

*Section: Preliminary studies in PPT***MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ACCORDING TO KOHLBERG'S STAGES: A REVISED ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY****Elmedina Cesko**Psychologist & Psychotherapist
Basic Trainer on PPT (Pristina, Kosovo)Email: elmedina_c@hotmail.com

Received 5.11.2024

Accepted for publication 22.12.2024

Published 22.01.2025

DOI: [10.52982/lkj255](https://doi.org/10.52982/lkj255)**Abstract**

This study investigates the moral development of preschool children aged 3 to 6 in Kosovo, framed within Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning and principles of Positive Psychotherapy. The study measured moral reasoning levels and altruistic behaviors using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), which focused on social competence and emotional maturity. Results confirm that moral development follows the sequential stages outlined by Kohlberg, with cultural factors influencing specific moral expressions. Gender analysis revealed that girls exhibit higher altruistic behaviors than boys, aligning with existing literature. The findings highlight the critical role of pro-social parental modeling and culturally sensitive positive reinforcement in fostering moral and altruistic behaviors. This research underscores the importance of integrating cultural values and strengths-based approaches to support moral development in early childhood.

Keywords: moral development, preschool, children, Positive Psychotherapy**Introduction**

A child's key development in growing up is accurately understanding how the world operates – learning the 'rules of the game.' The child must learn important rules, such as the social world's laws, sanctions, and practices. If a culture is to survive, it must have rules about right and wrong, what is allowed and what is not, and what is fair and dishonest (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In addition to these formal laws, we also have many social rules that govern daily behavior. Social rules, in general, are designed to guide children in distinguishing between 'right' and 'wrong' behavior. Therefore, the study of how children comprehend and adhere to rules has traditionally been categorized under the concepts of 'morality' and 'moral development.' Until the beginning of the last century, moral

development was a matter of academic treatment only for philosophers and scholars of religion. Today, psychologists have also started to have a great interest in this field (Yilmaz, Bahçekapili, Sevi, 2019).

When we refer to the definition of 'moral,' it is about principles and rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong behavior. It is often linked to societal norms, individual conscience, and ethical reasoning (Blackburn, 2021). While Kohlberg developed his theory of children's development, he focused on the concept of morality, wherein 'moral development' refers to the process through which individuals acquire and refine their understanding of moral principles, ethical behavior, and justice over time. It includes cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, evolving through distinct stages (Rest, Narvaez,



Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). As far as morals have a development structure, moral education involves the deliberate effort to teach individuals moral values, ethical reasoning, and socially acceptable behavior. It often includes fostering empathy, responsibility, and understanding of moral concepts (Nucci, 2001).

Lawrence Kohlberg developed the theory of moral development throughout his life, based on Piaget's theory. Kohlberg's theory holds that moral reasoning is the basis of ethical behavior and has six identifiable developmental stages, each more adequate in response to moral dilemmas than its predecessor. Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment behind the age studied by Piaget, who also claimed that logic and morality develop through the constructive stage. Kohlberg's model consists of three levels of moral reasoning – pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional – each consisting of two stages. The two components of each stage, the social perspective and the moral content, represent innate and environmental influences (Nucci, 1997).

Positive Psychotherapy encourages focusing on building upon children's current strengths. This strengths-oriented framework suggests that educators and parents focus on enhancing moral behaviors through positive reinforcement, allowing children to internalize prosocial behaviors as part of their growing self-concept. The correlation suggests building upon individuals' existing strengths. This strength-focused approach emphasizes leveraging current abilities to facilitate further moral and personal development (Peseschkian, 1987).

Positive Psychotherapy appreciates cultural context as integral to growth, making the consistency in moral reasoning stages across cultures a notable insight. This implies that while moral reasoning follows a universal path, cultural values shape specific moral expressions. Positive Psychotherapy would suggest culturally sensitive interventions that build on local values and norms, helping children appreciate the moral underpinnings of their culture as a foundation for personal growth (Peseschkian, 1987).

Methodology

2.1. The Research Problem

In many non-industrial societies, individuals seldom reach stage five of moral development. However, in technologically advanced cultures, a significant number of individuals are capable of achieving this stage.

a) How have pre-school children developed their understanding of morality based on these theories?

b) The research problem in this study is not about identifying those with the "worst" development but rather about understanding the rationale behind selecting the sample.

2.2. Research Hypothesis

The main research hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: The population with preschool children will be described as having the same moral development levels.

Hypothesis 2: According to gender, there is a difference regarding the degree of altruism, where girls are more altruistic than boys.

2.3. Limitations of the Research

The first limitation that accompanies the sample of this research can be the small representative sample. A sample with more respondents is needed to achieve as many reliable results as possible.

Only participants from Kosovo are insufficient for generalization; only a model for the country can be used.

What is missing from the study is a correct balancing and inclusion of the respondents for demographic variables, which, as individual elements, can influence the final result.

2.4. Research Design

The quantitative research aims to collect a sample of preschool children to measure their development of moral behavior through the prism of moral reasoning during the stages of children included in the educational system of preschool institutions in Kosovo.

This study's participants are parents of preschool children aged between 3 and 6. The selection process employed a random sampling technique to ensure that the sample was representative of the target population. All selected parents were fully informed about the purpose and nature of the research and willingly agreed to participate voluntarily. To uphold ethical standards, participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous,

ensuring their privacy and confidentiality throughout the study.

The instrument for this study is called the Early Development Instrument: A Population-based Measure for Communities (EDI for short). Developing its items involved consultations with educators in collaboration with the Early Years Action Group and the Parenting and Literacy Centres. In 2002, the EDI core items were revised by modifying answer options to several items. The instrument contains five sections: physical health and well-being, social competencies, emotional maturity, language, cognitive development, and communicational skills and general knowledge. However, questions were chosen from two sections: social competencies and emotional maturity. The reason is that questions are related to the descriptions of moral development stages. In total, there are 103 items, but for this study, 57 questions were selected from two sections (EDI, Offord Centre, 2002).

Results

The ‘Early Development Instrument’ is used in this study to measure the presented hypotheses.

The results of this study are presented in the following tables:

Table 1
Gender distributions of participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Boy	49	49.0	49.0
Girl	51	51.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Table 2
Age distribution of participants

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
3 years	18	18.0	18.0
4 years	32	32.0	50.0
5 years	29	29.0	79.0
6 years	21	21.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Table 3
One simple test of moral development

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation

Moral Dev.	100	.63	.17
------------	-----	-----	-----

Table 4
A simple test for gender analysis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Boys	49	.53	.13
Girls	51	.60	.15

According to the results, the average moral development of pupils in preschool institutions is M=0.63, DS=.17. The study sample consists of 100 pupils, with 49% female and 51% male participants. Regarding the age distribution, 18% of participants are 3 years old, 32% are 4 years old, 29% are 5 years old, and 21% are 6 years old. Based on response patterns to the questionnaire, 2% of respondents selected 'never,' 17% chose 'sometimes,' 32% indicated 'often,' and 49% selected 'always' for the behavior-related questions, representing the overall sample response distribution.

The last table let is related to the second hypothesis; it compares boys and girls in terms of a specific measure, with boys (N = 49) having a mean score of 0.53 (SD = 0.13) and girls (N = 51) having a mean score of 0.60 (SD = 0.15). The results indicate that, on average, girls scored higher than boys by 0.07 points. The standard deviation for both groups is relatively small, suggesting that individual scores were close to the group averages, with slightly more variability among girls (SD = 0.15) than boys (SD = 0.13). These findings highlight a small but notable difference in the measured variable between boys and girls.

Conclusions

The results indicate that the development of moral reasoning, as outlined by Kohlberg, progresses through the stages in a fixed order without regression to previous stages. This finding supports the first hypothesis, which posits that ‘even within our society, the sequential order of stages remains consistent, with no deviations from the established progression.’

The first hypothesis can be related to the cultural context of Positive Psychotherapy, which appreciates cultural context as integral to growth, making the consistency in moral

reasoning stages across cultures a notable insight. This implies that while moral reasoning follows a universal path, cultural values shape specific moral expressions. Positive Psychotherapy values cultural context, acknowledging that positive traits may be universally beneficial but culturally expressed differently, and cultural values and norms help children appreciate the moral underpinnings of their culture as a foundation for personal growth (Peseschkian, 1987). Cross-cultural research supports that moral development follows similar stages across diverse contexts (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2005), aligning with Positive Psychotherapy's principle of culturally adaptable positive intervention strategies.

Related to the results of the second hypothesis, where girls show higher altruistic behaviors than boys, some studies indicate that girls exhibit higher levels of altruism than boys. For instance, a study by Skarin and Moely (1976) found that girls generally obtained higher altruism scores than boys, although 7-9-year-old girls were relatively low in altruism.

Additionally, a comparative study of altruism among boys and girls in joint and nuclear families found that girls scored significantly higher on altruism scales than boys, indicating that girls are more altruistic than boys (Sanadhya, Sharma & Sushil, 2010).

Pro-social modeling by parents plays a critical role in fostering altruistic behavior in children. By providing a positive example, reinforcing pro-social actions, and nurturing empathy and moral reasoning, parents help children internalize the values and behaviors that underpin altruism. This connection underscores the importance of cultivating an environment where pro-social behavior is modeled, supported, and celebrated within the family (Grusec & Davidov, 2007). Children acquire much of their prosocial behavior through observational learning, particularly by emulating the actions of those around them. This finding underscores the role of parental modeling in moral development, as children internalize and replicate behaviors that align with the values exhibited by these influential figures. On the other side, social learning theory supports the importance of role models in moral development (Bandura, 1977), a principle also embraced by Positive Psychotherapy (Peseschkian, 1987; Peseschkian, 2016). Through observational learning, children adopt behaviors exhibited by their role models,

especially when these behaviors align with a framework of positive reinforcement and empathy (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1. Recommendations

Firstly, increasing the sample size is recommended to enhance the generalizability and external validity of the findings.

Attention should also be given to the emotional and psychological well-being of preschool educators and parents who provide information about their children. Advanced research into these factors can help acknowledge the demanding roles of educators in these institutions and the multiple responsibilities of parents, who may face challenges in dedicating focused attention to their participation in such studies.

Finally, future data collection is recommended to involve responses from parents and educators who interact directly with the children. This approach would allow for comparing perspectives, enabling more comprehensive and reliable conclusions.

References

- [1]. **BANDURA, A.** (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- [2]. **BLACKBURN, S.** (2001). *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- [3]. **BRONFENBRENNER, U.** (1994). Ecological models of human development. In *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, Vol. 3, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Elsevier. Reprinted in: Gauvain, M. & Cole, M. (Eds.), *Readings on the development of children*, 2nd Ed. (1993, pp. 37–43). NY: Freeman.
- [4]. **Early Development Instrument: Interpretation toolkit.** URL: <https://ediffordcentre.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/03/EDI-interpretation-toolkit.pdf> Accessed: 10.01.2025
- [5]. **GRUSEC, J. E., & DAVIDOV, M.** (2007). Socialization in the family: The roles of parents. In J. E. Grusec & P. D. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research* (pp. 284–308). New York: Guilford Press.
- [6]. **IVANOVA, V.** (2024). The possibilities of Positive Psychotherapy to help children with autism (ASD) and their families. *The Global Psychotherapist*, 4(2), 129–132. <http://doi.org/10.52982/ikj240>
- [7]. **KAZDIN, A. E.** (2005). *Parent Management Training: Treatment for Oppositional,*

- Aggressive, and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents*. Oxford University Press.
- [8]. **KOHLBERG, L.** (1984). *Essays on Moral Development, Volume II: The Psychology of Moral Development*. Harper & Row.
- [9]. **LAPSLEY, D. K., & NARVAEZ, D.** (2005). *Moral Development, Self, and Identity*. Psychology Press.
- [10]. **NAIDIONOVA, H., & UNINETS, I.** (2023). Parables as a Transcultural Tool for a Psychologist's Work with the Requests of Parents of Children with Abnormal Development. *The Global Psychotherapist*, 3(1), 93–97. <https://doi.org/10.52982/lkj186>
- [11]. **NUCCI, L.** (2001). *Education in the Moral Domain*. Cambridge University Press.
- [12]. **NUCCI, L.** (1997). Synthesis of research on moral development. *Education Leadership*, 44(5), 86–92.
- [13]. **PESECHKIAN, N.** (1987). *Positive Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice of a New Method*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- [14]. **PESECHKIAN, N.** (1999). *Positive Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice of a New Method*. Springer.
- [15]. **PESECHKIAN, N.** (2016). *Positive Family Psychotherapy: Positive Psychotherapy Manual for Therapists and Families*. Revised edition: International Academy for Positive and Transcultural Psychotherapy. Peseschkian Foundation, Wiesbaden, Germany.
- [16]. **PETERSON, C., & SELIGMAN, M. E. P.** (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford University Press.
- [17]. **REST, J. R., NARVAEZ, D., BEBEAU, M. J., & THOMA, S. J.** (1999). *Postconventional Moral Thinking: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach*. Psychology Press.
- [18]. **SANADHYA, R., SHARMA, D. K., & SUSHIL, C. S.** (2010). A comparative study of altruism among the boys and girls of joint and nuclear families. *Journal of Mental Health & Human Behavior*, 15(2), 88–90.
- [19]. **SKARIN, K., & MOELY, B. E.** (1976). Altruistic behavior: An analysis of age and sex differences. *Child Development*, 47(4), 1159–1165. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1128455>
- [20]. **VYGOTSKY, L. S.** (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
- [21]. **YILMAZ, O., BAHÇEKAPILI, H. G., & SEVI, B.** (2019). Theory of moral development. In Shackelford, T., & Weekes-Shackelford, V. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*. Springer.

