# Basic Human Values, Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Psychological Well-Being Among University Students

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The present study aimed to measure the relationship between basic human values, right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being among university students. The Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2003), Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 2006) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) were used to collect data. Sample comprised of 250 students including (men = 55, women = 195) from different universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The findings indicated that positive relationship existed between two orthogonal (openness to change vs. conservation & self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement) of basic values and psychological well-being and negative relationship was found between right-wing authoritarianism and two orthogonal dimensions (openness to change vs conservation & self-transcendence vs self-enhancement) of values. It was also observed that positive relationship exists between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being. Nonsignificant gender differences were found on given study variables. The results of the given study can provide help in the educational sector for devising programs that can help inculcating certain values in the students in result enhancing their psychological well-being and general view of life.

*Keywords.* Basic human values; right-wing authoritarianism, psychological well-being

Values and norms are developed by all the human groups; values determine what is important for a particular individual (Williams, 1979). Since the origin of values, they have become center of attention

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in social sciences. The basic purpose of this research on values is to explore how these values might affect attitudes, behaviors, decisions, and social interactions of a person especially their relationship with authoritarian personality and psychological well-being. Values have been defined by different scholars over the period in different perspectives. According to Durkheim (1964) values are an essential component for explaining social and individual changes and organization. Kluckhohn (1951) and Rokeach (1973) identified values as criteria that people use to justify their decisions or actions or to evaluate the given event. Values are as well used to categorize individuals, societies and to understand the motivational underlining of attitudes and actions.

More recently, Schwartz (1992) has adopted the same view as of Kluckhohn (1951) and Rokeach (1973) and categorized values as criteria rather than as built-in qualities in objects. Schwartz identifies ten basic Values with different underlying motivations having compatibilities (e.g. conformity & security) and differences (e.g. power & benevolence) among them. Although these Values are common in almost all the cultures, the difference relies in the amount of importance assigned to each value; that is each individual and group have distinct value priorities (Schwartz, 2012). Schwart's model is one of the most comprehensive models and applicable in a wider cultural context (Knafo, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2011), therefore, present study is reliant upon value priorities based on Schwartz Value Theory comprising of ten basic values forming four higher order values followed as openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, self-direction), conservation (tradition, conformity, security), self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence), and self-enhancement (power, achievement) predominant in almost every culture. This theoretical structure was supported from different studies based on sample taken from sixty seven nations (Schwartz, 1992 ; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). It was also supported by a recent study by Fontaine et al. (2008).

As a result of the divergence and compatibilities among these values, the overall structures of values have been summarized into two orthogonal dimensions namely self-transcendence vs self-enhancement and openness to change vs conservatism (Schwartz, 2003). On the dimension of self-transcendence vs self-enhancement, values of power and achievement counter values of universalism and benevolence as both earlier highlight mainly about self-interests and second ones describe the importance of wellbeing and benefit of others. In the dimension of openness to change vs conservatism, stimulation and self-direction values oppose tradition and security

values by highlighting the self-governing actions, and willingness to change vs self-restraints and opposition to alteration. Hedonism includes both elements of openness to change and self-enhancement.

Preference of one value or set of values over other talks about to which particular group of society or school of thought one belongs to or affiliates with. For instance, researchers believe that individual pursuing particular values tend to have more inclination towards right wing ideology as compared to other values. More specifically right-wing attitudes refer to a greater preference for traditional values and norms, such as cultural or social conservatism, authoritarianism, and traditionalism (Onraet, Van Hiel, & Dhon, 2013). For example, Mc Farland (2010) stated that right-wing authoritarianism has a strong correlation with conservative values. Similarly, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) was found to have positive association with security values (conservatism) and negative association with universalism (self-transcendence) (Cohrs et al., 2007). Basis for RWA lies within identity or security concerns including preservation of tradition and in group norms (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002). Stangor and Leary (2006) also found that positive correlation exists between RWA and conservative Values.

During the past decade researchers have put increasing efforts in understanding the association between value priorities and psychological well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Values have both adaptive and maladaptive functions; in this regard Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) were among the first few scholars to distinguish among healthy and non-healthy values. Achievement, benevolence, stimulation, self-direction, and universalism were found to have positive relationship with well-being as compared to conformity, tradition and security Values which were found to have negative relationship with well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Cohen and Shamai (2009) conducted a study based on which they formulated that positive relationship exists among psychological well-being and Values of benevolence, self-direction, and achievement whereas negative relationship exists among Values of power and tradition and psychological well-being. Regardless of frequent backlashes, authoritarianism is still understood as pathological and casual factor of maladaptive behavior. However, a counter argument has also been made by Hiel and Clercq (2009). They claimed that authoritarianism could be considered as buffer zone against mental distress.

Many studies have been conducted to portray the relationship of authoritarianism and values. It was claimed that individuals having inclination towards Right-Wing Authoritarianism tend to give more importance to conservative values (Cohrs et al., 2005). Right-wing

authoritarianism was found to have a positive strong correlation with conservative values (Mc-Farland, 2010; Stangor & Leary, 2006). Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) was also found to have positive association with security Values and negative association with universalism (Feather & McKee, 2012).

Mainly Pakistani society is based on collectivistic culture in which tradition and Values are given certain preferences leaving a narrow passageway for critical or innovative way of life. Similarly, Schwartz (1994) ascertains that traditional or conservative Values are endorsed by collectivistic culture more than individualistic culture. Likewise, it was found that people from collectivistic culture give more preference to in-group members, surrender to in-group establishment, and demonstrate greater in-group prejudice (Marcus & Le, 2013). Keeping in view the similarities among collectivistic culture and authoritarianism, it is very essential to study the different dynamics of authoritarianism and its relation to basic human values with respect to Pakistani society. In Pakistan right-wing authoritarianism specifically in terms of its relationship with mental health and its proposed effect on psychological well-being is a less explored research area so far. Correspondingly, the specific relationship of basic values and psychological health has not been found. Therefore, present study will be contributive into this less explored area of testing relationship of authoritarian ideology and psychological well-being in the context of Pakistan. The result of present study would be useful for creating awareness and insight into different perspectives of political ideologies, values, and their impact on psychological health.

The objectives of the present study is to investigate relationship among basic values, right-wing authoritarianism, and psychological well-being. In addition, it is also intended to study gender differences on values, right wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being.

**Hypotheses**

1. Individuals scoring higher on openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement will have negative relationship with right-wing authoritarianism.
2. Individuals scoring higher on openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement will have positive relationship with psychological well-being.
3. A negative relationship exists between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being.

4. Men will be higher on right-wing authoritarianism as compared to women.

## Method

### Sample

This sample comprised of 250 (men = 55, women = 195) university students ranging from 18-35 years of age from different universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. Their education level was 14 years and above including PhD and was belonged to different disciplines. Participants belonged from different cultural and ethnic groups. They were taken from both nuclear and joint family systems. Sample was selected via convenient sampling technique grounded on cross sectional survey research design.

### Instruments

The demographic sheet consists of gender, age, educational level, parental status (alive or deceased), education level of mother and father, birth order, and family type.

### *Portrait Value Questionnaire*

Portrait Value Questionnaire was developed by Schwartz et al. (2003) consisting of 21 items has been psychometrically validated in different cultures. The subject is supposed to evaluate him/herself in terms of each portrayal, describing how much each portrayal is comparable to him/her on a 6-point scale, from 1 = *not like me at all* to 6 = *very much like me*. Alpha reliability of this scale in terms of each of the 10 basic values including Power ($\alpha$ = .65); Security ($\alpha$ = .70); Conformity ($\alpha$ = .63); Tradition ($\alpha$ = .53); Benevolence ($\alpha$ = .67); Universalism ($\alpha$ = .62); Self-Direction ($\alpha$ = .45); Stimulation ($\alpha$ = .72); Hedonism ($\alpha$ = .76); and Achievement ($\alpha$ = .76). In this study Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ-21) was be used to measure two orthogonal dimensions; Self –Transcendence vs Self- Enhancement and Openness to change vs Conservatism featuring 10- basic Values that are Power (PO) (2, 17), Security (SE) (5, 14), Conformity (CO)(7, 16), Tradition (TR) (9, 20), Benevolence (BE) (12, 18), Universalism (UN) (3, 8, 19), Self Direction (SD) (1, 11), Stimulation (ST) (6, 15), Hedonism (HE) (10, 21) and Achievement (AC) (4, 13).

### Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale

The most recent version of Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 2006) consists of 22 items. It is a 9-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency of scale is equal to Cronbach's alpha of .90. High scorers would be called as right-wing authoritarians; while, low scorers would represent left wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996).

### Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale

The 18-items Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale was originally developed by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (*strongly agree* = 1; *strongly disagree* = 7). The scale consists of six subscales namely Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, The Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others. High score acquired on this scale indicated better psychological wellbeing. The test-retest reliability coefficient of this scale reported by original authors .82 (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

### Procedure

With the permission of concerned authorities' proposed students from different universities of Rawalpindi/Islamabad were approached by the researcher. After being briefed about the purpose of the study, the informed consent was obtained. The researcher then collected the data by administering the scale to the respondents. Participants were expected to give their honest answers. The respondents were instructed to make sure to give response on every item. There was no time limit for completion of the scales as they were allowed to complete the scales at their ease. Respondents were assured about the confidentiality of the information they were providing, and they were given gratitude for their collaboration at the end of the process.

After getting data, scoring and analysis was done and results were computed to test the hypotheses.

## Results

Table 1

*Correlation between Study Variables (N = 250)*

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Right-wing Authoritarianism | - | .04 | -.18[*] | -.13 |
| 2. Psychological Wellbeing | | - | .40[**] | .34[**] |
| 3. Portrait Value (OP-CO) | | | - | .67[**] |
| 4. Portrait Value (ST-SE) | | | | - |

*Note.* OP-CO = Openness to Change Vs Conservation; ST-SE = Self-Transcendence Vs Self-Enhancement.
[*]$p < .05.$ [**]$p < .01.$

Table 1 indicates correlations among study variables. Results indicate that right-wing authoritarianism is positively correlated with psychological well-being. The two higher order of portrait values including openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement are found to have negative relationship with right-wing authoritarianism and significant positive relationship with psychological well-being.

*Figure 2.* Path Model of Relationship between Higher-Order Values with Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Psychological Well-Being.
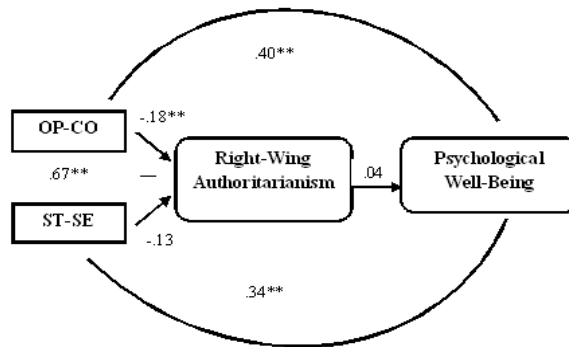


The above path model indicates that there exists a negative relationship between openness to change vs conservation and right-wing authoritarianism, that is, people with conservative values have a positive relationship with right-wing authoritarianism. Likewise, people with openness to change values have negative associations with right-wing authoritarianism. Moreover, there exists a

negative relationship between self-transcendence vs self-enhancement, indicating that self-transcendence has positive association with right-wing authoritarianism and a negative association with self enhancement. Besides, there is a nonsignificant relationship between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being.

Table 2

*Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Predicting Psychological Well Being Among University students (N=250)*

|  | B | SEB | β | t | p | LL | UL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors |  |  | Criterion: Psychological Wellbeing | | | | |
| PV (OP-CO) | .47 | .16 | .25 | 2.91 | .004 | 0.15 | 0.79 |
| PV (ST-SE) | .48 | .19 | .21 | 2.54 | .011 | 0.11 | 0.86 |
| RWA | .06 | .03 | .10 | 1.72 | .086 | -0.00 | 0.13 |

*Note.* RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism; PV (OP-CO) = Portrait Value (Openness to Change Vs Conservation); PV (ST-SE) = Portrait Value (Self-Transcendence Vs Self-Enhancement).

Summary of regression analysis shows that both openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self enhancement dimensions of basic human values accounted for 16% of variance in psychological well-being $F$ (3,247) = 22.59, $p$ <.000 and significantly predicts psychological well-being ($t$ = 2.91, $p$ < .00) and indicating that people higher on openness to change and self-transcendence are higher on psychological well-being. Right-wing authoritarianism accounted for 1% variance in psychological well-being $F$(3,247) = 16.18, $p$ > .005 and it does not significantly predict psychological well-being ($t$ = 1.72, $p$ >.005).

Table 3

*Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for Assessment of Basic Human Values and Psychological Well-Being as Predictors of Right-Wing Authoritarianism Among University Students (N=250)*

|  | B | SEB | β | t | p | LL | UL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors |  |  | Criterion: Right-wing Authoritarianism | | | | |
| PV (OP-CO) | -.67 | .29 | -.21 | -2.25 | .025 | -1.26 | -0.08 |
| PV (ST-SE) | -.15 | .35 | -.04 | -0.04 | .654 | -.85 | 0.53 |
| PWB | .21 | .12 | .12 | 1.72 | .086 | -0.03 | 0.45 |

*Note.* PV (OP-CO) = Portrait Value (Openness to Change Vs Conservation); PV (ST-SE) = Portrait Value (Self-Transcendence Vs Self-Enhancement); PWB = Psychological Wellbeing.

Summary of regression analysis shows that openness to change vs conservation dimension of basic human values accounted for 3% of variance in right-wing authoritarianism $F(3,247) = 8.48$, $p < .005$ and predicts right-wing authoritarianism ($t = -2.25$ $p > .005$) indicating that people higher on openness to change are lower on right-wing authoritarianism but the results are nonsignificant. Similarly self-transcendence vs self enhancement dimensions of basic human values accounted for 1% of variance in right-wing authoritarianism $F(3,247) = 8.48$, $p < .005$ and predicts right-wing authoritarianism ($t = -0.04$, $p > .005$) indicating that people higher on self-transcendence are lower on right-wing authoritarianism but the results are nonsignificant. Psychological well-being accounted for 0.5% variance in right-wing authoritarianism $F(3,247) = 8.48$, $p < .005$ and it does not significantly predict right-wing authoritarianism ($t = 1.72$, $p > .005$).

Table 4

*Gender Differences on Study Variables (N=250)*

| Variables | Men (n = 55) M(SD) | Women (n = 195) M(SD) | t | p | 95% CI LL | 95% CI UL | Cohen's d |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PWB | 51.98(13.35) | 53.00(11.81) | -.55 | .152 | -4.68 | 2.58 | 0.08 |
| RWA | 22.21(13.35) | 22.73(20.56) | -.16 | .250 | -6.83 | 5.79 | 0.03 |
| PV (OP-CO) | 22.57(6.03) | 21.15(6.51) | .15 | .476 | -1.67 | 1.96 | 0.22 |
| PV (ST-SE) | 21.15(5.11) | 20.57(5.49) | .74 | .409 | -0.94 | 2.09 | 0.10 |

*Note.* RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism; PWB = Psychological Well-Being; PV (OP-CO) = Portrait Value (Openness to Change Vs Conservation); PV (ST-SE) = Portrait Value (Self-Transcendence Vs Self-Enhancement).

Table 4 indicates there are nonsignificant gender differences on psychological well-being, basic human values and right-wing authoritarianism.

## Discussion

To explore the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism, and two orthogonal dimensions of basic human values, it was hypothesized that individuals scoring higher on openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement tend to be lower on right-wing authoritarianism. Results are in line with past research, for example, in a study by Cohrs et al. (2005), it was revealed that right-wing authoritarianism is negatively related to openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-

enhancement dimensions of basic human values. Similarly, Duriez et al. (2005) and Mc Farland (2010) also found significant relationship of right-wing authoritarianism with these two dimensions of basic human values. Findings indicate that people who tend to seek new experiences and opportunities are more likely to feel confined and restricted by the social norms and traditions and the reverse would be the case for conservatives as they give more importance to traditions and group norms. Similarly, according to social norm theory (Fein & Spencer, 1997), individuals' expression of out-group prejudice and derogation has a self-restorative function claiming that it benefits them by boosting their self-esteem. Consequently, it can be ascertained that individuals who adhere to right-wing ideologies tend to have more inclination towards power and achievement values and tend to show derogatory and demeaning attitude towards out-group members and reverse would be the case for the ones who treat out-group members as an equal being of society and work for their welfare.

To understand the relationship between basic human values and psychological well-being, it was hypothesized that individuals scoring high on openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement tend to have positive relationship with psychological well-being. The result of the study has indicated that a positive relationship exists between psychological well-being and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement dimension of basic human values which also specifies that individual having high scores on self-enhancement (power and achievement) values have low scores on psychological well-being. Self-enhancement values (power and achievement) express a desire for control and dominance in order to compensate uncertainty and sense of threat to one's material, psychological and social welfare. The reason that they are negatively correlated in our study is the evidence that they are a result or a cause of poor sense of well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000).

Similarly, the sample of the current study was drawn from a population which is largely group oriented and adheres to collectivistic approach, where group norms and values are given more importance as compared to personal growth or achievement. Working for the welfare and benefits of others (self-transcendence) is the core and prevalent values of this society.  This can also be further rationalized in terms of Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) congruity explanation claiming that individuals are likely to experience positive sense of well-being when they honor the same values that prevail in their surroundings (Sagiv, 2011).  Similarly the positive relationship between openness to change (self-direction and stimulation) and

psychological well-being harmonize with the emphasis of self-determination theory on autonomy and competence as enhancing well-being. These associations are also in agreement with the proposal that people who enjoy an optimistic sense of well-being prioritize personal development rather than self-protection, and the idea that such individuals have the emotional supplies to follow demanding, self-directed goals. Previous studies are as well in support of this result. Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) have established in their study that positive relationship exists between openness to change vs conservation and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement values and psychological well-being. Cohen and Shamai (2009) have also predicted similar relationship between dimensions of basic human values and psychological well-being.

To explore the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being, it was hypothesized that negative relationship exists between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being as supported by Duries et al (2011) and Tomkins' (1965). Authoritarian's attitudes were found to be a risk factor for the development of depressive symptoms (Duries et al, 2011). Similarly, Tomkins' (1965) suggested that positive relationship exists between right-wing orientation and negative emotions such as shame and fear. However, results of the present suggests that a positive relationship exists between right-wing authoritarianism and psychological well-being. The results can be rationalized in the context of the previous findings claiming that authoritarianism could be considered as buffer zone against mental distress (Hiel & Clercq, 2009). Previouly, it was claimed that some of the positive qualities including greater happiness were found to be present among conservatives in the United States. It was rationalized in terms of its relationship with religiosity as religiosity was found to have positive relationship with psychological well-being (Myers, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995) and right-wing authoritarians were found to be more religious as compared to Left-wing (Olson & Green, 2006).

A nonsignificant difference was found between male and female on psychological well-being, basic human values and right-wing authoritarianism. The sample for gender differences was not proportionate and past research also provide mixed support for any gender differences between right wing authoritarians and values orientations (Berzonsky & Papini, 2014). Therefore, role of gender in such variables can be studied in more breadth by a supplementary qualitative study.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

The present study may have some limitations such as; while, interpreting the results of this study a number of limitations should be taken into considerations. First the sample of current study was based on different University students, thus the results may have been influenced by the characteristics of these educational institutes. To minimize this limitation, it is needed that sample must be taken from different facets of life to assess the actual variability. Second, as the study was assessing psychological processes, the data was collected using self-report measures so common method-bias should be considered. Third, because of sample size, collection of data through online communication mediums and usage of cross-sectional survey design there can be a limitation of generalizability of data in different settings. This limitation could be reprimanded using other more effective methods of data collection and by increasing the sample size incorporating individuals from different parts of Pakistan representing different cultural and ethnic groups.

**Implications**

The present study was aimed to understand the relationship between basic human values, right-wing authoritarianism, and psychological well-being. The results of present study will help to focus on whether certain values can count for why individuals are authoritarians and how it will affect their psychological well being. The result of this study can also be used to create awareness for educational sector including teachers that how they can inculcate certain values in students leading towards better mental health of students. The results can also pave the way for further research in this genre specifically in Pakistan.

**Conclusion**

To better understand the bipolar attitudes in a Pakistani society from right wing to left wing ideologies it is imperative to understand a link between right wing authoritarianism and psychological wellbeing. We found people having right wing authoritarianism are higher on psychological wellbeing. This may be due to the cultural context of Pakistan where norms and traditional values are considered more socially acceptable and appreciated.

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