Understanding Moral Development Among Indian Adolescents

Saee Shashikant Patil[1], Sahitya Singh[2]

[1,2]*Department of Psychology, PES University, Benguluru, Karnataka, India*

Abstract— **Adolescence is a period of significant growth and development, not only physically but also cognitively and socially. During this stage, individuals go through moral development, which is the process of acquiring and internalizing a sense of right and wrong, and the ability to make ethical decisions. As adolescence is a critical period for moral development, adolescents become more self-reliant and assertive, and their decision-making abilities increase. This heightened awareness of their environment and others' feelings can help them respond and adapt to the changing conditions with more appropriate behaviour. As adolescents gain a greater understanding of the world, they may also begin to recognize the moral ramifications of their actions, which can lead to higher levels of responsible behaviour.**

Index Terms— **Moral, Adolescent, Development**

I. INTRODUCTION

When a person reaches adolescence, their cognitive development is complete, and they begin to define their own identities. Adolescents start to become more conscious of and adopt civil and social norms at this stage. In light of this, it would be more likely to use this discussion to examine moral growth in adolescence. Naturally, we must first define what morality actually is. The set of traditions and laws known as morality establishes what conduct is acceptable in society and what is not. Adolescents' peers and role models may have an impact on moral development. Adolescents get a higher level of awareness of other people's perspectives and expectations through interpersonal relationships and interactions with peers, which can help them develop morally. Similar to how beneficial encounters with mentors like teachers or religious leaders can help adolescents develop a strong sense of morality. The presence of role models within as well as outside the family is crucial for good moral growth. Along with cognitive factors, social factors are also extremely important for moral growth in adolescence. Adolescents are more likely to develop firm moral principles and act ethically if they are exposed to pro-social ideals and practises, such as volunteerism or community service. Certainly, there are a number of additional factors that may have an impact on moral growth during adolescence. Gender is one of these elements. According to research, males and females may approach moral reasoning in different ways, with males possibly prioritising justice and rights of the individual while females are more likely to emphasise compassion and relationships. This might be connected to disparities in socialisation processes and cultural gender roles expectations. Cultural context is another element that might have an impact on moral growth. During adolescence, teenagers may be exposed to a variety of cultural expectations and norms because different cultures have distinct moral ideals and beliefs. According to some study, adolescents who are raised in collectivist cultures which value unity and interdependence within the group might approach moral reasoning differently than those raised in individualistic cultures, which value the individual and their autonomy. It is important to note that, the process of moral development is not linear or predictable. As adolescents face new settings and obstacles, their moral reasoning may suffer setbacks or change. In order to assist adolescents, traverse these difficult moral choices and come to moral conclusions that are consistent with their values and beliefs, it is crucial for parents, teachers, and other adults to offer support and direction. Many writers have formed theories about morality throughout history. The theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg stand out among them as being the most notable, which will be discussed further in the paper.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While parents, religious authorities, and philosophers have long been intrigued by this question, moral growth has recently gained attention in study of psychology and education. Does moral growth depend more on parental or cultural influences? Does everyone acquire morals in the same ways? The root of moral development can be traced back to when it all started. When psychology emerged as an actual study which was based on scientific and empirical data. Here the authors Muscato. C & Mancinelli. M (2021) talk about the earliest and the most classic theory to ever exist about morals and its development, that is utilitarianism. At its core, utilitarianism holds that a behaviour is moral or acceptable when it results in the largest amount of benefit for the largest number of individuals. It is a theory of normative ethics that considers whether a particular action is morally right or wrong. With an economic assessment that emphasises human lives and claims that activities that bring joy to individuals are beneficial, utilitarianism provides an answer to this query. Then emerged a new theory that was supported by empirical validation. Upen (2019) explains the emergence of Kantianism. Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, advanced Kantianism as an ethical system. He contends that a decision's morality is independent of how it will affect others. Thus, this idea is a part of the deontological school of moral thought. Deontology, often known as deontological theories, is the study of ethics that emphasises accountability, moral obligation, and commitment. In order to provide people with moral guidance for making moral decisions or taking moral actions, Kant proposed this notion. After Kantianism emerged the theory of virtue ethics. The author Sakellariouv. A (2015) talks about virtue ethics which emphasises the importance of a person's personality and virtues in determining whether or not an action is morally appropriate. One of the three main moral theories is it. In virtue ethics, good and evil are defined in terms of what a "virtuous agent" would do. It holds that a course of action is morally correct if and only if it reflects whatever the virtuous agent might do in a given circumstance (Oakley, 1996, p. 129). Everything a moral person would do is what is right. And lastly the theory of casuistry made an appearance. Garcia. A & Monlezun. D (2022) explains that in its modern form, casuistry is an applied ethics methodology that employs case-based reasoning to bring about ethical convergence among diverse stakeholders in the form of professional opinions in paradigm situations. With newer situations, the general but variable ethical judgements can be changed. This anti-theory has become an influential alternative to conventional ethical theories and religious ethics in the field of bioethics. (pp. 450-451)"

"But these weren't the only theories that existed. Freud also talked about moral development. The authors MacArthur. A & Mazarin. J (2022) says that the concepts of conflict and self-regulation are at the centre of psychoanalytic concept on moral development. A person may regulate oneself when they can consider the needs of others while seeking to please themselves, according to Sigmund Freud, who believed that this is a sign of moral maturity. Greed and selfish motives are suppressed, and society perspectives solidify one's perception of what's right and wrong. According to Freud, the ego is made up of three different parts id, ego and superego. Id is the element of the self that is instinctual. It is the prehistoric portion of the human brain that controls aggressive and sexual desires. The ego is the self's mediator. It is the reality centre that keeps the superego and id in check. And superego is the self's altruistic side. It serves as the conscience and is the centre of morality."

"The theory by Piaget was what brought peoples interests in moral development. The author McLeod. S (2015) states that Piaget viewed moral development as a constructive process where moral notions are created through the interaction of action and intellect. Piaget was more concerned in what children thought than in what they did, such as whether or not they broke the rules. In other words, he was fascinated by kids' moral development. Piaget discovered that as children age, their views on morality, punishment, and regulations tend to evolve. In other words, moral development in children goes through universal stages, just like cognitive development does. Heteronomous morality (also known as moral realism) and Autonomous morality (moral relativism) were the two main categories of moral thought proposed by Piaget. Schmidt. A (2018) elaborates further by stating that children in the early stages of moral formation adhere to rigorous guidelines and show total subservience to authority. According to Piaget, this happens to young kids in part as a result of their cognitive growth. "

Moral realism", as defined by Piaget, is the idea that for children, rules are rigid, unchanging things. Children at this developmental stage also evaluate the wrongness of an action based on its immediate repercussions; punishment is viewed as the natural outcome of breaking a rule. Piaget also observed that this period was encouraged by the social ties between adults and children, who naturally have authority over young children and pass down authority and rules without debate. Children move into the second stage of moral development when they start to discover new aspects of their surroundings by their interactions with other children and adults. According to Piaget, children learn how to analyse rules critically and implement them based on collaboration and in regard with other children throughout this time. In this stage, children start to learn how to consider other people's perspectives. Another key idea at this level is intention. Children learn to evaluate the wrongness of an action based on the perpetrator's purpose, and punishment is modified accordingly."

"But one of the most well-known ideas addressing some of these fundamental queries was established by American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. His research improved and extended Jean Piaget's earlier findings. According to Kohlberg's theory, there are three levels and six stages of moral development. Here, Kendra Cherry (2022) explains the development of the theory by Kohlberg. The moral dilemmas that Kohlberg's study participants were given served as the foundation for his theory. To find out how participants arrived at their conclusions in each case, interviews with participants were also conducted. "Heinz Steals the Drug" is one illustration. In this case, a cancer patient's doctors think she may only be saved by one medicine. The local pharmacist who found this medication was able to produce it for 200 dollars per dose and sell it for 2,000 dollars each dose. Heinz, the wife's husband, was only able to raise 1,000 dollars to get the medication. With the pharmacist, he made an effort to haggle over a cheaper price or the possibility of receiving credit to repay him over time. Yet, the pharmacist was unwilling to accept a partial payment or sell it at a lower price. When Heinz was rejected, he instead entered the pharmacy and stole the medication to save his wife. "Should the husband have done that?", was what Kohlberg asked. Kohlberg was more interested in the rationale behind each participant's choice than whether Heinz was in the right or wrong.

He then divided their justification into his idea of moral development's stages. The six stages were then divided into three moral reasoning stages. The first stage is pre-conventional, conventional, and last being the post-conventional stage. Every stage offers an entirely new viewpoint, yet not everyone performs at their very best all the time. It is difficult for people to skip moral development phases since comprehension deepens as people build on their experiences. Kurt. S (2022) further elaborates that children's decision-making in the first stage is characterized by their self-interest in avoiding punishments at all costs. In the context of the Heinz dilemma, the man shouldn't steal the medication from the drugstore because doing so could result in him being in the jail. Kohlberg considers children's moral development in a manner in terms of the first phase of Piaget's theory. They believe regulations are meant to be observed and that people in control will definitely carry out punishment at an early age. A child's reasoning to the scenario may include "it's wrong to steal," or "it's against the law," without analysing the viewpoint of the man whose wife is unwell. Due of the limited connections that kids have with the defined principles, this stage is referred to as preconventional. They don't see ethics as something they absorb; rather, they see it as something society enforces. Byron-Cox. H & McClintock. M. (2021) explains that the second stage of moral development described by Kohlberg often starts at age 10, comprises adolescence, and is also characteristic of adults. At this stage, an individual's moral orientation shifts from being primarily self-centred to focusing on family, friends, and social structures that promote interpersonal connections. The degree of moral reasoning that is generally accepted reflects a framework designed to uphold social order. In this level, the emphasis is shifted from authoritative carer acceptance to societal approval, emphasizing the necessity for responsible connections on an individual level. The third stage, being "Good Boy, Nice Girl Orientation," explains that in order to gain respect for moral behaviour, it emphasises the need to be "kind" or "pleasant" to others. It becomes more important to cultivate positive interpersonal ties. A kid in this stage might, for instance, share their game with others to form friendships and appear great. Stage 4, which is known as "Law and Order", according to this stage, people work to uphold society's laws, shifting their focus from internalised rules from a particular context

to more general legal systems as the sources of authority. People promote a responsibility to uphold the law and the status quo as examples of responsible citizenship. An adolescent in this stage will not support or participate in actions judged to be 'bad'. Vinney. C (2019) explains that when an individual passes the peak of moral development, individuals begin to wonder whether the world is truly good. Morality in this situation derives from self-established ideals. Because it needed abstract reasoning, Kohlberg claimed that only 10–15% of people could reach this level. In Stage 5, "The Social Contract and Individual Rights," it is explained that society should operate as a social contract in which each person strives to make society as a whole better. In this situation, morality and individual liberties like freedom and life may outweigh specific legal requirements. The sixth stage, known as the "Universal Principles", discusses how individuals form their own moral standards, even when they disagree with societal norms. Every person must be treated equally while applying these rules."

"But there was a someone who wasn't really convinced and didn't agree with the theory of Kohlberg. This is where the author Hurst. M (2022) talks about a theory that gave importance to the moral development of women. A homeless porcupine is sheltered by a group of moles. Yet, the porcupine's quills frequently pierce the moles. What ought they to do? This hypothetical situation served as support for a notion that suggested men and women may follow different paths to moral growth. This course will present and put Carol Gilligan's theory to use. Lawrence Kohlberg, a developmental psychologist who popularized the theory of moral development, taught Gilligan. However, Gilligan argued that because Kohlberg's study's subjects were overwhelmingly male and because of that his theory excluded the caring perspective, it did not effectively address the gender variations in moral development. Girls are more likely than males to emphasise interpersonal interactions and assume responsibility for others' well-being, according to Gilligan, who also claimed that boys and girls are frequently socialized differently. The mother-child relationship, as well as the fact that females are typically taught a moral worldview that emphasizes society and concern about personal relationships, are given as possible explanations for this difference by Carol Gilligan. Vinney. C (2021) further say that moral judgement is

entirely centred on the oneself as well as the desire to survival in the "preconventional" level. A woman will decide to take care of her own needs when those demands conflict with the requirements of others. The woman acknowledges her obligation to others on the first step during the transition from the preconventional to the "conventional" level. She finally understands that her former moral approach could be defined as selfish. The conventional level concentrates moral judgement on consideration for others. The woman begins to perceive herself as a fellow member of the community which claims of being a model citizen depends on assisting and safeguarding others. Her compassion for others comes before her own needs, resulting to a self-sacrificing moral. The woman begins to feel conflict between her needs and those of others during the second transition from the conventional to the "postconventional" level. She starts to see that she needs to better balance her needs with those of other people. As a result of her starting to honestly evaluate her own desires, not only her responsibilities to others, but her moral judgement also shifts from "goodness" to "truth," rather than the other way around. The nonviolence principle governs moral assessment in the "postconventional" Level. The lady comes to a global ethic of concern and care because she realizes that her needs are just as significant as those of others. The woman is able to take ownership of her decisions by upholding the duty of care and avoiding damage or abuse to herself and others. e46

III. METHODOLOGY

Preamble:
The study's objective was clearly spelt out from the outset which is to ascertain the moral development among Indian adolescents. In carrying out this research twenty moral defining questions were raised, giving participants subjective answers, which is followed by research hypothesis which is stated in the null form. This chapter provides the methodology that was used in testing the hypothesis and arriving at a conclusion.

Statement of the problem:
The study aims to understand the moral reasoning of the Indian adolescents. Adolescents' moral development is a complex process that is influenced by a combination of various factors. Adolescents have

a time of growth during which they become more aware of both their own and other people's needs. Thus, the study also aims in understanding how moral behaviour plays an important role in the development of the adolescents.

Research Questions:
How to understand and measure the extent of moral development in Indian adolescents?

Objectives:
To understand and measure the extent of moral development among Indian adolescents.

Research design:
Qualitative research method has been used by the researcher. The researcher has collected qualitative data with the help of interview consisting of twenty descriptive questions that asses the moral development among adolescents. The answers given by the participants provide insights about their moral reasoning. This method of research has been adopted because it provides the researcher with a detailed description of the participants answers and the variations among the moral reasoning. Thus, being able to put together a coherent analysis of the various answers of the participants and form a narrative that paints picture of the reality of the participants.
Variables Moral development

Sample:
Inclusion Criteria: Consent of the participant to take part in the research study and adolescents above the age of 15.
Exclusion Criteria: Participants that do not consent to answer the interview questions and adolescent below the age of 15 and above the age of 20.

Measures:
A set of open-ended questions that the researcher had created were evaluated by a committee of experts. The questions covered various subjects and were centred on the interview's objective. The open-ended questions that were developed for the interview were ensured to address every objective of the study. The responses given by the respondents were analysed by experts and further was categorized into themes and sub-themes. After then, the questions were amended in light of the expert panel's suggestions and data. The interview questions have been attached in the appendix.

Procedure:
Twenty questions that talk about moral have been formulated by the researcher for the study. The initial step for the study was to find participants and conduct an interview for data collection. The participants have been randomly selected and upon selection were interviewed and asked the questions that they needed to answer. The data has been collected with the assistance of interview. After the data was collected, the data was analysed. The analysed data has been used to interpret the moral development among the participants.

Data Analysis:
In order to analyse the qualitative data, reoccurring themes must be identified. The development of themes and the drawing of conclusions from the identified theme will take place.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main themes that emerged frequently throughout the short interviews by the participants.
Theme – 1: Situation
Primarily it was observed through the interview that 98% of the participants mentioned that, their morals and values are based on the situation that they are in. When questions like: 'If a family is hungry and has no other ways to get food, is it okay to steal food from a rich store owner?' or 'Can a good person do bad things? Does that make them a bad person?' were asked participants stated that it was the situation that asked for the act of stealing or any other behaviour. Responses included, "Not like stealing is right, but in that situation, it is right", "Sometimes situations make them do that.", "Think about what I'll do in that situation", or "I think it depends on the situation.", describes the theme, situation appropriately.

Theme – 2: Right or wrong
One of the most important themes that was consistently observed was 'Right or wrong'. While defining what morals and morality mean to them, participants mentioned morals to be the values that help them understand the difference between what is considered as right or what is wrong. The participants were attempting to explain how morals define what is right and wrong. This can be observed through the statements of participants. "Whatever I think is right

or wrong in a way that does not badly affect other people.", "But that helped me to know what is right or wrong." and "I think following morals especially, those kinds of morals that you think is right and not because someone said it to you."

Theme – 3: Environment

Environment is one of the extremely important factors that influences the moral development and especially in adolescents. The participants answer reflected how the environment around them affected the way they form morals and values. This environment can be the culture, morals taught by parents, the socioeconomic status, etc. The theme environment can be identified when the participants mention statements or phrases like, "Basically, my environment." or "It's based on culture as well, where they grew up, what were the conditions."

Theme – 4: Subjectiveness of morals

Majority of the participants defined morals as being subjective. Participants were seen mention statements like, "Morals are subjective!", "Moral values are different and it is subjective. It depends upon each and every individual.", "I would say its subjective like morality. Because everybody has different values.", "Morality is always changing.", or "If you think something id morally right and I might not think its morally right so it depends on the individuals." Throughout the interview.

Theme – 5: Harm to others

It was also observed that the participants considered morals and values to be something that doesn't harm other individuals and their wellbeing. Statements such as, "It is how to stay in a society with harming anyone.", "White lies, because if we don't want to hurt the other person then.", "We do it like without even realizing it just so we don't hurt the other person.", "But if it's really going to hurt someone and put them down then I think it's wrong." Signifies that the participants wish that the morals that they have don't hurt other people in any way.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Implications:

The questions asked by the researcher, gave the participants a whole new view about the values that they follow and inculcate in themselves. The interview helped the participants to introspect and understand their morals and how it affects their growth and development as a person, took a few minutes for them to interpret and extend on how moral values affect their reasoning. Every participant had a different perspective on their ethics, morals, and value systems which the researcher found as the moral development that the adolescents went through during their childhood. This particular study can also serve as a helpful tool in analysing and inferring the implication of morals of participants in everyday life situations and decisions.

Limitations:

The sample selected for the study was entirely made up of adolescents and not any other age group. The participants were from India and answers given by the participants were based on the Indian culture, so the interpretations cannot be generalized across all the cultures from different countries.

Scope for further research:

This study lays the road for understanding the subjective variations and experiences in adolescents' moral development. The study can help in predicting how moral development varies across cultures and age groups. It can help in describing how moral development in adolescents change over time as they progress into becoming an adult. Also, in reporting how moral development affects the mental health of adolescents. Understanding how adolescents learn and how far they can advance in their moral development will come from studies in academic or curriculum achievements and the development of academics or curriculum for moral development. Further research might reveal variables that haven't been studied yet.

VI. APPENDIX

Interview questions for Moral Development among adolescents.
1   What does the word morality mean to you?
2   What are your moral standards?
3   How would you define your moral development?
4   4.How do you decide what is moral and what is not?
5   Do you think moral development leads to upward influence development?

6   If an action has a positive outcome overall but negative consequences for one individual, is it still morally, right?

7   Do you think that a person can have good morals and be evil at the same time. Why or why not?

8   Can your morals influence other people's behaviour? If yes, then how?

9   Can a good person do bad things? Does that make them a bad person?

10   What is your opinion about killing someone?

11   Is what my majority of people decide always right or can it be wrong? Please share your thoughts.

12   According to you is abortion morally, right?

13   Are there any circumstances in which lying might be considered morally right?

14   14.What would you do if you witnessed a friend acting immoral?

15   What do you think is the difference between law and morality?

16   If a family is hungry and has no other ways to get food, is it okay to steal food from a rich store owner?

17   .If country A says it's OK to steal and country B says stealing is wrong, which one is right? Can they both be right? If so, how?

18   What would you do if your boyfriend is cheating on you with your best friend?

19   Do you think white lies are a thing?

20   Is it morally acceptable to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage? Why yes and why not?

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