

Demographic Correlates of Work Values: A Study of Social Workers in India

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Engaging a worker remains a big challenge for organisations. Research suggests that understanding work values of professionals enables organisations keep the workers engaged. Besides analyzing the work value preferences of social work professionals in India, the study empirically examines the relationship between demographic variables and work value preferences. In all 200 social workers from various sectors in the National Capital Region participated in the study. The study suggests that social work professionals preferred work values which could have helped them realized their potential while giving least priority to social interaction, social relation and dependency values. Demographic variables like age, education, religion and gender were found to impact the work value preference of social workers.

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Changing Values

Values occupy a prominent place in the scientific and public discourses at various levels. They are believed to have a substantial influence on the cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of individuals (Locke 1976, Rokeach 1973), and changing values are frequently evoked as explanations for a variety of social ills (Etzioni 1993), employee problems in the workplace (Nord et al 1988). The conceptualisation of values have focused on two types at the most fundamental level, one being an object or outcome while the other is used to describe a person as opposed to an object. The early understanding of values came from Allport (1931) for whom value was a belief upon which a man acts by preference. Kluckhohn et al. (1951) further expanded the understanding by defining values "as a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action." However, in much of the organisational literature dealing with values, the framework and definition advanced by

Rokeach (1973) has been particularly popular 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.” A value system is an enduring organisation of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-state of existence along a continuum of relative importance. In Rokeach’s conception, values entail attention to both means (such as acts) and ends (such as outcomes of various sorts). Later on, a more elaborate definition was given by Schwartz (1992), who defined values as “desirable states, objects, goals, or behaviours, transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and to choose among alternative modes of behavior.” An important merit of this definition is that it distinguishes values from attitudes by pointing at their generalised nature.

Work Values & Their Impacts

The system of work values functions in a many ways. It affects an individual’s perceptual processes in that external stimuli are perceived in ways that are consistent with the value structure itself (Postman et al 1948, Williams 1979). Values serve a legitimizing function in that they can provide reasons to justify an individual’s past behaviour

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(Nord et al., 1988, Williams 1979). Of critical importance is the propensity of values to directly affect behaviour in a way that encourages individuals to act in accordance with their values (Rokeach 1973, Williams 1979). In this regard, values are one of a number of forces that affect behaviour (Rokeach 1973). Values should, therefore, have their greatest impact in the absence of task and situational variables (e.g., incentives, limitations) that affect behaviour in other ways. Also, as with other constructs that are central to an individual, values affect general modes of behaviour across situations and over time (Epstein 1979).

While assessing the relationship between values and behaviour, it is important to distinguish “espoused” values from “in use” values (Argyris & Schon 1978). Since values are socially desirable, there are strong pressures to publicly express and validate values whether or not they are held internally (“in use”). Therefore, when an individual’s values are different from those prevalent in his or her social environment (e.g., unit, organisation), the values of the social environment may influence what the individual says, but they may not predict how he or she will actually behave. Because values affect perceptions and behaviour, they also have implications for interpersonal interactions. When persons share similar value systems (i.e., interpersonal value congruence), they tend to perceive external stimuli in similar ways. Among other things, this similarity in interpreting and classifying environ-

mental events serves to clarify their inter-personal communications. Individuals with similar value systems also behave in similar ways. This enables them to better predict the behaviour of others and, thus, more efficiently coordinate their actions. In effect, value similarity produces a social system or culture that facilitates the interactions necessary for individuals to achieve their common goals (Kluckhohn 1951). Because predictability in interpersonal interactions reduces role ambiguity and conflict, individuals with similar values should also experience greater satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships (Fisher & Gitelson 1983, Byrne's 1971).

Demographics & Work Values

Even though there is growing interest in analyzing the work values of organisational members (Elizur 1984, 1994, Elizur et al 1991, Judge & Bretz 1992) a general lack of attention has been found in professionals working in non-profit organisations in general and social workers in particular in India. Social work professionals have remained elusive from the understanding of work value priorities, similarities/differences with fellow professionals in other fields and the impact of particular value system. Researchers have considered several demographic characteristics as possible correlates of work values. For example, Cherrington et al (1979) found that age, education, and seniority were correlated with several work values including the moral importance of work, pride in one's craftsmanship, and the

importance of money. Gender is probably the most popular demographic variable in work-value studies. A consistent finding in the literature is that men tend to be more concerned about money and other economic rewards, as well as independence, mastery, dominance, competitiveness, and long-term career goals. Women, on the other hand, tend to be concerned with job affiliation, social approval, and shorter-term career goals (Elizur 1994, Furnham 1984, Lynn 1993, Dolan et al. 2002). Tait, Padgett and Baldwin (1989) found out that as women have more equal participation in the workforce, such gender differences are reduced. Traditionally, it can be said that men have been observed to be more concerned with instrumental values and women with affective ones.

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One problem with such demographic analyses is that it is quite difficult to identify the actual causal factor. Thus, it is likely, that gender, race, and age do not directly impact work values but are actually surrogates for societal roles, socialization and expectations (Elizur 1994, Mannheim 1993). For this reason, one must be careful in attributing any causal impact to demographics, separate from society and culture.

Objectives of the Study

The review of existing literature leads us to focus on critical aspects about

(Table Contd.)

	Mean	SD	Age	Edu	Rel	Gender	WE
Physical activity	13.85	2.71	.07	.00	-.09	-.09	.09
Prestige	15.25	2.94	.03	-.08	.02	-.01	-.05
Risk taking	12.24	3.69	.01	-.04	.00	-.01	.03
Social Interaction	13.14	2.57	.09	.09	-.11	-.19*	.17*
Social Relation	13.44	2.74	.01	.05	.05	-.08	.03
Variety	13.01	2.59	.21**	.06	-.01	-.07	.24**
Working Condition	14.91	2.84	.01	.22**	.11	.04	.05
Peace of Mind	16.23	2.43	.04	.10	.04	.01	-.00
Comforts of Life	12.02	2.95	-.11	.02	.08	-.04	-.12
Dependency	11.09	3.18	.16*	-.02	-.06	-.18*	.27**

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

This was followed by achievement (Mean = 16.87), ability utilisation (Mean = 16.57) and altruism (Mean = 16.56). The respondents have clearly preferred individual development and personal achievement with emphasis on being able to utilise their potential. In line with their professional pursuit SWPs preferred to be able to help others. The work values show their desirability for higher order values. On the other hand SWPs showed least preference for depending on others for emotional support (Mean = 11.09). While they tended to believe that their job had sufficient variety and comfort in it they were risk averse. SWPs' less preference for social relation (Mean = 13.44) and social interaction (Mean = 13.14) work values goes on to

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show that we are gradually becoming more individualistic in our orientation. The correlation data shows that social workers in higher age groups having more work experience favoured ability utilisation ($r = .24$). It is only appropriate for organisations to consider more experienced SWPs for jobs worth their abilities else it may lead to value incongruence. The result showed that SWPs tended to prefer achievement ($r = .16$) as work value implying their preference for challenging assignment and feedback.

Altruism was found to be positively related to age and experience ($r = .16$) among these SWPs. This finding suggests that SWP's willingness to help others increases with age and it may be attributed to understanding the importance of cooperation at work. The positive relation between authority and age ($r = .21$) and authority and experience ($r = .17$) shows that SWPs would like to have authority as they grow in age and

experience. The correlation analysis shows significant relationship between educational qualifications and autonomy at work ($r = .14$). A negative relationship was found between life style and age ($r = -.16$) as well as experience ($r = -.19$). SWPs in higher age groups were found to prefer rule bound and conformist approach to life. Both age and experience were found to positively correlated with dependency ($r = .16$ and $r = .27$ respectively) i.e. in due course of time the SWPs developed personal relationships with colleagues and increasingly tended to share their life experiences. That SWPs with higher age and experience tended to prefer variety ($r = .21$ and $r = .24$ respectively) shows their desire to break the monotony and get involved in work providing them differential experience.

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None of the demographic variables showed significant relationship with personal development, physical activity, prestige and risk taking. Respondents with higher academic qualification tended to prefer good working conditions ($r = .22$). The study found only one out of the three culturally adapted work values showing significant relationship with demographic variables i.e. comforts of life and peace of mind did not show any relationship with the demographic variables.

Results showed significant but negative correlation between gender and

three work values namely; authority, social interaction and dependency. Females showed less willingness to exert authority ($r = -.22$) as compared to their male counterparts as also lesser tendency to be engaged in social interaction ($r = -.19$) than men. Female SWPs did not like to depend on others and this was reflected through significant but negative correlation between gender and dependency ($r = -.18$). The preceding findings on the relationship between gender and dependency and social interaction contradicts the earlier finding about females having preference for affective work values (Elizur 1994, Furnham 1984, Lynn 1993)

Table 2 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for work values among different age groups. One way ANOVA on social workers put in three age groups, 25 years or less, between 26 and 30 years and 31 years or more showed significant results for ability utilisation $F(2, 197) = 7.56, p < .05$ reflecting that the age has significant impact on their preference for ability utilisation. Similar results were found for altruism $F(2, 197) = 3.13, p < .05$, authority $F(2, 197) = 4.65, p < .01$, lifestyle $F(2, 197) = 3.88, p < .05$, and variety $F(2, 197) = 4.66, p < .01$ work values. Looking at the results from table 1 one can infer the social workers not

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only differed in their preference for ability utilisation, altruism, authority, lifestyle, and variety work values but with increasing age and experience they place higher emphasis on these work values excepting life style where social workers of younger age groups showed greater tendency to enjoy the freedom of activity. In a way the results support

the findings of Cherrington et al (1979) who found age, and seniority correlated with several work values. Looking at the preceding discussion it can be said that the findings do not support hypothesis 1 about age having no significant impact on the work value preference of social work professionals.

Table 2: One Way Analysis of Variance for Age

Work Values	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ability Utilisation	Age	48.85	2	24.43	7.56	.00
	Error	636.17	197	3.23		
	Total	685.02	199			
Altruism	Age	33.38	2	16.69	3.13	.04
	Error	1050.02	197	5.33		
	Total	1083.40	199			
Authority	Age	76.18	2	38.09	4.66	.01
	Error	1611.00	197	8.18		
	Total	1687.18	199			
Life Style	Age	75.34	2	37.67	3.89	.02
	Error	1909.01	197	9.69		
	Total	1984.36	199			
Variety	Age	60.19	2	30.09	4.66	.01
	Error	1272.81	197	6.46		
	Total	1332.99	199			

One way ANOVA result for SWPs having different academic background is portrayed in Table 3. The result $F(2, 197) = 4.87, p < .01$ shows that social work professionals' preference for working conditions differed. SWPs with higher academic qualification tended to

give more emphasis to working conditions. Thus hypothesis 2 that difference in the education level of social work professional will not affect the work value preference of social work professionals is not accepted.

Table 3: One Way Analysis of Variance for Educational Qualification

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Working Condition	Edu Qual	75.45	2	37.72	4.87	.00
	Error	1525.76	197	7.75		
	Total	1601.19	199			

The ANOVA results for religion have been shown in Table 4. SWPs were put in to five major religious categories viz. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and others. While correlation analysis did not reflect any significant relation between religion and work values the social workers differed signifi-

Table 4: One Way Analysis of Variance for Religion

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Advancement	Religion	183.32	5	36.67	3.38	.00
	Error	2102.08	194	10.84		
	Total	2285.39	199			
Life Style	Religion	120.31	5	24.06	2.50	.03
	Error	1864.04	194	9.61		
	Total	1984.36	199			
Prestige	Religion	103.34	5	20.67	2.49	.03
	Error	1613.65	194	8.32		
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cantly in their preference for advancement $F(5, 194) = 3.38, p < .01$, lifestyle $F(5, 194) = 2.50, p < .05$ and prestige $F(5, 194) = 2.49, p < .05$. This goes on to show that respondents of diverse religious affiliations showed difference in the way they look at advancement of their career, the lifestyle they would have or for that matter their view about prestige. In the present study religion emerged as a variable which had significant impact on the way social workers ranked advancement, life style and prestige work values. Therefore third hypothesis that work value preference among social workers is not influenced by their religion is not accepted.

Religion emerged as a variable which had significant impact on the way social workers ranked advancement, life style and prestige work values.

Male and female social workers appeared to be primarily differing in their preference for authority, social interaction and dependency work values. The ANOVA results, as shown in table 5, found significant differences in the way male and female SWPs viewed authority $F(1, 198) = 10.14, p < .01$. In fact, the correlation analysis reported that females tended to show lesser preference for authority as compared to their male counterparts. Male and female SWPs also showed significant differences in the way they valued social interaction and dependency. The ANOVA result for social interaction $F(1, 198) = 4.46, p < .05$ and dependency $F(1, 198) = 6.44, p < .01$ confirms the findings. Looking back at correlation it was seen that male SWPs were more likely to value interaction with fellow colleagues as well as depended on them compared to female counterparts. Contrary to the findings of some

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Table 5: One Way Analysis of Variance for Gender

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Authority	Gender	82.16	1	82.16	10.14	.00
	Error	1605.02	198	8.11		
	Total	1687.18	199			
Social Interaction	Gender	28.83	1	28.83	4.46	.04
	Error	1281.25	198	6.47		
	Total	1310.08	199			
Dependency	Gender	63.48	1	63.48	6.44	.00
	Error	1950.90	198	9.85		
	Total	2014.38	199			

unpublished research by (Sagie, Elizur & Koslowsky 1996) the study did not find women in this study were found to be less preferring affective values to their male counterparts. As found by Tait, Padgett and Baldwin, (1989) the increasing participation of women in the workforce could be reason behind the reduced difference or change in the work values between men and women. The findings suggest that hypothesis 4 saying there will be no significant difference in the work value preference of male and female social work professionals is not accepted.

Implications for Management

The findings suggest that social workers rank personal development, achievement and opportunities for using their abilities as their foremost work values. The primacy of these values and achievement in particular reflects their willingness for challenging assignment, urge for feedback and sense of competitiveness. They valued citizen-ship behaviour in the organisation by show-

ing preference for altruism. Understanding that social workers would more likely choose jobs which would have similar value contents to their own value preference, organisations would have to ensure the presence of these contents. The issue of whether social workers are willing to go to geographical locations needing them most could also be seen from work value perspective. They have clearly shown less preference for creativity, risk taking etc. i.e. task involving too much of these elements is bound to disengage the employees. In a study of the recruitment process in an organization, Adkins, Russel and Werbel (1994) observed that various organisations utilise the congruence between the personal work values of recruiters and candidates as a selection tool to ensure retention and greater engagement.

Social relation or social interaction did not come out as a preferred work value in this study and organisations should be careful in not allowing this indifference in interpersonal relation to transpire in team working as social work-

ers being associated with non-profit organisations work in team and involve with community to carry out intervention in community. Organisations employing social workers would have to find out ways of providing opportunities for professional development and ability utilisation and to this effect role of human resource department becomes very critical in creating such oppor-

tunities. Employing more female SWPs will result in reduced social interaction and creating a culture which is less authoritative.

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