1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Meaning in life has been one of the mysteries that have captured human imagination since ancient times. Meaning in life is important to people for sometime now, as is evident from a couple of best seller lists. *The Purpose Driven Life*, that uncovers the secrets of living out our God-given purpose, has sold more than 30 million copies and is the most translated book. The book *Man’s Search for Meaning* has sold over 12 million copies and is the most influential book. It is the memoir of Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl’s life in Nazi death camps that argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward.

The quest of why we are here and what is our purpose in life is one of the most human efforts. Philosophers dating back to Plato and Aristotle have pondered about the reason for our existence and what makes life worth living. Different religion have presented their individual answers to this human quest; from serving to idolising a higher power (a common practice among Christians, Judaism and Islam) to living in harmony with nature and one self (as observed most Eastern thought). The concept of meaning in life is increasingly the focus of psychological research studies and has also been the focus of research in both sub-disciplines of existential and positive psychology. Nietzsche said ‘He who has a why to live can bear almost with any how’, thus laying the importance of having a sense of meaning in life. Steger and Kashdan (2007) deliberated that ‘life is meaningful to people when
they can satisfactorily answer the big questions about their lives, such as who am I, why am I here, what is truly important to me, what am I supposed to do with my life’. So the question of meaning in life involves deep self-probing questions such as Who am I?, Why am I here? How does this meaning in life develop? What gives shape to a sense of meaning in life for an individual? These have been some of the questions that engrossed me for sometime.

‘Probing on purpose of our existence, on meaning in life helps us to discover what we need to do to better ourselves in particular and the society we live in. and help us develop meaningful goals. As one grows spiritually, one tends to think about higher things and so does not get trapped and lost in materialistic matters. This make us experience the process of moving from bondage to liberation’ (Kumari, Times of India, 04 November 2011). From the paragraph, we understand that meaning in life in an Indian context is seen as a spiritual quest. In a land that is worshipped as ‘mother India,’ people, primarily look for meaning in the religious activities and they discover themselves through this process. It transcends beyond materialism to a metaphysical reality. India being traditional collectivistic society is undergoing a change (especially observed in urban centres) as in certain aspects is leaning towards a more individualistic society, with choices available in abundance to living a fulfilling life. These changes can be attributed to globalisation, access to information and increasing consumerism along with technology advancement and increasing mobility amongst different classes of society (Gergen, 2001).
In this paper, we define meaning as – ‘the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence’ (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006). The importance of having a sense of life meaning and purpose is summed up by Pinquart (2002) who stated, ‘purpose in life is a defining feature of mental health.’ In the literature, the terms meaning and purpose are often used interchangeably. Steger’s (2009) definition of life meaning posits that life meaning involves two key components – comprehension and purpose. Comprehension relates to making sense of one’s life, while purpose relates to having an overall life mission (Steger, 2009). Frankl (2006) proposed that finding meaning is a primary human drive. With this premise, he created logotherapy to assist people to find meaning in their lives. Hoffman, Vallejos, Cleare-Hoffman, and Rubin (2015) reported that while little empirical research exists for outcomes of existential therapy approaches, components of existential therapy (including relationships, emotions and meaning) are backed by empirical research.
In her lecture ‘Meaning in life and why it matters’ Wolf puts forward that the term ‘meaning’ captures the idea that it a philosophical idea that has a dimension of value that leads us on a good path (Wolf, 2007). To live a life of meaning according to her is that an individual comes to understand ‘how to live?’ Meaning in life has emerged in positive psychology as one of many variables. It was Martin P. Seligman who raised the question of what makes life worth living in 1999. Seligman (1999) put forward the idea for the focus of mental health to be not on problems or disorders or the disease model but on actions that ‘lead to well-being, to flourishing communities’. The focus in now on human inner strength and meaning considered to be a buffer against mental strain and suffering that an individual goes through in life. For example, Meaning forms one of the five pillars in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model of well-being - it sits alongside Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships and Accomplishment as key factors of influence. Findings from research conducted by Vella-Broderick, Park, and Seligman (2009) show that life meaning has a role to play in psychological health. Drawing on data from 332 Australian adults, these authors found that three factors predicted well-being – life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect. Meaning and engagement variables were also measured, and were shown to account for the biggest variance in the three predictor variables, and socio-economic status. Other research with adult populations shows meaning in life to be positively associated with intrinsic religiosity, extraversion and agreeableness, and negatively associated with anxiety and depression respectively (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).
1.2. Meaning and Purpose

The terms ‘meaning’ and ‘purpose’ are sometimes used interchangeably in literature (Clarke & Kissane, 2002; Patterson, King, Ball, Whittington, & Perkins, 2003; Sarvimaki & Stenbock-Hult, 2000). While one could argue the critical differences between the terms, the definitions of both terms generally encompass integrating one’s past, present, and future, finding meaning in suffering, and a sense of fulfilment (see Table 1). Many studies that use the term ‘meaning’ derive their definition from the work of Frankl (2006), one of the guiding theoretical perspectives in this research. For the purposes of this dissertation, literature examining both meaning and purpose will be incorporated resulting in the use of both terms in the literature review.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Study</th>
<th>Term used</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinquart (2002)</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Having directedness and ambitions in life, feeling that one’s present and past life has meaning, having a belief that provides purpose in life, and having objectives and goals for living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bondevik &amp; Skogstad (2000)</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Based on Frankl: a “will to purpose” found through relationships, work, and suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Braam et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Commitment to the concept of meaning in life, the concept of meaning provides a framework to view one’s life, a sense of fulfilment, and a feeling of integration or significance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarke &amp; Kissane (2002)</td>
<td>Meaning/Purpose</td>
<td>Based on Frankl: a ‘will to purpose’ found through relationship, work, and suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dittmann-Kohli &amp; Westerhof (2000)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>The understanding of what it means to live one’s life and one’s purposes and goals in life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ebersole &amp; DePaola (2001)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>One’s comfort or satisfaction with their own meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkman &amp; Moskowitz (2004)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>A combination of value, goals, and beliefs that lead to a sense of fulfilment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francis &amp; Hills (2008)</td>
<td>Meaning/Purpose</td>
<td>The degree to which persons believe their lives have meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krause &amp; Shaw (2003)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>The perception of purpose, order, and coherence in one’s existence, the quest for and realization of worthwhile goals, and an associated sense of fulfilment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Langer (2000)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>A collection of themes throughout life that give individuals a purpose and identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musick, Traphagan, Koenig, &amp; Larson (2000)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Having a framework through which to understand one’s existence, particularly in difficult situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schnell &amp; Becker (2006)</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Having a meaningful experience, a life task, feelings of being part of a greater whole, and belief in a deeper meaning in life</td>
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In addition to relationships being reported between life meaning and mental health, there is preliminary empirical evidence that life meaning is linked to physical health. Roepke, Jayawickreme, and Riffle (2014) examined the association between life meaning and physical health. They concluded that higher levels of meaning are associated with improved physical health. However, the authors also indicated that the mechanisms and causal pathways by which these associations occur are presently unclear, and that further research is required.

Human beings, as far as we know can think, dream and are the only organisms that contemplate and wonder why and think about our thinking. It is a natural phenomenon for individuals to question why they exist and what is the meaning of their existence; this helps to make sense of our lives and that our lives matter. It’s the understanding we develop of who we are, what the world is like, and how we fit and relate to the grand scheme of things (Heine, Proulx and Vohs, 2006). All through history and across civilisation meaning in life is answered with deep insight in different ways. A substantial amount of research has shown a strong relationship between the experience of meaning in life and psychological well-being (Krause & Hayward, 2013; Wong, 2012; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). In this sense, people who feel that their lives are full of meaning are more optimistic (Kelly, 2002), have higher levels of self-esteem (Steger et al., 2006) and positive emotions (King et al., 2006).
Kiang and Fuligni (2010) demonstrated that meaning in life acts as a mediator in the relationship between ethnic identity and adjustment. Brassai, Piko, and Steger (2011) reported that a lack of life meaning was associated with poor psychological health and quality of life among Romanian adolescents. That meaning may play a protective role in physical health behaviours (e.g. drug use, sexual health, physical inactivity and diet). More recently, Wilchek-Aviad (2014) examined meaning and suicidal tendencies in Ethiopian immigrant youth and native-born Israeli youth of 277 samples. A negative relationship was found between suicidal tendencies and meaning in life, and thus concluded that meaning in life is critical to reducing suicidal trends in youth from both cultural groups.

Notion of meaning in life, the theory-building and empirical investigation has originated within Western cultures largely from Aristotelian notions of the good life, or experiences intimately associated with Western European history like the Nazi concentration camp where Frankl derived logotherapy (Frankl, 1963). It is little known whether these meaning dimensions are similarly prominent in non-Western cultures. Cultures are thought to influence self-concepts along an independent (or individualistic) to interdependent (or collectivistic) continuum (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Culture provides individuals with an understanding about world, it influences their thinking about the world including individual’s experiences on meaning in life (Steger et al., 2008). Interdependent cultures stress on connectedness, possibly leading to dialectical thinking (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Kitayama and colleagues study on cultures found that Chinese individuals might possess the presentiment of cyclical change - that current
happiness is likely to become sadness soon (Kitayama et al., 2003). Steger and his colleagues found that for members of interdependent cultures life is not expected to become more and more meaningful; rather, presence of meaning unfolds into search for meaning, which in turn transforms into greater meaningfulness (Steger et al., 2008). Interdependent cultures might encourage the view that meaning is an unstable resource that waxes and wanes, requiring effort to sustain, search for meaning would be positively related to presence of meaning in interdependent cultures (Steger et al., 2008). In Steger and his colleagues study of cross cultural American and Japanese young adults 1183 in the United States and 982 Japanese, the Japanese participants reported searching for meaning more, Americans report more meaning in life than Japanese. More importantly, whereas search for meaning was negatively related to presence of meaning among Americans, it was positively related to presence of meaning among Japanese. Thus, culture must affect how people construe the search for meaning, casting it in a negative light in America and in a positive light in Japan (Steger et al., 2008).

Psychotherapists view meaning in life as an essential component in therapy. Existential philosophy was first applied to the field of psychotherapy in the mid 1940’s by Viktor Frankl. His experiences as a prisoner in a World War II concentration camp gave him the opportunity to put theory into practice. As a result of this experience Frankl was able to support Nietzsche’s statement, ‘He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how’ (Frankl, 2006). Meaning for Frankl is not found like a gold coin under a rock, it is something given to us, an experience of freedom and responsibility, a positive vision of one’s life and the
future, having purpose and fulfilment of existential goals. When this sense of meaning is not reached, a negative cognitive-motivational state is originated, as well as hopelessness, perception of lack of control over one’s life, and absence of vital goals. In his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* Frankl, developed a specific approach to therapy, which he called logotherapy, literally referring to meaning.

Logos is a Greek word, which denotes ‘meaning’. Logotherapy, or as it has been called by some authors, ‘The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy,’ focuses on man’s search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.

This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance, which will satisfy his own will to meaning (Frankl, 2006).

Since Frankl began this line of research, meaning in life has been extensively studied and considered an essential ingredient of human well-being. It has the value of being a stress buffer. People who present a consistent meaning of life are more resilient against life stressors, while people with a weak meaning of life seem more vulnerable to emotional problems, and more likely to succumb to hopelessness (Mascaro, Rosen & Morey, 2004). Individuals who do not feel they have meaning or purpose in life may experience depression, boredom, hopelessness, and discontent and may feel there is no reason to live (Pinquart, 2002).
Steger and Kashdan (2007) argued that ‘life is meaningful to people when they can satisfactorily answer the big questions about their lives, such as who am I, why am I here, what is truly important to me, what am I supposed to do with my life’. Meaning is related to ‘understanding one’s life as a whole’.

Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) defined meaning in life as ‘the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence’. Meaning in life is operationally defined by the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ: Steger et al., 2006). Meaning is measured by referring to the subjective meaning of the individual, without the constraints of the specific types of meaning. This scale makes the distinction between the search and presence of meaning in life. Presence refers to the extent to which an individual experiences their life as meaningful. Searching corresponds to an individual’s desire to discover or augment the meaning of their life (Steger, 2009).

Steger and colleagues developed the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al. 2006). The MLQ is growing exponentially in popularity, yielding some interesting findings regarding the interaction of presence of meaning and search for meaning. The MLQ measures presence of meaning (Presence) and search for meaning (Search) in a (5 items/scale, 10 items total), psychometrically sound manner. Often an inverse, significant correlation is reported between presence of meaning and search for meaning, suggesting that the more meaning one perceives, the less motivation there is to discover additional meaning (high meaning with low search for meaning), and vice versa (low meaning with high
search for meaning). However, some people will report high perceived meaning and high search for meaning (life is meaningful and there is motivation to pursue additional meaning), and some people will report low meaning coupled with low motivation to search for meaning (life perceived as meaningless with little drive to discover meaning). Moreover, a number of new studies have found significant interaction effects between presence of meaning and search for meaning (Park et al. 2010, Schulenberg et al. 2011 and Steger et al. 2009), which suggest the relationship is significantly more complex than previously thought, and which will ultimately warrant continued empirical inquiry to better understand the nature of the relationship.

Since religion and spirituality deal with answering and resolving fundamental questions about one’s existence and purpose, it often plays an important part in a person’s life, thus exploration of its contribution to one’s meaning in life can be a source of great help for counsellors (Exline, Yali & Sanderson, 2000). Religion provides meaning in life for many people because it provides both strength for everyday life and hope for the future (Pinquart, 2002). Religion offers individuals a way to feel connected to something outside of the self (Haidt, 2006). Religiousness is a complex phenomenon that is concerned with basic values made up of an array of experiences, beliefs, and behavioural dimensions which vary in salience for each individual (Bondevik & Skogstad, 2000). As such, because one’s religion or spirituality is a lens through which a person interprets his or her reality, it is closely linked to concepts of meaning (Park, 2005). Spirituality is often described as a desire to find ultimate purpose in
life and the search for meaning in life is a part of one’s journey towards spiritual awareness (Frankl, 2006).

We can see from literature that there is agreement on the importance of meaning in life as an essential element of spirituality. Meaning in life involves a significant feeling, experience, or perception that one’s existence is of significance. It provides a reason for living and a sense of fulfilling a higher purpose in life. It makes life more than just a survival quest, but rather experiencing one’s life as having made or being able to make a difference in the world.

Midlife or middle age has come from research that dates back to the 1950s, when people lived shorter, more predictable lives, and midlife was considered to be a point between youth and old age (McCaughey, 2003). Midlife is not a new phenomenon but one that has had a revival of interest. This resurrection can be attributed to the increase of life expectancy rates, with people living longer. However research into women’s midlife experience is still needed from the perspective of culture and gender. Mizo women today are experiencing new changes that were not prevalent in the past. The different events creates diverse experiences such as single parents, careers, divorce and separation, death in family, newly widowed are some of changes that women in midlife face. Women now have a lot of balancing to do between home and children and workplace and social pressures and personal interests. It will be worthwhile to investigate these women’s lives.
Levinson (1996) developed a theoretical model of adult developmental processes by offering distinct, sequential stages, which include phases of relative stability and transition. Levinson divided the lifespan into four overarching eras: the era of pre-adulthood (0-22), the era of early adulthood (17-45), the era of middle adulthood (40-65), and the era of late adulthood (60+). The era of middle adulthood contains the mid-life transition (40-45), the entry life structure for middle adulthood (45-50), the age 50 transition (50-55), and the culminating life structure for middle adulthood (55-60).

While other theorists focus on separate domains of adult development, Levinson’s approach to lifespan issues is inclusive, detailed, and therefore more valuable. Levinson’s theory of adult development is significant because he is one of the first to focus primarily on adult development in Middle Adulthood (Lachman & Bertrand, 2001) and to assign specific stages to Middle Adulthood’s developmental.

Midlife can be defined as a period of reflection and growth for many who look to the future for the fulfilment of desires and goals of the past. Negative images of women in midlife are plenty, of miserable empty nesters, being left for younger women, menopausal madness, physical changes, sagging flesh, illness, aging parents and wonder at our ability to cope with these events. Woman without alternative images and models may see her future as restricted and contrite. This present study seeks to examine the experience of meaning in the lives of Mizo women in midlife who have witnessed the transition of Mizoram from a union territory to a statehood in 1987, who live in a state with the second highest literacy rate, asking does this give a sense of well being and satisfaction in their lives.
1.3. Statement of the problem

The research problem is the lack of in-depth knowledge about middle-aged women’s experience of meaning in life. Despite the increasing numbers of ageing women, quality research on the midlife experience is scant. While there have been several research being carried out on meaning in life in different populations, raging from clinical diagnosed people (does suffering from cancer and mental illness) (Anand, 2014; Mitchell, 2006; vander Spek et al., 2013; and Schelenberg, 2011), to adolescents and emerging adults to older adults (Erylimaz, 2010; Thantluanga, 2015; Tetley, 2010; Waddell, 2012; Steger, 2009, 2012). This current study attempts to address the experience of meaning in life from the point of view of Mizo women in their midlife, which is perceived in this study as the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006), an individual’s decision, judgement and activities that makes sense and is significant with an overarching purpose (Steger, 2009). The available literature regarding midlife women may contain ageist, sexist, and biased perspectives. Some studies provide inconsistent, inaccurate, even contradictory information (Banister, 2000). The investigative focus has been on its negative aspects, such as menopausal physical symptoms or midlife crisis. Meaning in life has not been sufficiently studied. The only place where researchers seem to agree is that meaning is a subjective experience and could not be defined or constructed in one particular way. Therefore the conceptual frameworks of meaning in life may not be universally applicable. Lately many researchers have realised that meaning in life and how it is derived may vary with cultures. This study aims to empirically explore the meaning in life of Mizo women.
in midlife. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for Mizo women and provide guidance and perspective for women.

The midlife period is poorly understood – either medical and menopausal transitions of hot flashes, osteoporosis, heart disease, estrogen replacement therapy, depression, empty nest and other midlife crises, and less on the wealth of new opportunities that this group of women have at their disposal (Perrig-Chiello & Perren, 2005). There is need for alternative images that are not so demoralising. As such I hope to contribute to the literature germane to the field of counselling psychology a more nuanced and textured understanding of women’s experience. My hope is to bring to professionals working in the area of counselling psychology an awareness of the concerns that inform the experience of women in the midlife transition.

So far studies on Mizo women have been on their role in church, and the results do not always provide a sufficient reflection of women’s experience. Not much empirical research has examined women in midlife and the experience of meaning and how their accounts are personally and socially constructed. The cultural, socioeconomic and educational pressures that sustain women’s silence misleadingly make people assume that middle age Mizo women'slives are smooth. Meaning and purpose in life are central elements of positive mental health (Pinquart, 2002). It seemed appropriate to conduct research that sought to understand the realm of Mizo women’s experience and the factors that may contribute to and/or detract from their well-being.
Theories about meaning of life and midlife as a developmental stage are culturally specific rather than universal. Generally a westerner’s view is objective in contrast to the eastern view, which is subjective and integrative.

So far there is limited research in Mizoram that has examined meaning in life among women in midlife and the ways the culture influences and shapes women’s experiences and perceptions of their roles and positions in life. I believe the knowledge and experience gained through ageing brings maturity and harmony, which can benefit the individual and community as a whole. To help midlife women we must understand the various socio-cultural, psychological and life cycle forces on women.

These women, who are currently between the ages of 40 and 55, had different experiences when compared with previous generations. They grew up in a time period with numerous social changes, such as advanced education, employment in government sector, witnessed the transition of Mizoram from a union territory to statehood in 1987. However, they may not have been able to take full advantage of the many positive changes that were occurring since they were the first generation to have such possibilities, and few role models or mentors were available to guide them.

One point of agreement in literature seems to be the conclusion that having a sense of purpose or meaning in life is consequential for positive mental health, physical health, and general happiness – happy people are productive people. The alternative seems unproductive and bleak. Therefore, empirical work evaluating life meaning, and especially the role of meaning in life is necessary.
Given the above association between meaning in life and well-being, further examination of the role that meaning plays in facilitating health is warranted. In order to investigate this construct among Mizo women context, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ, Steger et al., 2006) will be used for the sample. This will be the first study to explore how the instrument performs using this specific sample population.

As a researcher I entered my middle years with a new sense of self. To me it felt like starting over a new life, a period of transformation. This change gave me new meaning in my life and purpose. Erikson’s theory of lifespan psychological changes and Frankl’s ideas of striving for deeper meanings resonate with my own experience of middle age. I began to wonder what other women in this particular developmental period were experiencing physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Perhaps, with a thorough understanding of how women in midlife define and experience meaning in their lives, counselling therapist can create interventions that are effective. This study can be instructive as some move through midlife. Hopefully, this investigation will make ageing seem less menacing and perhaps less frightening or mysterious.

1.4. Significance of the Study

In India, approximately 40.91% of the total population falls under the age bracket of 25-54 years (CIA World Factbook 2014). According to the Census 2011, 60.3% Indian fall under the age bracket of 15-59 years. There is an increasing need to develop an understanding of the middle aged population in a liberalised and globalising India.
Little is known about how Mizo women define and experience meaning in their lives. From my observations living in Mizoram, women in their midlife are most likely married and have children at home; motherhood is the central role. Most of the women are employed and bringing in income to the family. The numerous vying roles of mother, daughter, sister, wife, friend, and employee can provide a rich resource as well as restrict the midlife woman and her meaning in life.

Finally this study is significant for the Mizo church and community as a whole where women constitute a large part of membership of the church. Equally important will be the woman participants’ various experiences that will provide guidance and perspective for the younger women. The findings from this study will for the first time shed light on Mizo midlife women and could lend insight to effectively support women with their issues and thus benefit society at large. This may also be a resource for counsellors and psychotherapist in advancing treatment in mental health and used as a reference to help develop strategies for counsellors and practitioners. Meaning in life and well being/quality of life seems to be holding an important place when it comes to judging a society; a society cannot fare well when the majority of its inhabitants are found to be dissatisfied, discontent and depressed with themselves and their surrounding.
1.5. **Aim of the study**

There is an increase in the number of studies on meaning in life and interest in what is the experience of meaning in life in the life span and how different cultures experience this. This study aims to extend research on meaning in life of Mizo women in their midlife.

1.6. **Research questions**

The following three research questions will structure the exploration of this important topic. The specific questions this study sought to answer were:

1. Are sociodemographic factors related to meaning in life for the Mizo women in midlife?
2. What is the level of presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life for the Mizo women in midlife?
3. What do Mizo women in their midlife consider meaningful in their life?

1.7. **Research objective**

For the purpose of this study the following objectives were framed:

1. To establish the sociodemographic factors related to meaning in life for Mizo women in midlife.
2. To determine the level of presence and search for meaning in life for the Mizo women in midlife using the Meaning in life Questionnaire (MLQ).
3. To describe the subjective experience of meaning in life among Mizo women in midlife.
1.8. Operational definitions

The concept of the meaning of life can be overwhelming and many leave it as the stuff of philosophers. In order to make this study useful and meaningful, there must be guidelines for using and understanding the term.

**Meaning in life** – The sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006). For the purposes of this study, meaning in life is understood as an individual, subjective construct. Therefore, participants’ reports of meaning in their lives will be taken at face value for they are the ultimate experts concerning what makes life meaningful for them.

**Religious** – Refers to someone who is an adherent to a religion and its religious or spiritual practices. For the purposes of this study, religion refers to the practices engaged by members of a social organisation, the outward worship, creed and theology, which reflect the understanding of God.

**Menopause** – This term is used to describe the biological as well as social changes that occur in midlife women. The most commonly accepted definition of menopause states that menses must have ceased for at least one year.
**Midlife** – The term middle age, or middle years, have been used to refer to the stage between young and older adulthood in life span studies. In the last decade it came to be accepted that midlife fell between the age 40 and around 60 (Santrock, 2009).

**Counselling** - In therapeutic terms it refers to a form of confidential helping which values and seeks to elicit each client’s innate internal resources, coping abilities and strengths. Counsellors may help clients with specific problems in the present, but they may also support clients with long term problems stemming from the past.

**Logotherapy** - Logotherapy is a meaning-centred psychotherapy.