

An Exploratory Investigation of Refugees Personal Values and Subjective Well-Being in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: This study offers an integrated approach to understanding subjective well-being and attempts to extend the theoretical and empirical evidence on the causal relationships among Afghan refugees from personal values effect on their subjective well-being. The data were collected using an online survey among ($n = 105$) Afghan refugees in Malaysia. A structural equation model using AMOS was developed to examine how personal values and subjective well-being were related. Results showed that: (1) Healthy values are related to positive effects for second-generation immigrants and (2) Unhealthy values are related to negative effects. These results can be due to Afghan refugees' rising aspirations and ambitions that follow their routine in the improved surroundings in their host country. It can be suggested that fostering healthy values and delaying the process of Afghan refugees' uncertain social expectations is a promising route to enhance their subjective well-being.

KEYWORDS: personal values, subjective well-being, second-generation immigrant, Refugee

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Article 1 of the 1951 Convention of Refugees, a person is considered a refugee if they are living outside of their place of origin or usual residence and has a legitimate fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political organization, and they are outside their regular place of living. A refugee is not able or not willing to seek shelter within that nation or go back there due to fear of harassment and persecution. Thus, people under this category need the fundamental freedoms of protection, safety, independence, family life and migration. While the rights of refugees to receive assistance for their physical and mental health, as well as education and justice, are guaranteed by Articles 23 of the Refugee Convention and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHCR, 2010).

The idea of values has taken center stage in the field of environmental ethics ever since it emerged as an academic discipline in the early 1970s. People see values as large motivational structures that articulate what is important to an individual (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Rohan, 2000; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). People also consider actions, objects, individuals, and events to be more or less attractive based on their values (Feather, 1995; Schwartz, 1992). But are values linked to our sense of well-being as well?

Human values vary within and between cultural classes (Rokeach, 1973); whereas the country is seen as the main unit of common basic values (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). This coincides with the definition of cultural values by Williams (2004) as common beliefs about what is healthy, right, and desirable in a society. Values stressed in a given nation have become the most central aspect of culture comprehension, as scholars hold them accountable for influencing and explaining individuals' and groups' basic views, behaviors, and goals.

Personal values are seen from the psychological point of view as beliefs about desirable, transformational objectives, varying in significance, which functions as guiding ideals in people's lives (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). While different from other psychological constructs (Schwartz, 1992), values have been found to be systematically linked to personality characteristics (Boer & Fischer, 2013), motivations (Vasconcellos et al., 2020), individual religiosity (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004), and attitudes (Cowling, et al, 2019).

Schwartz (1992), who first defined ten different kinds of personal values-Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Obedience, Stability, Control, Accomplishment, Hedonism, Relaxation, and Self-Direction at the individual level, mostly complies with the theory of human values when talking about values. There are some good and healthy values and some others unhealthy (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; & Strupp, 1980).

Schwartz & Sortheix (2018) indicated that the pursuit of healthy values might lead to perceptions like people are kind or as attitudes for example tolerance or good behaviors caused increased well-being.

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With regard to this phenomenon, this research starts with the recognition of the significance of Afghan refugees' faces and experiences in planning for social inclusion. This is because it has been the catalyst for many social and government projects to create an international bridge to understand and experience across borders (Pitts, 2005).

The argument made by Senator Fulbright (see Fulbright, 1976) indicates that programs for inclusion can have very positive implications. However, the full positive effects are not always obtained due to different social and psychological obstacles (Fedrigo et al., 2021). In addition, Pitts (2005) indicated that in the worst-case circumstances, this might escalate global tensions and increase ethnocentrism for both parties. Due to the complexity of the influences and interactions of the well-being attributes that were previously studied in isolation from one another, it may be possible to learn more about what refugees experience by examining their experiences further during their stay. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine how personal values affect the well-being of Afghan refugees.

Sagiv & Schwartz (2000) have proposed that values should play a functioning role in the process-related experience. Schwartz found that some pan-cultural principles of motivation include kindness (protection and improvement of the well-being of people with whom one is in regular contact), universalism (understanding, respect, tolerance and defense of the welfare of all people) and self-direction (independent thought and action, choosing own goals), had been continuously rated across cultures as being greater effective than other varieties of values. In addition, this research adds to the body of knowledge by investigating the applicability of psychological concepts in the sense of refugees.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Malaysia fact sheet (2023), the total number of refugees and asylum seekers is some 183,790 from different countries by the end of January. The number of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia was around 3370 Afghans at the end of January 2023.

With the present growth in the number of refugees in Malaysia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is aware of the challenges and information gaps between the organization and the partner nations and the refugees, especially in times of crisis (UNHCR, 2020).

Despite the fact that Afghan refugees can be found all over the world, they prefer to congregate in the biggest city. Even though this experience in the host country can present opportunities to encourage intercultural competence and broaden one's worldview, adjusting to a new culture may be difficult and stressful for the refugees (Jamaludin, et al., 2021).

Evidence from around the world is mounting that unfavorable social and economic conditions, such as pandemics, have a significant impact on the risk of sickness (Schmidt et al., 2020). The purpose of this study was to determine whether refugees' personal values were independent of their ability to achieve social inclusion. The current study addresses how personal values influence an ability to "fit in" and subjective well-being as an indicator of positive mental health. The researcher limits the hypothesis to the flow of results from personal values to subjective well-being. Afghanistan refugees who have experience with the Malaysian climate and who know the Malaysian community well are participants in the current study. The results are then supposed to flow toward subjective well-being from personal values.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nearly 200 million people now live in foreign countries, according to a UN survey (Naghdi, 2010). It is understood that migration has become an important aspect of the 21st century in terms of immigrant interactions, and current evidence suggests that it continues to bring both challenges and opportunities for the host and immigrant communities (UN, 2000:54).

With this in mind, this study sought to connect the immigrant behavior of the second generation to other areas of the lives and experiences of people (i.e., the kind of happiness that contributes to the quality of life or the general sense of well-being and to examine the broader effect on others' lives based on the findings of studies by Berry & Hou (2019); Bloch & Hirsch (2017), Sirgy (2009) and (Uysal & Perdue, 2012).

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes, refugees in Malaysia predominantly live in the Klang Valley, where they are forced to share living space in large groups, frequently finding jobs under the table as their status is often not registered as legal. In addition, they are not able to attend formal educational institutions and although they can enjoy access to the Malaysian government health care system, the cost of treatment combined with a lack of sufficient income may discourage refugees from seeking treatment (Zarkesh, et al, 2017).

This study focused on gaining an understanding of the well-being of Afghan refugees in Malaysia, considering the lack of legal status for refugees in Malaysia and the plight they face in terms of access to jobs, education and health care. Well-being is explored in this research through a self-administered questionnaire to identify how participants respond to life in Malaysia by gaining an awareness of how their well-being is affected by personal values. Maybe the research suggests that there is a significant relationship between personal values, and subjective well-being (Bobowik et al, 2011, & Jamaludin et al, 2016).

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While correlations between subjective well-being and refugees are developing agreement on how values will affect the personal and subjective well-being of refugees remains unclear (Jibeen, 2019; Hendriks, & Bartram, 2019). The study indicated the gap and concentrates on the personal values and subjective well-being of Afghan refugees.

In the refugee context, the relationships between values and well-being are worth investigating because these relationships can have an impact on behavior, a topic in which all of society has an interest (Hendriks, & Burger, 2019). We can understand how differences in values impact their well-being only by elucidating the value fit, enabling the selection of programs and initiatives for the right group of refugees that fit well with the value system built and formed by the appropriate decision-makers (Cohen & Shamai, 2010). In addition, according to Cavlin (2020), research about individual values and well-being mostly occurs in America and Europe. Thus, investigation of the relationship of these variables in an area where it is still plausible such as Malaysia is warranted.

Grounded on The Human Values Theory by Schwartz (1992, 1996 and 2000), the theory of Self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2001) and other relevant literature, this study put advancing the statement that the variables analyzed can be taken as a starting point in the design of studies related to core issues relevant to the perception of personal values of Afghans refugees' in affecting subjective well-being.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To the researcher's knowledge there are no studies investigative the relationships between personal values and subjective well-being of second-generation immigrants. This was the goal of the present study. Against the backdrop of theories and past studies reviewed above, the researcher tested based on the following research question:

RQ 1 Which domains of values healthy vs unhealthy are more strongly associated with Afghans Refugees' subjective well-being?

RQ 2 Which subdomains of values in healthy (inspiration, self-direction, diversity, kindness, and achievement) vs unhealthy (conformity, security, and power) values, are more strongly associated with subjective well-being?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

RO1: To examine which domains of values healthy vs unhealthy are more strongly associated with refugees' (Afghans) subjective well-being.

RO2: To examine subdomains of values in healthy (stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, and achievement) vs unhealthy (conformity, security, and power) values, which are more strongly associated with subjective well-being.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A paradigm is the fundamental worldview or set of beliefs that guides the investigation (Creswell, 2009). It reflects the set of beliefs, values and assumptions that are generally accepted among researchers concerning the nature and conduct of research. Therefore, a paradigm can be described as a holistic conceptual framework that underpins a research methodology. In essence, the paradigm of this study can be categorized as the objectivist approach which is also known as positivism (Bryman, 2008).

The study believes that the independent variables (personal values) can act as meaningful entities in explaining the subjective well-being of Afghan refugees. As such, by using the effect analysis approach, the hypotheses can be tested and the truth about the Afghan refugees concerning subjective well-being can be attained. Thus, this is the epistemological view that underpins this study. This type of testing study is consistent with the principle of reductivism (Bryman, 2008).

Additionally, in this phase of the literature search, focus is placed on two categories of crucial data for all studies:

- I. Findings from earlier research on subjective well-being and personal values
- ii. theories and ideas used in earlier studies that looked at subjective well-being.

Selecting some of the components of a population as a unit of study allows this sampling design to infer conclusions about the subjective well-being of the Afghan refugee. The following primary factors were given more weight when choosing a sample size for this study: (1) because of cost-effectiveness, (2) high accuracy of the result, (3) great speed in collection of the data, (4) availability of the population elements. The sampling design involves selecting the subjects from the target population, the selection strategy, and the sample size.

There were 105 Afghan refugees in the sample. There isn't a sampling frame in the nation that could accurately capture the proportion of Afghan refugees living in Malaysia. However, age and gender are represented in the sample in a way that would give the current study the needed variation. Subjective well-being and personal values, which have several types and branches, are additional study factors.

1.7 FINDING

1.7.1 Descriptive Statistics

For all the scales used in the analysis, Table 1 indicates the means and standard deviations. With the exception of power and negative affect, all mean scores were above the neutral point of the scale (above 3), indicating that respondents were on the positive side of the scale. Additionally, the lower end of the scale suffered a setback.

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Table 1, descriptive Statistics for the Variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Values - Self-direction	4.87	0.65
Values - Benevolence	4.66	0.62
Values - Achievement	3.70	1.19
Values – Stimulation	4.17	1.05
Values - Universalism	4.89	0.62
Values - Hedonism	4.34	1.13
Values - Security	4.26	0.88
Values - Conformity	3.93	0.84
Values - Tradition	3.01	0.78
Values - Power	2.82	0.99
Life satisfaction	3.66	0.63
Positive affect	3.50	0.61
Negative affect	2.01	0.61

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to come up with answers to the study topics. The two-step method that was recommended was used for the data analysis by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

To optimize all measurements for the structural model, a computation model utilising the maximum likelihood estimate technique was used. The initial items related to five important variables, including positive influence, adverse impact, life satisfaction, "healthy" personal values (self-direction, benevolence, hedonism, universalism, stimulation, and achievement), and "unhealthy" personal values (conformity, tradition, security, and power) (CFA), were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. The CFA results revealed a marginal fit (CMIN/DF =1.62), a root mean square approximation error (RMSEA) of 0.07, and a comparative fit index (CFI) of .70 for the remaining items. Consequently, for all further investigations, this measurement model was used.

A reliability test was conducted to ascertain the internal consistency of several measures for each construct. According to Table 1, every Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value is greater than 0.5, with the exception of the health and life satisfaction values, which are both 0.47. Nevertheless, the composite reliability ranged from 0.71 to 0.84 for almost all structures. This demonstrates that numerous tests are valid for assessing each component in this approach (Nunnally, 1978). The factor loadings inside the constructs were used to perform a construct validity test, and as can be shown in Table 2, all standardized factor loadings were found to be quite high. The measurement had convergent validity, as evidenced by this (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Table 2, Validity and Reliability Analysis

Variables	Loadings	AVE	CR
Healthy values	0.85	0.47	0.71
	0.65		
	0.50		
Unhealthy values	0.98	0.64	0.77
	0.56		
Positive affect	0.92	0.53	0.77
	0.66		
	0.56		
Negative affect	0.81	0.57	0.80
	0.83		
	0.61		
Life satisfaction	0.76	0.47	0.73
	0.69		
	0.60		

*AVE: Average Variance Extracted, CR: Composite Reliability

The model is assumed to be free of multicollinearity issues because Table 2 shows that the coefficients of correlation between the latent constructs were not larger than 0.9 (Tabachnick, Fidell, & Ullman, 2007; Hair et al., 2013). The constructs were found to pass the criteria for their reliability, convergence, and discriminant validity, according to sufficient evidence from the reliability and validity tests.

1.8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The empirical results of this study suggest that one needs to further explore how personal values interact with each other in order to understand the well-being of Afghan refugees. The analytical contribution of this study is expressed in terms of exploring the interaction between the different values of well-being in refugees by addressing the interaction of the antecedents.

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This analysis concludes that individual variations in the focus on stimulation, self-direction and hedonism in personal values are significant determinants of positive affect. Their negative effect is affected by conformity and security. Possibly refugees may benefit more from their experience in Malaysia depending on their personal values. The information on their value preferences can also be used as a basis for possible interventions to enhance social inclusion. More studies must investigate whether personal values are predictors of other outcomes for Afghans refugees, such as psychological health.

This study has a variety of practical effects as well. The affective and cognitive dimensions of subjective well-being and personal values are critical for the study of immigrants of the second generation. Relevant parties need to take into account their experiences and variables that promote subjective well-being and personal values.

It is also suggested here that further work on the predictors of subjective well-being is necessary. By extending the proposed model to include other constructs in the relationship between personal values and subjective well-being, predictors such as personality stress resilience (Grant and Kinman 2012), further examination can be carried out.

In addition, the researcher would like to encourage potential researchers to look at moderating or mediating factors (social support) from this study that would impact subjective well-being. Other than this, one potential solution is to design research related to the different interpretations of the experience of second-generation immigrants, such as discrimination and acculturation, in the future. To examine connections between theoretical conceptions in the field of well-being studies, perhaps field experiments can be added. At the same time, it might be suggested that more qualitative research be conducted. This would offer more thorough, unrestricted viewpoints.

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