

Mediating Role of Self-Concept in Moral Development and Risk-taking Behaviours among Children

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Abstract

Present study was done to investigate the mediating role of self-concept in moral development and risk-taking behavior among children. Aim of the study was to explore the role of self-concept as a mediator between moral development and risk-taking behavior among children. Study was done on the sample size of 300 children. Sample of the study was selected through purposive-convenient sampling technique. Sample was selected from the government and private schools of Rawalpindi. Moral development was measured through Bandura scale for moral disengagement. Self-concept of the children was measured using Braken scale for self-concept and risk-behaviors among children were measured through *sensation seeking scale by zakerman*. It was hypothesized that self-concept act as mediator between moral development and risk-taking behaviors among children. Data was statistically analyzed through using SPSS. Result of our study showed that self-concept is a strong mediator of moral development and risk-taking behavior among children. Furthermore, our study revealed that self-concept is a strong predictor of moral justification, distortion of possible consequences, diffusion of responsibility, dehumanization and attribution of blame. Our study also revealed that girls scored significantly high on moral justification, distortion of possible consequences and diffusion of responsibility whereas boys scored significantly high on the risk-taking behaviors. Our findings have strong implications for child psychopathology.

Keywords: self-concept, moral development, risk-taking behaviors.

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Introduction

Moral disengagement can be defined as the set of psychological mechanism involving a range of types of cognitive rationalization that people use to preserve a favorable view of self when they are involved in an immoral action (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprera & Pastorelli, 1996).

According to Bandura (1996), moral disengagement serves as a way to stop individuals, making negative thinking and acts, as the individual is free from self-censure and potential guilt. Bandura conceptualized moral disengagement as a mechanism that allows individual to act inhumanely while seeing themselves as a well-mannered.

In the past a lot of research work have been done on domain of moral disengagement, in the field of child and youth development (Parterson, 2000). Particularly moral disengagement has been studied as a possible predictor of delinquency and aggression and it tends to be related with both (Bandura, Barbaranelli & Capara 1996; Pelton, 2004).

It has been suggested that moral identity has strong relationship with pro social behaviour and it has also been linked with reduced unethical behaviors (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Shoe, Aquino & Fereeman, 2008).

According to Zahra (2010), self- concept can be view as the set of thoughts, believes, emotions, and individual his or her own perception. Individual's cognitive, physical and social competence all comes under self-concept. Self-concept formulate as a result of individual experience with the environment and individual's evaluation of these experience. Additionally views of significant others, causal attributions and real reaction plays a vital role in the process of development of self (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976).

Risky behavior can be defined as any behavior that affects individual health directly or indirectly (Giedd, 1997). Some are the most common risky behavior in which adolescents are more likely to be involved are delinquency, substance abuse, aggression, violence and risky driving and sexual behavior.

Adolescence is the time period of life during which individuals are most prone to be indulge with drug abuse and are more prone to develop serious and vital substance abuse issues that may continue into adulthood (Brown & Reinell, 2010).

Individual need to maintain group identity with peer make them more likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviors (Lightfoot, 1992). As adolescents spend a considerable amount of time at school in this way school environment may play important role in risky behavior (Hehn, et al., 2007). School where there is positive environment had fewer

delinquent and anti-social students as compared to schools where the environment is less favorable (Donnelly, 2008).

Many researches have supported that threatened egotism because of inflated view of self, which may cause of risky behavior of sensation seekers (Cheung, 2002). Adolescents sometime involved in risky and deviant behaviors to enhance or maintain self-esteem, or to decrease the threat of having low self-esteem (Cheung, 2002).

In adolescence self-concept tends to gradually increase and become more positive as individual is striving for liberty, freedom, role taking abilities, personal authority and there are many opportunities to act and behave in socially and culturally acceptable ways (Cole, 2003). However not all the studies have supported this view rather there are many researches which investigated that there is inverse relation between high self-esteem and risk-taking behavior (Diblasio, 2006).

Following were the objectives of our study

- 1) To investigate the role of self-concept as a mediator between moral development and risk-taking behavior among children.
- 2) To find out the gender differences in moral development and risk-taking behavior.
- 3) To examine the gender differences in self-concept of children.

Methodology

Risk-taking behavior

Risk-taking behavior refers to any behavior that directly or in indirectly affects individual's physical and mental health. It includes heavy drinking, dangerous driving, fighting and smoking (Gullone, 2000).

Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement refers to a set of psychological mechanisms involving various types of cognitive rationalization that people use to maintain a view of the self when they engage in immoral action (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996).

Self-concept

Self-concept is a multidimensional and context dependent learned behavioral pattern that reflect an individual's evaluation of the past behaviors and experiences and predicts individual future behaviour (Braken, 1992).

Population

The population of the present study consisted adolescents. 154 males and 146 females participated in the current study. Data was collected from Rawalpindi.

Sample

Study was done on the sample size of 300 children. Sample of the study was selected through purposive-convenient sampling technique. Sample was selected from the government and private schools of Rawalpindi.

Research Design

A correlational research design was used to investigate mediating role of self-concept in moral development and risk-taking behavior among children.

Instruments

Following instruments were used in the present study.

- “Consent form”
- “Demographic data Sheet”
- “Moral disengagement scale”
- “Sensation seeking scale”
- “Multidimensional self-concept scale”

Consent form

Consent form was designed to take permission from the participants and briefly told them about the nature and purpose of the study. Participants were assured that information taken from them will be kept confidential and will be used only for the research purpose.

Demographic data sheet

Demographic data sheet was devised to gather basic information about participants such as name (optional), age, gender, education, father and mother’s occupation, marital status, monthly income of the head of family, number of siblings and birth order of participant.

Sensation seeking scale (Zuckerman, 1994)

Sensation seeking behavior among adolescence was assessed by using form 4 of the sensation seeking scale (SSS by Zuckerman 1994), which consists of 40 items in a forced choice format. The SSS has produced an overall scale as well as four subscales; experience seeking, thrill and adventure seeking, disinhibition and boredom susceptibility. Some of its items have reverse scoring.

Moral disengagement scale (MDS; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996)

Moral disengagement scale (MDS; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) is a 32 items self-report measure that determine individual’s tendency to use cognitive mechanism that disengage self-sections and justify the use of deviant behavior. Scoring on moral disengagement scale is done on five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, disagree, don’t know, agree and strongly agree).

Moral disengagement scale is used for measuring eight moral disengagement mechanism, namely moral justification, advantageous comparison, euphemistic language, displacement of responsibility, distortion of possible consequences, diffusion of responsibility, dehumanization and attribution of blame. All these mechanisms are used in subscales, each subscale consists of four items and there is no reverse scoring for any item.

Multidimensional self-concept scale (MSCS; Braken, 1992)

Multidimensional self-concept scale (MSCS; Braken, 1992) is a self-report tool for measuring self-concept in a multidimensional fashion. The MSCS has 150 items and it was developed for use by children and adolescents from grades 5 to 12. The items in MSCS are rated on a likert type response scale with four options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items in MSCS are divided into six subscales, which are based on the Braken's multidimensional factors and global self-concept theory. The subscales of Braken's multidimensional self-concept scale are physical, social, affect, competence, academics and family. These are sub scales are combined to make global self-concept.

In the first phase of the study, prior to use sensation seeking scale and moral disengagement scale were translated in to Urdu for their convenient usage. Translation procedure was done in a community form including students and staff teachers of Fatima Jinnah Women University, after the Urdu translation of scale these scales were given people who were expert in English having masters' degree in English for forward translation.

Procedure

Permission was taken from the participant about their wiliness for participation in the study. Participants were briefly told about the purpose of the study. Proper instructions were given to the participant filling the questionnaires. They were assured that the information taken from them would be kept confidential and will be used only for research purpose. They were instructed to fill the questionnaires with care and not to omit any item. It took almost 30 minutes in administration process and all the data was collected in four weeks. Data was analyzed using SPSS. Independent sample t-test was used to examine gender difference among study variables. Mediation was used to know the role of mediator among study variables.

Results

Table 1

Alpha Coefficient Reliability of moral disengagement (MDS), sensation seeking (SSS) and self-concept (MDSCS)

| Scales | N | M | SD | @ | Ranges | | Skew |
|--------|----|-------|------|------|--------|-----------|-------|
| | | | | | Actual | Potential | |
| MDS | 32 | 84 | 13.5 | .78 | 1-160 | 55-119 | .296 |
| MJ | 4 | 13.1 | 3.1 | .6 | 1-20 | 5-20 | -.004 |
| EL | | | | | | | |
| AC | 4 | 8.74 | 2.72 | .67 | 1-20 | 4-16 | .50 |
| DR | | | | | | | |
| DC | 4 | 8.22 | 2.73 | .56 | 1-20 | 4-17 | .70 |
| AB | | | | | | | |
| DH | 4 | 11.1 | 2.93 | .78 | 1-20 | 4-20 | .12 |
| | 4 | 9.33 | 2.6 | .65 | 1-20 | 4-17 | .498 |
| | 4 | 12.8 | 2.69 | .68 | 1-20 | 4-20 | -.22 |
| | 4 | 10.5 | 3.28 | .73 | 1-20 | 4-18 | -.01 |
| DOR | 4 | 10.8 | 2.7 | .6 | 1-20 | 4-17 | -.18 |
| SSS | 40 | 58 | 3.4 | .62 | 1-80 | 49-69 | -.29 |
| BS | 10 | 14.2 | 1.45 | .5 | 1-20 | 11-18 | -.053 |
| D | 10 | 14.5 | 1.34 | .88 | 1-20 | 11-18 | -.006 |
| ES | 10 | 14.7 | 1.38 | 0.84 | 1-20 | 11-18 | -.062 |
| TAS | 10 | 14.8 | 1.50 | 0.70 | 1-20 | 11-19 | .026 |
| MDSCS | 74 | 172.2 | 25.5 | .57 | 1-298 | 131-256 | -.013 |
| SS | 24 | 56.7 | 6.9 | .66 | 1-96 | 39-75 | -.202 |
| FS | 25 | 60.2 | 9.6 | .77 | 1-100 | 39-77 | -.192 |
| AS | 25 | 54.1 | 9.1 | .63 | 1-100 | 36-149 | 3.177 |

Note : MDS= Moral disengagement Scale; MJ=moral justification subscale of moral disengagement scale; EL=Euphemistic language subscale of moral disengagement scale; AC=Advantageous comparison subscale of moral disengagement scale; DR=Displacement of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DOR=Diffusion of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DC=Distorting consequences subscale of moral disengagement scale; AB=Attribution of Blame subscale of moral disengagement scale; DH=dehumanization subscale of moral disengagement scale; SSS=Sensation Seeking scale; BS=Boredom susceptibility subscale of sensation seeking scale; D=disinhibition scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale); ES=Experience Seeking scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale);

scale);TAS(Thrill And Adventure scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale), MDSCS=Multidimensional Self-concept Scale; SS=Social self-concept scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale), FS= Family Self-concept Scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale);AS=Affect Self-concept Scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale).

Table 1 shows that the Cronbach reliability of moral disengagement scale is .76 that is satisfactory level, moral justification which is the subscale of moral disengagement scale is .60, euphemistic language(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .67, advantageous comparison(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .56, displacement of responsibility(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .78, diffusion of responsibility(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .6, distorting consequences(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .65, attribution of blame(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .68, dehumanization(subscale of moral disengagement scale) is .73, sensation seeking scale is .62, boredom susceptibility which is the subscale of sensation seeking scale has reliability .53, des inhibition subscale is .88, experience seeking is .84, thrill and adventure is .70. Cronbach reliability of Multidimensional self-concept scale is .57, social self-concept subscale is .66, family self-concept subscale is .77 and affective self-concept scale has .63 reliability. On average multidimensional self-concept has significant reliability which shows that it is a reliable instrument.

Table 2

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Multidimensional self-concept scale (MDSCS) and moral disengagement scale (MDS). (N=300)

| Variables | MDSCS | B | B |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Moral disengagement scale (MDS) | | 106.5 | -.117 |
| R ² | .11 | | |
| F | 4.1 | | |
| Δ R ² | .11 | | |

**p<.01, *p<.05

The values in the above table demonstrate that moral disengagements are contributing a significant change in outcome self-concept among adolescents. This is demonstrated by the value of R^2 in this model, which is .11. The value of R^2 explains the variance caused by the independent variable in the dependent variable. This shows that 11% of the variance in the self-concept is explained by moral disengagement. The overall model is statistically significant as $F= 4.1, p < .05$. The value of standardized beta coefficient provides a measure of the contribution of each variable to the model in terms of standard deviation. The overall table illustrates that the regression model is predicting moral disengagement among adolescents.

Table 3

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Multidimensional self-concept scale (MDSCS) and sensation seeking scale (SSS). (N=300)

| Variables | MDSCS | B | B |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| Sensation seeking scale(SSS) | | 41.35 | .139 |
| R^2 | 0.19 | | |
| F | 5.83 | | |
| ΔR^2 | 0.16 | | |

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The values in the above table demonstrate that sensation seeking is contributing a significant change in outcome self-concept among adolescents. This is demonstrated by the value of R^2 in this model, which is 0.19. The value of R^2 explains the variance caused by the independent variable in the dependent variable. This shows that only 19% of the variance in the sensation seeking is explained by self-concept. The overall model is statistically significant as $F= 5.83, p < .05$. The value of standardized beta coefficient provides a measure of the contribution of each variable to the model in terms of standard deviation. The overall table illustrates that the regression model is significantly predicting sensation seeking among adolescents.

Table 4
Mean difference between gender in deviance and self-concept

| Variables | Males | | | Females | | | Cohen's D | | |
|-----------|-------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|-----------|------|-------|
| | N | M | SD | N | M | SD | T | P | |
| MDS | 154 | 84.2 | 14.06 | 146 | 84.75 | 12.97 | -.300 | .76 | -0.15 |
| MJ | 154 | 9.7 | 2.96 | 146 | 9.26 | 2.4 | 1.57 | .116 | -0.10 |
| EL | | | | | | | | | |
| AC | 154 | 10.43 | 2.67 | 146 | 10.62 | 2.7 | -.59 | .550 | 0.20 |
| DR | | | | | | | | | |
| DC | 154 | 9.51 | 3.34 | 146 | 9.3 | 2.8 | .357 | .721 | 0.34 |
| AB | | | | | | | | | |
| DH | 154 | 12.70 | 2.79 | 146 | 12.92 | 2.58 | -.717 | .474 | 0.20 |
| DOR | | | | | | | | | |
| | 154 | 10.36 | 3.09 | 146 | 10.39 | 3.06 | -1.13 | .92 | 0.11 |
| | 154 | 8.94 | 2.91 | 146 | 9.14 | 2.7 | -.596 | .552 | -0.22 |
| | 154 | 10.29 | 2.61 | 146 | 10.34 | 2.7 | -.142 | .887 | -0.14 |
| | 154 | 12.25 | 3.05 | 146 | 12.66 | 3.24 | -1.13 | .25 | -0.05 |
| SSS | 154 | 58.34 | 3.82 | 146 | 59.36 | 9.3 | -.98 | .330 | -0.08 |
| BS | 154 | 16.02 | 1.61 | 146 | 16.33 | 1.7 | -1.57 | .116 | 0.13 |
| D | 154 | 14.99 | 3.27 | 146 | 15.23 | 3.55 | -.62 | .533 | -0.07 |
| ES | 154 | 14.58 | 3.06 | 146 | 14.91 | 3.23 | -.91 | .36 | 0.07 |
| TAS | 154 | 12.7 | 2.28 | 146 | 12.86 | 3.25 | -.48 | .629 | -0.19 |
| MDSCS | 154 | 170.02 | 11.7 | 146 | 172.68 | 12.72 | -1.88 | .061 | -0.23 |
| SS | 154 | 55.96 | 6.71 | 146 | 57.59 | 7.05 | -2.04 | .041 | -0.31 |
| FS | 154 | 60.62 | 9.71 | 146 | 60.11 | 9.67 | .453 | .651 | 0.04 |
| AS | 154 | 53.4 | 7.11 | 146 | 54.97 | 10.77 | -1.46 | .144 | -0.19 |

Note : MDS= Moral disengagement Scale; MJ=moral justification subscale of moral disengagement scale; EL=Euphemistic language subscale of moral disengagement scale; AC=Advantageous comparison subscale of moral disengagement scale; DR=Displacement of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DOR=Diffusion of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DC=Distorting consequences subscale of moral disengagement scale; AB=Attribution of

Blame subscale of moral disengagement scale; DH=dehumanization subscale of moral disengagement scale; SSS=Sensation Seeking scale; BS=Boredom susceptibility subscale of sensation seeking scale; D=disinhibition scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale); ES=Experience Seeking scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale); TAS(Thrill And Adventure scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale), MDSCS=Multidimensional Self-concept Scale; SS=Social self-concept scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale), FS= Family Self-concept Scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale); AS=Affect Self-concept Scale(subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale).

Table 4 indicate the results of t-test to access gender difference on three scales of moral disengagement, sensation seeking and self-concept.

Conclusion and Discussion

Present study was done to investigate the mediating role of self-concept in moral development and risk-taking behavior among children. Aim of the study was to explore the role of self-concept as a mediator between moral development and risk-taking behavior among children. Study was done on the sample size of 300 children. Sample of the study was selected though purposive-convenient sampling technique. Sample was selected from the government and private schools of Rawalpindi.

Deviant behavior is a vast category so it was difficult to directly assess the all domains within deviant behavior. So in this study deviant behavior was measured within three specific domains of the deviance including moral disengagement, risk-taking behavior and sensation seeking behavior. In this study moral disengagement was measured by using moral disengagement scale developed by Bandura in 1996. Risk-taking and sensation seeking behavior was measured by using Sensation Seeking Scale developed by Zukerman in 1998 and self-concept among adolescents was assessed by using Multidimensional self-concept scale developed by Braken. Multidimensional self-concept scale asses self-concept in six domains including academic self-concept, physical self-concept, family self-concept, social self-concept and affect self-concept but in this study only three subscale of multidimensional self-concept scale were used these are Social self-concept, family self-concept, and affect self-concept.

Results of our study supported our hypotheses that boys are more prone towards deviance. Study of the Dornbush, Erickson, Laird & Wrong (2001) showed that male is the single best predictor of criminal behavior.

Pardini, & Fite (2010) proved that boys are more involved in risk-taking behaviors than girls. Zukherman in 2007 also concluded that boys in all ages are more involved in deviant behaviors as compared to girls. Results of this study did not support this hypothesis as there does not exist significant gender difference in deviant behavior among adolescents. So it can be concluded that in Pakistani context gender difference in deviant behavior are rare. Many factors may be involved in it like changing trends, parenting styles, peer pressures and personal interest in deviant kind of activities may be the same for girls and boys.

Our third hypothesis was to investigate the gender difference in self-concept. Results of our study show that there does not exist significant gender differences in self-concept. Findings of our study show that there exist significant gender difference in social self-concept, no significant gender difference were founds in other domains of the self-concept.

Our forth hypotheses was to investigate whether self-concept as a mediator of moral disengagement and risk-taking behavior among adolescents. As Oyserman & Markus, 1990 negative self-concept has been used to explain a wide variety of deviant behaviors and has been an important feature in many explanations of delinquency. Gordon and Caltabiano (1996) investigated that adolescents who were the heaviest substance users they were those who score low on self-esteem and they scored high on sensation seeking. Bandura, 1999 explored the relation between self-concept and sensation seeking and found that people with low self-esteem are less capable to resist drinks and score high on sensation seeking behaviors. Results of our study support our hypotheses and prove that changes in self-concept leads to moral disengagement among adolescents.

Limitations & Suggestions

Researcher faced some limitations during the course of the study. Firstly, the sample size is not large enough to generalize the results. Secondly, there were financial, and time constrains in conducting research. Thirdly researchers used three main scales with lot of subscales and items were nearly 180. Participants faced difficulty in filling the questionnaire with concentration which may directly or indirectly influence the results of the study. Only students from Rawalpindi schools and colleges were selected so we can't generalize the finding on the rest of the cities of Pakistan.

Further researches can include a larger sample size so that the findings can be generalized. More research is needed to include the more aspects of deviance among adolescent. Very little work is done on the relationship between self-concept and deviant behavior among adolescent

in all over the world, especially in Pakistan, so more research is needed to generalize its findings. For future researches a comparative study is needed to see the impact of other variables like low socioeconomic status, peers and neighborhood and adolescents' deviant behavior.

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