

## **Moral Development and Family Environment: Relationship between Moral Reasoning, Attachment Security and Family Typology**

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### **Abstract:**

*The present study was carried out to examine relationship of moral reasoning with family typology and attachment security among youngsters. The Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986) was used as a measure of moral reasoning. The Family Typology scale (Bhatti, Channabasavanna, Prabhu, Krishna, and Rao, 1985) was used to measure family environment. Kerns Security Scale (Kerns, 1996) was the instrument to measure attachment security. The sample consisted of 100 students (50 males and 50 females) within the age group of 17-21 years from various colleges in Chandigarh. The data were subjected to statistical analyses and correlations were calculated. The results indicate a significant negative relation between moral reasoning and family pathology, egoistic family and anomic family typologies.*

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### **Introduction:**

Morality is a topic of long standing interest to mankind in general. It is an important part of our relations with society. By morals we mean a system of rules that govern and guide our behaviour. The origin of the term moral is in the Latin word "mos" meaning a custom or way of accomplishing things.

Turiel (1983) defined Morality as 'prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other.'

A contemporary perspective by Haidt (2010) offers a broader view and emphasizes the function of moral systems. He says,

"Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperative social life possible."

Moral development is viewed from various perspectives. One of the most frequent ways of approaching it is from the standpoint of moral reasoning.

Moral reasoning is the ability to evaluate the situations and moral issues as right or wrong keeping in view the knowledge of moral standards (Varma, 1967). It involves the application of abstract and general moral standards to specific episodes.

Moral reasoning is defined as "prescribing, evaluating, and justifying with reference to socially good and right action" (Gibbs, 1977). It encompasses all the cognitive processes by which a person analyses, makes decisions about what is right or wrong, and finally expresses his judgment.

Sigelman (1998) says that morality implies "(1) an ability to distinguish right from wrong, (2) to act on this distinction, and (3) to experience pride when one does the right thing and guilt or shame when one does not."

Moral reasoning is essentially a cognitive activity and is acquired and developed through experience and maturation. Moral development refers to the achievement of this cognitive ability. In a way moral reasoning will depend on moral development. The two terms are essentially related conceptually.

Guertin (1986) opines that environment plays a very significant role in moral development.

#### **Family Environment:**

The family is the basic unit of human society. Human children have a slower rate of development as compared to other species. Therefore, the importance of the family regarding influence is paramount. It has been reported that children start showing the rudiments of moral behaviour as early as the first 6 months of life. These are evidenced in a child's pointing, playing, showing, and sharing. Infants younger than six months start reacting emotionally to others distress. The environment of the family is vitally linked with the achievement of these developmental milestones.

Experiences early in life due to family should therefore logically be one of the primary influences that encourage the development of moral behavior.

#### **Family Typology:**

Bhatti, Channabasavanna, Prabhu et al (1985) of National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore have given a concept of 'Family Typology' that has its origins in the clinical field. Family according to them is "a culturally determined biological entity for social living. Family is a social reality conceived by culture for its biological growth". From their extensive experience with Indian families they conclude that Indian families are unique systems in the world. They have conceived the following four types of families: -

- 1) *Normal Cohesive Type*: These families are characterized by commitment to the norms and standards of the contemporary social system. They follow the institutional methods to accomplish their goals. The members are affiliated by mutual attraction, belongingness and working for common family objectives.

- 2) *Egoistic Type*: These families are characterized by commitment to the standards and traditions of the family. The importance of the family image and prestige is paramount to the members and they are willing to go to any extent to maintain it. Everything else is secondary. Interpersonal affability is also with consideration of the family image. These families are excessively independent of the society.

- 3) *Altruistic Type*: The 'we' feeling or extreme cohesiveness characterizes these families. Interpersonal regard, emotional warmth, trust, interpersonal commitment are some of the features of these families. There is again the feeling of leaving no stone unturned for the benefit of the family members. However, it is also susceptible to immaturity and dependency on the part of the members. There is so much of reliance on the family that it is adverse for self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-help.

- 4) *Anomic Type*: Each member following their own way of life based on individual convictions characterizes these families. Individualism is the most important. The members are individualistic and are not influenced by other members and follow their own lifestyle, and individual conviction. Personal pleasure, ambition and achievement orientation characterizes these family members. Each to his own is the norm and usually there is no interference or influence of one member on another.

#### **Attachment Security:**

A very important aspect of the child's experience is his attachment to a caregiver in his infancy and childhood.

In the words of Goldberg (1999), attachment is, "a quality of relationships which lasts one's lifetime."

Bowlby (1969) in his book "Attachment and Loss " (vol. 1), said that, "To say of a child that he is attached to, or has an attachment to someone, means that he is strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure and to do so in certain situations, notably when he is frightened, tired or ill. The disposition to behave in this way is an attribute of the child, an attribute which changes only slowly over time and which is unaffected by the situation of the moment."

Ainsworth (1993) and others (Main and Cassidy, 1988) have classified the following four primary types (1 secure and 3 insecure) of attachment relationships.

1. Secure attachment- it is characterized by infants who are not unduly upset distressed by separation from parent and they are easily comforted upon parents return.
2. Avoidant attachment- it is characterized by children who are not distressed on being separated from parent and avoid the parent on reunion.
3. Resistant attachment- it is characterized by children who cling to their parents and fail to explore prior to separation and show angry, resistive behaviour on reunion.
4. Disorganized\Disoriented attachment- it is characterized by children who show confused, contradictory behaviour when reunited with the parents.

#### **Review of Literature:**

The following studies talk about the various aspects of family especially parenting behaviours that are linked to moral development in children. Hoffman, (1963) in a pioneering study found that parents who "accepted" their children as measured by playing games with

them and giving them lots of affection, had children who demonstrated a lot of positive affection to their peers in play behavior. London, (1970) in his study of 27 Christians, who risked their lives to save Jews from the Nazis, found that all of them tended to have very strong identification with a 'moralist' parental model. Rosenhan (1970) in a study of American civil rights workers found that the fully committed activists reported very warm and emotionally positive bonds with their parents. Dunn (1987) supports the view that conversations between parents and children regarding emotions may contribute to a child's early conscience development.

Flanagan and Tucker (1999) found that youngsters who reported that their families laid emphasis on compassion for the less fortunate, were the ones who held socially responsible values.

Laible and Thompson (2000) in their research supported the idea that parent-child discourse in the context of a supportive relationship plays a role in a child's early conscience development. Kochanska (1995) and Laible and Thompson (2000) confirm the view that a warm, supportive and therefore secure mother-child relationship advances a child's early conscience development. The increasing ability to understand and make judgements about moral issues and genuine internalization are associated with the development of conscience. It is worthwhile to note that studies on conscience include multiple phenomena such as *altruism*, empathy and compassion, the feelings of responsibility for others' welfare, concern for others, prosocial goals and acts, and the feelings of well being and pride on performance of a prosocial act.

Walker, Hennig, and Krettenauer (2000) found that interactions with both parents and peers were predictive of moral maturity in children.

According to Hoffman (2001), children's moral norms are acquired primarily through early encounters in disciplining whereby parents try to elicit the child's prosocial behaviour and inhibit antisocial or selfish impulses.

On the other side of the fence, the studies show the ill effects of family disturbances on children's development. Koenig (2000) in her doctoral dissertation "Moral development: The effects of childhood maltreatment on prosocial behaviors and transgressions" found that neglected children engaged in significantly less rule-compatible behaviour compared to nonmaltreated children.

Sturges, Dunn, and Davies (2001) found that children's externalising problems (aggression, conduct disorder, criminal behavior) were related to their perceptions of their relationships with fathers and their prosocial behaviour to their closeness with both fathers and mothers.

Attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1990) have emphasized the role of parent-child bond in a child's socialization. Early interactions with caregivers provide the context wherein children construct their initial mental representations of the social world-including its moral and cultural conventions.

Other studies on attachment have also linked avoidant attachment with externalizing problems and aggressive disorders in children (Cassidy and Kobak, 1988; Renken et al., 1989; Lyons-Ruth, 1996; Dozier et al., 1999).

Mikulincer, Orbach, and Iavnieli (1998) in a series of six studies examined the link between adult attachment style and subjective self-other similarity. Whereas, avoidant persons underestimated self-other similarity and anxious-ambivalent persons overestimated it, secure persons provided more accurate similarity scores. This is similar to perspective taking which is a constituent of moral development.

Kumru and Edwards (2003) in a study on Turkish adolescents found the adolescents reports of attachment to their parents to be positively related to their empathy, sympathy, and perspective taking. Middle or late adolescents sample have also yielded positive relations between secure attachment and sympathy, perspective taking and prosocial behavior (Markiewicz, Doyle, and Brendgen, 2001; Laible, Carlo and Roesch, 2004).

Three studies by Mikulincer (2003) revealed that enhancing attachment security strengthened endorsement of two self-transcendent values, namely benevolence (concern for people who are close to oneself) and universalism (concern for all humanity).

#### **Hypotheses:**

- 1) There will be a negative correlation between moral development and family typology scores (indicative of pathology).
- 2) There will be a positive correlation between moral development and altruistic family typology.
- 3) There will be a positive correlation between moral development and normal cohesive family typology.
- 4) There will be a negative correlation between moral development and egoistic family typology.
- 5) There will be a negative correlation between moral development and anomic family typology.
- 6) There will be a positive correlation between moral development and attachment security.

#### **Methodology:**

##### **Sample:**

A sample of 100 students (50 males and 50 females) was drawn from various colleges of Chandigarh. The age range of the subjects was from 17 to 21 years.

**Instruments:**

1. Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986). The Defining Issues Test (DIT) is a widely used objective measure of moral reasoning based on Kohlberg's moral stage theory.

2. Family Typology Scale (Bhatti, Channabasavanna, Prabhu, Krishna, and Rao, 1985). This 28-item scale was constructed at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore, India.

It measures the following four family typologies namely,

- i) Normal cohesive,
- ii) Egoistic,
- iii) Altruistic,
- iv) Anomic.

High overall scores are indicative of pathology in the family.

3. Kerns Security Scale (Kerns, 1996).

This is a 30 item, forced choice scale with 15 items each for the mother and father subscale. It assesses the attachment security of children for both mothers and fathers. The items measure the extent to which the children perceptions of their mother or father as responsive and available. It also measures the children's reliance on the attachment figures when experiencing stress and their ease in conversing with their parents.

The KSS has high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) and a high Test-Retest correlation over a short time period ( $r = .75$ ). Indian researchers have successfully used this test with fruitful and meaningful results (Singla, 2002; Mehta, 2002).

**Statistical Analysis:**

The data were subjected to statistical analyses viz. correlation and descriptive statistics i.e. Means, SDs.

**Results and Discussion:**

The correlations obtained by statistical analysis (See table 2), reveal the following significant relationships. Moral development scores correlate significantly negatively with family Typology (pathology) scores, Egoistic family typology scores and Anomic family typology scores. Expected positive correlations were yielded by the Sub test scores of the Family Typology Scale viz. Normal Cohesive family typology, Egoistic Family typology, Altruistic family typology and Anomic family typology; and Attachment Security Scale sub test scores viz., Mother Attachment scores, Father Attachment scores, Mother Availability, Mother Dependence, Father Availability and Father Dependence scores. Also in line with logic Family typology total pathology scores correlate negatively and significantly with Attachment Security total and Mother and Father form sub test scores. Attachment Security total scores also show a significant negative correlation with Normal Cohesive family typology, Egoistic family typology and Anomic family typology scores.

These results uphold three of the proposed six hypotheses. Moral development has been found to be negatively related with family pathology, Egoistic family typology and Anomic family typology. However, the correlations obtained with other variables have not achieved significance statistically. In other words, the results shed light on what doesn't have a relationship with moral development, namely, family pathology in general, and specifically egoistic and anomic family patterns. Significant results also recognise the inverse relationship between Attachment Security and Family typology (pathology), Normal Cohesive family typology, Egoistic family typology, and Anomic family typology.

Analysing the results it appears that there is a clear cut relationship between family

environment and Attachment security but one cannot hold the same for moral development and these two variables.

Psychoanalysts originally claimed that a child's moral /conscience/superego developed when the child internalized parental standards to offset anxiety caused by erotic and hostile feelings towards parents. Recent Neopsychoanalytic approaches emphasize the role of positive bonding between parent and child that results in internalization, empathy, guilt and prosocial affect. It has been shown that children form strong consciences when securely attached to warm and responsive parents (Emde et al., 1991).

Social Learning theorists emphasize the role of models and recognize the role of parents in modeling and encouraging appropriate behaviours. Not only do parents directly teach moral responses to their children by rewarding appropriate behavior and punishing undesirable behavior, but there is also the influence of underlying processes like imitation and identification. In addition the nature of the family environment, the quality of parent-child interactions and specific child-rearing practices all have a direct effect on the child's tendencies.

According to Hoffman (2001), it is the parents who through modeling, and disciplining lead to the internalization of those norms, which subsequently guide a child's behaviour. Family pathology would account for the parenting styles involved, in the present study, especially the Uninvolved/Neglectful and the Authoritarian styles, which are associated with the anomic and the egoistic family typologies respectively. The Authoritarian style is low on acceptance and involvement with coercive disciplining. These parents make many demands and control the child's behavior through yelling, commanding, and criticizing. They resort to force and punishment instead of reasoning. The child is not granted autonomy to take decisions on

his/her own. Children with such parents are often anxious and unhappy. Girls, appear dependent, lacking in exploration, and overwhelmed by challenging situations. They are also prone to hostility when frustrated among peers. Boys, especially, manifest high rates of anger, aggression and defiance (Hetherington, Parke, Gauvain, and Locke, 2006). Uninvolved style is low on both acceptance and involvement, with little control and general indifference to issues of autonomy. Such parents are emotionally detached and withdrawn. At its extreme it may be called as form of maltreatment called neglect. Long term involvement in parenting, communication with their children are rarely the priorities of such parents, who are too overburdened by other stresses of life such as poverty, marital conflict, etc. It is a most disruptive influence on the healthy development of the child. It is linked with poor emotional self-regulation, low academic self-esteem and school performance, and frequent antisocial behavior among such children.

Kochanska (1993) proposed a model of conscience integrating two research perspectives on (a) qualities of parental socialization and (b) individual differences among children, as they contribute to conscience development. She opines that cold, threatening, and punitive parents do not raise morally mature children.

Attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1990) have emphasized the role of parent-child bond in a child's socialization. Early interactions with caregivers provide the context wherein children construct their initial mental representations of the social world-including its moral and cultural conventions.

One may conclude that research on parenting has generally shown that parental responsiveness, authoritative parenting, inductive disciplining and involvement bears an association with a child's moral maturity. This

study however, reports that though one may clearly assume that the presence of family pathology will not be associated positively with the development of moral reasoning but it cannot be assumed that having a positive family environment or security of attachment with caregivers, will be sufficient to be linked with moral development in children. It points to the cognitive-structural perspective of Piaget and Kohlberg on moral development that parents and family may not be the most important factor in the development of moral maturity but it may be due the interactions with society, especially one's peers that one attains moral maturity. This study underlines the importance of family environment in the development of secure attachment in children and the associated psychological benefits that accrue from it. It however, suggests that for the development of moral maturity the above may not be enough. The answer may lie in a multidisciplinary approach, inclusive of biological, behaviourist, socio-cognitive and psychoanalytic viewpoints, focusing on multiple causation and pathways to come up with an accurate paradigm. Also the issue needs to be viewed from the level of the individual, especially at childhood stage, since morality may also be dependent on intellectual ability of reasoning. More research is required to come up with a comprehensive model.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
MD	100	8.1500	4.63490
FT	100	32.7900	8.18387
NCFT	100	6.5400	3.13797
EFT	100	7.9300	3.08877
Altruistic FT	100	10.8000	2.99832
Anomic FT	100	7.4400	3.01619
ATT.SECURITY(m)	100	44.5100	6.94640
AVAILABLITY(m)	100	27.0200	4.34144
DEPENDENCE(M)	100	17.5500	3.54017
AS(f)	100	42.1500	6.52017
AVAILABILITY(f)	100	25.7100	4.89546
DEPENDENCE(f)	100	16.8600	3.54201
ATT. SECURITY	100	86.6600	12.11912
Valid N (listwise)	100		

Table 2: Matrix of Correlation Coefficients

	MD	FT	NCFT	EFT	Al. FT	An. FT	Att. Sec(M)	M. Availability	M. Dependence	Att. Sec(F)	F. Availability	F. Dependence	Att. Sec
MD	1	-.272**	-.183	-.259**	-.153	-.232*	-.040	-.070	.047	-.020	-.109	.036	-.034
FT	-.272**	1	.506**	.747**	.527**	.788**	-.368**	-.290**	-.370**	-.338**	-.188	-.355**	-.393**
NCFT	-.183	.506**	1	.190	-.161	.305**	-.381**	-.341**	-.327**	-.373**	-.276**	-.338**	-.419**
EFT	-.259**	.747**	.190	1	.337**	.489**	-.201*	-.067	-.311**	-.194	-.093	-.253*	-.219*
Al. FT	-.153	.527**	-.161	.337**	1	.272**	-.040	-.056	-.020	.054	.049	.040	.006
An. FT	-.232*	.788**	.305**	.489**	.272**	1	-.293**	-.271**	-.244*	-.315**	-.160	-.286**	-.337**
Att. Sec(M)	-.040	-.368**	-.381**	-.201*	-.040	-.293**	1	.888**	.840**	.619**	.439**	.529**	.906**
M. Availability	-.070	-.290**	-.341**	-.067	-.056	-.271**	.888**	1	.507**	.457**	.418**	.287**	.754**
M. Dependence	.047	-.370**	-.327**	-.311**	-.020	-.244*	.840**	.507**	1	.652**	.346**	.681**	.833**
Att. Sec(F)	-.020	-.338**	-.373**	-.194	.054	-.315**	.619**	.457**	.652**	1	.748**	.793**	.893**
F. Availability	-.109	-.188	-.276**	-.093	.049	-.160	.439**	.418**	.346**	.748**	1	.442**	.654**
F. Dependence	.036	-.355**	-.338**	-.253*	.040	-.286**	.529**	.287**	.681**	.793**	.442**	1	.730**
Att. Security	-.034	-.393**	-.419**	-.219*	.006	-.337**	.906**	.754**	.833**	.893**	.654**	.730**	1

