

## Moral values among rural children : gender differentials

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### ABSTRACT

Moral values are on constant decline in the present day society which are indicative of a civilized and uncivilized persons. With the serious increase in juvenile delinquency, increase in studying the causes, cures and prevention of juvenile delinquency has become a psychological and a sociological concern .The present study investigated the assessment of gender differences in moral values among rural children .Two hundred children (100 boys and 100 girls) of late childhood years(10-12years) from rural areas of Ludhiana district were assessed for the moral values and the levels of moral values using Moral Value scale and differences were assessed using z test. Results revealed a non-significant gender differences within joint and nuclear families as well as irrespective of family type among total respondents and also a non-significant association was found between the levels of moral values and gender within joint families, within nuclear families and among total respondents irrespective of the type of family though favouring girls in moral value and its levels.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a general consensus that moral values are on constant decline in the present day society which are indicative of a civilized and uncivilized person. With the serious increase in juvenile delinquency, increase in studying the causes, cures and prevention of juvenile delinquency has become a psychological and a sociological concern. The level and types of youth crime can be used by commentators as an indicator of the general state of morality and law and order in a country, and consequently youth crime can be the source of 'moral panics'. Morality has two principal meanings: In its "descriptive" sense, morality refers to personal or cultural values, codes of conduct or social morals that distinguish between right and wrong in the human society. In its "normative" sense, morality refers directly to what is right and wrong, regardless of what specific individuals think (Gert and Bernard, 2008).

Late childhood is perhaps the most critical period for the formation of moral values in children as children in this period

starts absorbing the nature of moral and immoral behavior in varied situations as this is the stage of autonomous morality. Family is the primary social institution and its forces have a major influence on the moral behavior of the child. Family is the basic and universal social structure of human society.

The effective experiences within the family relationships make important contributions in moral understanding of children (Dunn, 1988). It has been found that family system influences the personality development of the child and this in-turn influence the altruistic behavior which is also an aspect of moral development in children. India's social norms are more restrictive for girls. They are taught to have patience, forbearance, kindness, helpfulness and the like characteristics .Thus, their rearing is different from boys which may be an important cause of higher level of altruism among girls than among boys (Sharma *et al.*, 2010) girls mostly identify with mother who are the most sacrificing and altruistic member of most of the families. But today with the change in the mind sets of the people child rearing practices are not gender specific the treatment for girls and boys are almost equal with same

kind of exposure to both.

In view of the above, the present study has been planned with the objective to assess the gender differences in moral values among rural children.

## METHODS

The present study was undertaken in four randomly selected villages of Jagraon block of Ludhiana district in Punjab. From these villages total four Government High Schools and one Government Primary School were selected. From each school a sample of 40 children in the age range of 10-12 years belonging to middle socioeconomic status were purposively selected. This sample was equally distributed over the two sexes (20 boys and 20 girls) which were further subdivided into joint and nuclear families (10 boys and 10 girls). Therefore a total sample of 200 children was retrieved from the selected locale belonging to Punjabi origin and middle socio-economic status.

For the assessment of moral values among children moral value scale (MVS) was used. A self structured personal information sheet was also used to gather data on the socio-personal characteristics of the children (age, class, parent's qualification and occupation).

The children were assessed in different dimensions of moral values *i.e.* Honesty, truthfulness, stealing and Cheating. Further the sample were categorized into 5 different levels of moral values *i.e.* very high, high, medium, low and very low moral values. The collected data were analyzed and interpreted using appropriate statistical techniques which included percentages and Chi-square test and z test.

## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 illustrates the gender wise distribution of children across various dimensions of moral values in joint families. It was found that 66 per cent of boys as well as girls displayed 'truthfulness'. 'Honesty' was displayed by 66 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls followed by 66 per cent of boys and 74 per cent of girls who displayed 'resistance to stealing' whereas 'resistance to cheating' was exhibited by 64.22 per cent of the boys and 66.22 per cent of the girls.

Overall it was found that there were no gender differences in moral values but the dimensions of 'resistance to stealing' and 'resistance to cheating' had comparatively high percentage among girls than boys whereas comparatively more number of boys displayed honesty than girls. On the whole, non-significant differences in moral values in joint families may be accounted by the fact that due to same kind of nurturance and same home environment, the children in joint families display less gender differences.

The results of the analysis in Table 2 indicate non-significant association of levels of moral values and gender within joint families. A slightly high per cent of girls (36%) as compared to boys (34%) were seen in 'medium' level of moral values similarly 'very high' levels were also displayed by more number of girls (34%) than boys (32%). An equal number (22%) of girls as well as boys showed 'high' moral values. However, low levels of moral values were displayed by 8 per cent boys and 6 per cent girls and in the category of 'very low' moral values only 4 per cent boys and 2 per cent girls were falling.

Concluding the above data it, can be said that majority of children drop in medium levels and since nearly equal

Dimensions of moral values	Joint families(n=100)				Z-value
	Boys (n=50)		Girls (n=50)		
	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Truthfulness	33	66.00	33	66.00	0
Honesty	33	66.00	31	62.00	0.42
Resistance to stealing	33	66.00	37	74.00	0.87
Resistance to cheating	32	64.22	33	66.22	0.21
Overall	33	66.00	33	66.00	0.00 <sup>NS</sup>

Levels of moral values	Joint families(n=100)				χ <sup>2</sup>
	Boys (n=50)		Girls(n=50)		
	f	%	f	%	
Very high	16	32.00	17	34.00	0.05 <sup>NS</sup>
High	11	22.00	11	22.00	
Medium	17	34.00	18	36.00	
Low	4	8.00	3	6.00	
Very low	2	4.00	1	2.00	

Table 3 : Gender -wise distribution of children across various dimensions of moral values in nuclear families						
Dimensions of moral values	Nuclear families(n=100)				Z-value	
	Boys (n=50)		Girls(n=50)			
	f	%	f	%		
Truthfulness	23	46.00	24	48.00	0.20	
Honesty	22	44.00	24	48.00	0.40	
Resistance stealing	26	52.00	27	54.00	0.20	
Resistance to cheating	24	47.11	25	49.11	0.20	

proportion of boys and girls fall in all the levels of moral values, there is non- significant association of level of moral values with gender in joint families

Results of Table 3 unveil the distribution of boys and girls across different dimensions of moral values in nuclear families. It was found that in nuclear families nearly half *i.e.* 46 per cent of the boys and 48 per cent of the girls showed 'truthfulness'. In case of 'honesty', only 44 per cent boys and 48 per cent girls displayed the same and were statistically at par with each other. The data probing 'resistance to stealing' revealed that more than half *i.e.* 52 per cent of the boys and 54 per cent girls had 'resistance to stealing' followed by 'resistance to cheating' which was displayed by 47.11 per cent boys and 49.11 per cent of the girls with non- significant differences.

In a nut shell, the data gave the impression that there were non-significant gender differences of moral values within nuclear families though girls out perform boys with higher percentage in all the dimensions of moral values which may be due to the differences in expectations from boys and girls. In Indian society, girls are expected to behave more ideally than boys. Overall nearly half of the boys (47.11%) and 49.11 per

cent of the girls showed desired moral values that indicated low levels of moral values among girls.

Table 4 illustrates the gender wise distribution of children across the different levels of moral values in nuclear families. The percentage of children lying in the category of 'very high' moral values were 22 per cent for boys and 24 per cent for girls which was slightly higher for girls but statistically non-significant. In the category of 'high' moral values, the boys covered 18 per cent and girls with 20 per cent .About 42 per cent of the boys and 40 per cent of girls were falling in 'medium' level of moral values whereas 12 per cent boys and 10 per cent of the girls showed 'low' moral values followed by 'very low' moral values which was displayed by equal proportion of boys and girls *i.e.* 6 per cent.

Comparatively higher number of girls showed 'very high' and 'high' levels of moral values whereas 'medium' and 'low' levels of moral values were displayed by higher number of boys than girls. 'Very low' moral values were displayed by equal number of boys and girls. Therefore, overall there were statistically non- significant gender differences in the levels of moral values.

Table 4 : Gender-wise distributions of children across various levels of moral values in nuclear families						
Levels of moral values	Nuclear families(n=100)				$\chi^2$ 0.18 <sup>NS</sup>	
	Boys(n=50)		Girls(n=50)			
	f	%	f	%		
Very high	11	22.00	12	24.00		
High	9	18.00	10	20.00		
Medium	21	42.00	20	40.00		
Low	6	12.00	5	10.00		
Very low	3	6.00	3	6.00		

Table 5 : Gender-wise distribution of total respondents across various dimensions of moral values						
Dimensions of moral values	Total respondents (n=200)				Z-value	
	Boys (n=100)		Girls (n=100)			
	f	%	f	%		
Truthfulness	56	56.00	57	57.00	0.14	
Honesty	55	55.00	55	55.00	0	
Resistance stealing	59	59.00	64	64.00	0.73	
Resistance to cheating	56	56.00	58	58.00	0.29	
Total	56	56.00	58	58.00	0.29 <sup>NS</sup>	

NS=Non-significant

**Table 6 : Gender-wise distribution of total respondents across different levels of moral values**

Levels of moral values	Total respondents(N=200)				$\chi^2$ 0.43 <sup>NS</sup>
	Boys(n=100)		Girls(n=100)		
	f	%	f	%	
Very high	27	27.00	29	29.00	
High	20	20.00	21	21.00	
Medium	38	38.00	38	38.00	
Low	10	10.00	8	8.00	
Very low	5	5.00	4	4.00	

Analysis given in Table 5 reveals the gender wise distribution of total respondents across various dimensions of moral values. It was found that ‘truthfulness’ was shown by more than half of the respondents *i.e.* 59.00 per cent of boys and 57.00 per cent of girls. Similarly, 55 per cent of the boys as well as girls displayed ‘honesty’. ‘Resistance to stealing’ was shown by 59.00 per cent boys and 64.00 per cent girls followed by ‘resistance to cheating’ with 56 per cent boys and 58 per cent of the girls falling in this category.

All the dimensions showed statistically non-significant differences though slightly inclined towards girls. While probing the data as a whole, it can be said that there were statically non-significant gender differences in moral values in children of late childhood years, reason that could support the findings which could be that in late childhood years children’s morality is governed by society and not by individual self.

Data of Table 6 probe regarding the distribution of children across various levels of moral values. Accordingly percentage of children showing ‘very high’ level of moral values was 27 per cent for boys and 29 per cent for girls. In case of ‘high’ moral values, only 20 per cent boys and 21 per cent of girls were showing the same. Comparatively high per cent of boys and girls (38%) displayed ‘medium’ level of moral values. Further, in the category of ‘low’ moral values, only 10 per cent boys and 8 per cent of girls displayed the same similarly very ‘low’ moral values were displayed by 5 per cent of boys and 4 per cent of girls. However, the data revealed that there was non- significant association of levels of moral values with gender but slightly high proportion of the girls in ‘very high’ and ‘high’ levels and high proportion of boys in ‘low’ and ‘very’ low levels of moral values indicated high morality among girls than boys .

Similar study conducted by Tripathi (1990) to assess the level of moral judgment between the children of lower income and middle income group revealed no gender differences in moral judgments. Consonance to this Siberman (1990) studied the relationship between childrens’ level of moral reasoning and family environment and found gender differences favouring

girls. Contradictory findings were accounted by Thakur and Kang (2002) who found females as high scorers than males in moral values and moral judgment. Saraswati and Sundaresan (1989) revealed no gender differences in moral judgments. Results are also in line with the findings of Gill and Jaiswal (2006) who determined that both males and females were equal in learning moral values imparted by the researcher.

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