

## Correlates of psychological wellbeing with reference personal values

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The present paper analyses the relationship between value priorities of individuals and their wellbeing utilizing Schwartz values model and Carol ryff's Psychological wellbeing [PWB] scale. Even though psychological wellbeing has been studied in relation with personality variables, hardly research studies conducted linking PWB and personal values. The study was conducted over a sample of 876 students (429 male and 447 female drawn from various colleges in Madurai, TN, India. Results revealed that the male participants had significantly lower PWB than female participants. This difference might be partly due to females espousing higher self-direction, security values and lower hedonism and stimulation values. Overall, it was found out that espousing hedonistic values provides significantly lesser psychological wellbeing. PWB scores had significantly positive correlation with values of Tradition and Self-direction. Analysis of higher-order personal values revealed that there is a significant negative correlation between self enhancement value domain and almost all dimensions of PWB such as autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance and total PWB. On the other hand, It was noticed that there was a significant positive correlations were found between self-transcendence values and psychological well being domain of personal growth. In sum, the results showed that hedonistic values provides "psychological ill being", whereas espousing values like self-direction and tradition provides greater psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: psychological wellbeing, personal values, happiness, eudaimonia

The goal of all human life is happiness. Countries throughout the world aim to keep their citizens happy by devising policies and strategies for betterment of human lives. Time and again they need to evaluate the impact of these policy interventions by assessments. For this governments have to depend on psychologists and economists to make an assessment of the success of their political activities. Psychology, which has hitherto been obsessed with mental illness, had begun to focus on human happiness or wellbeing. In the past few decades' proliferation of research in psychological wellbeing has turned the tide for good. An Internet search (on June 2012) for 'happiness' fetched more than 13,00,000 results.

The study of wellbeing has taken two different directions. One focuses primarily on pleasurable emotions and avoidance of negative emotions; and satisfaction of life as a whole and different domain like work, family, leisure etc. The subjective well-being approach reminds one of the charvaka philosophy of ancient India, which upholds sensual and material enjoyments as the summum bonum of life. The charvakas' goal of life is to lead a life of merriment and fun with no worry about ethics or discipline. Charvaka way of life rejected the notion of God and moral values (Kumar, 2006). The other approach aims at self-actualization, meaningful life and the extent to which a person fully integrates this into his or her life. The former is interested in studying what is known as subjective wellbeing or hedonia, while the latter seeks to understand psychological wellbeing or eudemonia.

These two traditions of wellbeing have created a huge impetus in research into happiness or well-being. While Assessments of eudaimonic wellbeing have been many, several researchers have used Ryff's Psychological Well-Being framework (PWB; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to operationalize it (e.g., Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Lindfors & Lundberg, 2002). In Ryff's PWB scale, she identifies six psychological dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing. Each dimension articulates diverse

challenges individuals encounter as they strive to function positively. These are:

*Self-acceptance* (the capacity to see and accept one's strengths and weaknesses); purpose in life (having goals and objectives that give life meaning and direction); personal growth (feeling that personal talents and potential are being realized over time); positive relations with others (having close, valued connections with significant others); environmental mastery (being able to manage the demands of everyday life) and autonomy (having the strength to follow personal convictions, even if they go against conventional wisdom).

Significant advancements have been achieved in identifying the demographic features, correlates and personality and biological bases of SWB, (e.g. Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999; DeNeve & cooper, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Urry et al., 2004). Compared with the hedonic perspective, the eudaimonic approach has been much less frequently studied, especially with large-scale populations. Rare exceptions are the investigations directed by Carol Ryff, namely the MIDUS (Midlife in the United States)/MIDJA (Midlife in Japan), NSFH (National Survey of Families and Households), and WLS (Wisconsin Longitudinal Study).

Previous empirical research has examined how eudaimonic well-being is influenced by socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and culture. Aspects of well-being, such as positive relations and self-acceptance have consistently showed little age variation, while autonomy and environmental mastery have been found to be positively related to age.

In addition, few gender differences have been identified, with women generally rating themselves higher on positive relations and personal growth than men (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). With regard to socioeconomic status, existing evidence has consistently verified that educational accomplishment, occupational status and income are positive predictors of eudaimonic well-being (Keyes et al., 2002; Marmot et al., 1997; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Eudaimonic well-being has also been linked with reduced biological risk, such as lower levels of daily salivary cortisol, pro-inflammatory cytokines, cardiovascular risk, and longer REM sleep duration (Lindfors &

Lundberg, 2002; Ryff et al., 2004) and left prefrontal cortex activation (Urry et al., 2004), which is associated better emotional outcomes (Davidson, 2004). Taylor et al. (2003a,b) examined links between overall PWB and various biomarkers (cardiovascular reactivity and recovery, salivary cortisol) in a laboratory stress challenge (N = 92). Analyses showed that PWB resources mediated the link between self-enhancement and levels of salivary cortisol. Srimathi and Kumar (2010) exploring the Psychological Well being of Employed Women across Different Organisations in South India found out that, women teachers had highest total and sub-dimensions of Psychological Well Being. Although many demographic factors and personality variables have been studied in connection with psychological wellbeing, personal values a personality variable- has been largely ignored.

### *A note on personal values*

Originally, values were conceived of as philosophical concepts, which were insolubly tied to virtuous living and morality (cf. Perry, 1926). Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1951) were among the first social scientists who gave the value concept a more concrete, terrestrial meaning by linking values to ordinary activities such as reading newspapers, watching movies or voting. Currently, values are conceived of as guiding



Figure 1: Schwartz's Circumflex model of values

principles in life, which transcend specific situations, may change over time, guide selection of behaviour and events and which is part of a dynamic system with inherent contradictions. This shift in the thinking about the nature of human values has been largely influenced by the work of Milton Rokeach (1973; 1979). Rokeach defined the value concept as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence".

### *Schwartz's individual values model*

Schwartz and Sagiv (1995) defined human values as desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives.

Schwartz (1992, 1996) derived a typology of the different content of values by reasoning that values, in the form of conscious goals,

serve three universal requirements of human existence: biological needs, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and demands of group functioning. Ten distinct motivational types of values were derived from the three universal requirements, distinguished by type of motivational goal they express.

According to Schwartz and Sagiv (1995), the value system is structured by relations of conflict and compatibility among value priorities. The pattern of these relations is presented in Figure 1. Competing value types emanate in opposing directions from the center; compatible types stand in close proximity around the circle. As can be seen, the ten value types are organized into two dimensions composed of four higher-order value types that combine the standard types.

### *Values and wellbeing*

In an article titled, "Who is Happy?" Myers and Diener (1995) had offered a theory of Happiness, in which three significant factors influencing Happiness were stressed. The first two were "Hedonic Adaptation" and cultural worldview. The third component was values and goals (Emmons, 1986). But only a few studies have examined the relationship between values and PWB. Because of the evaluations one makes to decide one's wellbeing, personal values were thought to have a significant impact on wellbeing levels of respondents.

A few sparse researches have indicated that, a person's subjective sense of well-being might depend upon his or her profile of value priorities (Sagiv Schwartz, 2000; Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2002; Shingehiro, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999). Oishi et al. (1999) tested their value-as-a-moderator model on the relationship between values and subjective wellbeing at the intra-individual and inter-individual level. They found out through a diary study, that intra-individual changes in life satisfaction were strongly related the degree of success in the domains that individual's values. Kasser & Ryan (1993, 1996) found that the type of goals individuals pursue influences mean levels of well-being. Sagiv and Schwartz predicted (2000), that people for whom particular values are especially important may tend to have a more positive sense of well-being than persons guided by a different set of values. That is, well-being may be associated with emphasizing particular values (e.g. compassion) rather than others (e.g. security). Most other researchers who have explored the values and wellbeing relationship have focused on materialism values alone. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) (Table 1, Pg.352-353) have provided a review of such studies which provide considerable support for the notion that materialism is negatively associated with well-being.

This study explores the relationship between personal values (utilizing the Schwartz model) and psychological wellbeing (PWB). This study draws respondents from college students from a liberal arts college, social work college, teacher training college and nursing college.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The study was conducted over a sample of 876 students (429 male and 447 female; Mage = 20.17, S.D = 1.530) drawn from various colleges in Madurai, TN, India. They were randomly selected into the study. Students who had sought counseling or psychotherapeutic services were excluded from the study.

### Instruments

*Portrait Values Questionnaire* (PVQ; Schwartz et al., 2001). The 40 items scale was used to assess the Personal values; Each item consisted of a description of a person ("portrait") with two sentences. The subjects are asked to assess how similar to the portrayed person they are on six point rating scale. The possible answers are: very similar, similar, rather similar, rather dissimilar, dissimilar, very dissimilar; coded with the scores 1 to 6.

*Psychological Wellbeing Scale*: The 18 items PWS was used to measure the Psychological wellbeing (PWB). It consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents were requested to rate the statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement.

A Socio-demographic questionnaire was used to tap the demographic variables of the sample under study.

### Procedure

Eight hundred and seventy six students (429 male and 447 female; Mage = 20.17, S.D = 1.530) were administered the above-mentioned tools. The students were informed that the results of the study would be kept confidential, and will not have any impact on their academic outcome. The students were advised to seek clarifications from the

research assistants, whenever they do not understand any terms or words and doubts clarified then and there. The participants were asked to answer the questions honestly without intending to create a favorable impression. Statistical analyses like t-Test and Karl Pearson product moment correlation coefficient were used.

### Results and Discussion

The purpose of study was to investigate the relationship between Personal values and Psychological or eudaimonic wellbeing. The statistical analysis (TABLE 1) showed that the male sub-sample is significantly higher in hedonism ( $p < .001$ ) and stimulation ( $p < .01$ ) values, whereas the female sub-sample is significantly higher in the self-direction ( $p < .01$ ) and security ( $p < .05$ ) values. A t-Test between the gender revealed that the female participants are significantly higher in the personal growth ( $p < .001$ ), positive relations ( $p < .001$ ) and purpose in life ( $p < .001$ ) dimensions of the Psychological well-being. And the female sub-sample is significantly higher in the Total PWB ( $p < .001$ ) than the males.

This result indicated that, albeit indirectly, that espousing values of security and self-direction provide one a significantly higher Psychological wellbeing. Because, the female students who possess these values significantly higher enjoy better psychological wellbeing than male students. The probability of other extraneous variables having an effect on the well-being other than these values is also possible for the occurrence of this results.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviations and t-Test on gender for the all the variables (N=876)

	Male (N=429)		Female (N=447)		t-Value	Significance		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Personal value								
1	Security	4.049	.547	4.1319	.565	-2.183*	.029	
2	Conformity	4.241	.758	4.270	.732	-.571	.568	
3	Tradition	3.743	.768	3.694	.830	.906	.364	
4	Benevolence	4.277	.751	4.264	.746	.256	.798	
5	Universalism	4.303	.583	4.339	.641	-.863	.387	
6	Self-direction	3.983	.669	4.138	.657	-3.469**	.001	
7	Stimulation	3.794	.974	3.610	.967	2.799**	.005	
8	Hedonism	3.758	1.154	3.419	1.308	4.067***	.000	
9	Achievement	4.116	.747	4.180	.691	-1.317	.188	
10	Power	3.272	1.341	3.338	1.249	-.758	.449	
Higher order Values								
1	Conservation	4.011	.395	4.032	.410	-.757	.449	
2	Self-enhancement	3.715	.686	3.646	.748	1.435	.152	
3	Openness to change	3.845	.567	3.722	.604	3.091**	.002	
4	Self-transcendence	4.290	.550	4.302	.588	-.297	.767	
PWB								
	Autonomy	55.995	16.020	58.202	18.163	-1.904	.057	Significant at 0.05 levels
	Environmental mastery	55.141	16.236	56.040	16.699	-.808	.420	* Significant at 0.01 levels **
	Personal growth	54.532	17.704	62.329	20.421	-6.045***	.000	Significant at 0.001 level ***
	Positive relations	58.443	16.742	63.435	17.940	-4.253***	.000	Significant at 0.001 level ***
	Purpose in life	59.440	19.271	65.647	19.694	-4.714***	.000	Significant at 0.001 level ***
	Self-acceptance	55.905	16.956	58.115	18.359	-1.852	.064	NS Not significant
	Total PWB	56.576	13.061	60.628	14.975	-4.273***	.000	Significant at 0.001 level ***

The Pearson's product moment correlation yielded significant results. It is revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between tradition values and Total psychological wellbeing ( $r = .067, p < .05$ ) as well as sub-dimensions of environmental mastery ( $r = .076, p < .05$ ) and positive relations ( $r = .076, p < .05$ ). This is

contradiction to past research and wellbeing theories like Self-determination theory and western psychotherapeutic literature, which suggest that traditional values will result in conformist attitude towards society. This may provide oneself poorer wellbeing. But, this surprising finding is to be expected in a collectivistic

culture like India where interdependence is fostered. Rather being independent and 'stand out in the crowd', following traditional norms provides one greater peace and harmony.

It was also found out that hedonistic values correlate significantly negative with psychological wellbeing (r = -.122, p< .01). The

hedonism values also correlate significantly negative with autonomy(r = -.147, p< .01), environmental mastery(r = -.077, p< .05), personal growth (r = -.184, p< .01) and self-acceptance(r = -.106, p< .01). This result is consistent with earlier finding. Pursuing purely pleasure-oriented happiness does not provide psychological wellbeing.

TABLE 2 : Correlation matrix between Personal values & Psychological wellbeing

	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Positive relations	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance	Total PWB
1 Security	-.060	-.052	-.027	-.044	-.042	.002	-.047
2 Conformity	.072(*)	.002	.032	-.048	-.018	.008	.010
3 Tradition	.044	.076(*)	.032	.076(*)	.064	.029	.067(*)
4 Benevolence	.002	-.002	.039	-.065	-.059	-.013	-.021
5 Universalism	.096(**)	.037	.075(*)	-.027	-.011	.030	.042
6 Self-direction	.139(**)	.096(**)	.074(*)	.037	.016	.094(**)	.095(**)
7 Stimulation	.003	.032	-.006	.066	.065	.010	.036
8 Hedonism	-.147(**)	-.077(*)	-.184(**)	-.020	-.042	-.106(**)	-.122(**)
9 Achievement	.018	-.026	.056	-.014	.029	.026	.021
10 Power	-.112(**)	-.057	-.045	.036	.006	-.040	-.044

\* p < .05; \*\*p < .01

PWB scores had significantly positive correlation with values Self-direction(r= .095, p<.01). Most of the PWB dimensions had significant positive correlation with self-direction values viz. autonomy (r = .139, p< .01), environmental mastery(r = .096, p< .01), personal growth (r = .074, p< .05) and self-acceptance(r = .094, p< .01)

Another interesting finding was that while conformity values correlated significantly positive (r = .072, p<.05), the power value correlated significantly negative with autonomy dimension of PWB.

This anomaly can be explained by the possibility that because the student population has high group affiliation. When they conform to the group norms by forgoing their independent thought they enjoy autonomy within the group. But when they espouse power values highly then their autonomy is thwarted within their group by social sanctions.

The universalism values correlate significantly positively with autonomy (r=.096, p<.01) and personal growth (r=.076, p<.05).

Table 3: Correlation Between Higher Order Values and PWB

	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Positive relations	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance	Total PWB
Conservation	.046	.028	.029	.001	.011	.026	.029
Self-enhancement	-.146**	-.088**	-.114**	.005	-.011	-.077*	-.090**
Openness to change	-.049	.000	-.105**	.036	.013	-.033	-.031
Self-transcendence	.053	.019	.066*	-.057	-.044	.008	.009

\* p < .05; \*\*p < .01

Analysis of higher-order personal values revealed a significant negative correlation between self enhancement value domain and almost all dimensions of PWB [autonomy (r = - 0.146, p<.01) personal growth (r = - 0.114, p<.01), environmental mastery (r = - 0.088, p<.01), self-acceptance (r = - 0.077, p<.05)] and total PWB (r = - 0.090, p<.01). This finding points out ancient Indian wisdom that too much of importance on self and selfish ideals will yield conflict and lack of peace of mind.

There is also a significant positive correlation between self-transcendence value dimension and personal growth (r=.066, p<.05),

and significant negative correlation (r= -.105, p<.05) between openness to change values and personal growth. Even though the first finding is acceptable, the latter finding is surprising. To grow as a person psychologically means to be open to the opportunities in the environment. But contradictory result could possibly suggest that in the student's sample, keeping focused in the studies and avoiding any possible distractions in the form of extra-curricular activities and personal leisure life after college may be the norm. And transgressing the norm by indulgence in stimulation experiences may provide poorer personal growth.

Table 4 : Correlation coefficients between subscales of Psychological wellbeing scale

Dependent variables	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Positive relations	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance	Total psych. well being
1 Autonomy	1						
2 Environmental mastery	.586**	1					
3 Personal growth	.609**	.522**	1				
4 Positive relations	.403**	.482**	.501**	1			
5 Purpose in life	.452**	.399**	.614**	.669**	1		
6 Self-acceptance	.633**	.688**	.628**	.520**	.466**	1	
7 Total PWB	.773**	.765**	.828**	.757**	.774**	.827**	1

\* p < .05; \*\*p < .01

The different sub-dimensions of the Ryff's psychological wellbeing scale correlated significantly. It implies that there were significant mutual relationships between subscales of PWB scales, where those who scored high in one subscale also scored high in rest of the scales and vice versa.

In conclusion the present study attempted to explore the relationship between personal values and psychological wellbeing. The findings suggest that females possess significantly higher wellbeing than males. The males have significant higher hedonistic and stimulation values and the females have significantly higher self-direction and security values. It was suggested that this might be a reason for difference in the wellbeing levels between genders. The tradition and self-direction values correlate significantly with PWB, indicating the espousing of these values affords one higher psychological-wellbeing. Whereas espousing hedonistic values decreases the PWB levels of an individual in the Indian social milieu. The findings also indicate that focusing on Self-enhancement values affords one a depleted PWB. These results entail that in an Indian context following tradition with self-direction affords one a 'good life', whereas following hedonistic pleasures and self-enhancement values will decrease the psychological wellbeing.

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