Stability and change in value priorities among Croatian adolescents

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Background

Values are:
• enduring beliefs that guide behavior in daily situations and that are preferred personally or socially to opposite values (Rokeach, 1973)
• desirable goals that transcend specific situations and serves as guiding principles in people's life (Schwartz & Blysk, 1987; 1990)

Adolescence is the time when young people set the goals they want to achieve in their lives. During adolescence they also set the standards important to them in life and establish a certain hierarchy of personal values. Thus, we were interested in the stability and change of value hierarchy and importance of different value orientations among adolescents over the period of 8 years in which Croatia went through major economic and social changes.

The main question is what determines relative ranking order of a specific value in a value hierarchy at the individual and social levels. Current research results emphasize the complexity of the relationship between the relative position of a value in value hierarchy and the possibility to satisfy this value. By now, specific conditions which determine importance of specific values have still not been precisely defined.

According to Schwartz et al. (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Schwartz & Blysk, 1986) a hierarchy of specific values is in accordance with life circumstances. Thus, relative importance of a certain value increases with the increased possibility of its assurance, and it decreases with the decreased possibility of its assurance. However, for certain values different mechanisms are in operation. For values that represent growth needs (e.g. self-actualization) people will reduce their importance if they are unable to realize them. But for values that represent deficiency needs (e.g. safety) the greater the deprivation, the more important the value that represents deficiency need.

Results

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who have chosen specific value as one of three most important to them

Table 1: Comparison of value hierarchy based on average ranking values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• friendship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• marriage and children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• professional success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• steady job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• money</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fun</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that the value hierarchies found for the both samples were remarkably stable between 1998 and 2006. In both years, the most important values were health, friendship, getting married and having children, and the least important were money and having fun (Figure 1 and Table 1). These results are in accordance with the results from other countries.

Table 2: Factor loadings (principal component analysis, oblimin rotation) and descriptive statistic for 18 values

Table 3: Correlations among value orientations (2006-blue; 1998-yellow; p<.01)

Table 4: Descriptive statistic and reliability coefficients for value orientations

Conclusion

Since Croatia in the past 17 years went through significant and turbulent socio-economic changes, and since value priorities are not independent of societal changes, some degree of change in value priorities could be expected. However, results obtained in our study indicate stability of value hierarchy and value orientations among adolescents over the period of 8 years. We researched values in the personal domain on which societal changes have less influence, and in which those changes are less noticeable than in the domain of work and political values. Thus, stability in hierarchy and value orientations obtained in this study is not surprising, and could be explained by the type of values we examined.

Method

Sample

Two nationally representative samples of adolescents
• year 1998, N=2823
• year 2006, N=876

Instruments

The same two instruments were used to assess adolescents' values in both studies. 
• List of values - respondents ranked 7 values in order of their importance to them by using a numbers from 1 to 7 (1="the most important to me" to 7="the least important to me")

Value orientation correlates: the importance of the values and values intercorrelations. The highest importance to self-actualizing values and the lowest importance to hedonistic values (Table 4). Differences among attached importance to three value orientations proved to be statistically significant in both years (p<.01), while there were no significant differences in importance adolescents attached to each value orientation between two years (p>.05). However, at the level of specific values significant changes were found in 6 out of 18 analysed values (Table 2).

Factor analyses, using principle component analyses with oblimin rotation, of the 1998 dataset and 2006 data yielded essentially the same three-factor solution (Table 2). In 1998, factors accounted for 47% of the total variance, and in 2006 for 49% of the total variance. These three factors were identified as follows: conventional, hedonistic, and self-actualizing value orientation.

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