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THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VALUES IN OLD AGE

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Abstract: This study explores the theoretical and practical aspects of the psychology of values in old age. Values serve as guiding principles that shape behavior, motivation, and overall well-being. In older adulthood, value priorities often shift towards emotional regulation, meaningful relationships, generativity, spiritual engagement, and legacy. The alignment of daily activities, social interactions, health behaviors, and leisure pursuits with these values significantly enhances life satisfaction and psychological resilience. Understanding and supporting value expression in older adults is essential for caregivers, families, and institutions to promote dignity, autonomy, and a meaningful life. Practical implications include interventions focused on value clarification, engagement in meaningful activities, and fostering intergenerational connections.

Keywords: psychology of values, old age, life satisfaction, emotional well-being, generativity, meaning of life, value-based interventions, social engagement, autonomy, resilience

ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ПСИХОЛОГИИ ЦЕННОСТЕЙ В ПОЖИЛОМ ВОЗРАСТЕ

Аннотация: Данное исследование посвящено теоретическим и практическим аспектам психологии ценностей в пожилом возрасте. Ценности выступают в качестве руководящих принципов, формирующих поведение, мотивацию и общее благополучие человека. В старшем возрасте приоритеты ценностей часто смещаются в сторону эмоциональной регуляции, значимых межличностных отношений, генеративности, духовной вовлеченности и наследия. Соответствие повседневной деятельности, социальных взаимодействий, поведения в области здоровья и досуга личным ценностям значительно повышает удовлетворенность жизнью и психологическую устойчивость. Понимание и поддержка выражения ценностей у пожилых людей имеют важное значение для заботящихся о них лиц, семей и учреждений с целью обеспечения достоинства, автономии и наполненной смысла жизни. Практические рекомендации включают интервенции, ориентированные на выявление ценностей, участие в значимых видах деятельности и укрепление межпоколенческих связей.

Ключевые слова: психология ценностей, пожилой возраст, удовлетворенность жизнью, эмоциональное благополучие, генеративность, смысл жизни, ценностно-ориентированные интервенции, социальная активность, автономия, устойчивость



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Human life is intrinsically shaped by values, which serve as guiding principles for behavior, motivation, and well-being. In the psychology of aging, values assume a central role because they reflect not only individual life histories but also adaptive processes that contribute to psychological resilience in later life. The study of values in old age encompasses both theoretical conceptualizations and practical implications across developmental psychology, gerontology, and clinical applications. This comprehensive discussion synthesizes key theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical considerations essential for understanding how values manifest, shift, and influence the lives of older adults. The study of values in psychology originated with foundational work by Milton Rokeach, whose 1973 book *The Nature of Human Values* posited a hierarchical system of values that guide individual attitudes and behaviors. Rokeach emphasized the distinction between terminal values (end-states of existence such as happiness or wisdom) and instrumental values (modes of behavior such as honesty or independence). While Rokeach's formulation applied broadly to adults of all ages, it set the stage for later lifespan developmental perspectives that examine how values evolve across the lifespan.

Developmental psychologists including Paul B. Baltes (1987) introduced the concept of the lifespan perspective, asserting that development is lifelong, multidimensional, and influenced by both gains and losses. Within this framework, values are not static; instead, they are dynamic, responding to changes in physical health, social roles, and existential concerns. For example, aging may increase the relative importance of values related to emotional regulation and meaningful connections, consistent with Carstensen's Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (1991). According to Carstensen, as individuals perceive the time left in life as limited, they prioritize emotionally meaningful goals and relationships over novel experiences and external achievements. Empirical research supports the notion that older adults often exhibit increased emphasis on values such as emotional well-being, spirituality, generativity, and legacy. A longitudinal study by Schwartz and Bardi (2001) revealed that while values such as power and achievement tend to decline with age, values associated with universalism, benevolence, and tradition tend to increase. These shifts reflect a broader reorganization of motivational priorities that corresponds with changing life contexts, including retirement, health challenges, and social role transitions.

Values also intersect with cultural frameworks. In cross-cultural research, Shalom H. Schwartz (1992) developed a universal theory of basic human values, identifying ten broad value types (e.g., security, conformity, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation) that are found across diverse cultures. Aging influences not only the priority of these values but also their expression within specific social contexts. For example, older adults in collectivistic cultures may place heightened importance on family and tradition, while those in individualistic cultures may emphasize autonomy and self-direction. Another important theoretical contribution is Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), which highlights how awareness of mortality influences value systems. In old age, the salience of mortality becomes more prominent, leading many individuals to seek symbolic immortality through values that transcend the self — such as



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artistic creation, spirituality, or contributions to community. This existential dimension of values in old age underscores the psychological efforts to maintain self-continuity and meaning as life nears its end.

In clinical gerontology, values play a key role in therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing quality of life. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) emphasizes value clarification as a core process, helping older adults identify personally meaningful directions and engage in behavior that aligns with those values. Research by Hayes et al. (2006) demonstrates that value-based interventions can reduce depressive symptoms and increase life satisfaction among older populations. Similarly, Life Review Therapy, pioneered by Robert Atchley (1989), encourages older adults to reflect on life achievements and reconcile regrets, fostering a sense of coherence and value-driven purpose. The practical implications of values in old age are particularly salient in caregiving and long-term care settings. Training programs for professional caregivers increasingly emphasize value-centered care, which recognizes the individual's value priorities as central to care planning. Such programs encourage empathy, respect for autonomy, and culturally sensitive understanding of value systems. For example, a study by Duggleby et al. (2009) found that when caregivers acknowledged the spiritual and relational values of older adults with chronic illness, both psychological well-being and quality of care improved.

Despite advancements, the psychology of values in old age faces methodological challenges. Longitudinal studies are essential for tracing value changes over time, yet they demand extensive time and resources. Self-report measures, such as the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) or the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS), may be influenced by cognitive aging and social desirability biases. Recent innovations include experience sampling methods and ecological momentary assessments to capture value-related behaviors in real time. In addition, neurobiological research is increasingly exploring how aging affects value processing in the brain. Studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) reveal age-related changes in areas such as the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the striatum, which are involved in reward and value evaluation. These findings suggest that biological aging interacts with psychological processes to influence how values are prioritized and experienced. Looking ahead, future research must integrate interdisciplinary approaches — combining developmental psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and cultural studies — to form a more holistic understanding of values in old age. There is also a need to examine how rapid societal changes, such as technological innovation and shifting family structures, influence the value landscapes of contemporary older adults. The psychology of values in old age encompasses a rich interplay of theoretical perspectives and practical applications. Values are not fixed attributes but evolve through life experiences, social contexts, and existential awareness. From the foundational theories of Rokeach and Schwartz to contemporary therapeutic practices and neurobiological insights, the study of values offers profound implications for enhancing the dignity, meaning, and well-being of individuals as they age. Effective engagement with values — whether in



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research, clinical practice, or caregiving — can foster greater psychological resilience and a deeper appreciation of the human experience in later life.

As individuals progress into later stages of life, the practical application of values becomes increasingly intertwined with daily routines, social interactions, and personal well-being. Values serve not only as abstract ideals but also as active guides for decision-making, relationship management, and adaptive coping. In older adulthood, the ways in which values are enacted can be observed in various domains, including family life, community involvement, leisure activities, and self-care practices. One key aspect is the alignment of daily behaviors with internalized values. Older adults who actively engage in activities that reflect their core values — such as volunteering, mentoring younger generations, or participating in cultural and spiritual practices — tend to report higher levels of satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose. For instance, dedicating time to family gatherings, supporting grandchildren's education, or maintaining traditions in daily routines allows older individuals to express values like benevolence, responsibility, and continuity. These behaviors reinforce self-esteem, promote intergenerational bonding, and foster meaningful engagement with the surrounding community.

Another critical area involves health and lifestyle choices. Values related to health, independence, and longevity often guide decisions regarding diet, physical activity, and adherence to medical recommendations. Older adults who prioritize vitality and self-sufficiency may engage consistently in walking, swimming, or gentle strength training, as well as preventative health measures such as regular medical check-ups. This not only reflects value-driven behavior but also enhances resilience against age-related declines and improves overall quality of life. Social networks are also deeply influenced by value priorities. Older adults may choose to invest their energy in relationships that provide emotional support, mutual respect, and shared experiences. Selectivity in social engagement often leads to smaller but closer networks, enhancing emotional well-being and reducing stress. Activities such as community gatherings, club memberships, or group hobbies allow individuals to live out values of connectedness, cooperation, and shared purpose. In some cases, values also dictate the maintenance of autonomy in decision-making, ensuring that older individuals can express preferences regarding living arrangements, care options, or personal routines.

Spirituality and meaning-making often emerge as central value domains in older age. Engagement in reflective practices, prayer, meditation, or attendance at communal spiritual events provides avenues for expressing values related to transcendence, gratitude, and ethical living. Such practices can buffer against anxiety, loneliness, and existential distress, creating a sense of coherence and continuity in life narratives. They also foster resilience when facing losses or transitions, allowing individuals to reinterpret challenges in the light of enduring values. Practical applications of values extend into adaptive coping strategies. Older adults frequently encounter changes in health, mobility, social roles, or cognitive functioning. Those who ground their responses in internalized values are more likely to engage in proactive problem-solving, seek supportive relationships, and maintain a constructive outlook. For example, choosing to approach mobility limitations with



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creativity — such as modifying living spaces, utilizing assistive technologies, or participating in adaptive sports — exemplifies the integration of values related to independence, perseverance, and self-respect.

Cultural and societal norms further shape the enactment of values in later life. In societies where elders are respected and supported, older individuals have more opportunities to express values publicly, participate in decision-making, and contribute to community life. Conversely, in environments where aging is associated with marginalization, older adults may need to adapt their value expression to private or familial contexts. In both cases, the psychological benefit is greatest when actions align with internal value priorities, reinforcing a sense of integrity and life satisfaction. The interplay between values and leisure activities is another practical dimension. Engagement in creative pursuits, artistic expression, gardening, reading, or travel allows older adults to experience pleasure, growth, and self-expression consistent with values such as curiosity, self-direction, and aesthetic appreciation. Structured programs in retirement communities or local organizations can support such activities, providing both social interaction and opportunities to live out personal ideals.

Family dynamics often serve as a microcosm for value expression. Older adults frequently transmit their value systems to younger generations, shaping cultural continuity and intergenerational identity. Storytelling, sharing life experiences, and guiding grandchildren in moral or ethical decisions allow elders to demonstrate values like wisdom, responsibility, and altruism. This process not only strengthens familial bonds but also contributes to the older adult's sense of legacy and fulfillment. The alignment between values and environmental choices has practical significance. Older individuals may engage in sustainable practices, civic participation, or volunteerism to manifest values such as stewardship, fairness, and social responsibility. Even seemingly small actions — like supporting charitable causes, participating in local governance, or contributing expertise in community projects — exemplify the tangible enactment of abstract value principles.

Conclusion

The psychology of values in old age is a multidimensional field that bridges theoretical understanding and practical application. Values serve as fundamental guides for behavior, decision-making, and well-being, and they evolve across the lifespan in response to life experiences, social roles, and existential awareness. In older adulthood, values often shift toward emotional regulation, meaningful relationships, generativity, spiritual engagement, and legacy, reflecting an adaptive re-prioritization of goals. Practical implications of these value systems are evident in daily behaviors, health practices, social interactions, leisure activities, and coping strategies. Older adults who align their actions with personal values experience higher levels of life satisfaction, resilience, and psychological well-being. Additionally, the transmission of values to younger generations, participation in community life, and engagement in meaningful activities contribute to a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Overall, understanding and supporting the expression of values in older adults is essential for promoting holistic well-being, dignity, and a meaningful life. Integrating theoretical frameworks with practical strategies allows



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caregivers, families, and institutions to foster environments in which older individuals can live authentically, maintain autonomy, and continue contributing to society in ways that reflect their deeply held principles.

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