



International Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science (IJHASS)
E-ISSN: 2471-7576
E-mail: editor@ijhassnet.com
<http://ijhassnet.com/>

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Value Priorities and Subjective Well-Being; A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to understand the life value priorities with subjective well-being. Two sample groups of university students, from Turkey-Istanbul and USA-Hawaii were invited to participate in the study. The satisfaction with Life Scale, PANAS and Schwartz Value Survey were administered to 210 participants. Self direction, achievement, benevolence and universalism values are associated with subjective well being in two samples. The results also revealed some differences, such as in Turkish sample; tradition, power and conformity is also related to well being whereas, in US sample, this conservation dimensions is irrelevant with subjective well being. Those differences were discussed both using self-context and socio cultural factors.

Research regarding values encompasses various fields including sociology, psychology, and organizational studies. Since the 1970's, values have been defined by multiple scholars. One of the first definitions of the term was made by Rokeach (1973). According to him, values are individuals' ideal behavior styles or beliefs regarding life goals that serve as multi-level standards to guide behavior in various ways (Uyguc, 2003). Rokeach (1973) conceptualized two sets of values: terminal and instrumental. Terminal values refer to life's main goals; while instrumental values refer to modes of conduct to achieve these goals. Every individual has his own set of terminal and instrumental values within a hierarchical structure. Value system is an organized set of permanent standards adopted by a society based on its goal of existence guiding its perception, attitude, and behaviors (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998). Rokeach's definition of values has inspired other researchers' utilizing this term in various life situations.

Values also consist of goal-directed behaviors (French, Kahn, 1962), criteria for choosing goals (Locke, 1976), and desired aims in terms of guiding human life in differing levels of importance (Tevruz, Turgut, 2004). Zedeck (1997) has defined values as desirable, trans- situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. All of these definitions highlight the concept of goal, which is equated with the concept of value. Therefore, the concepts of values and goals are used interchangeably. The body of research and theory on life values has derived from basic value systems that allow individuals to navigate the different aspects of their lives (Roe and Ester, 1999).

Schwartz (1992) detailed ten motivationally distinct, broad and basic values, derived from three universal requirements of the human condition; needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups. These ten values were intended to include all the core values recognized in cultures around the world and to cover the distinct content categories found in earlier value theories.



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Each of the ten basic values can be characterized by describing its central motivational goal:

1. **Self-Direction.** Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring.
2. **Stimulation.** Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
3. **Hedonism.** Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.
4. **Achievement.** Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
5. **Power.** Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
6. **Security.** Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.
7. **Conformity.** Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
8. **Tradition.** Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self.
9. **Benevolence.** Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the “in-group”).
10. **Universalism.** Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.

In this study, our aim is to derive more insight into the growing literature of life values and how they are related to individual’s well-being from a cultural perspective.

Relations between SWB and Life Values

Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as ‘a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life’ (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). A person who has a high level of satisfaction with their life, and who experiences a greater positive affect and little or less negative effect, would be deemed to have a high level of SWB (or in simpler terms, be very happy).

There is a considerable agreement in the psychotherapy literature in the West that particular values contribute positively to personal mental health, whereas other values are detrimental. For example, Jensen and Bergin (1988) identified values from self-direction (e.g., autonomy, freedom), benevolence (e.g., responsibility, inter-personal and family relationships), and universalism (e.g., self-awareness, personal growth) value types as “healthy”. Similarly, Strupp (1980) referred to autonomy (self-direction), responsibility (benevolence) and fairness to others (universalism) as “healthy values”. There is also some agreement that achievement and stimulation values are “healthy” values. In contrast, values of the conformity, tradition, security and power types are often considered “unhealthy” (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Psychotherapy researchers have not explicitly discussed the causal processes that might link mental health to the importance attributed to these “healthy” and “unhealthy” values from a cross-cultural perspective however it is a common belief that values are culture dependent.

The studies on values conducted in the eastern cultures (İmamoglu & Aygun, 2002; Tevruz, Cinko and Turgut 2010) have shown that culture-specific collective traits lead people in these cultures to comply with life values even more. It has been observed that, when compared to individualistic cultures, individuals from collectivistic cultures give more importance to normative and extrinsic goals rather than individualistic and intrinsic life goals. Longitudinal comparative studies conducted in collectivistic cultures since the 1970's have found that although young people gravitate towards individualistic life goals in their attitudes, their behaviors show that they have difficulties actualizing them in their lives (Schwartz, 2017). To understand the cultural aspects of this dissonance, SWB could be a good indicator. This is based on the assumption that the fit between the person’s value priorities and values prevailing in the environment is crucial to well-being (Triandis, 1990).



SWB can represent the degree to which people in a society are achieving the values they hold dear. In this study, we are not only comparing value differences in two samples but also try to understand how they are related with SWB. This model provides us crucial information about how self/environmental determinants were related to this context.

Method

This section outlines the study's methodology and includes sample's demographic information and measures and statistical tools used for data analysis.

Sample and Procedure

The research was presented as part of a study of values in countries and was conducted with two groups, students in humanities and social sciences departments in Turkey (n =102, University of Marmara) and USA (n =108, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa). Questionnaires were administered both using paper and pencil and online via a research website (www.lifevaluesresearch.com).

In order for participation to be truly voluntary, the nature of the questions was explained verbally or detailed in an informed consent form. Respondents were told that they would be asked about their values, feelings, and attitudes. They anonymously completed a questionnaire, containing instruments in the order listed below, followed by a set of background items. All instruments were administered in respondents' native language.

Measures

The following section includes separate measures for each one of the following variables in question; personal life values, perceived environmental values, subjective well-being, and self-efficacy.

Life Values.

The importance that respondents attributed to each of 21 values as guiding principles in their life were measured with a slightly expanded version of the Schwartz Value Inventory (1992). Respondents were asked to identify themselves with the traits given and how much these traits are appreciated by their society (Figure 1). Respondents rated their responses from 1 (not important) to 6 (of supreme importance). The standard indexes recommended by Schwartz (1992, 1994) were used to measure the priority given to each of the ten value types. The average internal consistency coefficients for the value types (combined samples) were: universalism .73; benevolence .68; tradition .49; conformity .64; security .64; power .66; achievement .65; hedonism .71; stimulation .61; and self-direction .58. The reliability coefficients varied little across samples and were within the range of variation commonly observed for the specific value types as cited by Schwartz (2017).

Life Satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to assess general life satisfaction. The scale consisted of four items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The higher scores represented a higher satisfaction in life. In the original study, the internal consistency of the SWLS was found to be, .87. By using principal component factor analysis, a single factor emerged and explained 66% of the total variance. The Turkish version of the scale was translated and examined by Koker (1991) to reflect the intended meaning of the original items. The reliability of the Turkish version was .76. The internal consistency coefficient obtained for our sample was, .84.



Positive and Negative Effect Schedule

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was originally developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1998). In PANAS, the items are grouped into a positive affect (PA) scale and a negative affect (NA) scale. Each PANAS scale is composed of 10 mood-related adjectives. The positive affect mood adjectives are active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, and strong. The negative affect mood adjectives include afraid, ashamed, distressed, guilty, hostile, irritable, jittery, nervous, scared, and upset. The high scores in PA are a reflection of enthusiasm, alertness, and pleasurable engagement with the environment; low PA is a reflection of a state of depression and a lack of vitality. On the other hand, high NA indicates aversive mood states and subjective distress, whereas low NA indicates calmness and relaxation. On a 6-point Likert-type scale, participants are asked to rate how frequently they experience the emotions from 1 (never) to 6 (always). Researchers (Watson et al., 1988) reported that two factors, PA and NA together, accounted for 68.7 % of the total variance in general ratings. Internal consistency coefficient was found as .88 and .87 for PA and NA respectively. The internal consistency coefficient obtained for our sample was, 85.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 15 statistical package was used to investigate the relations among variables in the research model, namely personal life values, perceived environmental values, subjective well-being, and self-efficacy. Principal component and varimax rotation technique were adopted in the factor analyses to identify the dimensions of the variables. The relations among the variables were also examined by multiple and hierarchical regression analyses.

Results

Using PROXSCAL, which is a multidimensional scaling method in SPSS, we first looked at the spatial configuration of 10 value dimensions on the two-dimensionally structured value circle (Fig. 2). The Pearson correlation coefficients are used as similarity proximities. Transformation proximity is interval and no restriction is given to common space. Simplex is used as an initial starting configuration where stress convergence and minimum stress are .0001 and maximum iteration is 100.

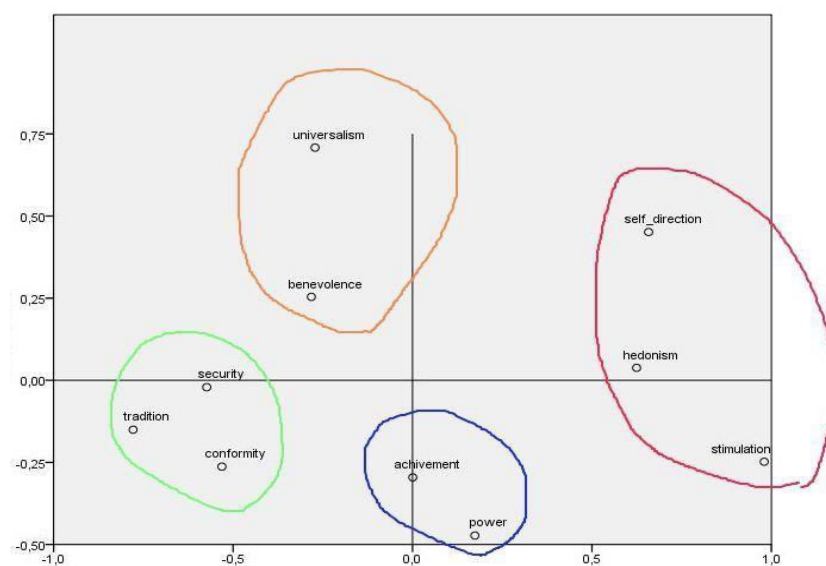


Fig. 2. Configuration of Value Dimensions



The circular structural form of Schwartz Values repeats itself for both sample groups in our study. The circular arrangement of value dimensions represents a motivational continuum. The closer any two values in either direction, the more similar their underlying motivations. The more distant any two values, the more antagonistic their underlying motivations. Distribution of 10 values can be summarized with four higher order value types. Self direction, hedonism and stimulation forms “Openness to Change” dimension whereas, security, tradition and conformity correspond “Conservation” dimension. On this structure, openness to change values oppose conservation values. On vertical axis, benevolence and universalism values compose “Self Transcendence” dimension. On the opposite side of the continuum, power and achievement values form “Self Enhancement” dimension. Our findings point a universal structure of Schwartz value dimensions relevant to other studies conducted from 67 nations.

Table 1. Presents the means and standard deviations of life values in two samples. Levels of values varied across U.S and Turkish students. Turkish students reported higher levels of values on power, universalism, conformity and tradition dimensions compared to U.S. students, whereas, U.S. students showed higher level on achievement dimension.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of life values in two samples

<i>Value Types:</i>	Turkish Students N=102		US Students N=108	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Power	3.98	1.09	3.72	0.98
Achievement	4.48	1.13	4.71	1.16
Security	4.30	1.31	4.12	0.99
Conformity	3.85	1.18	3.34	1.13
Tradition	4.40	1.05	3.76	1.01
Benevolence	5.25	0.83	5.10	0.98
Universalism	4.88	0.76	4.57	0.74
Self Direction	4.75	0.83	4.73	0.94
Stimulation	4.12	1.17	4.19	1.27
Hedonism	4.46	1.17	4.50	1.17

The main purpose of this research is, to understand which values contribute positively to students well being and is there any differences within two samples. Table 2 presents correlations of the ten value types within the two measures of subjective well being in two samples. Achievement, benevolence, universalism and self direction were found significantly related to subjective well being in both samples. Self direction is the strongest determinant of subjective well being, significantly related with both measures of subjective well being among two samples. Power, conformity and tradition were significantly related with subjective well being in Turkish sample. The correlations were not strong but they were reliable. Stimulation is significantly related with subjective well being in US sample.

**Table 2. Correlations of value priorities with subjective well being indexes**

<i>Value Types:</i>	Turkish Students N=102		US Students N=108	
	<i>SWL</i>	<i>PAS</i>	<i>SWL</i>	<i>PAS</i>
Power	0.07	0.22*	0.12	0.16
Achivement	0.20*	0.39**	0.23*	0.07
Security	0.28**	0.18	0.12	0.13
Conformity	0.28**	0.24*	0.10	-0.08
Tradition	0.19	0.19*	0.15	-0.04
Benevolence	0.31**	0.37**	0.25*	0.07
Universalism	0.24**	0.12	0.27*	0.12
Self Direction	0.32**	0.37**	0.34*	0.22*
Stimulation	-0.06	0.11	0.21*	0.09
Hedonism	0.00	0.23*	0.28*	0.13

SWL: Satisfaction with Life Scale, PAS: Positive Affective Scale * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Achievement, self direction and benevolence were the key determinants of subjective well being of university students in both samples in our study. The Values Theory supports the idea of values like universalism and benevolence represents general assumptions about eastern cultures, on the other hand, values like "Achievement" are more likely with western cultures (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Sagie, 2000; Bilsky et al., 2011). These are opposing variables showing negative correlations with each other.

Achievement is a very strong motive in "Social Needs Theory". It set apart from all other motives. All social needs like power, affiliation relies on lacking intrinsic individual conducts and avoiding negativity, whereas need of achievement is an independent motive related with intrapersonal strength and self determination. So we should understand the meaning of "achievement" from the cross cultural perspective by asking a simple question; how can you describe achievement? Being a devoting mother/father, (caring, protecting ...) to become rich, to build up a good character, to live with virtues, to be appreciated by others, to pull up a new trick while surfing, to find a cure for a rare disease.

We can define "Achievement" as; personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards. The meaning of that definition can either be interpreted by individualistic cultures as an independent success of oneself, or collectivistic cultures as an accomplishment of a goal which is beneficial for society rather than oneself. It's difficult to relate achievement with only individual cultures as a high priority value. In this research, Achievement has found to be the strongest determinant of well being in both samples.

As we have mentioned before, most of the study identified values from the self direction, benevolence, achievement, and universalism value types as healthy. In contrast, values of the conformity, tradition, security and power types are often considered unhealthy (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000). Value researchers explain those relations from intrinsic/extrinsic motivation orientation. For example, Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) provided a systematic basis for relating values to needs. Building on Maslow, (1970) they classified the ten value types into those that represent growth & deficiency needs as self direction, universalism, benevolence, achievement and stimulation representing primarily growth needs.

Our findings were also identical from that point of view that in our two samples, self direction, universalism, benevolence, and achievement values were related to subjective well being. On the other hand; conformity,



power and tradition are also related with well being of university students in Turkey. So how come traditional values can work together with “openness to change” and “self enhancement” dimensions while explaining subjective well being.

Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) proposes the concept of “autonomous-related self” as a feature of Turkish culture. For Turks autonomy is not seen from an individualistic perspective. There is an intersection between autonomy and relatedness. These two basic needs have often been seen as conflicting and their coexistence has been considered rather problematic. In Western scholarship, the importance of autonomy, agency, independence, privacy, self-reliance and self sufficiency has been strongly endorsed for decades (Schwartz, 2000). Autonomy is defined as involving both self governing agency and separateness from others as a single construct. Thus contemporary studies issue some concerns about that definition as two meanings attributed to autonomy could be distinct (Keller, 2016). Our findings also support that conceptualization.

In Turkish sample, determinant of well being of university students include opposing value dimensions (self direction, achievement, benevolence, conformity, and tradition) that foster the development of autonomous relational self. Happiness for Turkish University students relies on both being independent on their decisions and preserving family ties. The possible coexistence of autonomy and closeness is of key importance to happiness in Turkish Sample. Autonomy and relatedness dynamics is the key understanding SWB in Turkey. On the other hand, in US sample, conservation dimension is not related with SWB of university students.

Conclusion

The results of this study support the direct relations between well being and value priorities. Values like self direction, universalism and achievement were highly related with subjective well being in both samples. Previous studies indicates similar results (Schwartz, Sortheix, 2018), researchers explains the relations of value priorities and subjective well being by “Self Determination Theory”. According to the theory, autonomy, relatedness and competence are innate, basic psychological needs. Even though there is general agreement that autonomy and relatedness are basic needs, they have often been seen as conflicting and their coexistence has been considered rather problematic. While all societies somehow manage to meet these two basic needs, autonomy has been prioritized in the individualistic Western world and in psychology (particularly with the underlying influence of psychoanalytic thinking and its current forms). In western societies, pursuit of autonomy leads directly to intrinsic satisfaction. People are likely to experience a positive sense of well being to the extent that they pursue intrinsic rather than extrinsic needs or goals (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

However, in Turkish sample, both opposing values were related with subjective well being. That shows us some clues about value differences in eastern/western cultures, explaining subjective well being. In US, fulfillment of autonomy and competence needs could be enough for life satisfaction and happiness, whereas in Turkey, need for relatedness is vital with autonomy and competence for attaining happiness and meaning in life. For further understanding, cultural and cross-cultural studies need to go beyond the familiar Western oriented frameworks and study diverse socio cultural contexts to derive more insights on subjective well being literature. Indigenous studies must be encouraged if new eras of complexities of values and cultures are to be discovered and understood.

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E-ISSN: 2471-7576

E-mail: editor@ijhassnet.com

http://ijhassnet.com/

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