

Exploring pro-social moral reasoning of Sri Lankan school children using Eisenbergian dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

Prosocial moral reasoning is an area that is supported through past research as having gender, age, and cultural variations. However, so far it had not been measured in the Sri Lankan context. The present study explored the age and gender differences in prosocial moral reasoning of Sri Lankan children using Eisenbergian dilemmas. The participants of this study were 86 school children representing grades five, eight, and eleven, who answered four culturally adapted stories from Eisenberg's original study. A comparison was made between the findings of the present study and the original study of Eisenberg. Through the analysis it was found that there was a cultural difference in the development of prosocial reasoning since the majority of the sample was in level 3-approval seeking and stereotyped orientation. Similar to the original study, participants showed a gradual increase in their level of morality with age but in fewer numbers. All these differences highlight the need to develop a separate theoretical model for non-western cultural settings for prosocial behaviour.

Keywords: *Prosocial Behaviours, Moral Reasoning, Eisenberg, Dilemmas*

Every step of the way life throws us a curve ball of choices which would ultimately decide our past, present, and future. So, at its core life is simply a combination of choices – good or bad. People as individuals undertake this process of decision making from their childhood and it is expected that with time people mature in their outlook of making decisions. The maturing of one's conception of right and wrong is the morality development of that individual. The level of morality that one possesses has an effect in making our life decisions easy or hard. And the way one behaves when faced with a choice or crossroads is unique to him/herself and may be justified by their own reasons. For example, one may have an exam and a party on the same day. The choice he/ she makes will be backed by his/her own reasons such as the possibility of retaking the exam, all the friends coming to the party, the exam comprising of half the grade etc.

The Collins dictionary defines a dilemma as “a difficult situation in which you have to choose between two or more alternatives” (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2020). An example of a dilemma can be a friend knowing that the husband of her best friend is cheating on her

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friend and contemplating whether to tell your friend or not. She may not be sure on how to proceed and may have trouble deciding because the fate of her friend is at stake. Developmental psychologists and moral philosophers believe that the way a person responds to a dilemma showcases their level of morality. This premise has led to the conceptualization of many psychological theories of morality development by theorists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Eisenberg, Gillian etc. (Bee, 2010; Berk, 2013).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) presented a cognitive developmental theory of morality with three stages: Pre-moral, Heteronomous and autonomous. Lawrence Kohlberg developed on Piaget's theory and came up with his own three-level theory (Pre-conventional, Conventional and Post-Conventional) with the exception of each level being subdivided into two stages.

In the recent years, the theories of moral development widened its scope to include prosocial reasoning. Prosocial behaviour is identified by researchers as one of the characteristics of moralistic living. According to Eisenberg (1991, p. 36), prosocial behaviour is "voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another...there are different kinds of prosocial behaviours, for example, helping, sharing and comforting. However, a more important distinction among prosocial behaviours revolves around the actor's motive for his or her behaviour. Prosocial behaviours can be motivated by a variety of factors including egoistic concerns (the desire for reciprocity, a concrete reward, or social approval), practical concerns (e.g., the desire to prevent damage to an object), other-oriented concern (e.g., sympathy) or moral values (e.g., the desire to uphold internalized moral values)".

According to Eisenberg, prosocial moral reasoning is also developed in stages. Hedonistic orientation is where the individual is concerned with self-oriented consequences rather than moral considerations. Reasons for this form of reasoning include direct gain to the self, reciprocity, and concerns for others because one needs and likes the other due to ties of affection. Needs-oriented orientation is where the individual expresses concern for the physical, material and psychological needs of others even though the needs of the other person conflict with those of the individual. Approval orientation / stereotyped orientation is where stereotyped images of good and bad persons and behaviours and considerations of others' approval and acceptance are used in justifying prosocial or not so prosocial behaviours. Self-reflective empathic orientation is where the individual's judgments include evidence of self-reflective, sympathetic responding or role taking, concern with the other's humanness and guilt or positive emotion related to the consequences of one's actions. Strongly internalized stage is when justifications for helping or not are based on internalised values, norms, responsibilities, the desire to maintain individual and societal contractual obligations or improve the condition of society and the belief in the dignity, right, and equality of all individuals (Eisenberg, 2005). These levels were studied by Eisenberg using vignettes of pro-social dilemmas where in each dilemma the needs or wants of the protagonist are in direct conflict with those of another individual or group (Eisenberg et al., 1995, 1999, 2002; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1991). This study focuses on Eisenberg's framework of prosocial morality rather than that of Kohlberg or Piaget, due to the fact that it makes no claims about inalterability and universality like the latter but emphasizes that personal characteristics, emotion, environmental factors, socialization influences and situational factors do have an impact on moral development.

Unlike in the Asian context, many research have been conducted in the Western discourse on the development of morality and have attempted to trace factors contributing either

negatively or positively to this development. In a naturalistic study by Chadha & Misra (2006, p. 167) that explored the nature and development of patterns of prosocial reasoning and behaviour of 167 Indian children between 5 and 14 years of age, from low and high socioeconomic strata, it was found out that “orientation to physical needs of others and to honouring request made, increased with age. Some gender and SES differences in prosocial reasoning were noted. Prosocial behaviour, however, was not significantly influenced by age, SES, or gender. Apart from a low negative correlation with authority/punishment orientation, prosocial responding was found to be unrelated to the use of any reasoning category”. In a study done by the same researchers in 2004 they identified concern for physical needs of others, hedonistic considerations, orientation to affectional relationship, stereotypes of a good/bad person or behaviour, and internalised norms and values orientation as the main prosocial patterns seen in the sample of 167 Indian children from low and high SES. Hedonistic reasoning tended to decrease with age giving way to orientation towards others and internalization of norms. Although the results didn't significantly express any gender differences, it identified some SES differences (Chadha & Misra, 2004). The study which was carried out by using stories of moral dilemmas found results very similar to that which have been realized through the many studies of Eisenberg specifically on hedonistic reasoning decreasing with age. But the fact that they discovered no apparent gender difference stands out from the rest due to the fact that many western studies argue the opposite. As the conclusion of these studies, the researchers highlight the role played by the respective environments in shaping one's prosocial reasoning.

The unique role played by culture is highlighted in the study of Guzman et al (2012, p. 239) where the “results indicate patterns of shared and unique beliefs about prosocial behaviours in ways that reflect the sociocultural context and acculturative experiences of the respondents. Findings suggest that beliefs about prosocial behaviours and parenting are culturally structured and dynamic—changing to reflect the experiences and developmental landscape of parents and children.” The sample of the study included 47 mothers of young adolescents who participated in one of the seven focus groups, three of which were conducted in Spanish with first-generation Mexican-American immigrants, two were conducted in English among the second generation (US-born) Mexican Americans and two were conducted with European Americans.

Kumar & Abdullahi (2016) looked into the gender differences in prosocial behaviour using 60 (30 males and 30 females) students from Lovely Professional University, Punjab using the Prosocial Personality Battery (PSB). The results showed female participants to be of high in perspective taking dimension and other oriented moral reasoning dimension of prosocial personality inventory and no significant gender differences in the rest of the dimensions. So, although not significant this study points to a gender difference in pro-social morality at least in certain dimensions.

A meta-analysis that looked quantitatively into the gender differences in moral orientation showed small gender differences with females favouring care orientation and males favouring justice orientation. The researcher mentions that the results do not significantly suggest a gender difference where females are predominantly care oriented and males predominantly justice oriented (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). But in the 1996 cross-national study on the relations among prosocial moral reasoning, gender role orientations and prosocial behaviours females were associated with more self-reflective, internalized concerns. The sample included 265 Brazilian children and adolescents and 67 US adolescents. The US adolescents had scored higher on internalized moral reasoning than their Brazilian

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counterparts, suggesting a cultural difference in their prosocial development (Carlo et al., 1996). In another study of Brazilian adolescents in 2003, the researchers examined 149 participants and found that “a feminine orientation predicted sympathy and perspective taking, perspective taking predicted prosocial moral reasoning and sympathy, and sympathy had both direct and indirect paths (through moral judgment) to prosocial behaviour” (Eisenberg et al., 2001, p. 518) .

In an introductory article by Eisenberg and colleagues on early adolescence and prosocial behaviour, they highlighted that there was a general increase in prosocial behaviour during the adolescence when compared to other ages and that adolescence showed a gender difference in pro-social morality favouring the females (Eisenberg et al., 2007). In a 2005 study on the age changes in prosocial responding and moral reasoning in adolescence and early adulthood, results implicated that the dimensions of prosocial morality which were more socio-cognitively based showed increases with age, whereas the others did not show a similar trend (Eisenberg et al., 2005).

A study looking into a longitudinal follow up on the prosocial moral judgement of 34 preschool children 18 months later found out that they were significantly more needs-oriented and approval oriented and less hedonistic oriented than earlier results indicated (Eisenberg et al., 1983). In a similar study by Eisenberg et al. that looked into prosocial development in middle childhood over a 7 year period confirmed that other than hedonistic and needs oriented reasoning which decreased with age, other forms of reasoning progressed in a linear pattern with age and most interestingly, reasoning associated with empathy or role taking showed a similar increase with age for females and not males (Eisenberg et al., 1991). When extending the study to adolescence the same researchers found that hedonistic reasoning declined in use until adolescence and then re-emerged mainly for boys. Needs-oriented reasoning, reciprocity reasoning, and approval and stereotypic reasoning increased until early adolescence and then declined. Several types of high-level reasoning emerged in adolescence and the females of the study scored higher than the boys.

In a 2001 study by Shimizu, Japanese adolescents almost always integrated care and justice reasoning. Additionally, both males and females stressed caring, which they regarded as a communal responsibility (Shimizu, 2001). Most of the research in child and developmental psychology provide evidence for cross cultural variations in prosocial behaviours, where children who spend more time with family and family activities tend to score higher on altruism (Pope Edwards & Whiting, 1980; Whiting et al., 1992; Whiting & Pope Edwards, 1973). Thus, communal upbringing is shown to increase prosocial reasoning of children.

Contradictory findings from the existing literature on individual and cultural differences for prosocial morality may point to a need for constructing a newer unique theoretical framework best suited to the needs of a specific culture. Thus, the aim of the current study was to explore the prosocial moral reasoning of Sri Lankan children using Eisenbergian dilemmas and to look at the possibility of using the western frameworks for the study of morality in the local context.

The significance of this study was that it looked at the conceptualization of prosocial morality regarding the local Sri Lankan context and tried to critically analyse the application and usage of western theories in a non-western setting. The prominent feature of this study

was that no similar research has been conducted in the Sri Lankan setting prior to this. Therefore, this is the first step in conceptualizing a moralistic framework for Sri Lanka.

The study ranged from gaining an understanding of the level of prosocial reasoning of the Sri Lankan children to comparing the findings with that of the original study in order to determine the validity of using a western framework to assess the locals. The study did not aim at providing an alternative theoretical approach for the local setting but was only deciding whether such a framework is indeed necessary.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample consisted of 86 school students from Pilimathalawa Primary school and Pilimathalawa Central College, with 32 students from grade 5 (12 males and 20 females with a mean age of 9.78) , 25 students from grade 8 (14 males and 11 females with a mean age of 12.88) and 29 students from grade 11 (17 males and 12 females with a mean age of 15.79). Around 22% of the sample were from urban residential areas, with the majority of 78% representing rural residential areas.

Measures

In order to explore pro-social moral reasoning of Sri Lankan children using Eisenbergian dilemmas, Nancy Eisenberg, the original researcher was contacted and the stories that she used in her research as the assessment tool were occupied. It consisted of 4 stories that described different scenarios that ultimately required the reader to decide whether the protagonist should help the character in need of help or not. Additionally, the reader was asked to give reasons for his/her decision. To gain the final tool for the study, these stories were culturally adapted as described below.

The 4 stories of Eisenberg for assessing pro-social moral reasoning, first needed to be culturally adapted to the Sri Lankan context as a tool. The standard method prescribed by the World Health Organization for the translation and adaptation of instruments was used to culturally adapt the tool. According to the WHO in order to be culturally adapted an instrument has to be forward translated, expert reviewed and back translated, pretested to arrive at the final version (“WHO | Process of Translation and Adaptation of Instruments,” 2010)

In the first step of forward translation, a single translator should translate the tool into the needed language. The translator should possess knowledge about the field, be knowledgeable about the English-speaking culture but his/her mother tongue should be the primary language of that culture. The primary researcher who met all these requirements forward translated the 4 stories into Sinhala. For the expert panel submission, the translated stories were presented to the secondary researcher, who did further alterations to it. In back translation, the forward translated stories should be presented to an independent translator who is fluent in English and has no knowledge about the original tool to translate the forward translation back to English. For this, the services of a final year undergraduate specializing in English at the University of Peradeniya were recruited. Her translation was then compared with the original tool and consequently, certain alterations to the Sinhala version was done. Finally, the measure was pilot tested among a few male and female undergraduates of the university to further cut off any phrases that might be confusing for the children or culturally inappropriate.

Procedure

After obtaining permission from the schools to do the research, first, the researcher met with the students and handed them the consent forms that they should bring back the next day, signed by their parents. The collection of data was done on three separate days with each grade taking a separate day. Each session consisted of the following steps: gathering of the consent forms signed by the parents, handing the personal data sheets to students for completion. The personal data sheet comprised of the demographics of the child such as his/her age, hometown, and family information etc. Finally, the students were briefed on what was expected of them in the questionnaire. It was important to emphasize to the students that in the stories they only had the options of either helping the protagonist or not and that there was no middle path option. At this point, the researcher was ready to answer any questions that they encountered while reading the stories. The same procedure was conducted for all three grades in order to collect the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In analyzing the data, first the responses of the three different samples were coded into relevant stages. This was done using the original scoring manual of Nancy Eisenberg. The responses of the stories consisted of three variations such as ‘helping, not helping and rejected (responses that had chosen both the alternatives of helping the protagonist and completing one’s own commitment. One such sample response for the first story is as follows, “I will run fast and tell her parents and then go to the party”) and were coded as such. Secondly, the reasons that the participants provided for either helping or not helping the story’s protagonist were coded into the categories established in Eisenberg’s theoretical model on prosocial morality. Example responses of these categories included, hedonistic reasoning - “she might get a reward” / “they might return the favour someday”, needs-oriented reasoning - “he’s hurt” / “they need food”, stereotyped / approval oriented reasoning - “it’s the kind thing to do” / “others would think she did the right thing”, empathy oriented reasoning - “he’d feel sorry for them” / “I’m trying to put myself in her shoes”, strongly internalized stage- “all citizens of a society have a responsibility to help others” / “he’d feel guilty if he didn’t live up to his own values”.

Scores were then calculated for the five categories using a scale of 1-5 where 1=no use of reasoning, 2=use in 1 story, 3=use in 2 stories, 4=use in 3 stories, 5=use in 4 stories. A composite index for the sample was obtained for the five categories to get a clear understanding on where each participant stood on the different levels. The composite index was analyzed to obtain the dominant category and lowest category for each individual. Finally, chi-square analysis was run to look at the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

$$Composite\ index = \frac{x}{y}$$

x = that reasoning type’s total for the individual

y = total scores for all categories of reasoning

Table 1 Frequency of responses

		Grade 5		Grade 8		Grade 11	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Story 1	Helping	12	18	14	11	14	11
	Not Helping	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Rejected	0	2	0	0	2	1
Story 2	Helping	12	17	9	5	10	11

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		Grade 5		Grade 8		Grade 11	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Story 1	Not Helping	0	0	1	1	1	0
	Rejected	0	3	4	5	6	1
	Helping	11	18	8	7	13	11
	Not Helping	0	1	4	3	3	1
Story 3	Rejected	1	1	2	1	1	0
	Helping	11	17	12	10	15	10
Story 4	Not Helping	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Rejected	1	3	2	1	2	1

Notes. *N*=86

As shown in table 1 almost all the participants irrespective of their gender and age has taken pro helping approach except in story 3 where in comparison to the other stories the number of not helping behaviours has increased. The responses where an exact answer was not given were categorized as rejected. In the rejected responses participants usually remarked that they would somehow help the protagonist of the story and also help him/herself or that they would ask for help from an adult.

Table 2 Frequency of the use of categories

		Grade 5		Grade 8		Grade 11	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Category 1 Hedonistic	No use	7	16	2	7	12	9
	Use in 1 story	4	3	8	3	5	0
	Use in 2 stories	0	1	4	1	0	3
	Use in 3 stories	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Use in 4 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0
Category 2 Needs Oriented	No use	11	15	10	6	8	7
	Use in 1 story	1	3	2	3	8	5
	Use in 2 stories	0	0	2	2	0	0
	Use in 3 stories	0	2	0	0	1	0
	Use in 4 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0
Category 3 Stereotyped/Approval Orientation	No use	2	6	5	3	11	6
	Use in 1 story	2	2	6	6	4	4
	Use in 2 stories	3	2	3	1	2	2
	Use in 3 stories	5	10	0	1	0	0
	Use in 4 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0
Category 4 Empathic Orientation	No use	10	17	10	8	12	5
	Use in 1 story	1	2	4	2	5	5
	Use in 2 stories	1	1	0	1	0	2
	Use in 3 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Use in 4 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0
Category 5 Internalized Orientation	No use	12	19	10	5	13	8
	Use in 1 story	0	0	4	5	3	2
	Use in 2 stories	0	1	0	0	1	0
	Use in 3 stories	0	0	0	1	0	2
	Use in 4 stories	0	0	0	0	0	0

Notes. *N* = 86

Table 2 summarizes the frequency of the use of categories of reasoning in the four stories by the participants according to their age and gender. According to table 2 except for the males

of grade 11, all the other groups were dominated by category 3- stereotyped/ approval-oriented reasoning. As the data suggests a single type of reasoning had not been used consistently in all the four stories by any participant. Even the use of a single type of reasoning for three stories was not common.

Table 3 Chi-square results of story categories

	χ^2	<i>d</i>
<i>Story 1</i>		
Age	12.78	0.41
Gender	0.87	0.11
<i>Story 2</i>		
Age	25.54**	0.63
Gender	5.38	0.29
<i>Story 3</i>		
Age	25.76**	0.60
Gender	7.73	0.33
<i>Story 4</i>		
Age	5.77	0.48
Gender	2.77	0.33

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

The chi-square analysis between the responses of the stories with that of the participants' age and gender as shown in table 3 were statistically insignificant with $p > 0.05$ except for story 2 ($\chi^2 = 25.54, p = 0.01, d = 0.63$) and story 3 ($\chi^2 = 25.76, p = 0.01, d = 0.60$) with that of age.

Table 4 Comparison between the original study and the present study

		Eisenberg's Model	Present Study
Dominant Category	Grade 5	Category 2 Needs-Oriented Orientation	Category 3 Approval/Stereotyped Orientation
	Grade 8	Category 3 Approval/Stereotyped Orientation	Category 3 Approval/Stereotyped Orientation
	Grade 11	Category 4 Empathic Orientation	Category 3 Approval/Stereotyped Orientation

Table 4 provides a comparative overview of the Eisenbergian model of prosocial development (based on her original study) and the findings of the present study. According to Eisenberg, the three age groups should fall under the categories of needs-oriented, stereotyped and empathy, respectively. In the present study, all three age groups were dominated with category 3 reasoning- approval/ stereotyped orientation.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on analysing the prosocial moral reasoning of Sri Lankan children using Eisenbergian dilemmas and the researcher aimed to discuss the relevance of the western frameworks in evaluating the morality in the local setting.

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Humans are generally characterized by prosocial behaviours such as but not limited to helping others, being kind to others, looking after others (Aydinli et al., 2013; Dovidio, 1984; Halevy et al., 2015; McClintock & Allison, 1989; Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010). When looking at the helping behaviours of people, we can see that not all have the willingness to help (Aderman & Berkowitz, 1983; Berkowitz, 1973) and this willingness is further reduced if the action of helping negatively impacts one's own life.

Sri Lanka is no stranger to helping others in need. The four major religions practiced in Sri Lanka- Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam have incorporated the act of helping others as a value in their respective religious belief systems. For example, the 'dana paramita' of Buddhism. As a culture, Sri Lanka is still an interdependent/ collectivistic nation (Schwartz, 1990) when compared to the independent nations of the West. Starting at the smallest social unit- family, Sri Lankans are much dependent on the others around them. Their opinions are valued, and their approval is sought. Any deviation from the social norm is considered a huge mistake and is criticised by the society (*Country Comparison - Hofstede Insights*, n.d.; Seo et al., 2008). In this culture people quite often engage in behaviours that they personally would not like but they do so to please those around them.

According to table 1 helping behaviour was chosen by the majority of the sample across all stories except for the third story where helping would have resulted in losing a cash prize. Many of the participants chose the 'not helping' option and gave the lose of the cash prize as the reason for the decision. As it was mentioned in the beginning people's tendency to help is often negatively impacted by the fear of losing material things (Tang et al., 2008). This could be due to the fact that winning a cash prize is a tangible achievement when compared to feeling good. Thus, it is probable that many would think twice about helping the other in such a situation. One of the main objectives of the present study had been to determine the possible existence of a relationship between the level of reasoning with that of age and gender. To achieve this objective chi-square analyses were run on the data collected. There was not a significant relationship between the responses of the four stories with that of age and gender, except for stories 2 and 3 with age (Chadha & Misra, 2004, 2006; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). This contradicts the findings of the original study of Nancy Eisenberg and similar studies (Eisenberg et al., 1987, 2005; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1991; Kumar & Abdullahi, 2016).

The second story relates the encounter with a bully and the difference that was seen between the age groups in story two can be due to the fact that the youngsters fear to help more than the older age groups. This was proven in the study by Chadha & Misra where they observed that orientation to physical needs of others increased with age (2006). Also, in story three, the relative importance posed by the cash prize to the different age groups may vary. This may be the reason behind the significant relationship observed between story 3 and age. As given in table 2 similar to the original study (Eisenberg et al., 1987), a single category of reasoning was not consistently used by individuals in all 4 stories. The categories changed from story to story for all individuals. Even though the researcher was able to determine a dominant category for each of the participants, none of the participants had used that particular type of reasoning in all the four stories. For example, participant X wanted to help the girl in story 1 because she was injured and in need of medicine – needs oriented reasoning and wanted to help the farmers because they might return the favour one day – hedonistic reasoning. This further proved the modern western criticisms of morality that argue against the idea of every individual having a single specific level of reasoning across all situations. Theorists like Piaget and Kohlberg believed that in a given time of life every

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individual is in a definite level of moralistic development. But Eisenberg (2005) claimed that situational variables have a profound impact on determining one's level of morality in a given situation. Therefore, the level of reasoning that person A displays in situation 1 can significantly change from the level of reasoning displayed by the same person in situation 2.

Furthermore, the lack of significant results for certain stories could be highlighting a measurement error, with the participants from a non-western culture not being able to relate to the stories presented in them. In the study by Guzman et al (2012) the results indicated that beliefs about prosocial behaviours are culturally structured, thus this may be the reason behind the sample's inability to relate to certain stories. Thus, the scenarios used in the western setting may not be effective to evoke the helping behaviour of the Sri Lankans as they might not relate to the scenarios in the same way (for example a birthday party, although is a growing trend, only selected families in Sri Lanka engage in it still and assisting villagers is something that adults involve in rather than children). It might be due to this culturally in-adaptivity issue of the stories that the participants only significantly correlated with the other two stories.

The sample, irrespective of gender and age differences was dominated by category 3 reasoning. According to Eisenberg (1986) the three age groups should be dominated by needs oriented, approval oriented and empathy-oriented type of reasoning. But in the current study, all age groups were dominated displaying approval oriented// stereotyped orientation. This may be due to cultural differences as shown in the study by Shimizu (2001). Similar to the current study, in the study by Chadha & Misra (2004) they too identified stereotypes of a good/bad person or behaviour as one of the main prosocial patterns seen in that particular sample of Indian children.

Sri Lankan culture is such that people tend to value what others think of them and so they feel obligated to act in ways that are considered right by the society. In the study by Shimizu (2001) helping others was mentioned as a normal thing by the participants. Similarly, in the present study, the majority of responses of the participants for the stories were phrased along the lines of "It is the right thing to do", "mother told me to always help others", "we would gain merits if we help others". These responses further prove the interdependent, approval seeking and religious upbringing of the Sri Lankans that shapes their morality development (Carlo et al., 1996). If a theoretical framework is to be established in Sri Lanka then the impact of these social variables should be taken into account.

One of the main limitations of this study was the inadequacy of the sample size which makes it impossible to generalize the findings to the larger population. Another limitation was the researcher's choice of the paper pencil measure as opposed to an interview to gather data from the participants. If interviews were conducted instead of a written assessment, then the clarity of the responses could have been improved further. Also, the researcher had disregarded the religious, ethnicity, family- the impact of similar social institutions that would shape one's morality, especially in the Sri Lankan setting. If the study were to be more analytical and holistic, it would have had to investigate the impact of the above-mentioned variables as well.

Future studies should focus on the cultural implications of pro-social morality of Sri Lankan children. Sri Lankan children's tendency for approval seeking and stereotypical reasoning should also be explored.

CONCLUSION

Although there are differences in the levels of reasoning with age and gender, they are not significant enough to indicate clear distinctions between the variables. The inability to replicate the original study implies the significance of cultural variables in shaping the prosocial moral reasoning of children in Sri Lanka.

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Conflict of Interest

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