

Moral Values of Children: Evidence from Schools

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Abstract

Moral values in children are affected by social environment. Schools are the important socialising agents for child development. This paper aims to examine the moral values of children aged 8 to 11 years by drawing a comparison between the children belonging to two different kinds of schools (Anganbadi & Government primary schools). The participants were interviewed with the help of a moral values scale and observed their school and other activities to find out the ground reality of social contexts in the schools. Results revealed that stealing, lying, dishonesty and cheating behaviour were evident in the children of both schools. The findings will be discussed and pointed out.

Key words: Moral values, children, social context and schools

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Introduction

In a world which has hopes of starting a life on moon and made nuclear weapons so powerful to reduce a country to ashes, we have come a long way. On one side, we have successfully acquired all the comforts for an easy life yet there are problems of war, hatred, terrorism, innumerable horrific crimes and the list goes on. Lack of moral values may be the foundation stone of all the things wrong with the world. These must not be ignored because it influence our life in every manner. This scenario pointed out have we come this long way by compromising our moral values for these comforts? Is it development? Thus, this paper attempts to get an insight about the moral values among children in our context. As the children are considered national assets and future generation, who make this world better place for peaceful living. They are target population everywhere for changing the society. The childhood is a development stage where the consolidation of self-concept is going to be started. In this way, children are the mirror of a family, culture, society and nation. Schools are the important socialising agents to establish a character within students which is a comprehensive aim of school discipline especially during childhood. At this developmental period, school environment, peer group and school teachers are more important rather than family and parents for nurturing the moral values in the children even the parents have less time for their kids due to workload in the present time.

The terms moral and morality are concerned with what is just, conduct, and our relationships and interactions with others. "Certain traits of character," which described as truthfulness, honesty, chastity, amiability, etc., are considered moral because they are linked with other numerous qualities, attitudes, and social interactions (Dewey, 1916, p. 357). While the term value is explained in two ways; i) the attitude of "prizing a thing, finding it worth while, for its

own sake or intrinsically,” within a complete experience,ii) the intellectual act of “comparing and judging”, appraising, estimating, valuating when experience is lacking (Dewey, 1916, p. 238, 249).

The moral character of the individuals develops gradually with the course of development with age advancement throughout their early childhood and late childhood. Moral development has been considered as the increase in the internalisation process (i. e., behaviour, emotional and judgment aspects of moral action) about what society views as moral behaviour and its basic cultural rules, including three levels of internalization processes (Sears, Maccoby & Levin, 1957);

- A behaviour criterion of internalization is that of intrinsically motivated conformity or resistance to temptation. Such a conception is obvious demand under the moral character requirements. Children who have successfully developed this resistance to the temptation of what fascinate them at that time are consistent in their acts of moral conduct. Children who are getting ample opportunities to cheat and steal, to be punished and noticed for doing so at the time of learning to resist these temptation. They are still behaving in the fair way that maintain their integrity intact. This is a sign of internalization of moral values into their behaviour by doing the right thing even when no one is watching.
- The second criterion for internalization of morality is the emotion of guilt and feeling of self-punitive or the strength to view their own actions by introspecting them unbiased. They are to be self-critical of their mistakes before being realised to feel guilty for their wrong doing.

- Third criterion for internalization of morality is that the individuals should be able to make judgments and stick by their idea of right and wrong doing even if others around them are violating it. The person should not only think of moral behaviour but also enact them when required for reflecting a law abiding person. Children often face difficulty in making judgments because they are always made to feel that this is not their territory, but as Piaget (1954) explained that, they can make right judgments sticking by the principles of morality if they have internalized the moral behaviour.

It suggested that the most important factors determining resistance to temptation for cheating or disobeying are contextual rather than fixed (Hartshorne & May, 1930). As moral values are imparted to the next generation through socialising agents (e. g., family, school)consequently influence the development of children and the society.Moral values are focused here which directly influences thebehaviour of children as lying, cheating, dishonesty and stealing behaviour. These are:

Lying behaviour:It can be defined as a misrepresentation with the intent to deceive (Bok, 1978; Nettler, 1982; Newson & Newson, 1976). It can be observed in children from young age and these serve as building blocks of covert antisocial behaviour. Children engage in lying behaviour for various reasons, to avoid punishment, to seek attention, to brag or fantasies(Ackerman &Kappelman, 1979).Children's motivation to engage in lie telling varies according to their age. It also depends on how they are being treated for telling a lie in their family or school because the earliest lies are those which are aimed to avoid punishment and with time and socialisation process the child learns what is to be told and what to be held back based on the reinforcement they get for telling the truth.

Cheating behaviour: Cheating is a covert and deliberate way to break a rule and gain advantage (Green, 2004). This is a crucial behaviour in children's moral and social development. It serves as precursor to more serious unethical practices as an adult, breaching tax paying rules or inability to form stable interpersonal relationships. Although here the focus is mainly on academic cheating which leaves teachers puzzled about the actual knowledge of the children and also imposes question on children's ability to control temptation when no one is watching. This is an indicator of self-control, which serves as important surviving currency as the child develops into an adult.

Dishonesty: This is a broader term which includes telling a lie, cheating when no one is watching or, plagiarism. Dishonesty in the present study limits primarily to the academic kind where the children hide things from their teachers and peers. It has been observed in researches that children are well aware of their social context when they use dishonest means (Heyman, 2015).

Stealing behaviour: Many studies indicated a link exists between low socio economic status and stealing behaviour. Few studies also reported that stealing behaviour was not associated with low socio-economic class (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; Griffiths, 1952; Tuddenham, Brooks & Milkovich, 1974).

There are several studies conducted on morality and moral values, suggesting the strength of these values in regulation of human behaviour and also indicating deterioration in moral values in the contemporary society. Increasing rate of antisocial and criminal activities in our society are reported that indicate the alarming situation for preserving moral values to ensure the safety of human life. For example, Nirbhaya rape case (December 2012) shocked the whole country and compelled us to think where we are going to be landed? Thus, the present paper is

designed to examine the moral values which affect the behaviour of children in two different school environments. It tries to explore how different school environments will lead to differences in moral values of children. Thus, this study examined the moral values of children in two different schools; School 1 (Aganbadi) and School 2 (Government Primary school).

Methodology

The present study was conducted with 57 children age ranged 8 to 11 years, selected from different kind of schools (i. e., Aganbadi & Government Primary schools). The word ‘Anganwadi ’means ‘courtyard shelter ’in Hindi. The Anganwadi Programme, started by the Government of India in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme today is the World’s largest Programme aimed at enhancing the health, nutrition and learning opportunities of infants, young children and their mothers. It caters the need of providing pre-school education as well as breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, mortality and morbidity. The Government’s emphasis has been on integrated and holistic development of children, as far as the two basic elements of human resource development, as health and education, are concerned (Mamatha & Sarada, 2009).

While Government primary schools cater the needs of people belonging to lower middle class in the present time. According to the Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution all children are entitled to receive at least primary education. Indian government provides “free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” The Indian Loksabha on 28th November 2001 passed the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Bill, making education a fundamental right. The responsibility of creating awareness and promoting the growth of education was given to the individual states with specific guidelines from the State Government. The intention was to provide education to every child

irrespective of their financial background through formal schooling system (Bajpai & Sangeeta, 2004; PRIA, 2012).

Both the Aganbadi and Government Primary schools differed greatly in terms of their administration, infrastructure, resources and the students' socioeconomic class. For example, in Aganbadi school, basic amenities such as safe drinking water and benches to sit are not available to the students. Whereas in Government primary school, basic amenities are present and there are ample of resources available to children, ranging from play materials to library facility. The participants were selected from these two schools by purposive sampling method. The participants were approached individually and interviewed with the help of moral value scale.

Results and Discussion:

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and t-test in order to find out the difference between the students of Aganbadi and Government primary schools.

Table 1: Shows Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance of Mean Difference between School 1 (Aganbadi school) and School 2 (Government Primary school) on the measure of moral values.

Variables	School 1(Aganbadi)		School 2(Govt. Primary)		t-value
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Lying	14.00	1.41	14.36	1.18	0.93
Dishonesty	14.80	1.74	15.12	1.39	0.67
Stealing	14.95	1.62	16.64	1.03	4.26**
Cheating	13.76	1.54	14.56	1.7	1.63
Overall Moral values	57.52	4.7	60.68	3.26	2.67**

**p< 0.05

Table 1: Shows Mean, Standard Deviation and Significance of Mean Difference between School 1 (Aganbadi school) and School 2 (Government Primary school) on the measure of moral values. There is significant difference between the students of Aganbadi and Government primary schools on the value related to stealing behaviour and also on the overall moral values. It suggests that students of both the Aganbadi and Government primary schools indulged in lying, cheating and dishonest behaviour in their life. However, the tendency of stealing behaviour was slightly higher in the students of Aganbadi School As Compared To Government Primary School.

Field observation explored that students of Aganbadi School have educational deprivation in terms of exposure received in school, interaction with teachers and opportunities to engage in various school activities, recreational and sport activities in comparison to Government primary school.

Findings of the present study revealed that students of these two schools differed significantly only on the stealing domain of moral values suggested that it was slightly higher in the students of Aganbadi schools. During interview-session, few of them from Aganbadi school admitted that they have indulged in stealing activities and sometimes stolen edibles from shops or stolen items of their interest from their friends as their parents and other family members cannot afford proper two meal in a day. It was surprising fact that the parents of these students were well aware of their stealing behaviour but they do not have concern about this kind of undesirable behaviour and its modifications and corrections. A study (Dassi & Khan, 2000) was also reported such parental ignorance exists. These children do not view 'Minor stealing' as something immoral, rather they boast about it as an achievement because it is admired by their

friends of family as their capability to hunt for resources and being smart enough to get away without being caught.

It suggests that stealing behaviour was less prevalent in the students of government school. It may be due the fact that most of their demands are already fulfilled and these kids view stealing not only as an immoral act but also derogatory. They have a sense of their own image and are aware of the standards of their families. A child stated this with pride “I have all that I want, why would I steal”. The students from Aganbadi school also considered that stealing as a wrong thing to do because they have fear the consequences if ever caught and deny ever being engaged in any such acts. This scenario pointed out that economic deprivation can force the children to indulge in undesirable behaviour even they have guilty not to good action.

In the present study, lying behaviour is common in children of both schools but their reasons for telling a lie vary greatly, generally indulging in lying behaviour to escape punishment than to seek any reward in their early age of development (DePaulo & Jordan, 1982). Children from both the schools accepted that telling a lie is a bad behaviour, while interrogated further, they accepted for having engagement in lying behaviour often (Talwar 2002). The students of government primary school have reported frequent lying behaviour about their academic performance to their parents due to fear of punishment, pressure of good grades. In fact, they do not want to disappoint their parents and letting them down. Other study also reported that the children preferred lying behaviour to avoid negative consequences, especially in those children who have very punitive parents (Newson & Newson, 1976).

Cheating behaviour is common in children of both the schools, many children of Aganbadi school lacked insight that cheating is actually an immoral act. They consider copying from each other's notebook as an obvious thing to do, mainly because they have been primed to

copy answers from the notebook of academically bright students and reported no strict measures are taken to control cheating during exams, rather teachers ignoring them even if they saw them discussing during the exam, this could be due to less teachers and their lack of interest to deal with a slow learner. Teacher caring, rather than peer caring, was the best predictor of adaptive behaviour (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) in schools. Similarly, Calabrese and Cochran (1990) found that cheating stems from alienation, as a lack of support or lack of meaningful relationships with others in an environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). With respect to the children of Government primary school, the reasons to engage in cheating behavior are different, most obvious being the fear of failure and the fear of disappointing their parents and peers. Calabrese and Cochran (1990) suggest that pressure for performance may be a primary motivation underlying students' decisions to cheat, "fear of failure" and "parental insistence on grades" as two of their top three reasons (Schab, 1980) for their cheating behaviour.

Dishonesty was observed in children of both the schools, in the present context dishonesty was restricted to interaction with their friends or academic class only. Children of Government primary school advocated that it is rather foolish to be truly honest in the present competitive time and these leanings are mainly borrowed from their parents. It may be due to example of corrupt environment where mostly executive officers, political and corporate leaders are charged for their dishonesty and corrupt behaviour. Despite this fact, they are getting respected position and earning fame in the society, consequently they are representing social model for young children and adolescents. A research also suggests that experience with a competitive game in which deception is required for personal gain can bring about the tendency to indulge in dishonest ways earlier in the development process of a child (Ding, 2018). Children of Government primary school are more worried about their social status and image among their

group members which also inhibits them to do certain acts of dishonesty because when young children believed that they have a positive reputation, they take steps to maintain it (Fu, Heyman, Qian, Guo & Lee, 2016). Reduction in dishonest behaviour when detection is seen as more likely (Bott, Cappelen, Sørensen, & Tungodden, 2017; Pierce, Snow & McAfee, 2015).

A major question which arises from the above findings is, irrespective of ample of resources, good nurturance and care by parents why do children of Government primary school indulge in lying, cheating and dishonesty? Another important issue in the regard of children belong to Aganbadi is that they do not have clear conception about moral values, however, they are going to be enter in the adolescence period. It can be realised the miserable situation of those children age ranged 8 to 11 years old, who are studying in Aganbadi while they should be in the Government primary school, as the Aganbadi schools cater the educational and nutritional needs to children in 0-6 age group. It requires more elaborative and ground reality based research to examine the dynamics of non-functionality of moral values among children as well as influencing factors of such miserable and inappropriate conditions, confronted by children even lots of government policies are implemented for their holistic development. Thus, our findings suggests that different approaches to devise intervention programmes are required according to the children's circumstances to inculcate moral values in them because each child is unique and different from each other.

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