



## BASIC INDIVIDUAL VALUES: CONCEPT AND SCOPE

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**ABSTRACT** There is increasing interest in the “values research”, reflected by a number of articles that are appearing in mainstream psychological journals that consider values as an important field of study. Interest in “values research” inherently demands the understanding of the term 'values' first. This paper provides an omnium gatherum of what we have understood about values. It focuses on the basic knowledge about values and how the concept of 'values' has evolved so far. Also, the paper draws attention to the varied areas where values research has extended its premises.

**KEYWORDS :****Introduction**

Values are common to each and every individual. Values have been the central element of poetry, plays, novels, scriptures around the world. Most recent expression of values can be easily referred to in popular television shows, movies, politics, science, business and art. A human being functions and operates on strong, deep-rooted beliefs, traditions, rituals, culture and society. And values are an indispensable part of this list. Our psyche is so much loaded by them that we pursue our 'values' through something as mere as buying an eco-friendly note-book and as big as selecting a life partner. On a scientific note, researchers suggest that people who bear an awareness and understanding of their values contribute positively to their subjective well-being, mental health, happiness and utilizing constructive coping strategies (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000).

Such being the importance and pervasiveness of values in an individual's life, it becomes very necessary to have a high quality and appropriate comprehension of values. This comprehension implies what 'values' are and the most reliable mode is reviewing empirical research on values. Reviewing 'values' is also worth as it clarifies and strengthens the base upon which the future values research rests.

**The Review**

Values have been a part of research work since 1930s. But empirical work on a concept like values which is too subjective and which has no clear explanation became a tough task. For this very reason, values remained ignorant of research for the period between 1960s and 1980s. However, the late 80s witnessed the revival of values in psychological research. Back in 1973, Rokeach's work on values led to an increased interest of psychological research towards values. This gave rise to an urge to conduct empirical investigations on human values. And in the 21st century, Schwartz is credited to explain the structure of basic human values (Jarden, 2010). His is the most contemporary work done towards comprehending values.

The agglomeration of review dispense an understanding of values into four time periods-

**Early 50s**

This phase described values as a concept deeply rooted in us and as group specific. Values were conceived as a system or a particular way of accomplishing an aim or action. It was believed that values follow the principle of individual differences among people and exhibit varied patterns of sometimes appearing clear and easy to understand and sometimes only being hinted without being directly expressed. Research indicated that people cling on to values in a determined manner; they do not stop holding values or give them up easily. One aspect emphasized was that values were not goals. Also, values were seen categorized into six types- social, theoretic, religious, economic, political and aesthetic.

**Early 60s and 70s**

This period claimed that values are a belief. A belief which serves as a basis for people to act by choice, that is inert, lasting and non-detachable in nature and concerned with criteria of preference. Values follow the idea that a particular action, aim or conduct is more

personally or socially preferable over an opposite nature of action, aim or conduct.

**Early 80s and 90s**

However, this period continued the trend of explaining values as belief (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) and as a tendency of making choices for certain matters over others but gradually empirical work shifted towards describing values a step further and in a more comprehensive manner. Thus, values were now exclaimed as reflecting what held utmost importance for people (Braithwaite & Law, 1985).

Values build the foundations of how an individual approaches one's life; provide rationale for acts and feelings of individuals, precursors of how one shall live and what one shall treasure (Kristiansen & Zanna, 1994). Values were also viewed as a guide for behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985), thought and action (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Values were considered to be a necessity for one's existence as a human being (Harari, 1989) and that practicing similar values and having knowledge of other people's values led to increased trust and decreased conflict among people (Tetlock, 1986; Schwartz, 1990; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995).

Schwartz (1994) described values as situation-specific goals following the pattern of relative importance that operate as guiding forces in an individual's life.

**Two thousand till date**

This phase regarded values as a means to define how we endorse ourselves to the world, how people act, make assessments about people and events (Jarden, 2010). Values were thought of as bringing about consistency in social behaviour and being pertinent to phenomenon like self-esteem and making decisions. This very phase also has a credit to describe values as goals of a higher degree.

Further research work emphasized that people practiced and held values as treasured assets (Hills & Argyle, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2001). Various findings laid stress on the idea that values were beliefs to which people are personally attached, which people tend to protect, give great attention to. They were considered as choices made by individuals or groups representing their priorities and preferences (Jarden, 2010) and were derived from ideologies of an individual.

Around the early phase of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a discussion evolved that values function as a guide (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004) which led to various researches with similar conclusions. Values were regarded as abstract motivations which guide, describe and rationalize an individual's attitudes, opinions and conduct (Bardi & Schwartz, 2000). Values were perceived as a group of concepts employed by people to guide their conduct in a desirable way, as forces that regulate our thinking and behaviour, that warn us about good/bad or right/wrong of things, aid us in making preferences, are indispensable to the phenomenon of being a human (Bain, Kashima & Haslam, 2003) and comprise the center point of person's identity (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). However, despite of being a field that attracts ample research attention now, there is a very limited research on values. For the reason that it is very much a recent area in psychology and various psychological sub-

divisions like- social psychology, clinical psychology, organizational psychology, cross-cultural psychology and human development (Bardi & Schwartz, 2000;Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004).

An interesting thing to note is that the researches after 2003-2004 do not focus on understanding values i.e. they do not describe what 'values' are rather they moved further than only ending up research with defining 'values'. Probably, because of getting enough knowledge about 'values' from previous works, they focused more on the utility, application and implication of understanding 'values'. And thus, we come to know about the huge scope of values in comprehending sociology, psychotherapy, personality, culture, behaviour, well-being, mental health, consumer behaviour and many more phenomena better.

**Values: Concept and Scope**

Time Period	Concept of Values	Scope of Values Research
Early 50s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>System or way of fulfilling an aim</li> <li>Follow principle of individual differences</li> <li>Values categorized into 6 types- social, theoretical, relational, economic, political, aesthetic</li> </ul>	Action, Types of values, Values in sociology, Values and Psychotherapy
Early 60s and 70s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values were conceived as a belief</li> <li>Values are concerned with criterion of preference</li> </ul>	Personality, Nature of values, Values and well-being
Early 80s and 90s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued perception as belief</li> <li>Considered as guide for behaviour, thought and action</li> <li>Development of most comprehensive theory of structure of Human Values- Schwartz Values Theory (1992)</li> <li>Values are situation-specific goals that operate as life's guiding forces</li> </ul>	Values and psychotherapy, Patient and therapist values in psychotherapy, Values and sub-group social contact, Behaviour, Culture and values, Work-related values, Values and choice of alternatives, Values and political attitudes, Happiness and values, Media and values, Counseling and values, Life role choices and values, Values transmission, Values and mental health, Values and management, Smoking behaviour and values, Gender and values, Values shift, Values and Personality dimensions, Values and Science of psychology
Two thousand till date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values are means to endorse ourselves to the world</li> <li>Are pertinent to self-esteem and decision-making</li> <li>Are goals of higher degree</li> <li>Are treasured assets</li> <li>Considered as choices that represent priorities or preference of individuals or groups</li> <li>Forces that regulate our thinking and behaviour</li> <li>Are an indispensable aspect human existence</li> </ul>	Values and self-regulation & health behaviour, Alcohol abuse, Values and introversion-extraversion, Values and positive psychology (Psychological & Subjective well-being), Values and end-of-life decisions, Values and behaviour, Protected values, Values and consumer behaviour, Values and trust in institutions, Work values, Personal identity and values, Cultural comparison of values, Intra-individual value change, Political attitudes and values, Personal and cultural values, Early family experience and adult values

**CONCLUSION**

Values emerged as a research topic way back since 1938. Values have been least researched and underwent a dormant stage between 1958 to 1978. Revival of values research occurred after 1978 and since then its scope has been continuously expanding.

Different periods have witnessed different description of 'values'. However different be the linguistic description, every period came forward by explaining 'values' as deeply-rooted belief that influences action, are guiding forces of life and are preference-based. Another important point is the Schwartz's values theory served as a golden milestone as it opened new horizons for understanding and measurement of values. It has a great contribution in values research.

The review displays that the scope of values research grew wider and wider as there was increased clarity of the term 'values'. Values were researched more in relation to culture, behaviour and positive psychology. Future research could focus on value transmission within families, values of adolescence, youth, adults and elderly, relating values with educational attainment, values and anti-social behaviour, values and parenting, age and value change.

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