

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey



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ABSTRACT: The primary aim of this study was to explore the life values of higher education students in West Bengal, focusing on variations based on gender, habitation, social category, and stream of study. Researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey involving 365 undergraduate and postgraduate students selected randomly from four institutions. The Life Values Inventory, consisting of 42 items rated on a 5-point scale, was used to assess these values. The findings revealed that female students exhibited higher life values than male students, and urban students demonstrated stronger life values compared to those from rural areas. Significant differences were observed among social categories, with general category students displaying higher life values. However, no significant differences were found between students studying arts and those in science. These results highlight the influence of demographic factors on life values and underscore the need for targeted support for students from rural and marginalized backgrounds. The findings were discussed with implications for future research, practice, and policy making.

KEYWORDS: Life Values; Higher Education; Students; Demographic Impact; Cross-sectional survey;

I. INTRODUCTION

Values are core principles that shape individuals' attitudes and behaviours, exerting a profound impact on their life choices (Schwartz, 1992; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Life values refer to fundamental concepts that determine an individual's purpose and significance in life, influencing their choices, actions, and overall well-being (Rokeach, 1973; Inglehart, 1997). These values are developed through cultural, societal, and personal experiences, reflecting the varying importance individuals assign to different aspects of life (Hofstede, 1980; Tiliouine, 2015). The concept of values encompasses a wide range of aspects, such as ethical, moral, and sociological dimensions, all of which contribute to life values (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Understanding the connection between values and life values is crucial for comprehending how individuals navigate their lives and the factors that impact their life satisfaction and happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Keyes, 2006). The interplay between these factors is essential for creating interventions that enhance quality of life and personal satisfaction (Schwartz, 1992; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000).

Life values, which are core principles influencing how individuals behave and make decisions, significantly impact the lives of higher education students (Schwartz, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). Understanding these principles is crucial since they affect academic achievement, career choices, and overall well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Eccles, 2009). Examining the moral principles and beliefs of higher education students in the culturally and socially diverse environment of West Bengal can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and social scientists (Desai et al., 2010; Tiliouine, 2015). The main objective of this study is to investigate the life values among higher education students of West Bengal by examining variations based on gender, habitation, social category, and stream of study. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the socio-cultural factors that influence student development. West Bengal, a region known for its significant cultural and social diversity, offers a unique setting for examining the values of higher education students (Desai et al., 2010; Inglehart, 1997). Students in this region have diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, which significantly impact their life values and educational experiences (Desai et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1980). Gaining a comprehensive understanding of how these elements influence the values that students hold can provide useful insights for developing targeted educational policies and interventions (Eccles, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

I-A. Rationale of the study

Life values contribute significantly to the overall well-being and progress of individuals and communities globally, fostering ethical leadership and sustainable development (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). In a rapidly globalizing world, understanding and harmonizing diverse life values becomes essential for promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation (Berry, 1997; Hofstede, 2011; House et al., 2004). Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

these values, as students are at a formative stage of life where they are developing their identities and worldviews (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2009).

In the Indian context, the significance of life values is deeply rooted in the country's diverse cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions, impacting nation-building and social cohesion (Kumar, 2005; Pathak, 2010; Das, 2011). Indian higher education students often navigate the pressures of modernity and traditional values, which influence their decision-making processes and life choices (Verma & Saraswati, 2002; Bajaj & Nidhiprabha, 2017; Kumar & Maehr, 2010). Understanding these values provides insights into addressing prevalent challenges in India, such as corruption, communalism, and social inequality (Ghosh, 2008; Nussbaum, 2007; Chatterjee, 1998). This understanding is essential for fostering a society that is not only progressive but also ethically grounded (Sen, 1999; Gandhi, 2004; Bhargava, 2008).

West Bengal, known for its rich cultural heritage and intellectual legacy, offers a unique socio-educational landscape for exploring life values among higher education students (Chatterjee, 2005; Sarkar, 2013; Ghosh, 2016). The state has produced numerous eminent scholars, reformers, and leaders who have significantly influenced Indian and global thought, making it a fertile ground for studying the continuity and transformation of values amidst contemporary challenges (Tagore, 1917; Roy, 1969; Bose, 1994). Historical, socio-political, and economic factors in West Bengal shape the value systems of students, providing a nuanced context for this study (Chakrabarty, 2000; Banerjee, 2006; Bhattacharya, 2010).

The insights gained from this study have significant implications for educational policy and practice at various levels. At the global level, the study contributes to the discourse on value education, promoting best practices for integrating values into curricula and pedagogical strategies (UNESCO, 2015; OECD, 2018; Schwab, 2016). For India, the findings can inform national education policies, such as the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes the importance of value-based education (Government of India, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2021; MHRD, 2019). In West Bengal, the study can guide state-specific initiatives aimed at fostering value-based learning environments in higher education institutions (Chatterjee, 2005; Sen, 2011; Ghosh, 2018). Understanding the life values of higher education students also has practical implications for educators, counsellors, and policymakers. For educators, insights from the study can inform the development of curricula and teaching methods that foster critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and value-based decision-making (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2009). For counsellors, the findings enhance student support services by addressing value-related conflicts and promoting mental well-being (Corey, 2013; Rogers, 1961; Yalom, 1980). Policymakers can leverage the study's findings to design initiatives that support value-based education, thereby fostering a more inclusive, ethical, and progressive society (Sen, 1999; Gandhi, 2004; Bhargava, 2008). Hence, the researchers have chosen life values and tried to understand the present status of life values among higher education students in relation to various demographic factors of higher education in West Bengal.

I-B. Delimitations of the study

1. The present study was delimited to only two districts of West Bengal, specifically Kolkata and Paschim Medinipur.
2. The present study was delimited to only three (3) universities and one (1) college in West Bengal, namely Jadavpur University, Calcutta University, Vidyasagar University, and Midnapore College (Autonomous).
3. 365 undergraduate and post-graduate students as a sample for the present study.
4. The study was delimited to Bengali and English medium students only.
5. The study was delimited to only four independent or demographic variables i.e., gender, habitation, social category, and streams of study.
6. Only descriptive and parametric tests were used to show the real nature of data and the research process.

I-C. Objectives of the study

The present study has been undertaken to achieve the following objectives: -

1. To understand the current status of life values among higher education students in West Bengal.
2. To know the life values of higher education students by their gender.
3. To find out the life values of higher education students by their habitation.
4. To know the life values of higher education students by their social category.
5. To examine the life values of higher education students by their streams of study.

I-D. Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant mean difference in life values among students with respect to their gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant mean difference in life values among students with respect to their habitation.

H₀₃: There is no significant mean difference in life values among students with respect to their social category.

H₀₄: There is no significant mean difference in life values among students with respect to their streams of study.

II. METHOD

The primary objective of the study was to ascertain the current state of life values among students at the higher education level in West Bengal. The study utilised a descriptive method and a cross-sectional survey research design was to examine the life values

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

of higher education students in two districts of West Bengal, namely Kolkata and Paschim Medinipur. The sample consisted of 365 undergraduate and postgraduate students from three universities- Jadavpur University, Calcutta University, Vidyasagar University, and one college, Midnapore College (Autonomous). A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across several demographic variables, such as gender, habitation, social category, and streams of study. The dependent variable in this study is life values.

II-A. Instruments for Data Collection

For data collection, one self-made information sheet and one standardised test were used, namely- “Life Values Inventory” developed by Duane Brown and R. Kelly Crace, (1996). The inventory consists of 42 items with 5-point Likert scale. Maximum possible score is ‘210’ and minimum possible score is ‘42’. The scoring of this scale is very simple. In this scale each item is scored from 1 to 5 i.e., 1- Almost never guides my behaviour, 2- Sometimes Guides My Behaviour, 3- Often Guides My Behaviour, 4- Frequently guides my behaviour, 5-Almost always guides my behaviour. This inventory 14 major life values dimensions i.e., Achievement, Belonging, Concern for the Environment, Concern for Others, Creativity, Financial Prosperity, Health and Activity, Humility, Independence, Loyalty to Family or Group, Privacy, Responsibility, Scientific Understanding, Spirituality. In this study, the researchers collected 132 data from different districts of west Bengal. From these data, the researchers checked reliability and validity. Based on 132 data Reliability test ensures the consistency of the result. Here the reliability value is $\alpha = 0.84$. This value is high. So, the inventory is ready for final data collection. As the original Bengali version of inventory was used in the study, the content, concurrent and face validity were maintained by the researchers taking the help of his supervisor.

III. RESULTS

Table 1 Independent variables wise mean distributions

Variables	Category	Number	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	196	124.34	35.932
	Female	169	135.72	34.860
Habitation	Rural	263	125.21	35.647
	Urban	102	140.96	33.964
	General	171	135.01	36.087
Social Category	OBC	79	130.03	38.797
	SC	98	125.39	31.737
	ST	17	97.71	21.097
Stream of study	Arts	169	131.67	36.538
	Science	196	127.84	35.232

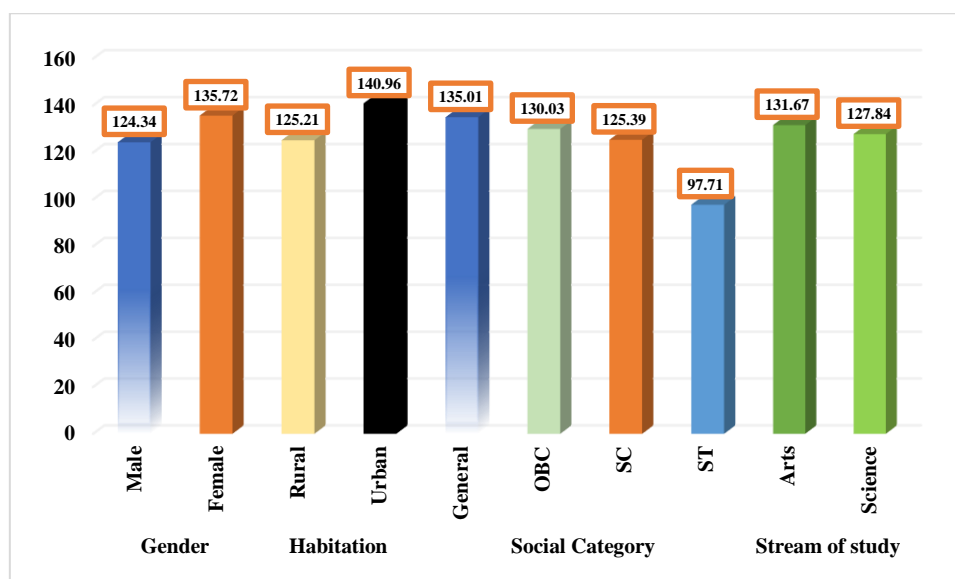


Figure 1 Showing independent variables wise mean distributions

Table 1 and figure 1 represents the mean values of a certain variable across different demographic categories, indicating variations in the mean scores based on gender, habitation, social category, and stream of study. Gender wise, mean score of male and female students is 124.34 and 135.72. Habitation wise, students belonged to rural and urban areas mean score of 125.21 and

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

140.96. Social category wise, mean score of general, OBC, SC, and ST category students is 135.01, 130.03, 125.39, and 97.71. Lastly, stream of study wise, mean score of arts stream students is 131.67 and mean score of science stream is 127.84 respectively.

Table 2 Inferential statistics based on H₀₁, H₀₂ and H₀₄

Variable	t-value	df	Std. error difference	MD	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remarks
Gender	-3.059	363	3.720	-11.380	0.002	*S P<0.05
Habitation	-3.838	363	4.104	-15.752	0.000	*S P<0.05
Stream of study	1.018	363	3.762	3.832	0.309	*NS P>0.05

Note: MD= Mean difference, df= Degree of freedom, *S=Significant, *NS= Not significant

Table 2 showed that the independent sample t-test based on different demographic indicators based on life values among students. For gender, the t-value of -3.059 with a significance level of 0.002 ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Similarly, for habitation, the t-value of -3.838 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance. However, the stream of study does not show a significant difference, with a t-value of 1.018 and a significance level of 0.309 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no significant difference in life values between arts and science stream students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3 Inferential statistics based on H₀₃

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F- value	Sig. (2 tailed)	Remarks
Social category	Between Groups	24045.035	3	8018.012	6.525	0.000	S* P<0.05
	Within Groups	443612.721	361	1228.844			
	Total	467666.756	364				

Note: df= Degree of freedom, *S= Significant

It can be observed from Table 3 that the computed F-value of life values based on social caste is $F(3, 361) = 6.525$; p -value=0.000. The difference in the mean is statistically significant at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the aforesaid H₀₃ is rejected and found differences cannot be attributed to any chance factor.

Major Findings

- The present status of life values among higher education students in West Bengal was found to be 129.61.
- Female students showed higher life values than male students and the difference was found to be statistically significant.
- Students belonged to urban habitation showed higher life values than rural habitation students and the difference was found to be statistically significant.
- Students belonged to general category showed higher life values than students belonged to OBC, SC and ST category students and the difference was found to be statistically significant.
- Arts stream students showed higher life values than science stream students and the difference was found to be statistically not significant.

IV. DISCUSSION

Life values, which are core principles that influence how individuals behave and make choices, play a crucial role in defining the lives of higher education students (Schwartz, 1992). The values mentioned, as identified by Sagiv and Schwartz in 2000, have a significant impact on academic achievement, job choices and overall state of wellbeing. It is crucial to comprehend the factors that influence the values held by students in West Bengal, an area characterised by considerable cultural and social variety. Prior studies have demonstrated that socio-cultural influences have a significant impact on the development of life values in young adults (Inglehart, 1997; Tiliouine, 2015). The objective of this study is to investigate the life values of higher education students in West Bengal, with a focus on analysing differences related to gender, habitation, social category, and stream of study. Research of this region, considering its socio-economic and cultural diversity, can offer useful insights for policymakers, educators, and social

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

scientists (Desai et al., 2010). This research aims to contribute to the creation of focused methods for enhancing the holistic development of students in higher education institutions by identifying the important factors that influence their life values.

The primary goal of this study was to explore the life values of higher education students, considering various demographic factors.

Findings of the study showed that female students had more life values than males. This may be because, in today's world, female students are often more engaged in activities that promote empathy, social responsibility, and community involvement. Educational and social programs focused on female empowerment could also be contributing to this trend. Similar results were found in different researches (Huertas-Delgado, 2020; Yuen, 2015; Hikmah et al. 2021; Concha, 2018). Conversely, some studies showed different results, indicating that male students had more life values than females. In these contexts, societal expectations might emphasize values such as leadership, ambition, and self-reliance in males, which could contribute to higher life values in male students. Similar results were found in different researches (Zhi-juan, 2011; Rao & Singh, 2021; Gupta & Verma, 2023; Khan & Ali, 2022; Das & Bhattacharya, 2020).

Results revealed that there was a significant mean difference in gender considering life values. This could be attributed to the distinct roles and expectations that society places on men and women. While women may prioritize values such as cooperation and caregiving, men might focus more on independence and achievement. Similar results were found in different researches (Patel & Sharma, 2022, Chakraborty & Roy, 2021; Kaur et al. 2023; Zhang et al. 2020; Ali & Rahman, 2021). However, some studies contradicted these findings, showing that gender was statistically not significant. In such cases, it could be that societal changes, like increased gender equality and similar educational experiences for both genders, have minimized differences in life values. Similar results were found in different researches (Mukherjee et al. 2022; Rao & Singh, 2021; Smith & Thompson, 2020; Chaudhuri & Banerjee, 2021; Patel & Desai, 2023).

Furthermore, results revealed that urban area students had more life values than rural area students. This could be because urban students have more exposure to diverse cultures, ideas, and global perspectives, which help shape a broader set of life values. The availability of various social and cultural activities in urban environments also plays a role in this development. Similar results were found in different researches (Kumar, 2016; Banerjee & Saha, 2020; Kumar & Sharma, 2021; Chakraborty & Das, 2022; Verma & Gupta, 2023; Singh & Patel, 2020). On the other hand, some studies showed different results, indicating that rural area students had more life values than urban area students. This might be due to the strong community bonds, traditional values, and close family ties prevalent in rural areas, which can foster deep-rooted life values. Similar results were found in different researches (Witter et al. 2021; Singh & Patel, 2022; Rao & Bhattacharya, 2020; Chaudhary & Sharma, 2021; Das & Ghosh, 2023).

Again, results revealed that there was a significant mean difference in habitation considering life values. This difference might stem from the distinct life experiences and challenges associated with living in different environments. Urban students, who often have access to more diverse resources and experiences, may develop a wider range of life values, whereas rural students might focus more on values that align with their community's traditions and needs. Similar results were found in different researches (Easterlin, 2020; Banerjee & Saha, 2021; Singh & Kumar, 2022; Choudhury & Roy, 2023; Mitra & Ghosh, 2020).

The study also found that students from the general category exhibited higher life values compared to those from other categories, with the difference being statistically significant. This could be due to greater access to resources, opportunities, and social networks that students from the general category often enjoy, which in turn fosters the development of life values. Similar results were found in some research (Desai et al. 2019; Sharma & Verma, 2020; Singh & Gupta 2021; Patel & Choudhury, 2020; Mitra & Roy, 2021; Rao & Sharma, 2023; Das & Gupta, 2021).

Finally, results revealed that Arts stream students showed higher life values than Science stream students, but the difference was statistically not significant. This may be because the Arts curriculum often emphasizes topics related to human culture, ethics, and social issues, which naturally lead to the development of life values. However, the lack of statistical significance suggests that life values are becoming important across all fields of study, reflecting a trend towards a more holistic approach to education. Similar results were found in some research (Hagedorn & Purnamasari, 2012; Singh & Patel, 2019; Rao & Kumar, 2020; Mitra & Ghosh, 2021; Chaudhuri & Sharma, 2022).

V. CONCLUSION

The study sheds light on how factors like gender, habitation, and social category influence the life values of higher education students in West Bengal. The results show that female and urban students, as well as those from the general category, tend to have stronger life values, likely due to better access to resources and opportunities that nurture these values. These findings highlight the need to consider these demographic influences when shaping educational policies and programs that aim to boost student well-being and ethical growth. Interestingly, the study also found that there is no significant difference in life values between students in the arts and science streams, indicating a broader acknowledgment of the importance of these values across different disciplines. This suggests that value-based education should be a priority across all areas of study. To create a more inclusive and fair learning environment, it's essential to provide targeted support, particularly for students from rural and marginalized communities. By

Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

addressing these gaps, educators and policymakers can help foster a generation of students who are not only academically successful but also grounded in strong ethical and social values.

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Life Values among Higher Education Students of West Bengal: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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