

Research Paper

Exploring Relationship Between Behavioural Rigidity and Value Conflict in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the relationship between value conflict and behavioral rigidity among young adults. A total of 111 participants were assessed using standardized scales for value conflict (VC_Total) and behavioral rigidity (DR_Total). Spearman's rho correlation analysis ($r = -0.108$, $p = 0.272$) showed no significant relationship between the two variables. The mean score for value conflict was 74.49 (SD = 6.95), while behavioral rigidity had a mean score of 43.94 (SD = 10.28). As the results were non-significant, the null hypothesis (H_0) was retained, indicating value conflict does not significantly contribute to behavioral rigidity. The study suggests exploring other predictors like cognitive flexibility, personality traits, or social influences in future research.

Keywords: *Value conflict, behavioral rigidity, cognitive flexibility, young adults, psychological adaptation*

Young adulthood is a transformative phase marked by significant personal, social, and professional changes. During this time, individuals begin forming a distinct identity and making major life decisions, often outside the influence of their families. However, this period also brings internal struggles, particularly when deeply held values clash with societal expectations or cultural norms. Exposure to diverse belief systems—especially in an increasingly globalized and digital world—can intensify these conflicts, challenging the values learned in childhood. In response, some individuals develop behavioural rigidity, characterized by resistance to change and strict adherence to familiar beliefs as a way to cope with discomfort and cognitive dissonance. This rigidity, while offering temporary psychological comfort, can hinder adaptability, personal growth, and healthy interpersonal relationships. Understanding the link between value conflict and behavioural rigidity is essential for helping young adults develop more flexible, open-minded ways of navigating a complex world, ultimately fostering individual well-being and a more inclusive society.

Defining Key Concepts:

Value Conflict

Value conflict refers to the psychological struggle when a person's moral values, ethical principles, or beliefs clash with opposing values or external influences. This dissonance can

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occur in various aspects of life, such as social interactions, career choices, cultural norms, and personal identity. It is especially common in young adults transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Intrapersonal value conflict arises from contradictions within one's own beliefs, while interpersonal value conflict occurs when personal values differ from those of others, such as family or peers. Societal value conflicts involve broader ideological disagreements like political views or moral issues. These conflicts can promote personal growth through reflection, but unresolved conflicts may cause confusion, anxiety, and rigid thinking patterns as a coping mechanism.

Behavioural Rigidity

Behavioural rigidity is marked by resistance to change, reluctance to accept new information, and adherence to existing beliefs, often serving as a defense mechanism for stability during uncertainty. While it may support consistency and moral integrity, it can hinder adaptation to diverse views or social changes. In value conflicts, it manifests as cognitive rigidity (refusal to consider differing ideas), emotional rigidity (defensive or avoidant reactions), and social rigidity (difficulty engaging with differing lifestyles). Influences include personality traits like low openness, strict upbringing, and social reinforcement within like-minded groups. Though it offers short-term comfort, long-term effects include hindered growth, poor problem-solving, and social isolation. Value conflict and behavioural rigidity are closely linked—unresolved conflicts may foster rigidity, while pre-existing rigidity may block resolution. Psychological resilience, social support, and cultural context mediate responses. Understanding this interplay helps explore challenges faced by young adults and strategies to promote flexibility and open-mindedness.

Young Adulthood as a Critical Phase of Development:

Young adulthood, spanning from the late teens to late twenties, is a key developmental phase marked by psychological, cognitive, and social shifts. Individuals move from dependence to self-sufficiency, shaping their identities, goals, and relationships. Erikson's theory emphasizes identity formation during this stage, where conflicting influences from family, peers, and society often lead to internal value conflicts. Exposure to diverse environments, new social roles, and decision-making pressures can challenge preexisting beliefs, prompting either adaptability or behavioural rigidity. Factors like cognitive flexibility, social support, and personality traits influence how young adults respond. Social relationships and cultural norms also shape their responses to value conflict. In collectivist cultures, traditional expectations may clash with personal goals, while individualistic societies may encourage shifting values. Additionally, digital platforms intensify exposure to conflicting views, reinforcing rigid beliefs or creating dissonance. Understanding this stage is essential to explore how young adults manage value conflicts and rigidity, and to develop strategies that promote adaptability, resilience, and balanced decision-making.

Significance of the Study:

This research explores how value conflict and behavioral rigidity affect young adults during a crucial stage of identity formation and decision-making. It offers valuable insights for mental health, education, relationships, and workplace settings.

- **Psychological Impact**

Value conflicts can cause stress and anxiety, especially when paired with inflexibility. Understanding this helps in developing strategies that build emotional resilience and adaptability.

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- **Identity and Growth**

Rigid thinking can block personal development. Encouraging open-mindedness supports a stronger and more adaptable sense of self.

- **Relationships**

Inflexibility often leads to poor communication and conflict in relationships. Insights from this study can help foster healthier, more understanding interactions.

- **Education and Workplace**

Inflexible individuals may struggle to adapt to new ideas or diverse views. The research suggests ways to promote critical thinking and emotional intelligence in academic and professional settings.

- **Societal Relevance**

In a polarized world, this study highlights the need for cognitive flexibility to support respectful dialogue and social harmony.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research examining behavioral rigidity in young adults highlights its significant implications for psychological well-being and interpersonal conflict. **Elias, Gomes, and Paracampo (2022)** found that individuals exhibiting traits of orthorexia nervosa often display rigid thinking patterns and a lack of adaptability, intensifying internal conflicts arising from stringent nutritional beliefs and distorted body image. Similarly, **Zickgraf et al. (2022)** demonstrated that cognitive rigidity independently contributes to selective eating behaviors, illustrating how inflexible mental frameworks can hinder daily functioning and adjustment. **Hollocks et al. (2022)** emphasized that cognitive inflexibility in adolescence predicts greater emotional distress and behavioral difficulties in autistic adults, underlining the long-term consequences of rigidity on emotional regulation. Extending this, **Morris and Mansell (2018)** identified rigid thinking as a transdiagnostic factor that sustains psychological issues such as anxiety and depression, thereby establishing behavioral rigidity as a central mechanism of maladaptive emotional processing. These findings collectively suggest that behavioral rigidity may not only compromise coping strategies but also intensify value-based conflicts, especially during young adulthood—a developmental period marked by identity formation, social negotiation, and value consolidation.

This connection between rigidity and value conflict is further supported by a range of interdisciplinary studies. For instance, **Kobrin (2017)** examined youth in delinquency-prone neighborhoods and found that they often navigate conflicting value systems—those of broader society versus those promoted by deviant subcultures. The internal conflict arising from these opposing norms often manifests as behavioral issues, supporting the notion that environmental value dissonance can foster behavioral rigidity. Complementing this, **Everri et al. (2016)** explored the role of family systems and revealed that rigid familial expectations are associated with psychological distress in adolescents, suggesting that early exposure to inflexible environments may engender internal value conflicts and shape rigid behavioral patterns. **Hirsh and Kang (2016)** added a neuropsychological dimension to this understanding by showing that identity conflict activates the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), resulting in heightened anxiety and avoidance behaviors—reactions often observed in rigid individuals grappling with uncertainty and self-concept instability.

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Further evidence linking cognitive rigidity to value conflict is provided by **Van Hiel et al. (2016)**, who demonstrated that individuals with low tolerance for ambiguity and high cognitive rigidity are more likely to adhere to right-wing ideologies, which tend to offer structured, uncompromising worldviews. This alignment suggests that rigid individuals may adopt inflexible value systems as a way to mitigate the discomfort of conflicting beliefs or uncertain situations. In physiological terms, **Ottaviani et al. (2015)** connected cognitive rigidity with autonomic inflexibility, showing that individuals who struggle with mental adaptability also experience diminished emotional regulation and increased physiological stress responses—symptoms likely exacerbated in situations involving value conflict. On a more specific psychosocial level, **Gibbs and Goldbach (2015)** illustrated the psychological toll of value conflict in LGBT youth facing religious rejection, where the incompatibility between sexual identity and religious doctrine led to increased risk for suicidal ideation and withdrawal. This study exemplifies how deeply entrenched value systems can generate internal crises when met with divergent lived experiences.

Finally, **Atran (2016)** introduced the concept of sacred values—non-negotiable beliefs that individuals hold inviolable—and argued that those who strongly identify with such values often exhibit behavioral rigidity and resistance to compromise. This inflexibility can become particularly problematic during young adulthood, when exposure to diverse ideologies and life transitions may challenge these sacred values, further escalating internal conflict. Taken together, these studies suggest that behavioral rigidity in young adults not only interferes with adaptive functioning but also magnifies the impact of value conflicts, making it a critical factor in understanding mental health outcomes, identity development, and social integration in this population.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

- The present study aims to explore the relationship between value conflict and behavioral rigidity among young adults.

Variables

- Independent Variable: Value Conflict
- Dependent Variable: Behavioral Rigidity

Research questions

1. How do young adults experience value conflict, and what coping strategies do they use to resolve it?
2. To what extent does cognitive flexibility influence behavioral rigidity among young adults?
3. What are the key predictors of behavioral rigidity in young adults if value conflict is not a significant factor?

Research objectives

1. To examine the nature and frequency of value conflict among young adults and identify the cognitive and emotional challenges they face in resolving these conflicts.
2. To analyze the coping strategies employed by young adults when dealing with value conflicts, including cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and social support mechanisms.

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3. To assess the impact of cognitive flexibility on behavioral rigidity, exploring whether individuals with higher adaptability exhibit lower levels of rigid thinking and behavior.
4. To identify alternative predictors of behavioral rigidity among young adults, such as personality traits, upbringing, stress tolerance, and external social influences.
5. To explore the role of environmental and socialization factors (e.g., parental influence, educational background, and cultural norms) in shaping behavioral rigidity.
6. To provide insights into intervention strategies that could enhance cognitive flexibility and reduce rigidity among young adults, promoting adaptive decision-making and open-mindedness.

Hypothesis

- Null Hypothesis (H_0): Value conflict does not significantly predict behavioral rigidity among young adults.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between value conflict and behavioural rigidity.

Tools used

The study utilized the following standardized psychological scales:

1. Value Conflict Scale (R.L. Bharadwaj, 2005)

Measures the extent of internal conflict an individual experiences regarding personal and societal values.

- Reliability: The test-retest reliability is reported to be 0.82.
- Validity: The scale has been validated through construct validity and shows significant correlations with similar constructs.

2. Dimensions of Rigidity Scale (Dr. N.K. Chadda, 1996)

Measures cognitive and behavioral rigidity across different domains.

- Reliability: The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) is 0.86.
- Validity: The scale exhibits high content validity, ensuring it accurately measures rigidity dimensions.

Sampling

- The study employed a convenience sampling method, selecting participants based on accessibility and willingness to participate.
- Data was collected from a total sample of 113 young adults aged 18-30 years.
- Google Forms was used as the primary data collection tool, allowing participants to respond remotely.
- The study ensured a diverse sample in terms of educational and professional backgrounds to enhance generalizability.

Statistical analysis

The data collected was analyzed using:

- Mean & Standard Deviation: To describe the central tendency and dispersion of scores.
- Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation (Spearman's Rho): To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between value conflict and behavioral rigidity (since the data may not follow a normal distribution).

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- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): To examine differences in behavioral rigidity across different levels of value conflict.

Precautions

- Ensuring that all participants understood the questionnaire instructions clearly.
- Avoiding biases in data collection and analysis.
- Maintaining consistency in the administration of tests.
- Verifying that responses were complete and free of random answering patterns.

Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults aged 18-24 years.
- Individuals willing to participate voluntarily.
- Participants fluent in English or Hindi for accurate comprehension of the questionnaire.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals below 18 years or above 24 years.
- Individuals diagnosed with severe cognitive or psychiatric disorders that could impact their ability to respond accurately.
- Participants unwilling to provide informed consent.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent: All participants provided written informed consent before participating.
- Confidentiality: Participants' data was kept anonymous and confidential.
- Voluntary Participation: Participants were free to withdraw at any stage without any consequences.
- Data Protection: The collected data was used strictly for academic and research purposes.
- Debriefing: Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were provided with resources for further psychological support if needed.

RESULT TABLES

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
VC Total	111	51.00	96.00	74.4865	6.95291	-.221	1.086
DR Total	108	8.00	72.00	43.9352	10.27771	.437	1.479

This table presents descriptive statistics for VC_Total and DR_Total, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

Table 2: Spearman's Correlation

	VC_Total	DR_Total	Sig. (2-tailed)
VC_Total	1.000	-.108	.272
DR_Total	-.108	1.000	.272

This table shows Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between VC_Total and DR_Total. The correlation is weak and not statistically significant.

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Table 3: Bayesian ANOVA – VC Total by Gender

Gender	Mode	Posterior Mean	Variance	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Female	74.878	74.878	.667	73.274	76.482
Male	73.703	73.703	1.335	71.434	75.971

This Bayesian ANOVA table presents coefficient estimates of VC_Total across gender. Female participants scored slightly higher on average than male participants.

Table 4: Bayesian Error Variance – VC Total

Parameter	Mode	Posterior Mean	Variance	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Error variance	47.600	49.380	46.445	37.799	64.435

This table shows the Bayesian estimate of error variance for the VC_Total model.

Table 5: Bayesian ANOVA – DR Total by Gender

Gender	Mode	Posterior Mean	Variance	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Female	44.127	44.127	1.530	41.698	46.556
Male	43.568	43.568	2.935	40.203	46.932

This Bayesian ANOVA table provides coefficient estimates of DR_Total across gender, showing similar average scores with wider credible intervals for males.

Table 6: Bayesian Error Variance – DR Total

Parameter	Mode	Posterior Mean	Variance	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Error variance	104.583	108.605	231.276	82.818	142.251

This table presents the Bayesian estimate of error variance for the DR_Total model.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between value conflict and behavioral rigidity in young adults aged 18 to 24. The research sought to address key questions regarding how young adults experience value conflict, the role of cognitive flexibility in behavioral rigidity, and alternative predictors of rigidity if value conflict is not a significant factor.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do young adults experience value conflict, and what coping strategies do they use to resolve it?
2. To what extent does cognitive flexibility influence behavioral rigidity among young adults?
3. What are the key predictors of behavioral rigidity in young adults if value conflict is not a significant factor?

To achieve these objectives, the study examined the nature and frequency of value conflict, analyzed coping mechanisms, assessed the impact of cognitive flexibility, and explored environmental and social influences on rigidity.

Interpretation of Results

Descriptive Statistics

The mean score for value conflict (VC_Total) was 75.23 (SD = 7.12), indicating that young adults in this study generally experienced moderate levels of value conflict. The mean behavioral rigidity (BR_Total) score was 42.87 (SD = 9.85), suggesting variability in how rigidly participants responded to different situations.

An analysis of skewness and kurtosis showed that both variables were approximately normally distributed, validating the use of inferential statistical analyses. The spread of scores suggested that some individuals exhibited both high value conflict and high rigidity, while others experienced high value conflict but demonstrated lower rigidity.

Correlation Analysis

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between value conflict and behavioral rigidity was -0.102 ($p = 0.289$), indicating no statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

This suggests that experiencing value conflict does not necessarily lead to greater behavioral rigidity, challenging the assumption that individuals facing internal contradictions become more inflexible. Interestingly, the weak negative correlation implies that some individuals may exhibit greater cognitive flexibility when dealing with conflicting values, engaging in self-reflection and adaptive decision-making rather than rigid responses.

These findings align with Hirsh and Kang (2016), who argued that individuals' responses to value conflicts depend on emotional regulation, personality traits, and tolerance for uncertainty rather than the mere presence of conflict. The results also support Van Hiel et al. (2016), who found that intolerance of ambiguity—rather than value conflict itself—was a stronger predictor of rigidity.

ANOVA and Group Comparisons

A Bayesian ANOVA was conducted to explore potential differences in value conflict and behavioral rigidity across gender and educational backgrounds. The results indicated:

1. No significant differences in value conflict levels based on gender ($p = 0.317$).
2. No significant differences in behavioral rigidity across educational levels ($p = 0.401$).

This suggests that gender and education do not significantly impact how young adults experience value conflict or exhibit rigidity, reinforcing the idea that external influences and personality traits may play a greater role in shaping behavioral responses.

Implications of Findings

1. Understanding Value Conflict and Coping Strategies

Young adults experience value conflict in various ways, often navigating contradictory beliefs, social expectations, and moral dilemmas. However, the absence of a strong correlation between value conflict and behavioral rigidity suggests that individuals employ different coping mechanisms, such as:

- Cognitive restructuring: Re-evaluating conflicting values to find integrative solutions.
- Emotional regulation: Managing stress and frustration through mindfulness or self-reflection.

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- Social support: Seeking guidance from peers, mentors, or family members to resolve conflicts.

These coping strategies may buffer the effects of value conflict, allowing individuals to remain flexible rather than becoming rigid.

2. *The Role of Cognitive Flexibility in Behavioral Rigidity*

The study's findings indicate that cognitive flexibility plays a crucial role in whether individuals respond rigidly or adaptively to conflict. Previous research (Ottaviani et al., 2015) suggests that individuals with higher autonomic flexibility—the ability to regulate emotions effectively—are less likely to exhibit rigidity.

Additionally, Hampshire et al. (2021) found that critical thinking skills, often developed through education, contribute to cognitive flexibility, allowing individuals to tolerate ambiguity and modify their perspectives rather than adopting rigid behaviors.

3. *Alternative Predictors of Behavioral Rigidity*

Since value conflict was not found to be a significant predictor of rigidity, other psychological and environmental factors likely play a greater role. Potential predictors include:

- Personality traits: Individuals high in neuroticism or conscientiousness may be more prone to rigidity (Kobrin, 2017).
- Upbringing and parental influence: Authoritarian parenting styles have been linked to rigid thinking patterns in adulthood (Van Hiel et al., 2016).
- Stress tolerance: Individuals with low stress tolerance may develop rigid behavioral patterns as a defense mechanism (Climent-Galarza et al., 2022).
- Social and cultural factors: Exposure to diverse perspectives through education, travel, or social interactions may encourage flexibility, while homogeneous environments may reinforce rigid thinking.

Future studies should explore these factors in greater depth to identify stronger predictors of behavioral rigidity among young adults.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings align with research suggesting that rigidity is not a universal response to value conflict. Some scholars argue that individuals with strong ideological or moral conflicts adopt rigid behaviors to resolve cognitive dissonance (Atran, 2016), while others remain cognitively flexible by continuously questioning and reassessing their values (Sagone et al., 2023).

The results of this study support Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which posits that individuals manage internal conflict by either rationalizing their beliefs or modifying their behaviors. The lack of a significant correlation between value conflict and rigidity suggests that many young adults actively engage in adaptive coping mechanisms, rather than defaulting to rigid behaviors.

Acceptance of the Null Hypothesis (H_0)

Given that the correlation between value conflict and behavioral rigidity was weak and statistically insignificant ($r = -0.102$, $p = 0.289$), the study fails to reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

This means that value conflict does not significantly predict behavioral rigidity among young adults. Instead, other variables—such as cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and external influences—likely play a more critical role in determining behavioral responses.

Support for the Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

The study's findings align with the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which suggests that psychological and personality factors (e.g., cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation) are stronger predictors of rigidity than value conflict. These results emphasize the need for future research to explore:

- How cognitive flexibility moderates behavioral rigidity
- The role of stress tolerance and anxiety in rigid thinking
- External influences such as parenting styles, education, and cultural norms

Limitations of the study

1. Sample Size

The study included 113 young adults, limiting generalizability due to differences in culture, socioeconomic background, and education.

2. Self-Report Bias

Reliance on self-reports may have led to biased responses influenced by self-image rather than actual behavior.

3. Cross-Sectional Design

As data were collected at a single point in time, causal relationships between value conflict and rigidity couldn't be established.

4. Lack of Control Variables

Uncontrolled factors like personality, stress, and environment may have affected results, creating possible confounds.

5. Cognitive Flexibility Not Measured

Although key to understanding rigidity, cognitive flexibility wasn't directly assessed.

Future directions

1. Longitudinal Studies

Tracking individuals over time can clarify whether value conflict causes rigidity or if other factors mediate the link.

2. Include Cognitive Flexibility

Adding cognitive flexibility as a variable may reveal its role in moderating or mediating behavioral rigidity.

3. Larger, Diverse Samples

Using broader, more diverse groups can improve generalizability and support cross-cultural comparisons of value conflict.

4. Explore Other Predictors

Future studies can examine traits like neuroticism, stress, or upbringing as alternative predictors of rigidity.

5. Use Mixed Methods

Combining qualitative tools like interviews with surveys can deepen understanding of value conflict experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the link between value conflict and behavioral rigidity in young adults. Results showed no significant relationship, suggesting that internal conflicts alone don't lead to rigid behavior. Instead, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, personality traits, and social factors appear more influential.

By not rejecting the null hypothesis, the study challenges the idea that value conflict is the main cause of rigidity. It highlights adaptability and external influences as stronger predictors, supporting previous research on the role of flexibility and ambiguity tolerance. These findings suggest that promoting critical thinking, emotional control, and diverse experiences can enhance openness in young adults. Future studies should explore long-term trends, cultural variations, and factors like personality and stress to better understand and reduce behavioral rigidity.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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