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### GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MORAL REASONING OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS

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#### ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine the levels and stages of moral reasoning among students of 10<sup>th</sup> grade in the light of Kohlberg's theory. Main objectives of the study were to measure the moral reasoning stages of male and female children of this grade and to find out the gender differences in moral reasoning. 100 students (50 boys, 50 girls) were selected as sample of the study from boys' and girls' schools. An Urdu version of Moral dilemma known as "Heinz and the druggist" was adopted and used as a measuring instrument for moral reasoning. It was found that, with a little variation, majority of the tenth graders were ranked at postconventional stage of universal ethical principle. Significant gender differences were also detected in the reasoning of tenth graders.

## INTRODUCTION

Moral development concerns with rules and conventions about just interactions between people (Santrock, 2006). Through this process proper attitudes and behaviors are developed in people toward others in society. As moral development is considered to be the backbone of an ideal social system, moral education forms an integral part of school curricula. The teacher plays an important role in the moral development of children. He should know the moral reasoning level of students to best teach the moral concepts in accordance with their level of moral judgement (Pervaiz, 2005).

Three levels and six stages of moral judgement were identified by Kohlberg. At the first level, called pre-conventional morality, individuals do not show any internalization for moral values. At this level, external rewards and punishment control moral reasoning of the individuals (Santrock, 2006). This level has two stages. The persons are considered at stage 1, who obey rules to avoid punishment. At stage 2, individuals begin to realize others' needs, but their personal needs and rewards determine right and wrong. Favors are retained along the lines of "You scratch my back, I will scratch yours". (Woolfolk, 2004; Ormrod, 1998). Loyalty to country, traditional values, and the laws of society form the basis for Kohlberg's level of conventional reasoning. This level of Kohlberg's theory also has two stages. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage- good boy/nice girl- people are concerned about interpersonal relationships, while at stage 4- law and order orientation- they believe that for maintaining social order, people should respect the laws as they are absolute. (Woolfolk, 2004). At the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of moral reasoning- the post-conventional level- morality is completely internalized. The individuals develop their own abstract principles who may obey rules if those are inconsistent with the standards. The person who is at stage 5- social contract orientation- recognizes that rules are flexible and can be changed if these are not in the best interest of society. Universal ethical principle- the 6<sup>th</sup> and the highest stage of Kohlberg's theory- has the persons who believe that conscience determines right and wrong, considering the universal values like justice and human rights.

Internalization is the key concept of Kohlberg's theory. It is a developmental change from the behavior which is controlled externally to the behaviour that is controlled by internal principles or standards (Santrock, 2005).

Gilligan made a major analysis of Kohlberg's work and was of the view that Kohlberg's theories were biased against women, as he took only males in his studies. Being the more than fifty percent of the total population, having the pivotal role in the family structure and mothers as the first teachers of their generations, females have a great influence on the society. As children are considered to be more attached to their mothers, their morality can be influenced by the morality of their mothers and sisters. So, there was a dire need to investigate the moral reasoning stages of the females at different levels and to seek the answer to the question raised by Gilligan that women are not behind from males as stated by Kohlberg.

Kohlberg's theory has generated a worldwide research for its verification and in many countries of the world, a lot of work has been done on this theory but

in Pakistan, the scenario is different. Therefore, there was an immense need to work on Kohlberg's theory to test its validity in Pakistani culture. So the researcher designed this study to determine the gender differences in moral reasoning of grade 10 students in the light of Kohlberg's theory.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. To investigate the stages of moral reasoning of secondary school students.
2. To determine the stages of moral reasoning among female students of public secondary schools.
3. To find out the gender differences in moral reasoning of secondary school students.

In order to achieve objective 3, following null hypothesis were tested;

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant correspondence between frequencies of male and female

Students at each stage of moral reasoning among 10<sup>th</sup> class students.

The level of significant for rejecting or accepting the above null hypothesis was .05.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Population***

The target population of the study consisted of students of 10<sup>th</sup> grades studying in all the government schools in Tehsil Hazro. The accessible population comprised 1145 students (700 boys, 445 girls) of grade 10 studying in government high schools for boys and girls located in Hazro town of district Attock, Pakistan.

#### ***Sample***

Data were collected from 100 students (50 boys, 50 girls), who were selected as sample of the study from the above mentioned population. Fifty male students of 10<sup>th</sup> class were selected randomly from Govt. High School No-1 Hazro while fifty female students of grade 10 were selected from Govt. Girls High Schools No-1 Hazro.

### **RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

In order to determine the moral stage of each participant of the sample, an Urdu version of the following famous moral dilemma "Heinz and the druggist" was used as research instrument: it was renamed as "Shehzad and Hakeem".

The purpose of translating the dilemma in Urdu was that, Urdu is the national language of Pakistan which is easy to comprehend as compared to English,

particularly by the students of govt. schools where medium of instruction and examination is Urdu.

In order to standardize the responses at the end of Urdu version of the dilemma, a question was asked: Was Shehzad right to steal the drug? There were two options 'Yes' or 'No' to respond and for each option, six reasons were given, each of these reason was an example relating one of six stages of moral reasoning. The options were also translated from English into the national language.

### DATA COLLECTION

In order to collect data, the students were individually interviewed in a separate room. The students were asked that the interview was just for the sake of entertainment so that they could give their opinion freely. First, whole moral dilemma was read out in front of the student. Who was asked to concentrate on the interview form containing this story and to read and then answer the question, "**Was Shehzad right to steal the drug?**" The answer to the said question could be Yes or No. After getting 'yes' or 'no' response to the question, the student was asked to select one reason which supported his view. Students were told that they could select only one option and they were also briefed that they could write their own reason too, on the back of the form if they did not agree with the reasons given in it. The same procedure was repeated for all the participants.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The moral reasoning stages of the students were decided on the basis of their responses to the presented moral dilemma. The responses from the subjects were categorized and tabulated into six categories of the Kohlberg's theory of moral development. To find out the gender differences in moral reasoning of the students, the chi-square technique of statistical analysis was applied. The level of significance for testing the null hypothesis relating to gender differences in moral reasoning stages was set at .05

### RESULTS:

**Table No 3:** Moral reasoning stages of male 10<sup>th</sup> grade students

Levels	Preconventional		Conventional		Postconventional		
Stages	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Total
Number	1	-	8	15	10	16	50
Percentage	2%		46%		52%		100%

Table No 3 shows that only 2 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> class students were at preconventional level , 46 percent were at conventional and remaining 52 percent were at postconventional level. This means that 10<sup>th</sup> class boys most frequently responded at postconventional level.

**Table No 6** Moral reasoning stages of female 10<sup>th</sup> grade students

Levels	Preconventional		Conventional		Postconventional		
Stages	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Total
Number	-	2	13	2	4	29	50
Percentage	4%		30%		66%		100%

Table No 6 shows that only 4 percent female 10<sup>th</sup> graders were found at preconventional level, 30 percent were at conventional level and 66 percent were at postconventional level. This means that 10<sup>th</sup> class girl students most frequently responded at postconventional level.

**Table No 9:** Significance of correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among 10<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	$\chi^2$	Level of significance
Male	1	0	8	15	10	16	50	20.6	< 0.05
Female	0	2	13	2	4	29	50		
Total	1	2	21	17	14	45	100		

d.f = 5

$$\chi^2_{0.05(5)} = 11.07$$

Table No- 9 shows the  $\chi^2$  value of 20.6 which is greater than the critical  $\chi^2$  value. Therefore, the probability of the null hypothesis being false is lesser .05. Thus the above null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there was significant correspondence between stages of moral reasoning and gender among grade 10 students.

It means that gender differences existed in moral judgment of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with a tilt toward boys at stage 4 and stage 5 and toward girls at stage 3 and stage 6.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to test the Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The main purpose of the study was to find out moral reasoning stage of 10<sup>th</sup> class students according to Kohlberg's theory of moral development and also to investigate the gender differences in moral reasoning. Majority of the 10<sup>th</sup> graders were found to be at postconventional level stage of universal ethical principle. As for as gender differences are concerned, moral judgment of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with a tilt toward boys at stage 4 and stage 5 and toward girls at stage 3 and stage 6. This finding supports Leary's (2005) research, who reported that females made significantly higher scores on the 'Defining Issues Test' as compared to males. But it does not support Kohlberg's theory whose studies revealed that girls were inferior to boys in moral reasoning, who mostly remained at stage 3 of moral reasoning. The reason may be the difference in socio-economic status. The socio-economic status of the female

students of 10<sup>th</sup> grade was higher than male students in the area. As the majority of boy students from well-off families go out of the city for their schooling in well reputed institutions but these families do not send their females to such schools due to cultural restrictions. Female students of that class get education in English medium schools at elementary level in the city but at secondary level, majority of them go to government school for their schooling, so this might be cause for their higher moral reasoning at that level. As Rodrigues (1983) found, socio-economic status had a positive influence on the moral judgment of children. It can also be stated that the cognitive ability can affect the result of the study in favor of female students at that level as Strand et al (2006) found that girls score on verbal reasoning was higher than boys. The quality of education provided in Government Girls High School No-1 Hazro showed better results for the last ten years as compare to Government Boys High School No-1 Hazro and other institutions in the area. Wimalasiri (2001) found the relationship between education and moral judgment.

The results of this study require further confirmation through future research.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study. Due to their response to the presented moral dilemma, majority of the tenth graders were ranked at universal ethical principle stage of postconventional level. It is concluded that gender differences existed in moral judgment of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students with a tilt toward boys at stage 4 and stage 5 and toward girls at stage 3 and stage 6.

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