

## Values and moral attitudes among adolescents

Popovska Nalevska, Gorica

*Internacional Slavic University, Gavrilo Romanovic Derzavin, Republic of Macedonia*  
([popovska.g@gmail.com](mailto:popovska.g@gmail.com))

Popovski, Filip ✉

*Faculty of technical sciences, St. Kliment Ohridski University - Bitola, Republic of Macedonia*  
([Filip.popovski@tfb.uklo.edu.mk](mailto:Filip.popovski@tfb.uklo.edu.mk))

Dimova Popovska, Hristina

*High School SABA - Bitola, Republic of Macedonia* ([Hristinadimova95@gmail.com](mailto:Hristinadimova95@gmail.com))



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### ***Abstract***

During the years of adolescence, defined by experts as a very important stage in the process of building one's self-identity, major changes occur at biological, social and cultural level. These changes may be exploited from educational perspective as complex opportunities of the adolescent's formation and development. The value system of one person depends on what is positively valued in the family, but also on what are the dominant values in the environment in which individual lives. Big societal change involves reexamining the existing values and embracing new ones, which can be a long-term process. The general aim of the research is to examine the values and moral attitudes of adolescents aged 16 to 21 years. The realization of this goal is done through the examining the rank of terminal and instrumental values at adolescents and examining the moral attitudes, such as the dominance of traditional and liberal attitudes. The examination of the values is carried out with abbreviated and partially modified version of Rokich's 'value questionnaire'. Moral attitudes are measured with a "scale of moral attitudes".

***Keywords:*** values, moral attitudes, adolescents, traditional attitudes, liberal attitudes

## Values and moral attitudes among adolescents

### 1. Introduction

The issues and problems of moral development and upbringing and the creation of positive ethical values have always been relevant not only in pedagogical science but also far beyond it. In modern society, in conditions of multiculturalism, the different models of communication, liberalization and democratization of society, theories and understandings of morality and upbringing, social and individual ethical values, methods, procedures and content of morality and ethics are changing. Morality was in general defined as the capacity to discern between good and evil (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Over the past years, there has been an increase in the approaches of the morality issues in psychology. Morality refers to how people relate to principles, norms and values and apply such guidelines in their life, by choosing between good and evil. Each individual makes moral judgments on a daily basis. However, in adolescence, as abstract, logical thinking and emotional and social dimension develop, these judgments are more nuanced, in line with the adolescent's values and beliefs. Moral development refers to changes in moral convictions coming to surface as a person grows and matures. Moral convictions are linked but different from moral behavior: we may know what we should do and yet, in reality, fail adopting a moral behavior.

Adolescents perceive values, principles, ideas of society in a critical way and try to build their own system of values. They quest their own manner of expression, through behavior and attitudinal constructions and models, through adopting a personal manner of response, through exploration of their own limits. The researches on the formation of a child's character show that the values acquired by such child come, to a large extent, from their personal and social interaction with parents, siblings or other adults within the family (See, 2018; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lexmond & Reeves, 2009) or outside it, in particular in the learning environment (See, 2018; Borba, 2002). See (2018, p. 2) defines the character as a set of behaviors, beliefs and attitudes modeled through the values interiorized by the individual: kindness, justice, respect, honesty, sincerity, loyalty, tolerance, dignity, understanding, altruism etc. The character is not a component of the inborn personality; the character is a component forming as early as childhood and adolescence in particular.

Value orientations serve as a general indicator of the orientation of interests, needs, personal requirements, position in society and the level of spiritual development. The path and perspectives of development of a society depend on the values formed among adolescents today and their level of preparedness for the new changes in social relations. That's why the insight in the way of forming of values and the profile of values of adolescent population can be of assistance for those who plan and realize the educational politics so as they can properly determine the goals of teaching and education and realize them successfully. The value system of one individual depends on what is positively valued in the family, but also on what are the dominant values in the environment in which he/she lives. Big societal change involves reexamining the existing values and embracing new ones, which can be a long-term process. We are witnessing the current crisis of values, which is visible not only individually but also socially. Schools play a major role and responsibility in education of young people. The school can fulfill this responsible role only if the upbringing is based on adequate goals and objectives that represent universal and human values, appropriate teaching methods, means and procedures, in conditions of democratic upbringing.

Values are an often example of exploring in different social sciences, a thing prescribed to their theoretical and practical contribution in interpreting and understanding of occurrences, as to a prognostic possibility deriving from their motivational embedding and relative stability. They enable explaining and predicting of the behavior in individuals, getting insight in their value orientations and contribute for the expanding of the realizations for mechanisms of forming of values and effects they have on socialization. The insight in the way of forming of values and profile of value in adolescent population can be of assistance for those who plan and

realize the educational politics so as they can properly determine the goals of teaching and education and realize them successfully. The data for value orientations in particular generations, gathered in different time periods enable bringing of conclusions for stability, respectively the changes in the profile of value in young, as to the influence of current social circumstances on individual value determinations (Joksimović & Janjetović, 2008).

The values are adopted through social learning, under the influence of different agents of socialization that consciously or intentionally, spontaneously contribute certain values to be accepted and adopted. When talking about forming of values in individual life, the family sets the foundation, although the influences on peers, and mass communication media also have significance. In regard to the adopting of socially preferred values, school is an agent of socialization that directly mediates between society and young people participating in the teaching-educational process. This is, certainly, if the goals of society are set clearly enough and the educational curriculum predicts and gives consistent and systematic influence of school on the values of the student (Joksimović & Maksić, 2006). The values and value orientation in the empirical research are most often used as synonyms because their differences can hardly be operationalized. However, such differences exist. The values do the function of all kinds of selective social behavior: social action, ideology, attitudes and moral reasoning, comparing with others, as to justifying yourselves and others.

Parsons and Shils assume that values are an element of an accepted symbolic system serving as a criteria or standard for choosing between orientation alternatives, because of this, they are necessary element of social acting and define the way of choosing and the proper obligation of such acting (Parsons & Shils, 1962). The definition of Kluckhohn emphasizes the explicit and implicit character of values typical for an individual or group: "Values aren't only in wishes, but quite more in needs, respectively they aren't only in what we wish for, but also in what we feel as right and proper to want for ourselves and others. In fact, values are abstract standards that overcome impulses of the moment and transient situations" (Kluckhohn, 1965). According to this, values represent certain standards, concepts, criteria and believes for the desired goals of human existence; individual and joint ways of behavior and social relations. Even authors define values as lasting or relatively lasting dispositions of the individual so as to notice, interpret and evaluate certain objects in a way seemingly desirable and according to such experience behave to them. (Serpel, 1978).

The famous explorer of values Rokeach (1973) has identified two important functions of values. One of these functions represents the standards managing our behavior, and the other, called motivational, regards to the components expressing our tendency for acquiring values (for example, we tend to be honest and solidary). In this regard, the tendency for fulfilling represents a human need. The implied determinations show that values contain three important components: cognitive (value as a concept), affective (value as something desirable) and conative (value as criteria for selection). Such provisions have shown to be fruitful and suitable for sociological exploring, because they place the values in the interpretive frame of the concept of social acting, representing the basis for understanding social dynamics.

Value orientations, however, represent individual hierarchical system of values determining the orientation of a person or the selectiveness of her conduct. Rot and Havelka (1973) define value orientations as general principles of behavior and acting regarding certain goals we strive to fulfill assumes that value orientations are wide, less articulated system of beliefs, respectively relatively consistent and enough coherently directed to certain categories of the goals. Value orientations in adolescents are gradually formed in the process of his or her socialization by reaching through of social information in the individual - psychological world of the adolescent. Forming of a system of value orientations is a process of person building and such system shows up to be a remedy for conducting of certain social goals. In modern conditions, the process of forming of value orientations in young generations takes place in the context of reforms happening in society. These changes not only lead to changes in economic relations, but also directly affect the spiritual climate and interpersonal relations.

In this article, the Rokeach's terminal and instrumental model of values is used. Rokeach (1973) defines values as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially

preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence". He proposed a list including two sets of values, namely the terminal values (referring to desirable and end-state existence; the goals that a person would like to achieve during their lifetime and may vary among different groups of people in different cultures) and instrumental values (referring to preferable modes of behavior; means of achieving the terminal values). In original lists, the values are ranked according to the terms of their importance as guiding principles of the respondent's life.

According to Rokeach, a value once acquired becomes part of an organized system of values; this value system works as a general plan for resolving conflicts and making decisions. Two types of values represent two separate yet functionally interconnected systems wherein all the values concerning modes of behavior are instrumental to the attainment of all the values concerning end states. One mode of behavior may be instrumental to the attainment of several terminal values; several modes may be instrumental to the attainment of one terminal value (Rokeach, 1973). Rokeach argues that each person has a system of values, an organization of his/her beliefs in relation to the forms of behavior he or she prefers, along a continuum according to their importance. Throughout the processes of maturation and learning, children and adolescents construct a way of being in a world, a self-concept, a knowledge of that which surrounds them, a confidence in their possibilities of transforming the environment self-efficacy and their own way of relating to others – social skills. In these processes, they gain knowledge, learn forms of behavior, attitudes and values, and consolidate beliefs. The different interpretations, perspectives and theories explaining these learning processes affirm that, as moral beings, we become who we are either because we learn values and reject counter-values or because we construct our values – or for both reasons at the same time.

From our perspective, and in accordance with the ethical learning model (Casas et al., 1995), we understand that the person indeed learns at the confluence of values and counter-values, at the same time constructing a scale or matrix of values, in which he or she prioritizes certain values and identifies with some of them in particular. In this learning, the observation of models, and identification with characters from real life or the virtual world, and of the conditions surrounding the different spaces of socialization and education/upbringing, are factors that contribute to constructing this matrix and orienting moral development. This dynamic, which characterizes the process of human development throughout life, is of particular importance in the period of childhood and adolescence, and is strongly influenced by the context in which we live. This life environment obviously includes the immediate physical context, but also more remote contexts to which we have access, and which generate our interest. In interaction with these, and with all the people who shape our social networks, we construct ourselves throughout childhood and adolescence, advance towards adult life with values, and counter values.

## 2. Methodology of the research

**Research objectives and tasks** - The general aim of the research is to examine the values and moral attitudes of adolescents aged 16 to 21 years. The realization of this goal is done through the realization of the following tasks: Examining the rank of terminal and instrumental values at adolescents and Examining the moral attitudes at adolescents, as well as the dominance of traditional and liberal attitudes. In this research term "value" imply a relatively permanent belief that a certain way of behavior or life purpose is personal or social preferred over the opposite mode of conduct or life goal". This definition is given by M. Rokeach (1973) who values further divides them into instrumental and terminal. The instrumental ones operationalize as modes of behavior, and terminal as life goals. Under the term moral attitude in this research is implied by the individual score obtained on the Scale of Moral Attitudes, which divides respondents into persons with more traditional and people with more liberal views.

**Methods, techniques, and sample of research** - The research was conducted with a descriptive - analytical method that is adequate and by the nature and character of the set goals of the research. The analytical method analyzed the views and opinions of the respondents covered in the sample of the research. The examination of the values is carried out with abbreviated and partially modified version of Rokich's 'value questionnaire'. The

questionnaire examines 16 terminal and 16 instrumental values that respondents should rank according to the importance they represent in their life. Moral attitudes are measured with a "scale of moral attitudes". Likert scale determined the degree of agreement or disagreement, on a five-point scale. It examines the attitudes towards the way of dressing, piercings, etc tattoos, the media and negative models of behavior, homosexuality, life in extramarital union, divorce, freedom of speech, intimacy with multiple people at the same time, relationships between persons with a large age difference, adultery, legalization of "soft drugs", pornography, cohabitation and a single parent. A higher score indicates attitudes that are more traditional. Moral attitudes provide the basis for the overall moral life. Attitudes always refer to specific persons and objects. They are relatively permanent, more specific than values, they are a product of values orientation and different in intensity.

**The sample** was chosen randomly and consists of 103 adolescents aged 16 to 21 years. While, **data processing** - The data were processed quantitatively using the EXCEL and STATISTICS computer programs. They were grouped according to the number of matching in certain categories and then placed into tables. In the statistical processing of the data it was applied standard procedures such as: calculation of frequencies, percentages and ranks.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Terminal and instrumental values at adolescents

The general aim of the research is to examine the values and moral attitudes of adolescents aged 16 to 21 years. The questionnaire examines 16 terminal and 16 instrumental values that respondents should rank according to the importance they represent in their life, the most important carries rank 1, and the least important rank 16. The instrumental ones operationalize as modes of behavior, and terminal as life goals. Instrumental can be: moral values and competency values, while the terminal ones can be: personal and social values. In instrumental values include: ambition, cooperation, self-control, independence, honesty, determination, resourcefulness, ability, helpfulness, clean, generosity, logic, conscientiousness, politeness, competition and tact. In terminal values include: social reputation, exciting life, true friendship, peace in the world, self-respect, harmonious family life, peace of mind, equality, wisdom, economic well-being, true love, self-improvement, security for loved ones, pleasure, social justice, a world of beauty. Its important to note that Rokic puts the emphasis on the values they have people, not objects. They are usually integrated into value systems which are hierarchically organized. They have a lasting quality, which limits their number, because they can only be relatively permanent several values - the most important ones.

**Table 1**

*Rank of instrumental values at adolescents*

Instrumental (modes of behavior).	Arithmetic mean	Rank
Helping	13.2	1
Politeness	12	2
Logic	8,9	3
Self control	8.6	4
Conscientiousness	8.5	5
Honesty	8.4	6
Generosity	8	7
Ability	7.8	8
Resourcefulness	7.5	9
Determination	7.3	10
Cooperation	6.6	11
Tactfulness	6.4	12
Independence	6	13
Ambition	5.1	14
Clean	4.9	15
Competition	3.1	16

In terms of instrumental values, respondents rank helping, politeness and logic the highest, and competition, clean and ambitiousness the lowest. Adolescents see that the values they conveyed by the family as positive, in reality they are inapplicable and difficult to defend. Thus, they may even value some assets negatively, and still apply them in their daily life, in order to realize a certain goal. On the other hand, young people prefer logic, that is, rational and consistent behavior much more. Seen through the lens of cognitive development, they just entered into formal operations. It implies the reorganization of the previously existing mental structures and matrices and the development of new, higher forms of opinion. They question social rules and norms, trying to build their own value system. In that complex process, it is logic that helps them not to go astray. Adolescents are characterized by the expectation of a logical and correct answer to every question and consistency in every situation. Even later in development, the experience factor will confront them with the realization that there is not only one truth and that it often has nothing in common with logic, much less with consistency. The least preferred behaviors are: clean, ambitious and competitive. This indicates that neatness and pedantry are not particularly important to young people in everyday life. They also do not strive to achieve or do better than others, nor do they care about acting carefully in sensitive situations without offending others. Competition as a mode of behavior is not characteristic of our climate and style of upbringing, which can be seen from the continuous low preference of this value by adolescents. Table 2 presents the obtained results of the terminal values examined in the research sample.

**Table 2**

*Rank of terminal values at adolescents*

Terminal values (life goals)	Arithmetic mean	Rank
social justice	13.3	1
contentment	12.4	2
true friendship	12.2	3
world of beauty	12.2	4
true love	11.2	5
security for those we love	11.1	6
self improvement	11	7
world peace	10.11	8
self respect	10.6	9
equality	9.8	10
peace of mind	9.5	11
wisdom	9.2	12
economic condition	9.2	13
exciting life	8.6	14
harmonious life	8.5	15
social reputation	7.7	16

After analyzing the obtained results, where the adolescent distribute the life goals from the most significant to the least significant, we come to the following results: social justice takes the first place, i.e. most of them single it out as the most significant for them. Against this goal, the least significant for young people is social reputation, which is last on the ranking list. What is also important for adolescent is satisfaction (rank 2). In third place is true friendship. The lowest ranked values are: social reputation, harmonious life and exciting life. The first two are characteristic of the development period in which these respondents are currently finding. Having honest and faithful friends, a life filled with many new experiences, challenges and excitements, things that are especially important in the period of adolescence. Relationships with peers are horizontal and in this period they have emphasized place, because they become more significant now than in childhood. The basic components of friendship are fidelity, intimacy and loyalty. That's why he thinks that friendships from the time of adolescence are usually the most intimate and strongest than ever in other age periods. True love defined as "a sincere and lasting love relationship with deep emotional and spiritual intimacy" is also highly desired life purpose by this group of respondents. It is known from the literature that heterosexual relationships in adolescence are a preparation for establishing the adult's sexual identity. In doing so, the choice of the first heterosexual partner is often problematic due to the fact that in the process of individuation the adolescent releases himself from parental dependence.

Experimentation in this field by engaging in sexual relations and relationships that last a short time is characteristic time. Hence, it cannot be expected that persons from early adolescence will reach deep emotional and spiritual intimacy, which is characteristic of mature love. But romantic and faithful love is something that is desired at any age. The high preference for this value among adolescents may also be the result of the influence of TV novels that are frequently shown on television channels and in which the main theme is always the struggle for true love. It is known that security is one of the basic human needs, which in Maslow's hierarchy is just above the biological needs and continuously motivates the individual for behavior that it will provide him. In an unsafe context, such as today's, security can only be sought within the family. There, parents try to spare their children from unpleasant experiences and make their lives as comfortable and normal as possible. Hence it is clear why these values-goals are so highly ranked by young people. This impression complements the ranking of social justice and harmonious life as the least preferred goals. It points to the conclusion that correcting social injustice, caring for the weak and powerless, in conditions where everyone is fighting for one's own existence is a distant and not so significant goal.

### 3.2 Moral attitudes at adolescents

The second task of the research is to examining the moral attitudes at adolescents, ie the dominance of traditional and liberal attitudes. Under the term moral attitude in this research is implied by the individual score obtained on the Scale of Moral Attitudes, which divides respondents into persons with more traditional and people with more liberal views about the way of dressing, piercings and tattoos, the media and negative models of behavior, homosexuality, extramarital life union, divorce, freedom of speech, intimacy with multiple persons at the same time, relationships between persons with a large age difference, adultery, legalization of "soft drugs", pornography, cohabitation and single parent. Higher score indicates more traditional views. Moral attitudes provide a foundation of the overall moral life. The views will always refer to specific persons and objects. They are closely related to values, but between them there are also important differences. Values take a more central position and as such they can be the source of attitudes. Attitudes are relative permanent, more specific than values, a product of value orientation and different in intensity. Values, on the other hand, will be more difficult changeable, more general, serve as standards of assessment, ideals towards which the individual strives for, imply complete adherence to them. This one a constellation of relationships between values and attitudes dictates theirs continuous, joint examination.

**Table 3**

*Scale of Moral attitudes at adolescents*

	Don't agree %	Less agree %	Not sure %	More agree %	Strongly agree %	Total %
1. Young people dress tastelessly and immorally	20.8	3.4	52.8	20.8	2.2	100
2. It is acceptable for young people to have piercings and tattoos	18.9	22.6	30.2	9.4	18.9	100
3. Certain content on TV (reality shows, music videos...) portrays negative patterns of behavior and should not be recorded	11.3	13.2	37.7	18.9	18.9	100
4. Homosexuality should be accepted	54.7	3.8	15.1	7.5	18.9	100
5. Unmarried partners should not live together	37.7	22.6	20.8	7.5	11.3	100
6. It is acceptable to have a child when you are not married	22.6	9.4	26.4	17	24.6	100
7. Is divorce an option that should be used when the marriage is not good?	11.3	20.8	34	20.8	7.5	100
8. It is okay to maintain intimate relationships with multiple partners	83	3.8	7.5	3.5	2.2	100
9. Relationships with a big age difference (over 10 years) are amoral and wrong	28.3	18.9	22.6	20.8	9.4	100
10. Adultery between partners should be forgiven	64.2	13.2	15.1	3.5	4	100
11. The use of "soft drugs" should remain illegal	18.9	5	13.2	13.2	49.7	100
12. Porn sites should exist and be available	50.9	3.8	28.3	11.3	5.7	100

The largest percentage of respondents do not agree/less agree with the statement that: homosexuality should be accepted, having an intimate relationship with multiple partners, infidelity between partners should be forgiven, porn sites should exist and be available. Regarding some of the claims a large number of young people have an uncertain attitude, such as: the acceptance of young people having piercings and tattoos, certain content on TV (reality shows, music videos...) portrays negative patterns of behavior and should not be filmed, it is acceptable to have a child when we are not married. The largest percentage of young people agree with statements: divorce an option that should be used when the marriage is not good, the use of "soft drugs" should remain illegal, it is acceptable to have a child when we are not married.

The obtained results are in line with many other researches. So, for example, research confirms that adolescents living in families where married parents do not differ significantly from their own parents regarding the attitude towards marriage/divorce (Coleman & Ganong, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1994). Against this, adolescents who live in families in which they are present frequently conflicts between spouses, as well as those of divorced parents they have a negative attitude towards marriage and accept divorce as good option (Muench & Landrum, 1994). But in most of the adolescents in this research, it will be registered that they do not have a clear attitude regarding divorce, cohabitation, relationships between persons with a large age difference, etc. This is, on the one hand, due to the age when attitudes towards these issues are still being formed, but it is also a consequence of the fact that young people today live in a new reality, in which divorces are a daily occurrence, as well as living in unofficial relationships, changing fashion trends, uncensored media content, new models, the promotion of freedom of choice and the like. It is precisely the unclear and undeveloped attitudes that prove that adolescents are at a crossroads between what they receive as a value system from their family and the culture in which they live and the new values that penetrate from Western countries through the media.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Adolescents have preferences for life goals that are in line with the characteristics of their age, such as an exciting life, true friendship, pleasure, true love, self-respect, self-improvement, peace of mind. This conclusion is also related to the preferred ways of behavior: ambition, independence, resourcefulness, decisiveness, logic, tact, self-control and honesty. The stage of formal operations in which adolescents find themselves, leads to the abandonment of rigid belief systems. They question social values and norms, that is, conventional limitations. In modern living conditions, when the integrative processes in world frames become intense, external ones also become strong influences on morale. The moral norms of a social environment most often they spread in the process of economic, political and cultural connection with other communities, whereby, as a rule, they prevail elements of the morality of more powerful nations and cultures, which is also the case in our country. This is followed by the changing of the material conditions for life, as well as the organizational-institutional structures of society. In our case, it is the increasing rate of unemployment and poverty in the Republic of North Macedonia, which threatens the satisfaction of basic human needs. It causes destabilization, insecurity, loss of hope that something will change, and if it persists for a long time, this condition inevitably leads to psychological death. Such a degenerative process is accelerated by the rapid integration processes in the world, materialized in the mass media.

It can be concluded that the non-acceptance of homosexuality, the legalization of light drugs, parallel relationships, the birth of a child without entering into marriage, etc., points to the conclusion that traditional attitudes regarding these issues are still present among the younger population in our society. However, he cannot confirm with certainty whether it is only a declarative non-acceptance of them or a real negative attitude, which leads to appropriate behavior. On the other hand, the unclear, as well as more liberal attitudes regarding divorce, cohabitation, relationships between persons with a large age difference, extramarital relationships, registered among adolescents show that, apart from the developmental changes characteristic of their age, factors originating from social context, causing a state of transition in the individual's values and attitudes, like the influence of the mass media. In fact, it gives a complex picture of intergenerational transmission due to the combined influence of age differences and the current accelerated process of moving from traditionalism to

modernism and even postmodernism. This shift will manifest itself in the appearance of the already mentioned alternative forms of family, such as one-parent families, same-sex families, different forms of cohabitation, etc. Such phenomena will still be more common in Western countries, but it is only a matter of time before they become everyday in our country. From there, the complexity of intergenerational transmission in countries that are undergoing a process of modernization, including our country, imposes the need for continuous research in the area of the family and the value system.

#### 4.1 Implications for teachers and learners

This study has significant psychopedagogical implications, as teachers may contribute to the formation of their students' moral character; they may represent models of behavior for the adolescents through principles, values and attitudes which they apply in their life and also through some activities, debates and didactic scenarios of which students are expected to understand and interiorize their own moral schemes. Additionally, adolescents may be involved in extracurricular and volunteer activities, which focus on development of the moral component of their personality. Positive examples from real life may also be provided to teach students how to behave in various situations. Adolescents are receptive to the models that they choose, this is why the family, the school, the friends, the mass media, the community, the church are all responsible in this respect and may influence the adolescent's value system to a very large extent.

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