

## **Relationship between Moral Atmosphere of School and Moral Development of Secondary School Students**

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### **Abstract**

The present investigation was conducted to identify relationship between moral atmosphere of school and moral development of secondary school students. An adapted and validated questionnaire (Cronbach alpha .795) was used to know the perceptions of students regarding moral atmosphere of school and one adopted interview inventory (Cronbach alpha .813) was used to assess the level of moral development of students. The sample of the study consisted of 1239 secondary school students. The subjects of the study were selected from seven districts of the Punjab province. Four schools were selected from each district. Two girls high schools and two boys high schools were selected randomly from one rural and one urban area of each district. Correlation was run to see the relationship between moral atmosphere of school and moral development of students. Major findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between moral atmosphere of school and moral development of students. It means the role of schools' moral atmosphere is significant in the development of students' morality. On the basis of findings, recommendations were made in the study.

**Keywords:** Moral atmosphere, Moral development, Secondary school students

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## **Introduction**

For the last quarter of the 20th century, within the field of developmental psychology, research on morality was dominated by developmental psychologists. Their keen interest in the area of morality opened new avenues of investigation. To shape the personality traits of a person, morality plays a crucial role (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Khanam (2008) argued that morality is the code of behavior which individuals show within a group. It encompasses the major features of a person, his thoughts, dealings and many more aspects of his actions. According to Vess and Halbur (2003), moral training is an imperative task of fostering those values and deeds in children that make them moral ones. Not only syllabi, but overall hidden culture of schools should leave permanent impact on students' personality. It is proved by several empirical data that schools pose major influence on students (Khanam, 2008).

A person's morality is influenced by a variety of internal and environmental factors. Parents and teachers are the main sources to inculcate the morality in children and adolescents (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Many researchers reported that parents, teachers, peers and school atmosphere play an important role in the moral development of adolescents. Moral development in children appears to be parent-child interaction patterns (Boyes & Allen, 1993). Kadivar, Kohoulat, Abdollahi, and Khoshbakht (2016) observed that the moral atmosphere of home clearly influences the rate of children's moral development. Moreover, moral development is strongly promoted when the perspectives and treatment of all family members are valued and promoted (Kohlberg, 1976).

According to Eccles et al. (1993), the effect of the moral atmosphere of school on real life moral judgment and behavior is particularly strong during adolescence because, during this phase, acceptance by the peer group is of utmost importance for the individuals. Studies in different traditions have suggested that the moral atmosphere in schools has had long term consequences for students' development (Andreou, 2000; Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Reinke & Herman, 2002).

Moral atmosphere is described as a shared culture or mutual understanding of what is an appropriate or inappropriate behavior based upon the interactions among group members (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). A moral atmosphere comprises certain characteristics of the environment including the presence of collective norms that influence the moral actions of the group members (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Treasure, 2003; Stephens & Bredemeier, 1996).

Although, several studies reported that the school environment have regularly been linked with psychosocial and behavioral adjustment problems in the adolescent period (Stevens, De-Bourdeaudhuij, & Van-Oost, 2002; Murray & Murray, 2004; Estevez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005). The quality of interaction of the adolescents with peers and teachers may determine their attitudes, and their behaviours (Jessor, 1991; Werner, 2004). In spite of all the above researches regarding the effect of schooling on behavioral and moral development of adolescents, there is a dearth of studies to examine the influences of the school atmosphere on moral development of secondary school students in Pakistan. It has motivated the researcher to conduct the study based on the relationship between the moral atmosphere of school and the moral development of secondary school students.

### **Research Objective**

The major objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between the moral atmosphere of school and the moral development of secondary school students.

### **Research Hypotheses**

Following were the research hypotheses questions of the study:

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between moral behavior of school teachers and moral development of secondary school students.
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between moral behavior of school students and moral development of secondary school students.
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female students regarding moral atmosphere of school.
- H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference between rural and urban areas' students regarding moral atmosphere of school.

### **Research Methodology**

A mix method was selected by approach and correlational research was employed by method. Population of the study consisted of all the secondary school students (classes 9 & 10) enrolled in 4425 schools (Urban 1086, Girls=505, Boys=581. Rural 3339 Girls=999, Boys=2340) located in 36 districts of the Punjab.

Geographical distribution of all the districts of the province of Punjab was followed for sampling. According to this distribution, Punjab has been divided into three regions namely Southern, Central, and Northern region comprising 10, 14, 12 districts respectively. Central region of the Punjab has been taken for the selection of the sample. Seven out of 14 districts were selected randomly from this region.

From each district, two schools from urban and two schools from rural (one male and one of school female) were selected randomly. From each school, two sections of class 9 and two sections of class 10 were selected randomly. From each section, 20-25 students were selected randomly. Total number of students was 1239.

### **Instruments of the Study**

#### **School Moral Atmosphere Questionnaire (SMAQ)**

This questionnaire comprised of 37 statements to know the perceptions of students regarding moral atmosphere of school. School moral atmosphere questionnaire was related to teachers and peers of students at secondary school level. School moral atmosphere questionnaire (SMAQ) was adapted from Host, Brugman, Tavecchio, and Beem (1998) and its reliability was determined through pilot testing (Cronbach alpha=.795).

#### **Moral Development Interview Inventory (MDII)**

Moral Development Interview Inventory (MDII) comprised of moral dilemmas to investigate the level of moral development of the students. This moral development interview inventory was adopted with the permission of the respected author (Khanam, 2008). To know the reliability of MDII, pilot testing was administered (Cronbach alpha=.813).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

First of all, written permission was taken from the supervisor of the study for data collection. Moreover, consent letter was given to schools principals before data collection from their schools. In addition, students were briefed the confidentiality issues. Researcher informed that their identity will be kept confidential.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Correlation between Moral Behavior of Teachers and Moral Development of Secondary School Student*

Variables	n	r value	Sig.
Moral Behavior of Teachers and MD	1239	.230	.000

Table 1 shows the results of Pearson correlation test which was performed to identify the relationship between moral behavior of teachers and moral development of secondary school students. The r- value shows that there was a significant correlation  $r = .230$  at  $p = .000$  between two variables. On the basis of these results our null hypothesis “There is no significant relationship of teachers and the moral development of secondary school students” is rejected. It concluded that there was a significant relationship between moral behavior of teachers and moral development of secondary school students.

**Table 2**

*Correlation between Moral Behavior of Students and Moral Development of Secondary School Students*

Variables	N	r value	Sig.
Moral Behavior of Students and MD	1239	.356	.000

Table 2 shows the results of Pearson correlation test which was performed to identify the relationship between moral behavior of students and moral development of secondary school students. The r-value shows that there was a significant correlation  $r = .356$  at  $p = .000$  between two variables. On the basis of these results our null hypothesis “There is no significant relationship of students and the moral development of secondary school students” is rejected. It means there was a substantial relationship between moral behavior of students and moral development of secondary school students.

**Table 3**

*T-test to identify difference between the perception of male and female students regarding moral atmosphere of school*

	Mean	SD	df	Mean difference.	t-value	Sig.
Male	137.3545	4.33	1237	-.65057	-1.305	.192
Female	138.0051	4.14				

Table 3 shows that an independent-sample t-test was performed to identify the difference in the perception of male and female students regarding moral atmosphere of school. Results explained that there is no significant difference between the perception of male ( $M = 137.35$ ,  $SD = 4.33$ ) and female ( $M = 138$ ,  $SD = 4.14$ ) students regarding moral atmosphere of school  $t(1237) = -1.305$  at  $p = .192$ . On the basis of these results the null hypothesis “there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female students regarding moral atmosphere of school” is accepted.

**Table 4***T-test to Identify Difference in Rural and Urban Areas Regarding Moral Atmosphere of School*

	Mean	SD	df	Mean difference.	t value	Sig.
Urban	137.3545	4.48	1237	-.05982	-.119	.906
Rural	138.0051	4.21				

Table 4 shows that an independent-sample t-test was performed to identify the difference in moral atmosphere of schools in rural and urban areas. Results showed that no significant difference  $t(1327) = -.199$  at  $p = .906$  was found in the moral atmosphere of school urban ( $M = 137.35$ ,  $SD = 4.48$ ) rural ( $M = 138.00$ ,  $SD = 4.21$ ) areas. On the basis of these results the null hypothesis “there is no significant difference between rural and urban areas regarding moral atmosphere of school” is accepted. And it is inferred that schools in rural and urban areas have almost similar atmosphere.

## Discussion

In the light of findings, it was concluded that the significant relationship between moral atmosphere of school and moral development has been observed. The moral role of teachers and students have major impact on students’ morality. It is consistent with the results of Guivernau and Duda (2002). They explored the relationship of the moral atmosphere of athletic team to aggressive tendencies among soccer players. Kadivar et al. (2016) also found that perception of school moral atmosphere is a significant factor in predicting moral competence of elementary school students. Li, Guo, Zheng, and Yu (2013) confirmed with the finding of my study that students’ moral atmosphere has significant impact on moral judgment. Brugman, Tavecchio, Van-Os, and Host (1999) also concluded that the moral atmosphere is more influential predictor of practical judgment. Brugman et al. (2003) investigated that school moral atmosphere proved as strong predictor of pro social behavior.

Various studies show that when school teachers model fundamental values and students learn skills to settle conflicts peacefully and practice prosocial behavior, the schools have a lower incidence of violence (Dolph & Lycan, 2008).

The findings illustrated that there is no significant difference between moral development of students in rural and urban areas. The findings are consistent with Doley (2014) found that there is no significant difference in the moral values scores of the students in rural and urban areas. On the other hand, according to Krauss, Hamzah, Suandi, Noah, Juhari, Manap, & Mahmood (2006), there are significantly higher levels of religiosity for rural youth than urban counterparts.

## Conclusion

In the light of above findings, the substantial relationship between moral atmosphere of school and moral development was noted. The moral role of teachers and students had greater impact on students' morality. Rural and urban areas were the same in the level of moral development of secondary school students. Furthermore, the perceptions of male and female students were same regarding moral atmosphere of school.

## Recommendations

The study recommends that Ministry of Education and heads of the schools should ensure that the moral atmosphere of the educational institutions should be supportive for the development of adolescents' morality. The school atmosphere is crucial role for the moral development of adolescents. So, the prime goal of education should be to develop children's morality, rather than to teach them only intellectual knowledge. The role of teachers and students in moral atmosphere of school were studied in this study, other factors which make moral atmosphere should be investigated. Further comparative studies are recommended to assess moral atmosphere of school in private and public sectors. The effect of moral atmosphere on moral development should be studied at higher education level.

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