# The Impact of Valued Living on Depression and Anxiety *

*Değer Odaklı Yaşamın Depresyon ve Kaygı Üzerindeki Etkisi*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of valued living on depression and anxiety. Valued living refers to a life in which a person's behaviors are consistent with his/her values. Participants consisted of 338 university students (204 women, 134 men), undergraduate and graduate, who are currently in their academic life. The sample of the study averaged 22.12 years of age. They were asked to complete an online questionnaire examining the degree of their valued living and depressive and anxious symptoms. Results of the study show that value domains that participants attach the most importance differ from the ones that participants' value-based behaviors are more consistent. The result of the correlational analysis shows that valued living is associated with both depression and anxiety in a statistically significant negative direction. Both value importance and value consistency have a negative significant impact on depression. However, only value consistency is found to have a significant association in the negative direction with anxiety. Moreover, Multiple Linear Regression analysis reveals that value consistency contributes to the prediction of depression and anxiety.

**Keywords:** Valued Living, Value Importance, Value Consistency, Depression, Anxiety.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma değer odaklı yaşamın depresyon ve kaygı üzerindeki etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Değer odaklı yaşam, bireylerin davranışlarının sahip oldukları değerleriyle tutarlı olduğu bir yaşamı ifade etmektedir. Çalışmanın katılımcıları akademik eğitimlerine devam etmekte olan lisans ve lisansüstü düzeyde, yaş ortalaması 22.12 olan 338 üniversite öğrencisinden (204 kadın, 134 erkek) oluşmaktadır. Katılımcıların değer odaklı yaşam, depresyon ve kaygı düzeylerini belirlemek amacıyla çevrimiçi bir ortamda anket tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda, en çok önem atfedilen yaşam alanlarının davranışların en fazla değerlerle tutarlı olan yaşam alanlarından farklılaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Korelasyon analizi sonuçları değer odaklı yaşamın depresyon ve kaygı ile istatiksel olarak anlamlı bir şekilde negatif ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Hem değerlere atfedilen önem hem de davranışların değerlerle tutarlı olma düzeyinin depresyon üzerinde anlamlı olumsuz bir etkisinin olduğu belirlenmiştir. Yalnızca değerlerin tutarlılık boyutunun kaygı ile negatif yönde anlamlı bir ilişkisinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, regresyon analizi sonuçları değerlerin tutarlılık boyutunun depresyon ve kaygıyı yordamaya katkı sağladığını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Değer Odaklı Yaşam, Değer Önem, Değer Tutarlılık, Depresyon, Kaygı

## INTRODUCTION

One of the criteria that individuals take when describing their ideal lives is their values. Values have been considered by social science researchers to be the main motivations underlying the behaviors that give meaning and purpose to life (Clawson, 1946; Morris, 1956; Rogers, 1964). Schwartz (1994), one of the prominent names in the field of social psychology with his studies on values, emphasized four basic features of values: (1) Values serve the benefit of the individual and society, (2) provide motivation for action, (3) make judgments and justification for actions. and (4) are gained through individual and social learning. Although values can be acquired through social learning, some researchers do not think that experience is a necessity for value acquisition. Plumb and colleagues (2009) suggested that, unlike other living things, humans can experience events verbally that they may never face. According to them, people can create abstract goals through these verbal behaviors. Dahl et al. (2015), also with a similar view, stated that a high-level intangible value such as world peace exists in humans without experience.

Valued living refers to a life lived congruently with values (Hayes et al., 2012). Valued life/valued living was first started to pull attention within the framework of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy; Hayes, et al., 1999). ACT is an approach that develops from the behavioral tradition that takes its philosophical foundations from functional contextualism (Biglan & Hayes, 1996) and its theoretical foundations from modern behavior analysis (Hayes & Wilson, 1993). According to ACT, value is defined as a verbally constructed, dynamic, and freely chosen behavior (Wilson & Dufrene, 2008). This approach as a transdiagnostic entity aims to increase psychological flexibility through six basic intervention areas applicable to

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everyone: (1) being able to look at cognitions from afar (cognitive defusion), (2) being open and willing to experience inner experiences (acceptance), (3) voluntarily participate at the moment (contact with the moment), (4) have a self that observes the moment independently (contextual self), (5) freely choosing the values that are important for oneself, and (6) display flexible and determined behaviors in line with values (value-oriented action) (Hayes et al., 2013).

It is thought that there are two important points for values as an experiential intervention area: clarifying values and putting values into action. Spending time with friends for someone who cares about close relationships and doing sports for someone who cares about self-care can be given as examples of the value and value-oriented behaviors. Values represent things that the individual freely attaches importance to regardless of moral and religious principles of society (Roemer & Orsillo, 2009). Valued behaviors exhibited to avoid feelings of guilt and regret caused by not complying with social rules are considered rule-directed behaviors (Blackledge & Barnes-Holmes, 2009). It has been found that such rule-driven behaviors are associated with avoidant coping mechanisms and increased levels of psychological discomfort (Ciarrochi et al., 2011). On the contrary, in times of distress, acting in line with important values has been evaluated as an effective coping mechanism (Hayes et al., 2012). Studies showing that an increased valued living level reduces the level of psychological discomfort support this assumption (A-Tjak et al., 2015; Ciarrochi et al., 2011; Vowles et al., 2019).

This study aims to examine the impact of valued living on depression and anxiety. For this aim, this study is expected to answer the following research questions:

1. Does valued living have an impact on depression and anxiety?

2. Do value importance and value consistency differ in terms of their impact on depression and anxiety?

3. Do value importance and value consistency predict depression and anxiety?

## METHOD

### Design and Participants

This is a correlational study. The sample of this study consisted of 338 university students aged 18-30 ($\bar{x}$=22.12±3.24 years) (Table 2) undergraduate and graduate, who are currently in their academic life. As seen in Table 1, most of the participants were women (60.4%), single (92.3%), and undergraduate (66.3%). Almost half of the participants stated their income level as medium (47.6%).

**Table 1:** Demographics of Participants

| Demographics | Groups | Frequency (f) | Percentage (p) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Woman | 204 | 60.4 |
| | Man | 134 | 39.6 |
| Marital Status | Single | 312 | 92.3 |
| | Married | 22 | 6.5 |
| | Divorced/Widowed | 4 | 1.2 |
| Income | Low | 110 | 32.5 |
| | Medium | 161 | 47.6 |
| | High | 67 | 19.8 |
| Academic Degree | Preparation | 47 | 13.9 |
| | Undergraduate | 224 | 66.3 |
| | Graduate | 67 | 19.8 |

### Measures

Participants were asked to complete an online survey form that takes approximately 15 minutes. Demographic information including age, gender, marital status, income, and academic degree was asked to get a brief background of participants.

*Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ)*

Wilson and Groom (2002) developed and introduced Valued Living Questionnaire (VLQ). VLQ has two subscales named *Importance* and *Consistency*. As the former measures the degree of importance people attaches to specific ten value domains, the latter measures the degree of consistency of people's actions with their values in the last 7 days. The overall valued living score is the meaning of products of importance and consistency scores for each domain. For each domain items scored 1-10. The range of scores for subscales is between 10-100 and for the overall scale is between 1-100 (Wilson et al., 2010). For this study, the Turkish version of VLQ named Değer Odaklı Yaşam Ölçeği (DOYÖ) (Çekici et al., 2018) is used to gather data. For DOYÖ, Cronbach alpha is found for

an overall scale of .90 and .85, .83 for importance and consistency subscales respectively. This study also has similar Cronbach alpha scores (.89 overall, .79 for Importance, and .88 for Consistency subscales).

*Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)*

Beck and colleagues (1961) developed BDI for measuring the degree of depressive symptoms in the last two weeks. This inventory includes 21 self-evaluation items scored 0-3. The range of overall scale scores is between 0-63. Higher scores represent higher depression levels. For this study, the Turkish version of BDI named Beck Depresyon Envanteri (BDE) (Hisli, 1989) is used to measure the degree of depression. The reliability of BDE is assessed by item analysis and split-half and correlation coefficients were found at .80 and .74 respectively. This study also examined BDE for its internal consistency. Cronbach alpha is found .90.

*Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)*

Beck and colleagues (1988a) developed BAI to assess whether a person has anxiety and measure the degree of clinical anxiety experienced in the last two weeks. This inventory includes 21 self-evaluation items scored 0-3. The range of overall scale scores is between 0-63. A higher score represents a higher anxiety level. For this study, the Turkish version of BAI named Beck Anksiyete Ölçeği (BAÖ) (Ulusoy et al., 1998) is used to measure the level of anxiety. Turkish adaptation study found a high internal consistency score of .93. This study also examined BAÖ for its internal consistency. Cronbach alpha is found at .93.

## Data Analysis

This study uses item analysis to assess internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach alpha). The impact of valued living on depression and anxiety is examined by a 1-tailed Pearson correlation analysis. Both subscales of valued living, importance, and consistency are examined separately to determine their impacts on depression and anxiety. Finally, whether valued living subscales predict depression and anxiety is investigated with multiple linear regression analysis. The kurtosis and skewness are calculated for each scale and their scores are found between (-.15, +1.5). The literature claims that scores within this range represent a normal distribution in social sciences (George & Mallery, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Therefore, parametrical tests are used for data analysis.

## FINDINGS

## Descriptive Statistics of Measures

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of Measures and Participants' Age

| Measure Scores | n | Min. | Max. | Mean | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VLQ | 338 | 3.70 | 100.00 | 61.01 | 20.55 |
| VLQ-importance | 338 | 27.00 | 100.00 | 82.50 | 12.77 |
| VLQ-consistency | 338 | 10.00 | 100.00 | 71.40 | 18.43 |
| BDI | 338 | 0.00 | 62.00 | 16.87 | 11.14 |
| BAI | 338 | 0.00 | 59.00 | 15.53 | 12.83 |
| Age | 338 | 18.00 | 30.00 | 22.12 | 3.24 |

As seen in Table 2, Importance and Consistency scores ranged from 27-100, 10-100 respectively. Mean of participants' value consistency score ($\bar{x}$=71.40±18.43) is lower than the value importance score ($\bar{x}$=82.50±12.77). Valued living scores ranged from 3.70-100. The mean of overall valued living score ($\bar{x}$=61.01±20.55) is found similar to the original study of VLQ ($\bar{x}$=59.52±14.14) (Wilson et al., 2010). BDI scores ranged from 0-62, whereas BAI scores are between 0-59. The mean of participants' depression score ($\bar{x}$=16.87±11.14) is classified between minimal ($\bar{x}$=10.90±8.10) and mild ($\bar{x}$=18.70±10.20) depression as determined by BDI (Beck et al., 1988b). Moreover, the mean of participant's anxiety ($\bar{x}$=15.53±12.83) is considered as low by BAI (Beck et al., 1988a).

## Descriptive Statistics of Importance and Consistency Measures for Value Domains

As seen in Table 3, spirituality has the highest mean ($\bar{x}$=8.66±2.02) and citizenship/community life has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=7.83±2.19) in terms of value importance. However, in terms of value consistency, family has the highest mean ($\bar{x}$=7.49±2.48) and parenting has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=6.75±3.02). It can be seen in Table 3 for all value domains, the average score for value importance is higher the average value consistency score. The psychometric evaluation study of VLQ which recruited undergraduate participants from a southern university in America shows that in terms of value importance, education/training the highest mean ($\bar{x}$=9.18±1.36) and citizenship/community life has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=7.16±2.22). Additionally, employment has the highest mean ($\bar{x}$=5.23±3.78) and education/training has the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=8.86±1.48) in terms of value consistency (Wilson et al., 2010).

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for Importance and Consistency Measures for Value Domains

| Value Domains | Importance M(sd) | Consistency M(sd) |
|---|---|---|
| **Family** | 8.20(2.44) | 7.49(2.48) |
| **Marriage/Couples/Intimate Relations** | 8.00(2.39) | 6.86(2.76) |
| **Parenting** | 8.58(2.38) | 6.75(3.02) |
| **Friendships/Social Relations** | 7.95(1.91) | 7.26(2.40) |
| **Employment** | 8.34(1.98) | 7.04(2.71) |
| **Education/Training** | 8.66(1.79) | 7.44(2.55) |
| **Recreation** | 7.89(2.12) | 6.83(2.51) |
| **Spirituality** | 8.66(2.02) | 7.17(2.73) |
| **Citizenship/community Life** | 7.83(2.19) | 7.33(2.42) |
| **Physical Self Care** | 8.35(2.05) | 7.19(2.58) |

## Findings of 1-Tailed Pearson Correlation Analysis of Valued Living, BDI and BAI

**Table 3:** Findings of 1-Tailed Pearson Correlation Analysis of Valued Living, Depression and Anxiety

| Measures | BDI | BAI |
|---|---|---|
| **VLQ** | -0.35*** | -0.21*** |
| **VLQ-importance** | -0.20*** | -0.09 |
| **VLQ-consistency** | -0.37*** | -0.22*** |

***p<0,001

As seen in Table 4, valued living is associated with depression in a statistically significant negative direction (r=-0.35; p<0.001). Both Importance and Consistency subscales of VLQ are associated with depression in a statistististically significant negative direction (respectively, r=-0.20; p<0.001; r=-0.37; p<0.001). This shows that as VLQ score for both Importance and Consistency increases, BDI score decreases, vice versa. Valued living is also associated with anxiety in a statistically significant negative direction (r=-0.21; p<0.001). However, only Consistency subscale of VLQ is associated with anxiety in a statistically significant negative direction (r=-0.22; p<0.001). There is no statistically meaningful relationship found between Importance subscale of VLQ and BAI score. This shows that as Consistency score of VLQ increases, BAI score decreases, vice versa.

## Multiple Regression Associations of Valued Living Importance and Consistency Scores with BDI

**Table 4:** Regression Coefficients of VLQ Subscales Predicting BDI

| | unstandardized coefficients | | standard coefficient | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | S.E. | β | t | P value |
| **VLQ-importance** | -.00 | .05 | -.00 | -.02 | >.05 |
| **VLQ-consistency** | -.22 | .03 | -.36 | -6.13*** | .000 |

Note: n=338, F= 26.55***, DF (2,335), p<0.001, $R^2$ (adj.) = 0.13

As seen in Table 5, the multiple linear regression model in which value importance and value consistency as explanatory factors predicting BDI as a predicted outcome is found to be statistically significant (F (2,335) = 26.55; p<0.001). Findings of analysis shows that value consistency score predicts BDI in a statistically significant negative way (t=-6.13, p<0.001). However, value importance score isn't included in regression model in a statistically significant way (t=.02, p>0.05). This variation explains 13% of the BDI score ($R^2$ (adj.) = 0.13).

## Multiple Regression Associations of Valued Living Importance and Consistency Scores with BAI

As seen in Table 6, the multiple linear regression model in which value importance and value consistency as explanatory factors predicting BAI as a predicted outcome is found to be statistically significant (F (2,335) = 8.88; p<0.001). Findings of the analysis shows that the value consistency score predicts BAI in a statistically significant negative way (t=-3.85, p<0.001). However, the value importance score isn't included in the regression model in a statistically significant way (t=.63, p>0.05). This variation explains only 4% of the BDI score ($R^2$ (adj.) = 0.04).

**Table 5:** Regression Coefficients of VLQ Subscales Predicting BAI

| | unstandardized coefficients | | standard coefficient | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | S.E. | β | t | P value |
| **VLQ-importance** | -.04 | ,06 | -.04 | -.63 | >.05 |
| **VLQ-consistency** | -.16 | ,04 | -.24 | -3.85*** | .000 |

Note: n=338, F= 8.88***, DF (2,335), p<0.001, $R^2$ (adj.) = 0.04

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of valued living on depression and anxiety. Initiative research questions were largely supported by correlation and regression analysis. As expected, valued living overall appeared to have a negative impact on psychological distress. Greater scores of valued living were associated with lower scores of depression and anxiety. This finding is found consistent with research in the literature (Bramwell &

Richardson, 2017; Ciarrochi et al., 2011; Donahue et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2015; Romero-Moreno et al, 2016; VanBuskirk et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2010). Most of these studies have examined valued living as a moderator and mediator. However, this study presents the independent level of impact of valued living on depression (-.35) and anxiety (-.21) in a non-clinical sample.

Romero-Moreno and colleagues (2016) were interested in the adaptation of VLQ to dementia caregivers most of whom are women and either offspring or spouses of the patient. The findings of the study pointed out the significant relationship between valued living (labeled as a commitment to own values), depression, and anxiety. As also in Wilson (2010), all these coherent results reveal the strength of the relationship between valued living and depression is stronger than the one between anxiety. This finding can be explained for depression by behavioral activation theory (Lewinsohn,1974) as a treatment model: increased activity increases the amount of positive reinforcement because of the environmental change and decreases avoidant behavior that worsens the depression. Additionally, ACT claims that valued behavior is intrinsically reinforced which means people get positive reinforcement by just doing the act (Wilson & DuFrene, 2008). Therefore, from a behavioralist perspective, valued behavior as a source of positive reinforcement helps to reduce depression. This finding requires a more detailed exploration of further studies.

Furthermore, this study extended the literature by examining the impact of both subscales of VLQ (importance and consistency) on both anxiety and depression. Findings show that value consistency has a stronger impact on both depression (-.37) and anxiety (-.22). This is an expected outcome within a theoretical framework. From an ACT point of view, the congruence of values and behavior is specifically emphasized in the valued living definition (Yadavaia & Hayes, 2009). The main goal of ACT for individuals is living in line with one's values while accepting negative inner experiences at that moment. Committed action is therefore seen as a primary goal for life (Hayes et al., 2013). The study of Lundgren et. al. (2008) with epilepsy patients who have taken an ACT intervention program also shows that as their committed action and therefore their psychological flexibility increases, epileptic seizures significantly decrease. Another psycho-intervention study also pointed out by Hoyer et al. (2020), as valued behaviors increase, the level of quality of life also increases. Additionally, results from this study indicate that value importance is only associated with depression at a low level (.20). Further studies are required to explain the variation of association of value importance and consistency with depression and anxiety.

The result of multiple regression analysis shows that as value consistency significantly predicts depression and anxiety, value importance doesn't contribute to the model. This finding is congruent with the study of Romero-Moreno et al. (2016), living in line with one's values significantly enables a prediction of depression. Although the regression model has a relatively low explanation score, the finding of prediction of valued consistency for anxiety is extended in the literature. Still, value consistency as an explanatory factor explaining %15 of depression is a noticeable finding of this study. Further studies can show how rule-governed behaviors (for example, adapting society's values to please others or avoid feeling guilt) and valued behaviors differ from each other in terms of explaining depression.

To conclude, the overall study results indicate that valued living has an independent negative impact at moderate to low levels on depression and anxiety. Especially, the consistency of behaviors with one's values has a stronger relationship with psychological distress. As expected, attaching importance to value domains when they become congruent with behaviors is more efficient in dealing with distress. There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, the sample of the study is relatively small, and the participants are young adults. Small participants and age range may negatively affect the generalization of this study. Therefore, a more generalized sample can show more reliable results. Additionally, comparing different age groups regarding their value importance and consistency can be an interesting research idea. Another limitation is that the study failed in terms of explaining the difference in valued living impact level on depression and anxiety. Further longitudinal and experimental valued-based behavior intervention studies with depression or anxiety patients can help to understand the underlying causal influence.

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