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Moral Self-Image (MSI) and Self-esteem (SE) Among Young adults

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Abstract

The present research explored the relation between MSI and SE among young adults in Pakistan. The sample comprised 400 young adults (200 men & 200 women) with an age range 19 to 36 years ($M = 29.1$; $SD = 7.6$ years) through convenience sampling. Moral self-image scale (MSIS; Naeem, Batool, Tariq, & Khan, 2022) and Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) were administered. Correlational research design was used to explore the study variable and its associations. The result of the study revealed that Moral self-image was positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = .65$, $p < .01$). To explore the association between MSI and SE, a simple linear regression was conducted showed significant association between MSI and SE ($\beta = .65$, $t = 13.62$, $p < .001$). To explore Gender differences, an independent sample t-test was conducted and the results of independent sample t test revealed that women scored higher on moral self-image than men [$t(398) = -2.45$, $p < .05$]. Results also revealed that women scored higher sub-dimensions of moral self-image includes generosity [$t(398) = -2.77$, $p < .01$], compassion [$t(398) = -3.84$, $p < .001$], and lawfulness [$t(398) = -2.22$, $p < .05$]. Although, no significant gender differences were observed on the variables of integrity [$t(398) = -1.62$, $p < .n.s$], forgiveness and social welfare [$t(398) = -.57$, $p < .n.s$], tolerance [$t(398) = -.36$, $p < .n.s$] and self-esteem [$t(398) = -.68$, $p < .n.s$] among young adults. The present study has its implication in clinical Psychology, personality assessment and educational setting.

Keywords: Moral self-image, Self-esteem, generosity, compassion, lawfulness

Introduction

Moral self-image is one the most crucial concept in order to understand what we meant to be a person, a human being or a creature considered superior to all the other creatures of the universe (Carr, 2001). Moral psychology is a branch of psychology which deals with study of moral development (Lapsley & Narvaez,



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2005). The core themes of moral psychology were moral judgment, moral reasoning, moral identity, moral action, moral development, moral diversity, moral character, altruism, moral sensitivity, moral responsibility, moral motivation, psychological egoism, moral anticipating, moral emotion, emotional predicting, and moral discrepancy (Teper, Inzlicht, & Page-Gould, 2011). The concept of moral integrity is central to our self-understanding which shield us from disproof our protective belts of denial, rationalization and special pleading (Bandura, 1999). Studying all these mentioned areas cannot downfall the importance of studying self and self-perception in morality as self cannot be separated from an existing moral space and related moral issues (Taylor, 1989). Moral self has arisen within developmental studies of moral judgment, and how the search for integrative linkages with other domains of psychology, particularly with social cognition and personality, took on certain urgency after the demotion or downfall of the dominant stage-and-structure approaches to moral development (Lapsley & Power, 1988; Lapsley & Quintana, 1985).

There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that the centrality of morality to self may be the single most powerful determiner of concordance between moral judgments and conduct. People whose self-concept is organized around their moral beliefs are highly likely to translate those beliefs into action consistently throughout their lives (Damon and Hart, 1992).

Naeem et al (2022) defined MSI as a person's self-evaluation of his/her own morality which can be measure through compassion, lawfulness, forgiveness, social welfare, tolerance and generosity. Moral self-image defined as "a person's malleable moral self-concept related to the traits of the prototypically moral person" (Jordan, Leliveld, & Tenbrunsel, 2015). These traits are care for others, kindness, compassion, generosity, helping others, fairness, honesty, hardworking, and friendliness (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral Self-image exists in individuals' flexible part of self and it is fully subjective alike rest of the components of working self-concept. It does not amount strength of a person's moral judgments, nor does it assess to what extent a person is actually moral or immoral, but it measures to what extent he thinks that he is moral (Jordan et al., 2015). An individual appraises his moral self, and then assign positive and negative labels to it on the basis of social and behavioral cues (Kernis & Goldman, 2003).

As compare to moral self-image, Self-esteem is a person's appraisal of his or her value (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) which refers to positive or negative evaluation of person about his self (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Rosenberg, 2016). Self-esteem defined is the degree to which one values oneself (Reber & Reber, 2002). Self-esteem reflects common or particular feelings of people about global self-worth and liking (Kernis et al., 2000). In general self-esteem thought to be the evaluative component of a broad image of the self, the self-concept being the most wide-ranging construct than self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Self-esteem is a permanent view about how a person gives value to himself which last for many years (Jacoby, 1994). Self-esteem conceptualized as an individual's positive or negative attitude about self. It signifies how much a person like and satisfied with his own self, as well as his feelings of perceived worth as compared with others (Brinthaupt & Erwin, 1992; Cook, 1988). It gives a subjective opinion about the adequacy of the self. This feedback is positive when the individual copes well with circumstances but



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negative when he avoids threats (Bednar, Gawain, & Peterson, 1989).

Both MSI and Self-esteem are internal and subjective evaluations of person: “MSI is person’s view about their morality and number of researches (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) defined self-esteem as global feelings of self-worth among a person (Kernis & Goldman). It is acceptable that a person’s self-esteem is likely to change, but it is unlikely to change in response to a single event or over a short period of time, usually any inconsistency in self-esteem is durable and required a long period of time to occur (Rosenberg, 1986, McCarthy & Hoge, 1982). Similar to moral self-image it is categorized into global as well as personal view about self. Self-esteem is closely related to moral self-image, but distinct as well. MSI is person’s overall insight about black and white, what is right? And what is wrong? What should do? And what shouldn’t? How to maintain the integrity, conscientiousness, generosity, kindness, lawfulness, and tolerance for others? How to forgive and what is his/her role in the society? On the other hand, self-esteem is person’s evaluation about his/herself, either positive or negative. Self-esteem and moral self-image differ from one another mainly in three ways: at first, “self-esteem concerns a person’s global feelings of self-worth rather than his/her specific moral self-appraisals, secondly, self-esteem is relatively stable and thirdly, self-esteem is more an emotional than cognitive response to the social world (Jordan et al, 2015). People evaluate the state of their moral selves and allocate negative or positive labels to it on the basis of social indicators from outer world and their own actions (Kernis & Goldman, 2003b). It has been found that provisional self-evaluation predicted global self-esteem, primarily when self-evaluations were component of the self that considered central by individual (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993; Pelham, 1995), similarly a person’s moral self has conception about morality central to his self-understanding, which motivate a person to behave consistent with those ideas (Blasi, 1983). To sum up, moral self-image and self-esteem are closely linked and there is a need to evaluate the relationship and association of these variables with one another among young adults.

Moral self-image is relatively a new construct; two studies were conducted (Jordan et al., 2015; Naeem et al., 2017) so far on the construct of moral self-image. First study was about trait based measurement of moral self-image in Netherland, and the second study was on the development and validation of moral self-image scale in Pakistan. Both studies provided sound and standardized instruments for the measurement of moral self-image and provided the rationale to find the relationship between different relevant and discriminant construct, and to evaluate the effect of moral self-image on different variables. Another rationale for the present study is the malleable nature of moral self-image that why people feel satisfactory moral in some situations while not in others. The current study aimed at exploring the relationship between two constructs among young adults of Pakistan. Further it has been indicated in previous research that females held higher views of their moral self than males (Cheng, 2014). Therefore, it is intended to find out gender difference on moral self-image. Another aim of the study was to determine the association between MSI and Self-esteem, as no previously research has been done yet regarding this particular area of investigation.

The objective of the study was to explore the relationship and association



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between moral self-image and self-esteem among young adults. Another objective for the present study was to explore gender differences in terms of moral self-image and self-esteem among young adults.

Hypotheses

- There would be significant positive correlation between MSI and SE among young adults.
- There would be significant association between MSI and SE among young adults.
- There would be gender differences in terms of MSI and SE among young adults.

Method

Sample

The sample comprised 400 young adults (200 men & 200 women) from Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Azad Kashmir. The age range of young adults was 19-36 years ($M = 29.1$, $SD = 7.6$ years). Convenience sampling strategy was utilized and participants were included in the present study who can comprehend English. Sample of 400 participants includes, 287(71.8%) Graduates, 104(26%) Postgraduates and 9(2.3%) doctorate level degree. The socio-economic status of sample indicated that 32(8%) participants belonged to upper class, 357(89.3%) participants are of middle class, and 11(2.8%) participants belonged to lower class.

Instruments

Moral Self-image Scale. The moral self-image scale (MSIS) was used to measure moral self-image of young adults on 5- point Likert scale ranged from 1=never to 5= always. This scale has 49 items, further divided into six sub-scales: integrity (items 1-12), generosity (items 13-25), compassion (items 26-31), forgiveness and social welfare (items 32-37), lawfulness (items 38-44), and tolerance (items 45-49). The Cronbach alpha reliability of each subscale is: integrity (.84), generosity (.83), compassion (.76), forgiveness and social welfare (.70), lawfulness (.73), and tolerance (.68) with total scale reliability of .92. Higher score on scale represents high moral self-image and lower score represents low moral self-image (Naeem et al., 2022).

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1979). The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) was developed by Rosenberg in 1965. It consists of 10 items with 4-point Likert scale (1-4) rated from strongly Agree (4) to strongly disagree (1), item number 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 were reverse items. The maximum score on this scale is 40. The score ranges from 1 to 40. Higher score shows higher self-esteem. The reliability of Rosenberg scale ranges from .50 to .90 in different cultural context.

Procedure

After formally commencing the study, Informed consent was taken from the participants. Aims of study was clearly explained to participants and they were assured that their information well be kept confidential. Purposive convenient sampling and correlational research design was used in this study. Moral self-



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image and self-esteem of young adults were measured by using standardized measures. Permission to use MSIS is taken from the respective author via email, whereas RESE is openly available online. After collection of data the scoring of data was done with the help of scoring key.

Results

The study aimed at exploring relationship, association and gender differences in terms of MSI and SE among young adults.

Table 1: Psychometric properties of variables (N = 400)

Variables	k	M	SD	α	Range		skew
					Potential	Actual	
MSI	49	199.3	27.4	.95	3.40-4.36	1-5	.05
Integrity	12	48.9	7.2	.88	3.81-4.26	1-5	.08
Generosity	13	54.8	9.0	.84	3.98-4.33	1-5	.01
Compassion	6	22.7	4.2	.84	3.51-4.05	1-5	.04
F & SW	6	23.4	4.1	.74	3.40-4.23	1-5	.02
Lawfulness	7	29.5	4.7	.84	4.02-4.36	1-5	.10
Tolerance	5	19.7	3.6	.77	3.58-4.27	1-5	.01
Self Esteem	10	28.33	5.69	.68	2.21-3.18	1-4	.11

Note: MSI = Moral Self Image, k = number of items; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation, F & SW= Forgiveness and Social Welfare.

The results of psychometrics showed that the instruments used in the study are reliable.

Table 2: Correlation among Moral self-image; Integrity, Generosity, Compassion, Forgiveness, Lawfulness, Tolerance, and Self-esteem in young adults (N=400)

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD
1. MSI	.86**	.89**	.78**	.72**	.84**	.72**	.65**	195.79	26.75
2. Integrity	--	.71**	.61**	.52**	.67**	.52**	.49**	48.97	7.25
3. Generosity	--	--	.67**	.55**	.69**	.56**	.47**	54.83	9.00
4. Compassion	--	--	--	.54**	.54**	.48**	.43**	22.76	4.29
5. F & SW	--	--	--	--	.62**	.59**	.46**	23.43	4.14
6. Lawfulness	--	--	--	--	--	.58**	.51**	29.52	4.76
7. Tolerance	--	--	--	--	--	--	.36**	19.76	3.62
8. Self esteem	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	29.01	4.20

Note. **p<.01 Note: MSI = Moral Self-Image, F & SW = Forgiveness & Social Welfare.

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed that there is significant positive correlation between MSI and SE of young adults ($r = .65, p < .01$). The self-esteem also had significant positive relationship with subscales of MSIS: integrity ($r = .49, p < .01$), generosity ($r = .47, p < .01$), compassion ($r = .43, p < .01$), forgiveness and social welfare ($r = .46, p < .01$), lawfulness ($r = .51, p < .01$), and tolerance ($r = .36, p < .01$).

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression for Moral Self-image as a Predictor of Self-esteem (N = 400)



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Predictor	B	SEB	B	t
Moral self-image	.08	.007	.65	13.62***
R ²	.31			
F	185.59***			

Note. ***p<.001

The result of simple linear regression indicated that MSI was a positive significant predictor of SE, [$\beta = .65, t(399) = 13.62, p < .001$]. The value of R² explained 31% variance in self-esteem accounted for moral self-image [R² = .31, F(1,398) = 28.6, p < .001].

Table 4: Gender Differences on Moral Self Image and Self Esteem

Variable	Men (n=200)		Women (n=200)		t(398)	95%CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	
MSI	192.60	26.12	199.17	27.47	-2.54*	-11.84	-1.30	.24
Integrity	48.39	6.84	49.56	7.62	-1.62	-2.59	.24	.16
Generosity	53.59	9.35	56.07	8.47	-2.77**	-4.23	-.71	.27
Compassion	21.95	4.07	23.57	4.37	-3.84***	-2.45	-.79	.38
F & SW	23.31	4.18	23.55	4.11	-.57	-1.05	.57	.05
Lawfulness	29.00	4.88	30.05	4.60	-2.22*	-1.99	-.12	.22
Tolerance	19.81	3.44	19.71	3.79	.36	-.98	.67	-.02
Self-esteem	28.94	3.90	29.09	4.49	.68	-.49	1.02	-.06

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.00, Note: CI = confidence interval; LL = lower Limit; UL = upper limit. MSI = Moral Self-Image, F & SW = Forgiveness & Social Welfare.

The results of independent sample t test indicated that women scored higher on moral self-image than men [t(398) = -2.45, p<.05]. Results also revealed that women scored higher on generosity [t(398) = -2.77, p<.01], compassion [t(398) = -3.84, p < .001], and on lawfulness [t(398) = -2.22, p<.05]. Although, no significant gender differences were observed on the variables of integrity [t(398) = -1.62, p<.n.s], forgiveness and social welfare [t(398) = -.57, p<.n.s], tolerance [t(398) = -.36, p<.n.s] and self-esteem [t(398) = -.68, p<.n.s] among young adults.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship and gender differences in terms of moral self-image and self-esteem of young adults. Moral self-image is relatively a new construct; it's not something how moral a person is as per the norms or expectations of the society, but it is concerned with the subjective perception of a person about how satisfied a person may feel with his or her morality. Moral self-image is a malleable concept which vary from one situation to another like you may feel donating a little money in normal situations satisfactory and you may not feel satisfactory after donating a huge amount in the face of adversity. These feelings of self-satisfaction with your morality can affect the perception of your self-esteem.

The present study indicated positive correlation between moral self-image and



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self-esteem of young adults. This finding is consistent with the previous findings of Jordan, Leliveld and Tenbrunsel (2015), who predicted positive relationship between Moral self-image and Generalized Self-esteem. The second hypothesis aimed to find out whether moral self-image predicts self-esteem. The result of simple linear regression indicated that moral self-image was a positive significant predictor of self-esteem. No prior literature was available to support or contradict the present findings, therefore the results of present study can provide a base for the future researches in the area.

The present study suggested that women scored higher on moral self-image than men. Moreover, Women scored higher on generosity, compassion, and on lawfulness. Although, no significant gender differences were observed on the variables of integrity among young adults. Findings from previous studies suggested that females have high views about their moral self than males (Cheng, 2014). The possible reason of this difference could be that in Pakistani culture females are groomed in a way to show compassion towards others in families. They remain generous to others. In patriarchal society of Pakistan females are considered honor of their families, so they tend to maintain integrity and conform to social norms. Sometimes females encounter many instances where they need to show tolerance otherwise their relationships with family member, especially opposite gender get worse. In Pakistan females get more oriented to work in NGOs and work for social welfare than their male counterpart. These hypothetical aspects of Pakistani society related to females need further explorations. Interestingly previous study suggested that male and female differ on self-esteem, however the gender difference was very small and male young adults had high self-esteem than female young adults (Orth et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2001), but this study found no significant difference between male and females in terms of self-esteem. These results are consistent with previous findings of Donnellan et al., (2007) and Galambos et al., (2006). To sum up, moral self-image of young adults has wide impact on their self-esteem. The importance of self-esteem is a very clear from the literature, therefore it is important to enhance MSI to boost the self-esteem of young adults.

Implications

The findings of this study will fill the gap in literature in moral psychology regarding moral self-image. This pioneering study in indigenous perspective would make contribution in literature in the field of psychology. It has implication for a social psychologist to understand profoundly both constructs: moral self-image and self-esteem, which are related to self-concept. Educational psychologist can use this research as foundation to make effective learning strategies which enhance moral behavior and thinking, as well as self-esteem among students of young adult age group. In clinical settings this research will explicitly contribute towards further researches which ultimately assist in designing a therapeutically model entirely based on moral dimensions. In organizations this research will help researchers towards understanding moral behaviors of employees and devising strategies to inculcate moral practices at work place.

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