and present experiences hold meaning, in addition to maintaining goals that make life worth living[10,11]. Purpose can be strengthened through involvement in meaningful activities and interventions focused on engagement and intentionality[10].

Life purpose is part of a broader construct known as Meaning in Life. This understanding has been systematized within the Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life[6,7], which has driven theoretical and empirical advances in research on the subject[7-12]. Proposed by Martela and Steger, as well as by George and Park[6,7], this model conceives of the meaning of life as a multidimensional phenomenon composed of three subconstructs: *coherence*, which relates to the perception that existence is coherent and understandable; *purpose*, understood as the capacity to set short, medium, and long-term goals and to direct behaviors toward achieving them; and *mattering*, which corresponds to the recognition of the intrinsic value of one's own life and one's contribution to society.

Conceptualizing life purpose as a dynamic component of the meaning of life aligns with the perspective of human development across the life span. If purpose is constructed and reconstructed in light of lived experiences, it must be understood through a theoretical framework that explains how individuals develop and adapt to the changes inherent in the aging process. The life-span developmental theory, proposed by Baltes[13], provides an important frame of reference for understanding shifts in life purpose during the transition into retirement.

Human development is a continuous process extending from childhood to old age, characterized by plasticity, multidimensionality, and a balance between gains and losses throughout the lifespan[13]. From this perspective, one's purpose in life can be understood as a dynamic construct, capable of transformation in response to experiences, shifts in social roles, and the demands of different developmental stages[6]. Thus, events such as career transitions, retirement, changes in relationships, and new personal achievements can contribute to the re-evaluation and redefinition of one's life goals and direction. Furthermore, a sense of purpose in life is linked to psychological well-being, fostering adaptation in the face of the challenges and changes inherent in the aging process[4].

This perspective also aligns with the Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life[6,7], which posits that meaning is structured by the dimensions of coherence, purpose, and mattering. In this context, purpose provides direction to life by integrating past experiences, present choices, and future expectations. Thus, the transition to retirement – involving shifts in roles, disruptions, and personal redefinitions – may necessitate a re-evaluation of what makes life meaningful, making purpose a central element in this process[14].

As people age and encounter new challenges, they turn to a sense of purpose in life as a resource for finding meaning and maintaining a clear direction toward their goals, even in the face of losses and difficulties. Human development is also influenced by historical and cultural contexts, which shape individual values and priorities. The Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) model, developed by Baltes and colleagues[13], proposes that individuals select relevant goals, optimize resources to achieve them, and compensate for losses resulting from the aging process. This process is closely linked to having a purpose in life, as it allows for the continuous adaptation of goals and strategies, thereby fostering personal fulfillment throughout the life span.

Individuals with high levels of purpose in life are more proactive regarding self-care, exhibit better impulse control, and tend to adopt healthier behaviors. These findings suggest that having a sense of purpose may play a significant role in maintaining physical function among older adults[15]. Furthermore, a sense of purpose guides decision-making related to the use of personal resources. Adults and older individuals with high levels of purpose work toward their goals, develop skills, and show greater social engagement[16].

From another perspective, studies on adaptation to retirement indicate that access to personal resources facilitates this process[5] and that changes in these resources have a direct impact on psychological well-being[4,17]. Six domains of resources relevant to this phase have been identified: physical, cognitive, motivational, financial, social, and emotional[16]. These

resources not only support adaptation to retirement but also foster the construction and maintenance of a sense of life meaning by providing the conditions for individuals to set new goals and preserve their sense of purpose. Thus, the greater the availability and quality of these resources, the greater the capacity to redefine one's life trajectory, promoting active and meaningful aging.

There are associations between high levels of life purpose and a reduced risk of mortality and various diseases, as well as better indicators of health, cognition, emotional regulation, subjective well-being, and adaptation to adversity[10,11].

Although scientific research on life purpose has advanced in recent years, there remain opportunities to expand the investigation of this construct within the context of the transition from career to retirement[10,11]. Gaps have been identified in the body of knowledge regarding the sense of life meaning among older Brazilian workers[17]. Furthermore, it has been observed that publications on this topic focus predominantly on young adults, underscoring the need to expand research involving older workers who are transitioning into retirement[18].

Consequently, while there is consistent evidence regarding the importance of life purpose for health, well-being, and adaptation to aging, its manifestation within the specific context of the transition from career to retirement remains insufficiently understood[14]. Investigating this phenomenon may broaden the understanding of the psychosocial factors involved in this process, contributing to the development of strategies for health promotion, retirement planning, and active aging[3,14].

In this context, this study aims to identify and understand perceptions regarding the purpose of life among older workers transitioning from their careers into retirement.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach and an exploratory design. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, and the textual data were interpreted using the thematic content analysis technique proposed by Bardin[19], with the support of the IRAMUTEQ[20] software for organizing and exploring the textual corpus.

The study was conducted within an organization in the energy sector in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, focusing on older workers – both men and women. Inclusion criteria were: being an employee of the organization, being 53 years of age or older, and being eligible for retirement during the study period, in accordance with current Brazilian legislation and the organization's internal policies.

Recruitment was conducted via invitations sent to eligible employees by a representative designated by the organization. Following their voluntary expression of interest in participating, the workers proceeded to the subsequent stages of the study.

Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, most participants held postgraduate degrees and reported an economic status ranging from satisfactory to excellent, indicating a socioeconomic and educational level above the average for the Brazilian population[1,2]. Thus, it is considered that the participants possessed, to some extent, individual resources that could, in principle, facilitate adjustment to retirement[5,16].

The project was conducted in compliance with ethical research standards and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under opinion no. 5,286,802. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2022.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed to address the study's propositions – specifically focusing on the concept of "purpose in life" – and covered seven thematic areas: (1) Investments; (2) Health and Lifestyle; (3) Relationships; (4) Purpose in Life; (5) Organization and Work; (6) Attitudes and Expectations Regarding the Future; and (7) Closing. Initially, eligible employees were invited to participate in the study; upon voluntarily expressing their interest, they completed a sociodemographic questionnaire and received instructions regarding the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF).

The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were conducted online – given that the participants were located in different Brazilian states – and were recorded with prior authorization. No additional interviews were required, as informational sufficiency had been reached. This approach aligns with the principle of "information power," which posits that the adequacy of a qualitative sample size depends on the extent to which the data produced can address the research question[21].

A semi-structured interview guide was used, centered on the following guiding question: "*Do you identify a purpose in your life?*"

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To preserve the participants' anonymity, any information that could lead to their identification was removed. The transcripts were organized into a single text file (.txt), enabling their use with the software IRAMUTEQ (version 0.7 Alpha 2) – an open-source tool built upon the R and Python programming languages.[20].

IRAMUTEQ was used as an auxiliary tool for organizing and exploring the textual *corpus*, enabling lexical analyses and the identification of classes based on text segments[20].

For the analysis of textual data, the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) method was employed, which enables the identification of lexical clusters based on the proximity of vocabulary found within the text segments of the corpus[20]. The dendrogram generated by the DHC facilitated the visualization of relationships between the identified classes and the initial organization of the data.

Subsequently, the identified lexical classes were interpreted by considering the meanings attributed by the participants, the discursive contexts, and the focus of the study, all in alignment with the adopted theoretical framework. This process allowed for the construction of thematic categories through the triangulation of the lexical analysis results and the qualitative interpretation of the discourses.

The classes labeled "*Coherence*" (Comprehension) and "*Purpose*" were not predefined; rather, they were named following the analysis, based on representative text segments, the words with the strongest statistical association (chi-square value), and their relationship to the theoretical framework.

Although the DHC identified two lexical classes, the interpretation of the data was not limited to the statistical clusters produced by IRAMUTEQ. In line with the qualitative approach adopted, the text segments were also subjected to interpretive analysis, taking into account their meanings within the context of the discourses.

During this process, the aim was to identify content that converged with the dimensions of the Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life. The "*Mattering*" dimension – while not forming an independent lexical class within the DHC – was recognized as an analytical category due to its thematic recurrence across various segments of the *corpus*, specifically those related to social contribution, caring for others, and the perception of having a positive impact on the lives of others. Its identification was grounded in the convergence of the meanings expressed by the participants, seeking complementarity between the automated lexical analysis and the qualitative interpretation of the data.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, 24 older workers participated – 66.7% men and 33.3% women – a distribution consistent with the predominantly male profile of the organization under study. The participants' ages ranged from 53 to 65, with a mean age of 57. The majority reported being married or in a stable civil union (79.1%) and rated the time spent with their partners positively, describing it as excellent or very good (87.5%).

Regarding educational level, it was observed that 79.2% of the participants held a postgraduate degree, master's degree, or doctorate. In terms of economic status, all participants reported their financial situation as ranging from good to excellent; 79.2% had a monthly income exceeding 10,000BRL, while approximately one-fifth fell within the 5,000BRL to 10,000BRL range. The majority (66.7%) had dependents. As for their perception of their own health, 66.6% rated their condition as satisfactory, and about one-fifth considered their health to be very good or excellent.

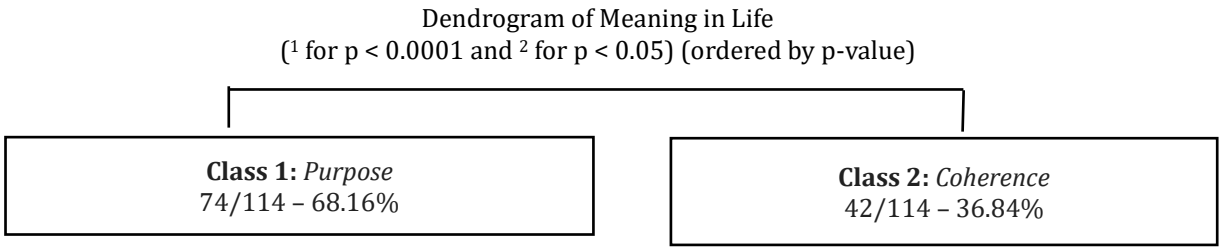
The textual analysis, conducted using the IRAMUTEQ software, was based on a *corpus* of 24 interviews organized into 151 text segments (TS). Of these, 114 were utilized in the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC), representing a 75.5% inclusion rate. The *corpus* contained 5,195 lexical occurrences, distributed across 1,131 distinct forms. The DHC identified two main lexical classes, labeled: Class 1 – *Purpose*, and Class 2 – *Coherence*.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of individuals in the transition to retirement. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2022.

Sex	Age	Educational leve	Marital status	Montly family income in BRL	Dependants	Current financial situation
Male	63	Postgraduate studies	Divorced/Separated	5,000 to 10,000	No	Good
Male	60	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	No	Good
Male	60	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Excellent
Male	57	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	5,000 to 10,000	No	Very good
Male	53	Undergraduate studies	Married/Civil union	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Good
Female	54	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	10,000 to 20,000	No	Very good
Male	57	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Very good
Male	58	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Very good
Male	57	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Very good
Male	55	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Very good
Female	57	Undergraduate studies	Divorced/Separated	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Very good
Female	62	Postgraduate studies	Widowed	Above 20,000	Yes	Very good
Female	62	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	No	Good
Female	53	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	No	Very good
Fenale	53	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Very good
Male	54	Secondary Education	Divordced/Separated	5,000 to 10,000	Yes	Good
Female	56	Undergraduate studies	Married/Civil union	5,000 to 10,000	Yes	Good
Male	61	Doctorate degree	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Good
Female	57	Master's degree	Single	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Good
Male	54	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	Yes	Very good
Male	59	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	10,000 to 20,000	Yes	Good
Male	65	Postgraduate studies	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	No	Excellent
Male	54	Undergraduate studies	Married/Civil union	5,000 to 10,000	Yes	Good
Male	56	Master's degree	Married/Civil union	Above 20,000	No	Very good

The dendrogram regarding the meaning of life showed that 68.16% pertained to *Purpose* and 36.84% to *Coherence*, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Dendrogram of the "Meaning of Life" for individuals transitioning into retirement. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2022.



Words	*f*	x^2
Filho (child)	*8*	*5.02*
Exemplo (example)	*8*	*5.02*
Coisa (thing)	*14*	*4.74*
Trabalhar (to work)	*11*	*4.68*
Entender (to understand)	*7*	*4.35*
Ano (year)	*7*	*4.35*
Só (only)	*13*	*4.1*
Pessoa (person)	*24*	*3.72*
Gosto (like)	*6*	*3.69*
Criar (to create)	*6*	*3.69*
Mesmo (same)	*5*	*3.05*
Sociedade (society)	*5*	*3.05*
Questão (question)	*5*	*3.05*
Palavra (word)	*5*	*3.05*
Entrar (to enter)	*5*	*3.05*
Querer (to want)	*16*	*2.96*
Conseguir (to achieve)	*8*	*2.78*
Cuidar (take care of)	*4*	*2.42*
Conhecer (to know)	*4*	*2.42*
Tema (theme)	*4*	*2.42*
Situação (situation)	*4*	*2.42*
Ver (to see)	*7*	*2.18*

Words	*f*	x^2
Missão (mission)	*7*	*12.79*
Ficar (to stay)	*5*	*8.96*
Deixar (to leave/let)	*6*	*7.66*
Levar (to take)	*4*	*7.11*
Ganhar (to gain/win)	*4*	*7.11*
Possível (possible)	*4*	*7.11*
Grande (big/great)	*4*	*7.11*
Forma (form/way)	*4*	*7.11*
Acontecer (to happen)	*4*	*7.11*
Manter (to keep/maintain)	*4*	*7.11*
Lado (side)	*4*	*7.11*
Pensar (to think)	*8*	*6.74*
Melhor (better)	*8*	*6.74*
Dar (to give)	*11*	*5.41*
Vez (turn/time)	*3*	*5.28*
Procurar (to look for/seek)	*4*	*4.19*
Próximo (next)	*4*	*4.19*
Melhorar (to improve)	*4*	*4.19*
Meio (middle/means)	*4*	*4.19*
Crescer (to grow)	*3*	*2.59*
Ir (to go)	*21*	*4.27*
Caminho (path/way)	*4*	*2.42*

Class 1 – *Purpose* – comprised 74 text segments (TS). The words with the strongest statistical association with this class were "child" and "example" (χ^2 = 5.02). However, beyond mere lexical frequency, the analysis revealed that this dimension was linked to the setting of goals, the continuation of personal projects, and the perception of contributing to the lives of others.

The participants demonstrated that, during the transition into retirement, one's life purpose extends beyond the occupational sphere, incorporating other roles and sources of meaning developed throughout one's life journey. Family – especially one's children – emerged as a central element, associated with notions of legacy, continuity, and contribution. This perspective is illustrated in the account provided by P3: "*I can tell you very clearly that my life purpose is to help my children spread their wings.*"

Other participants linked the concept of purpose to the pursuit of personal and social projects, demonstrating that the transition into retirement can foster the emergence of new goals. As reported by P6: "*traveling the world and helping people, both through volunteer work and through my art. In addition to charitable work, I'm also thinking about teaching people how to read and write, though that's a more ambitious goal, as it requires preparation.*" This account reveals a sense of purpose oriented toward expanding one's experiences, continuous learning, and social contribution, indicating that the construction of meaning remains dynamic and can take on new forms throughout the aging process.

Class 2 – *Coherence* comprised 42 text segments (TS). The terms that showed the strongest statistical association were "mission" (χ^2 = 12.79) and "to stay" (χ^2 = 8.96). This dimension was related to the reflective process of integrating past experiences, present-day life, and future expectations.

The research participants expressed a need to understand their own life trajectories and to reorganize their frames of reference as retirement approaches. This transition emerges as a moment for reflection on past choices, future possibilities, and the forging of new paths. Such a process is evident in the remarks of P20: "*No one here has a clear idea of what they're going to do with their life; no one knows what tomorrow – or even today – will bring; at least, we don't know what's going to happen, so we just try to live as we go*." This account suggests that retirement entails uncertainties and requires an ongoing process of contemplating the future. Making sense of one's own personal history becomes a resource for bringing coherence to the life lived thus far and for constructing new possibilities for action.

In addition to the two classes identified by the Hierarchical Descending Classification (HDC), the interpretive analysis revealed elements related to the "*Mattering*" dimension of the

Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life. Although this construct did not emerge as an independent lexical class during the IRAMUTEQ processing, its content appeared linked to the other dimensions – notably through narratives concerning social contribution, caring for others, and the perception of having a positive impact on the world.

Some accounts illustrate this dimension: P24: "*to build for humanity, for the world, for others, but also to take care of oneself.*" P21: "*I have a purpose in my life; an agreement I made with God to change the lives of some people.*" P23: "*and that is my purpose: to always do good for everyone.*"

For some, one's purpose in life is linked to a sense of belonging and contributing to something greater than one's own individual existence. The *Mattering* is connected to the construction of meaning through the relationships one forms, the care one shows, and the intention to create positive impacts in the lives of others.

In addition to dimensions related to the meaning of life, personal resources deemed important for the career-to-retirement transition process were also identified, such as: *physical and mental health*, *financial stability*, f*amily relationships*, *the potential for reorganizing personal goals*, and *the availability of time for meaningful activities*.

In the realm of health, participants reported viewing their physical and emotional conditions as significant resources for pursuing future endeavors. Regarding financial resources, all participants described their financial situation as ranging from good to excellent, a factor associated with greater freedom of choice and the ability to plan for retirement.

Social relationships were also highlighted as a source of support and meaning. Family was frequently linked to motivation for the future, while professional activities were reinterpreted by some participants; they were no longer seen merely as a source of income, but rather evaluated in terms of their potential for social contribution and personal fulfillment.

The accounts also revealed a desire to expand engagement in leisure activities, travel, time spent with family, and new experiences. This shift suggests a pursuit of greater autonomy in how one's time is organized, as well as the construction of a new identity following the departure from formal employment.

Beyond dimensions related to the meaning of life, the study identified the presence of future goals – though not always fully structured – which may foster a more proactive stance toward the transition into retirement. Participants who had already reflected on their plans and expectations for this new phase demonstrated a clearer sense of direction regarding potential courses of action and the utilization of available personal resources, such as physical and mental health, financial standing, social connections, and adaptability.

In the context of the career-to-retirement transition, one's purpose in life emerged as a multidimensional phenomenon. It encompasses the integration of one's past trajectory, the definition of future objectives, and a perception of one's own existence as something that remains meaningful through contributions made to oneself, to others, and to society at large.

DISCUSSION

A sense of purpose in life played a significant role in how workers transitioning toward retirement interpreted their life paths and envisioned their future. It was observed that these individuals had already reflected on future goals; although these goals were not yet fully structured into a formal plan, the individuals demonstrated a greater sense of direction and motivation to pursue their realization. This finding aligns with studies indicating that individuals with higher levels of purpose tend to set goals, develop competencies, and direct their personal resources toward objectives they deem meaningful[10,22].

The integration of past experiences, present life circumstances, and future expectations emerged as a central element; this aligns with the "*Coherence*" component of the tripartite model of meaning in life, which posits that attributing coherence to one's own life trajectory facilitates the interpretation of lived experiences and helps reduce feelings of uncertainty regarding the future[6,7]. In the context of the career-to-retirement transition, this capacity for biographical reorganization becomes particularly relevant, as leaving formal employment may represent not only an occupational shift but also a need to reconstruct one's identity, social roles, and sources of meaning.

The findings also support the perspective on resources for retirement adaptation, which posits that the availability of personal, social, financial, and health-related resources influences one's ability to cope with this transition.[5,16]. This research identified favorable conditions related to perceived health, financial stability, and social support – elements that may have contributed to a more positive outlook on the future. However, it is important to note that a high socioeconomic and educational profile was a significant characteristic of the participants. The majority held postgraduate degrees and had an income above the Brazilian average, which may imply greater access to resources for planning, making choices, and reframing the experience of retirement.

In this light, workers in contexts of greater economic vulnerability, or those with less access to educational, financial, and social resources, may experience the transition to retirement differently, as their capacity to make choices and develop new life projects may be constrained by more immediate material needs.

The meaning attributed to the future was not necessarily linked to remaining in formal employment, but rather to the possibility of accompanying, supporting, and contributing to the life paths of others. Retirement is not viewed as an end to one's productive capacity, but as an opportunity to redirect how one contributes and finds personal fulfillment

Even though the Tripartite Model of Meaning in Life encompasses the dimensions of *Coherence*, *Purpose*, and *Mattering*[6,7], only the dimensions of *Coherence* and *Purpose* emerged as lexical classes in the analysis conducted using IRAMUTEQ. This result may be due to the fact that the *Mattering* dimension – which involves more subjective aspects related to the meaning attributed to one's own existence and one's contribution to something beyond the self – appears transversally throughout the accounts, intertwined with the other dimensions, rather than as an independent lexical cluster. The identification of this dimension through interpretive analysis suggests that certain existential meanings may not be fully captured by statistical procedures for textual organization, reinforcing the importance of combining lexical analysis with qualitative interpretation.

Given that these workers are part of a structured organization – possessing established professional trajectories and access to specific institutional resources – the findings may also reflect the influence of the work environment on the development of a sense of purpose. The organization serves not merely as a productive space, but also as a context for personal development, social interaction, recognition, and the construction of identity. Consequently, institutional retirement-preparation programs could broaden their scope by incorporating opportunities for reflection on purpose, identity, future projects, and new social roles beyond financial and administrative matters[22].

The life-span developmental perspective proposed by Baltes[13] contributes to an understanding of these findings by highlighting that human development remains in a state of constant transformation, involving processes of adaptation in the face of changes and transitions. Furthermore, beyond serving merely as a theoretical explanation of development, this perspective suggests that retirement can represent a phase for the reorganization of possibilities, during which individuals draw upon accumulated experiences, available resources, and new goals to construct a meaningful life trajectory.

The National Policy for the Elderly (*Política Nacional da Pessoa Idosa*)[23] and the Statute of the Elderly (*Estatuto da Pessoa Idosa*)[24] highlight the importance of initiatives aimed at promoting autonomy, social participation, and quality of life. In this context, retirement preparation programs can play a strategic role by incorporating multidisciplinary interventions

that address psychological, social, financial, and health-related dimensions, thereby fostering active and healthy aging.

For the group studied, a sense of purpose in life emerged as a significant element in retirement planning, not merely as an individual trait, but as a process that can be encouraged through institutional spaces designed for reflection, personal development, and the creation of new life projects[14].

Integrating this topic into organizational programs can help workers prepare more comprehensively for this transition, taking into account not only their departure from the labor market but also the continuation of a meaningful life journey.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the life purpose of workers transitioning from their careers into retirement. It identified reflection on the past, a focus on the present, and planning for the future as central elements in constructing a life purpose during this transitional period. The theoretical model comprised two main dimensions – *Coherence* and *Purpose* – while a third dimension, *Mattering*, although present in the participants' accounts, was not substantiated by the lexical analysis performed.

The findings also showed that workers who had already begun reflecting on their future goals demonstrated greater motivation to develop new life projects, even if those projects were not yet fully defined. Furthermore, personal resources – such as physical and mental health, financial stability, personal goals, and social relationships – proved significant in fostering a more positive adaptation to retirement.

These results underscore the importance of incorporating reflection on life purpose into retirement preparation programs, thereby facilitating the creation of life projects aligned with active and healthy aging. The study broadens the understanding of the psychosocial factors involved in the career-to-retirement transition and contributes to the improvement of institutional programs designed for planning this stage of life.

In terms of public policy, these findings provide evidence that can support initiatives aimed at implementing and strengthening retirement preparation programs, in line with national guidelines for promoting healthy aging. Within the organizational context, the findings highlight the need for organizations to address retirement well in advance, by providing opportunities for individuals to reflect on their life projects, sense of purpose, and the personal resources required for this transition.

The results also offer practical implications for multidisciplinary teams working with individuals in the process of retiring – including psychologists, social workers, human resources professionals, physicians, nurses, and occupational therapists. Incorporating a sense of purpose in life into support practices can foster more integrated interventions – ones centered on workers' needs and the promotion of well-being throughout the aging process.

Among the study's limitations is the fact that the research was conducted within a single organization, which restricts the transferability of the findings to other organizational contexts. Furthermore, requirements regarding access to participants limited the ability to recruit workers directly, necessitating the use of institutional outreach strategies.

For future research, it is recommended that studies be conducted across different organizations and professional sectors – encompassing workers with diverse socioeconomic profiles – and that longitudinal studies be undertaken to better understand how one’s sense of purpose in life evolves during the transition into retirement, as well as its relationship with indicators of health, well-being, and adaptation to aging.

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