

# Systematic Literature Review: Exploring the Relationship between Life Meaning and Emotion Regulation

Maesaroh<sup>1</sup>, Herdiyan Maulana<sup>2</sup>, Anna Armeini Rangkuti<sup>3</sup>, Zarina Akbar<sup>4</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Master of Psychological Science, Faculty of Psychology Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta  
Rawamangun Muka Street, East Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia 13220  
[Maesah2508@gmail.com](mailto:Maesah2508@gmail.com); [Herdiyan\\_maulana@unj.ac.id](mailto:Herdiyan_maulana@unj.ac.id); [Anna\\_armeini@unj.ac.id](mailto:Anna_armeini@unj.ac.id); [zarina\\_akbar@unj.ac.id](mailto:zarina_akbar@unj.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This study aims to explore and synthesize empirical findings related to the relationship between *the sense of meaning in life* and the regulation of emotions through *the Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* approach. The background of this research is based on the importance of the meaning in life as one of the psychological resources that can strengthen the ability of individuals to manage emotions adaptively. Previous research has shown that individuals with high life meanings tend to use constructive emotion regulation strategies, such as *cognitive reassessment*, and less often use maladaptive strategies such as *emotion suppression*. The study examined nine scientific articles published between 2021 until 2025 using databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The results of the analysis show that the relationship between the two constructs is found in a variety of population contexts, such as college students, nurses, women with cancer, and individuals with postpartum depression, as well as across different cultural backgrounds. This study uses instruments such as *Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)*, *Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)*, and *DERS*. The majority of research is quantitative with a correlational approach. In general, the results of this study show that *the sense of meaning of life* contributes to the strengthening of emotion regulation ability, but further research is still needed with longitudinal, experimental, and cross-cultural approaches to deepen the understanding of the relationship between causal and contextual variables.

**Keywords:** Emotional Regulation, *Sense of Meaning in Life*, Positive Psychology, *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)*.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Sense of meaning in life* is one of the important aspects in existential and positive psychology that is often associated with a person's quality of life and psychological resilience (Steger, 2012). According to Steger (2012), the *sense of meaning in life* refers to the extent to which a person understands, finds, and feels that his life has a clear purpose, value, and direction. This concept is at the heart of existential psychology, which emphasizes the importance of the search for meaning as the main motivation of man, as initiated by Viktor Frank. Steger distinguishes the meaning of life into two main components, namely *the presence of meaning* and *the search for meaning* (Steger, 2022). Individuals with *the presence of meaning* have the perception that their lives have meaning, while the *search for meaning* reflects an active effort to find or deepen an understanding of the meaning of life. In positive psychology, the meaning of life is closely related to quality of life, life satisfaction, happiness, and psychological well-being. Theories show that individuals who have *a strong sense of meaning in life* tend to be better able to deal with pressure, show higher levels of resilience, and have a more stable and deep motivation for life (Steger, 2022).

Frank (1963) in his theory of logotherapy asserts that the search for the meaning of life is the main motivation of humans which is even more fundamental than the need for pleasure or power. In contemporary studies, Steger, et al., (2006) developed a *Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)* measuring tool that helps identify two main dimensions of *the meaning of life*, namely the search for *the meaning of life* and the existence of *the meaning of life*. Studies have shown that *a sense of meaning in life* is related to various aspects of psychological well-being, including life satisfaction, optimism, and hope (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992; Moomal, 1999; Damasio, et al., 2013). On the other hand, there is another construct studied in this study related to *the sense of meaning of life*, namely the regulation of emotions. In several previous studies, emotion regulation has played an important role in strengthening or even mediating the relationship

between the meaning of life and psychological well-being (Chen, et al., 2022). Individuals who are able to manage their emotions adaptively, such as through reappraisal, are better able to maintain psychological stability when facing difficult situations, so that the experience of life meaning can be more durable and useful (Kozubal, et al., 2023). In other words, emotional regulation helps a person to stay connected to their values and goals in life, even in the midst of disturbing stress or uncertainty (Saravani & Hajebi, 2021).

Emotion regulation is a person's ability to manage emotions that arise as a result of internal and external experiences (Gross, 2008). Gross (2014) states that individuals who are able to *reassess* or reinterpret a situation positively, tend to have lower levels of stress. The theory of emotion regulation developed by James J. Gross emphasizes that emotion regulation is the process by which individuals are involved in influencing the emotions they have, when they arise, and how they are experienced and expressed. Gross (2008) developed a model of the emotion regulation process consisting of five main strategies, namely situation selection, situation modification, attention distraction, cognitive change (*reappraisal*), and response modulation. These strategies are classified into two broad categories: *antecedent-focused emotion regulation* (which is done before the emotional response is fully presented) and *response-focused* (which is done after the emotion appears). This approach suggests that the way individuals choose and use strategies will affect the effectiveness of emotion regulation (Petrova & Gross, 2023).

One of the most adaptive emotion regulation strategies according to Gross (2014) is cognitive reappraisal or reappraisal, which is reinterpreting an event in a more positive or neutral way so as not to trigger intense negative emotions. Individuals who are accustomed to using these strategies tend to show better psychological well-being, such as lower symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. On the other hand, strategies such as suppression or suppression of emotional expression are actually associated with increased physiological load and unsatisfactory social relationships. This theory emphasizes the importance of individual awareness in choosing emotional regulation strategies that are appropriate to their emotional context and goals in order to function adaptively in daily life (Petrova & Gross, 2023). Recent studies have shown a potential relationship between a *sense of meaning in life* and emotional regulation, where individuals who have a strong sense of meaning in life are better able to deal with emotional distress constructively. However, these studies are still separate and have not been systematically organized. One of the main shortcomings is the lack of research that uses longitudinal design to observe the long-term dynamics between the two constructs. Most of the existing studies are cross-sectional, so they are unable to explain the direction of causality conclusively, whether the sense of meaning of life affects the ability to regulate emotions, or vice versa. In addition, existing research tends to be conducted on specific populations such as clinical patients or certain age groups, so generalizations of results are limited. The lack of comprehensive theoretical integration also weakens the understanding of the psychological mechanisms that link these two variables. Therefore, studies are needed that not only test these relationships longitudinally, but also consider relevant mediation or moderation variables in the context of individual development, in order to build a more robust and applicable theoretical model.

This manuscript was prepared to present the results of a systematic literature review that discusses the relationship between *the sense of meaning of life* and the regulation of emotions with *the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach*. This research aims to collect, sort, and synthesize relevant research findings from various studies that have been published in reputable scientific journals. The literature review in this manuscript will focus on three main things, namely how the relationship between the meaning of life and the regulation of emotions is explained in previous studies; the approach or theory used in explaining the relationship (e.g., Frankl's logotherapy or Gross's theory of emotion regulation); and examine the relationship between the two psychological constructs in various samples or populations used in previous studies, such as age variation, cultural background, and certain psychological conditions. In addition to examining the content of the findings conceptually, this paper also observes the methodology used by previous researchers, including the type of research (quantitative/qualitative), analytical techniques, and measurement tools used. Indirectly, the results of this study also reflect the general condition of contemporary psychology research related to *the meaning of life* and the regulation of emotions, including the tendency of the theme, the context of the research, and the emptiness of the literature that is still open to further exploration. Although this article is based on a literature study, the results of conceptual observations obtained through a review of scientific sources will be elaborated analytically to show how the relationship between these two variables is understood theoretically and empirically. This manuscript is expected to be an important reference in enriching scientific understanding of the role of the meaning of life in the process of managing emotions.

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

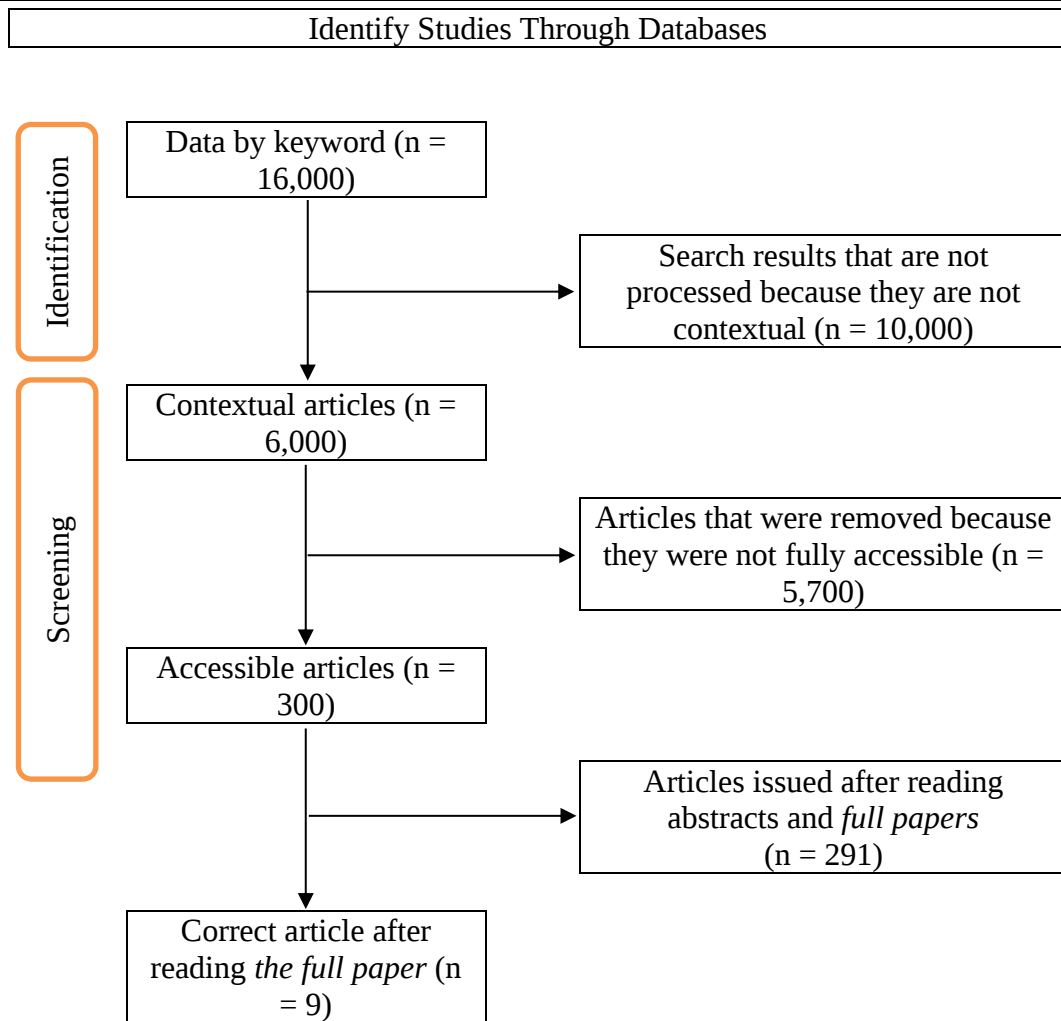
This research was carried out through a literature study by applying the *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)*. SLR is a structured approach that aims to identify, evaluate, synthesize, and compile various research findings relevant to a

specific topic or question. This method provides an opportunity for researchers to filter and summarize scientific evidence in a systematic and transparent manner. Therefore, SLR is an effective method to build a deep understanding of an issue and provide a solid foundation for scientific evidence-based decision-making. The procedure in this study includes three main stages.

In the first stage, the literature search process is carried out systematically through a number of academic databases such as Scopus, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar, with a publication deadline between 2021-2025 to ensure the availability of the latest information. A tool for selecting articles from several of these sources is Publish or Perish. The keywords used include "relationships", "influences", "roles", "*influence*", "*determinants*", "*predictors*", "meaning of life", "*sense of meaning in life*", "emotion regulation", and "*emotion regulation*." The search filters cover the range of the 2014–2024 publication year, are available in *full text*, and use English or Indonesian.

In the second stage, article selection is carried out through three stages, namely screening based on titles and abstracts, reviewing the full text, and extracting data from articles that meet the criteria. The inclusion criteria for articles used include: (1) scientific articles that are empirical, both quantitative and qualitative, (2) *emotion regulation* or emotion regulation being the main variable or one of the variables measured, (3) studies using validated emotion regulation instruments or measuring tools (4) articles published in national or international journals in the period 2021 to 2025, (5) the article is available in full text and is written in English or Indonesian. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria consist of: (1) articles that are non-empirical such as editorials, comments, or opinions, (2) articles that do not explicitly discuss the regulation of emotions and *sense of meaning in life*, (3) articles that cannot be accessed in *full text* and (4) studies with very specific clinical populations such as patients with psychotic disorders that cannot be generalized to the general population.

The third stage is the process of data extraction and analysis. The information gathered from each article includes the author's name, year of publication, title, research method, instrument used, and key findings. The analysis was carried out in a descriptive thematic manner by focusing on the relationship between emotion regulation and *the sense of meaning in life*. This process aims to identify patterns of relationship between emotion regulation and *sense of meaning in life*. The PRISMA diagram is used to systematically describe the stages of article selection and will be displayed in the research results section. Based on articles published in 2021-2025, out of approximately 16,000 articles selected through existing inclusion criteria, as many as 9 articles were found that were worthy of further analysis in this study.



### 3 RESULTS

This section presents the results of a literature review based on the articles that have been collected and selected with an approach *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) to provide a more systematic understanding of the relationship between *A Sense of Meaning in Life* and emotion regulation. To strengthen the representation of quantitative data, forest plots were used as a visualization tool to illustrate the strength and direction of the relationships between variables reported by each study. This forest plot displays effect measures such as correlation coefficients and confidence intervals, making it easier for readers to see the consistency of results, assess statistical significance, and understand the general patterns of relationships found. This approach not only increases the transparency of the analysis, but also supports a more accurate interpretation of the empirical evidence that has been gathered.

The presentation of results was carried out by organizing findings from various studies that met the inclusion criteria, both in terms of methods, population context, and thematic focus. The following table summarizes in detail the details of each study, including the name of the researcher, year, method used, measurement instrument, and discussion related to the findings of the relationship between the two variables.

**Table 1. Literature Review Results**

| No. | Name, Year             | Heading                                                             | Method       | Instruments                                                                                                                    | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Zhengzheng Lin (2022). | Emotion Regulation Strategies and Sense of Life Meaning: The Chain- | Quantitative | 1. <i>The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire</i> (ERQ) initiated by Gross and John (2003) adapted by Wang, et al., (2017) dengan | The results showed that <i>cognitive reappraisal</i> and <i>expression suppression</i> strategies had a significant correlation positively and negatively with the <i>meaning of life (sense of life meaning)</i> . |

| No. | Name, Year                                                                   | Heading                                                                                                                       | Method       | Instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                                                                              | Mediating Role of Gratitude and Subjective Wellbeing                                                                          |              | cronbach's alpha 0.753<br>2. <i>The Meaning in Life Questionnaire</i> was initiated by Steger et al. (2006) and has been adapted by Liu and Gan (2010) dengan cronbach's alpha 0.842.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2.  | Sisi Chen, Wen Zhou, Ting Luo, dan Lingzhi Huang (2022).                     | Relationships Between Mental Health, Emotion Regulation, and Meaning in Life of Frontline Nurses During the COVID-19 Outbreak | Quantitative | 1. <i>Meaning in Life Questionnaire</i> initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) and adapted in the context of Chinese dengan cronbach's alpha 0.71.<br>2. <i>The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire</i> (ERQ) initiated by Gross and John (2003) which was translated into Prof. The <i>retest reliability</i> for <i>cognitive reappraisal</i> was 0.82 and for <i>expressive suppression</i> was 0.79, while the <i>internal consistency reliability</i> was 0.85 and 0.77, respectively. | A total of 105 nurses, 14 men and 91 women, with an average age (30,295 ± 4,653) years. The average life meaning and mental health scores in frontline nurses were 49,971 ± 6,386 and 2,755 ± 2,580. The meaning of life in frontline nurses was positively correlated with <i>cognitive reappraisal</i> and negatively correlated with <i>expressive suppression</i> and mental health. Mental health was negatively correlated with <i>cognitive reappraisal</i> and positively correlated with <i>expressive suppression</i> . Emotion regulation in frontline nurses has a moderating effect between meaning of life and mental health. |
| 3.  | Cunha, N. H. D. A., Bonfim, C. B., Santos-Lima, C., & Siquara, G. M. (2022). | Emotion Regulation, Subjective Happiness and Meaning of Life of University Students in the Pandemic                           | Quantitative | 1. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) initiated by Gross & John (2003) with Cronbach's alpha coefficient between 0.79 (for the <i>cognitive reappraisal</i> subscale) and 0.73 (for the emotional suppression subscale).<br>2. <i>Meaning of Life Questionnaire</i> (MLQ) developed by Damasio, et al., (2013) in the context of a subject in Brazil.                                                                                                                         | The results showed that there was a positive relationship between <i>cognitive reassessment strategies</i> and the meaning of life, while emotional <i>suppression strategies</i> had a negative effect. <i>Cognitive change</i> is an emotion regulation strategy that has proven effective, both in reassessing situations and in the ability to manage the demands that arise due to the pandemic.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 4.  | Mohammad Javad Asghari Ebrahim Abad, Hamid Reza Karbalaee,                   | Modeling Structural Equations for Predicting Death                                                                            | Quantitative | 1. <i>Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale</i> (DERS) initiated by Gratz and Roemer (2004) with                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | A significant positive correlation was found between anxiety about death and anxiety about COVID-19 ( $r = 0.31$ ), as well as                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

| No. | Name, Year                                                                                   | Heading                                                                                                                                                     | Method                      | Instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | Mohammad Reza Mazloomzadeh, Faezeh Salayani, Sepehr Maghsoudi (2022).                        | Anxiety Associated with COVID-19 Based on Mediating Roles of Emotion Regulation and Meaning in Life                                                         |                             | Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.<br>2. Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) with Cronbach's alpha presence of meaning of 0.86 and search of meaning of 0.87.                                                                                    | difficulties in emotion regulation ( $r = 0.47$ ). On the other hand, there was a significant negative correlation between anxiety about death and life meaning ( $r = -0.43$ ). Anxiety about COVID-19 can indirectly predict anxiety about death through difficulties in the regulation of emotions and the existence of meaning in life.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 5.  | Zahra Ghanbari Zarandi (2024).                                                               | Effectiveness of Group Meaning Therapy Intervention on Quality of Life, Emotion Regulation and Life Expectancy of Women with Breast Cancer                  | Quantitative (Experimental) | 1. <i>Quality of life instrument</i> developed by researchers dengan cronbach's alpha 0.92<br>2. <i>Meaning of life instrument</i> developed by researchers dengan cronbach's alpha 0.86<br>Both instruments were given both before and after the experiment was conducted. | The results showed that before the intervention, there was no significant difference between the average score of quality of life, emotion regulation, and life expectancy between the intervention group and the control group. However, after the intervention, there was a statistically significant difference between the average scores of the two groups. The mean and standard deviation for quality of life at post-test was $29.75 \pm 6.91$ , for emotion regulation it was $98.28 \pm 10.25$ , and for life expectancy was $39.51 \pm 6.49$ ( $P < 0.001$ ). This means that the intervention was shown to significantly improve all three variables compared to the group that did not receive the intervention. |
| 6.  | Youjuan Hong, Xuan Zhang, Weiwei Wu, Jingjing Chen, Yan Lin, Junyu Zhao, Huimin Xiao (2022). | Relationships among nursing students' self-concept clarity, meaning in life, emotion regulation ability and depression: Testing a moderated mediation model | Quantitative                | 1. <i>The Sense of Life Questionnaire</i> initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) with Cronbach's alpha in this study of 0.90<br>2. <i>Emotional Regulation Scale</i> developed by Law, et al., (2004) with Cronbach's alpha of 0.73.                                           | This study found that <i>self-concept clarity</i> had a significant negative relationship with depression in nursing students, meaning that the clearer a person's understanding of themselves, the lower their depression rate. In addition, meaning <i>in life</i> acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between clarity of self-concept and depression. The ability to regulate emotions was also found to moderate the direct influence of self-concept on depression. These findings suggest that improving clarity of self-concept, strengthening the meaning of                                                                                                                                               |

| No. | Name, Year                                        | Heading                                                                                                                                                                    | Method       | Instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                            |              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | life, and training in emotion regulation skills can be effective interventions to reduce depression in nursing students.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 7.  | Rana Shakib Haji Agha dan Mohsen Kachooei (2021). | Comparing Meaning in Life, Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Body Image Concern among Women with and without Postpartum Depression                                          | Quantitative | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The meaning in Life Questionnaire</i> initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) with Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.89.</li> <li>2. <i>The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire</i> developed by Dr. Nadia Garnefski and Dr. Vivian Kraaij with cronbach's alpha in this study &gt;0.86.</li> </ol>                    | There was a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between women with and without postpartum depression in terms of <i>the presence of meaning in life</i> , the use of non-adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies (except <i>self-blame</i> ), adaptive strategies (except <i>acceptance</i> ), and concerns about body image. Women who are depressed tend to use non-adaptive strategies more, have higher body image concerns, and lower in the existence of life meaning and the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies.<br>Ask ChatGPT |
| 8.  | L. Kelada & O. Zamir (2024).                      | What Promotes Positive Parenting During Breast Cancer? A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Social Support, Emotion Regulation, and Meaning in Life                               | Quantitative | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The Meaning in Life Questionnaire</i> initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) with Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.84.</li> <li>2. <i>Emotion Regulation Questionnaire</i> initiated by Gross, et al., (2003) dengan cronbach's alpha 0,71.</li> </ol>                                                                      | The study found that the meaning of life had a significant influence, with values of $\beta = 0.30$ and $p = 0.012$ , on positive parenting behavior. This indicates that although the regulation of emotions in general is important in shaping the meaning of life, in this study the statistically strong role of positive parenting is the meaning of life itself, not the regulation of emotions directly.                                                                                                                                              |
| 9.  | Mitra Zeinolabedini dan Leila Zoghi (2025).       | Investigating the mediation of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and meaning of life with Tolerance of failure in married women in northern Tehran | Quantitative | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Meaning in Life Questionnaire</i> initiated by Steger, et al., (2006) with Cronbach's alpha pad with a dimension of searching for meaning of 0.84 and a dimension of having meaning of 0.78.</li> <li>2. <i>Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale</i> with a high reliability coefficient ranges from 0.85-0.93.</li> </ol> | This study showed that the meaning of life had a significant negative relationship with difficulties in emotion regulation ( $\beta = -0.262$ , $p = 0.006$ ), meaning that the higher the meaning of life that individuals have, the lower their difficulty in managing emotions. In addition, the meaning of life also has an indirect effect on tolerance to failure through the mediation of emotional regulation difficulties ( $\beta = -0.067$ , $p = 0.014$ ). This                                                                                  |

| No. | Name, Year | Heading | Method | Instruments | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----|------------|---------|--------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |            |         |        |             | suggests that individuals with a strong sense of life tend to have better regulation of emotions, which in turn improves their ability to cope with failure. These findings confirm the important role of emotion regulation as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship between the meaning of life and resilience to failure. |

## 4 DISCUSSIONS

The majority of the research analyzed in this study showed a positive relationship between *a sense of meaning in life* and adaptive emotion regulation strategies, especially *cognitive reassessment*. No studies were found that reported a weak relationship between these two variables. Studies by Lin (2022), Chen et al. (2022), and Cunha et al. (2022) consistently found that individuals with high life meanings tended to use reappraisals more often and avoid *expressive emphasis*, which in many contexts is negatively associated with psychological well-being. In the findings of Chen et al. (2022) who examined frontline nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic, emotion regulation was a moderator variable that influenced the strength of the relationship between life meaning and mental health. These studies confirm that the meaning of life is not only a psychological goal, but also an internal resource that influences the way an individual manages negative emotions. Meanwhile, Lin (2022) adds that *subjective gratitude* and *well-being* also mediate the relationship between emotion regulation and the meaning of life, suggesting the existence of complex and interconnected psychological trajectories. From this it appears that the role of the meaning of life in the process of regulating emotions is multidimensional and can be influenced by other psychological variables, reflecting the complexity of human emotional dynamics and cognition.

Several studies in this SLR examined the relationship between the meaning of life and the regulation of emotions in populations with high psychological stress, such as cancer patients (Zarandi, 2024; Kelada & Zamir, 2024), individuals facing death (Abad et al., 2022), to women with postpartum depression (Agha & Kachooei, 2021). Zarandi's study (2024) shows that life-meaning-based group therapy interventions are able to significantly improve quality of life, life expectancy, and emotional regulation in cancer patients. This reinforces the idea that meaning-based interventions can facilitate emotional processing in individuals experiencing life-threatening conditions. Similarly, Kelada & Zamir (2024) found that the meaning of life, along with social support from friends, correlated with positive parenting patterns in mothers undergoing breast cancer treatment. In the context of death, Abad et al. (2022) modeled the relationship between anxiety about death and emotion regulation and the meaning of life, and found that the meaning of life is protective against the adverse effects of emotion regulation difficulties. Agha & Kachooei (2021) also found that women with postpartum depression tend to have a lower meaning in life and use more maladaptive emotion regulation strategies. These studies reinforce the central role of the meaning of life as emotional support in the face of extreme stress.

Studies related to the relationship between these two constructs also involve cross-cultural populations such as China (Lin, 2022; Chen et al., 2022), Iran (Abad et al., 2022; Zarandi, 2024; Agha & Kachooei, 2021; Zeinolabedini & Zoghi, 2025), Brazil (Cunha et al., 2022), and Israel (Kelada & Zamir, 2024), which suggests that the relationship between life meaning and emotion regulation is relatively consistent even within different cultural frameworks. For example, although Eastern cultural contexts tend to emphasize self-control and social harmony, as in the Lin (2022) study, the use of *cognitive reassessment* strategies remains an important predictor for improved meaning in life. Meanwhile, a study by Cunha et al. (2022) on Brazilian college students during the pandemic also showed that *reassessment* strategies increased happiness and meaning in life, while *emphasis* had the opposite effect. In addition to culture, age variations are also reflected, as in the research of Hong et al. (2022) on nursing students and Zeinolabedini & Zoghi (2025) on women who marry in adulthood. In the study of Hong et al. (2022), the meaning of life mediated the influence of clarity of self-concept on depression, while the regulation of emotions moderated the relationship. This suggests that the role of life meaning and emotion regulation also depends on the stage of a person's psychosocial development.

In the theoretical aspect, most of the studies in SLR refer to the theory of emotion regulation from Gross (2003) and the *framework of meaning in life* from Steger et al. (2006). Cognitive strategies such as *reassessment* are generally

considered adaptive and help form meaningful perceptions of life experiences. The studies of Lin (2022), Chen et al. (2022), and Kelada & Zamir (2024) used the *Emotion Regulation Questionnaire* (ERQ), while Abad et al. (2022) and Zeinolabedini & Zoghi (2025) used the DERS instrument to evaluate difficulties in emotion regulation. *The sense of meaning in life* was evaluated using the *Meaning in Life Questionnaire* (MLQ) from Steger, except in the study of Zarandi (2024) who developed the instrument independently. In terms of methodology, all studies are quantitative with most of them being correlational designs, except for the Zarandi (2024) study which uses experimental design. In general, findings that use longitudinal or interventional designs such as the research of Zarandi (2024) are better able to show causal relationships between variables. However, most of the studies studied have not explored the mechanisms of mediation or moderation in depth in a long-term context, thus opening up space for further exploration through a mixed-methods approach or longitudinal design.

The results of this study show that there is a strong trend in contemporary literature that links the meaning of life to the regulation of emotions, especially as a protective factor in the context of high stress or psychological disorders. However, most studies are still *cross-sectional* and limited to the student population and clinical patients, so generalization of the findings to the general population or other age groups such as children and the elderly is still limited. In addition, the dominant quantitative approach tends to ignore the subjective or narrative dimension of the meaning of life that can be revealed through qualitative studies. Some studies also do not adequately explain the psychological mechanisms linking the two constructs, and few explicitly examine contextual influences such as spirituality, religiosity, or collectivistic culture. This gap provides an opportunity for advanced research to explore the relationship between life meaning and emotion regulation through longitudinal design, multicultural approaches, or even meaning-based interventions. The integration of theories such as logotherapy, processual emotion regulation, and *mindfulness* can also enrich understanding of how individuals shape and maintain emotional balance through meaningful experiences.

Based on the results of the literature review, most of the studies analyzed showed a positive and significant relationship between the regulation of emotions and the meaning of life. However, no reports have been found that explicitly state a weak or negative relationship between these two variables. This raises the possibility of publication bias, where studies with significant results are more likely to be published than studies with non-significant or conflicting results. Therefore, it is important for future research to recognize and balance the risk of this bias, including by including studies that do not show significant results. In addition, the use of *pre-registration* and open publication approaches can encourage transparency and strengthen scientific integrity in this field. Furthermore, most of the studies analyzed came from specific cultural contexts, so there is still limited understanding of how the role of culture affects the relationship between emotion regulation and the meaning of life. In the future, it is necessary to conduct cross-cultural research to explicitly compare these psychological dynamics in various social and cultural settings. In addition, it is recommended to develop an integrative model that contains the regulation of emotions, the meaning of life, as well as other relevant psychological variables, such as resilience and psychological well-being. This model can be a theoretical framework for understanding psychological mechanisms more comprehensively and preventing one-sided interpretations. That way, critical analysis can be deepened and interpretive biases in drawing conclusions can be minimized.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of a systematic review of several previous studies, it was found that *the sense of meaning in life* was consistently positively correlated with adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as *cognitive reappraisal*, as well as negatively correlated with maladaptive strategies such as *suppression*. *A sense of meaning in life* has also been shown to act as a psychological protector in a variety of contexts, including high stress, chronic illness, and depressive conditions. The studies showed consistency across cultures and ages, although most were still correlated. Therefore, further research with longitudinal design and interventions that explore in depth the mechanisms of the relationship between these two constructs is needed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author declares that this research received no financial support and was conducted independently. The author extends appreciation to everyone who contributed indirectly through academic discussions and feedback.

## REFERENCES

- Agha, R. S. H., & Kachooei, M. (2021). Comparing Meaning in Life, Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Body Image Concern among Women with and without Postpartum Depression. *Advances in Nursing & Midwifery*, 30(4), 7-14.
- Asghari Ebrahim Abad, M. J., Karbalaee, H. R., Mazloomzadeh, M., Salayani, F., & Maghsoudi, S. (2022). Modeling Structural Equations for Predicting Death Anxiety Associated with COVID-19 Based on Mediating Roles of Emotion Regulation and Meaning in Life. *Journal of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences*, 32(213), 92-102.
- Chen, S., Zhou, W., Luo, T., & Huang, L. (2022). Relationships between mental health, emotion regulation, and meaning in life of frontline nurses during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, 798406.
- Chigbu, U. E., Atiku, S. O., & Du Plessis, C. C. (2023). The science of literature reviews: Searching, identifying, selecting, and synthesising. *Publications*, 11(1), 2.
- Cunha, N. H. D. A., Bonfim, C. B., Santos-Lima, C., & Siquara, G. M. (2022). Emotion regulation, subjective happiness and meaning of life of university students in the pandemic. *Paidéia (Ribeirão Preto)*, 32, e3219.
- Damásio, B. F., Melo, R. L. P. D., & Silva, J. P. D. (2013). Meaning in life, psychological well-being and quality of life in teachers. *Paidéia (Ribeirão Preto)*, 23, 73-82.
- Frankl, V. E. (1967). Logotherapy and existentialism. *Psychotherapy: Theory, research & practice*, 4(3), 138.
- Ghanbari Zarandi, Z. (2024). Effectiveness of Group Meaning Therapy Intervention on Quality of Life, Emotion Regulation and Life Expectancy of Women with Breast Cancer. *Journal of Arak University of Medical Sciences*, 27(3), 146-153.
- Gross, J. J. (2008). Emotion regulation. *Handbook of emotions*, 3(3), 497-513.
- Hong, Y., Zhang, X., Wu, W., Chen, J., Lin, Y., Zhao, J., & Xiao, H. (2022). Relationships among nursing students' self-concept clarity, meaning in life, emotion regulation ability and depression: Testing a moderated mediation model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1003587.
- Kelada, L., & Zamir, O. (2024). What Promotes Positive Parenting During Breast Cancer? A Cross-Sectional Analysis of Social Support, Emotion Regulation, and Meaning in Life. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 31(4), 595-604.
- Kozubal, M., Szuster, A., & Wielgopolan, A. (2023). Emotional regulation strategies in daily life: the intensity of emotions and regulation choice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1218694.
- Lin, Z. (2022). Emotion regulation strategies and sense of life meaning: The chain-mediating role of gratitude and subjective wellbeing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 810591.
- Moomal, Z. (1999). The relationship between meaning in life and mental well-being. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 29(1), 36-41.
- Petrova, K., & Gross, J. J. (2023). Emotion regulation in self and others. *Emotion regulation and parenting*, 35-54.
- Petrova, K., & Gross, J. J. (2023). The future of emotion regulation research: Broadening our field of view. *Affective Science*, 4(4), 609-616.
- Richards, J. M., Butler, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2003). Emotion regulation in romantic relationships: The cognitive consequences of concealing feelings. *Journal of social and personal relationships*, 20(5), 599-620.
- Saravani, S., & Hajebi, M. Z. (2021). Prediction of insufficient self-discipline schema based on achievement motivation, the meaning in Life, and difficulties in emotion regulation in students Samira Gaeeni.
- Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The meaning in life questionnaire: assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 53(1), 80.
- Steger, M. F. (2012). Making meaning in life. *Psychological inquiry*, 23(4), 381-385.
- Steger, M. F. (2022, December). Making meaning in life: a thematic review of successful experimental psychological and psychotherapeutic interventions. In *Meaning in Life International Conference 2022-Cultivating, Promoting, and Enhancing Meaning in Life Across Cultures and Life Span (MIL 2022)* (pp. 5-20). Atlantis Press.
- Steger, M. F. (2022). Meaning in life is a fundamental protective factor in the context of psychopathology. *World Psychiatry*, 21(3), 389.
- Zeinolabedini, M., & Zoghi, L. (2025). Investigating the mediation of emotion regulation in the relationship between loneliness and meaning of life with Tolerance of failure in married women in northern Tehran. *International Journal of New Findings in Health and Educational Sciences (IJHES)*, 3(2), 154-162.
- Zika, S., & Chamberlain, K. (1992). On the relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being. *British journal of psychology*, 83(1), 133-145.