

Gender Differences in Moral Development: Kohlberg-Gilligan Debate

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ABSTRACT

Morality is an important cornerstone for smooth functioning societies. It has been a burning issue for intellectuals and academics since times immemorial. Kohlberg-Gilligan debate is a recent addition to this long-standing historical issue. The present study attempts to understand gender differences in moral development using Kohlberg's theoretical framework. Purposive and convenience sampling was used to select 84 college students (42 males, 42 females; 18-24 years). Content analysis was used to assess the responses given by the participants on five hypothetical moral dilemmas. The data was analysed using frequency, percentage, and chi-square test. Although there were no significant gender differences on each dilemma, overall responses given by the total sample indicated that females had a higher level of moral development compared to males. 39% of the total sample fell in the post-conventional level. The nature of the dilemma influenced the participant's placement on the stage. The findings have consequences for Indian young adults' moral reasoning as well as the steady shift in male and female societal roles.

Keywords: Moral Development, Kohlberg's Theory, Moral Dilemmas, Gender Differences

The concept of morality has been extensively studied throughout history. It has not only been present across cultures, with varying similarities and differences, but has been accepted and appreciated through the centuries. It has been debated by the philosophers whether emotions can be moral and whether they can lead to higher level moral judgement and behaviour (Pizarro, 2000). Emotions help people distinguish moral features in specific contexts, to motivate moral behaviour, and to undercut immoral behaviour. It can also play a communicative role by revealing our moral values and concern to others and ourselves (Ben-Ze'ev, 1997).

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) developed a comprehensive theory of stages of moral development. The stages were grouped into three progressively higher levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. His theory was based on a longitudinal study on 10-16 years old American males using ten hypothetical dilemmas to study moral

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development. He conducted interviews to understand the decisions and the reasoning behind it. Kohlberg regarded his moral stages as universal. The stages represent a sequential progress in moral development. He regarded each stage as a qualitatively distinct structure of moral thought that a person applies across a wide range of situations (Colby, Abrahami, & Kohlberg, 1987). Kohlberg described three levels of moral development, each of which was further divided into two stages (Berk, 2013)

Level 1: Pre-conventional

Stage 1: Punishment and obedience orientation

Stage 2: The instrumental purpose orientation

Level 2: Conventional

Stage 3: The “good boy-good girl” orientation, or the morality of interpersonal cooperation.

Stage 4: The social-order-maintaining orientation

Level 3: Post-conventional

Stage 5: Social contract orientation.

Stage 6: The universal ethical principle orientation

Stage 6 is the highest level of moral development in Kohlberg’s theory (1958). In this stage, right action is based on one’s individual choice as per one’s conscience, irrespective of law and social norms. Moreover, it includes abstract notions of equal consideration and dignity for all human beings (Berk, 2013). According to Srivastava et al. (2013), “Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are good (or right) and those that are bad (or wrong)”.

Carol Gilligan (1982) made an important point about gender disparities in moral growth in her critique of Kohlberg's theory, which is applicable to the current research. Kohlberg's stages were not universal, which was the crux of her criticism. He undervalued female moral growth largely because he only researched males and concentrated on the justice viewpoint, while the care perspective is more prevalent in females. Concern for others, she claims, is a separate but equally legitimate ground for moral judgement than focusing on impersonal rights. The focus of the controversy over gender disparities in moral growth has primarily been on these two theories (Woods, 1996).

Despite Gilligan's claims, subsequent research disagrees with her assertion that Kohlberg's strategy undervalues women's moral maturity (Turiel, 2005; Walker, 2005). Many studies indicate that females are at par with, if not higher than males in processing hypothetical moral dilemmas and everyday moral issues. Both genders have ideas and attitudes about justice and caring, and Kohlberg's approach does not penalize females who raise interpersonal problems (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Walker, 2005). Rather, multiple studies indicate that females advance faster from Stage 2 to Stage 3 reasoning than boys (Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007). Kohlberg included both justice and compassion as moral ideals, though he emphasized justice over compassion as the supreme moral ideal.

In a comprehensive literature review of several empirical studies, Zulfiqar (2021) revealed that some researchers (Gibbs, Arnold, & Burkhart, 1984; Walker & Hennig, 1999; Caravita, Gini, & Pozzoli, 2012) denied gender differences in moral development. On the other hand, some researchers found boys to be at higher moral judgment than girls (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005; Mullins & Tisak, 2006)

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or girls at higher moral development than boys (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Mohr, Sprinthall, & Gerler, 1987; Singh, 2020; Bruess & Pearson, 2002; Cordellieri, et al., 2020).

Another set of studies report that both men and women employed justice versus care moral orientations, but women were more likely to use caring concerns (Kalsoom, Behlol, Kayani, & Kaini, 2012; Rothbart, Hanley, & Albert, 1986). Using a sample from 67 countries (Study 1; $n = 336\ 691$) and 19 countries (Study 2; $n = 11\ 969$), Atari, Lai, and Dehgani (2020) reported sex disparities in moral judgments. In moral judgments, women consistently displayed greater regard for care, fairness, and purity than men did. Loyalty and authority, on the other hand, showed no gender differences and were highly variable across cultures. In both individualist and gender-equal societies, gender disparities in moral judgments were greater.

Throughout the span of one's life, virtually all behaviours engaged in, or decisions taken are based upon a certain moral framework which governs a sense of 'good/bad' 'right/wrong', and 'acceptable/ not acceptable'. Hence, it becomes important to study and understand which stage, or what cognitive framework an individual has with respect to morality, in order to make sense of opinions formed/decisions taken during situations entailing an ethical dilemma. Such information can also predict future courses of action that a person might take, as well as what kind of moral ideas they are likely to agree with or promote.

Literature review indicates that universality of Kohlberg's stages is a matter of debate. Studies have also indicated that gender differences in morality may not be uniform. Another pertinent question is whether Kohlberg (1958) underestimated female morality as claimed by Gilligan (1982). Hence, the present research attempts to study morality from a gendered perspective. The objective of the study was to investigate gender related differences in morality. It was hypothesized that the level of moral development in males will be different from that of females.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed-method and cross-sectional research design was used for the present study.

Sample

Purposive and convenience sampling was used to select 84 college students (42 males, 42 females) proficient in English, residing in Delhi NCR. The age range of the participants was 18 to 24 years ($M = 20.11$, $SD = 1.24$).

Instruments

Five hypothetical moral dilemmas were used for the present study, based on the concept of dilemmas given by Kohlberg. They were from five categories (euthanasia, robbery, saving six versus one life, car crash, and medical dilemma) and were adapted from Listverse Writers (2007) to make them culturally relevant and age appropriate for the sample, to obtain a broader view of the moral development.

Procedure

Structured interview was used for the purpose of data collection. The dilemmas were presented one at a time in a written format to the participants. They were also read aloud by the researcher simultaneously for better understanding. Two follow-up questions were asked:

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- What would you do?
- Why would you do so?

APA guidelines were followed for data collection.

Content analysis was used to assess the response given by the participants to each dilemma in order to determine the stage to which they belonged based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Reasoning determined assessment from stage 1 to 4, whereas both response and reasoning determined assessment in stage 5 and 6. Level 3 response represents the highest level of moral development. One well-known dilemma in Kohlberg's theory is about a man (Heinz) whose wife is dying and there is one very expensive drug for her treatment that he cannot afford. Level 3 response for this dilemma was that Heinz can steal the drug because there is nothing more important than human life. In the present study, similar moral dilemmas were used, and level 3 responses were scored based on self-chosen universally applicable ethical principles of conscience.

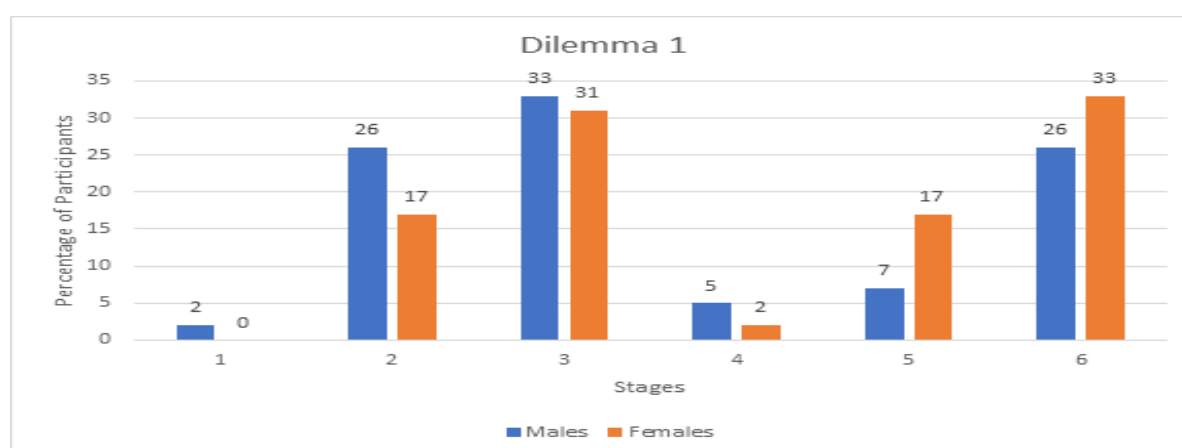
The nature of the dilemmas was varied and the stages in Kohlberg's theory are qualitatively different. Hence, the data was analysed in terms of frequency. It is important to note that the data was analysed from two vantage points. One was in terms of number of male (n = 42) versus female (n = 42) respondents. Second was in terms of the total number of responses given on all the five dilemmas (210 responses given by 42 males and 210 responses given by 42 females). Chi-square was used to analyse gender differences, if any.

Another aspect of data analysis was assessing the dominant style of the participants. A style was considered dominant if a participant was at the same level in three out of five dilemmas.

RESULTS

Dilemma 1: Table No. 1 Number of participants in each stage of moral development for dilemma 1

Level	Stage	Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	1	2	0	0
	2	11	26	7	17
II	3	14	33	13	31
	4	2	5	1	2
III	5	3	7	7	17
	6	11	26	14	33



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Figure 1 Comparison between males and females on various stages of moral development for dilemma 1

Dilemma 2: Table No. 2 Number of participants in each stage of moral development for dilemma 2

Level	Stage	Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	1	2	0	0
	2	0	0	1	2
II	3	4	10	1	2
	4	16	38	21	50
III	5	20	48	19	45
	6	1	2	0	0

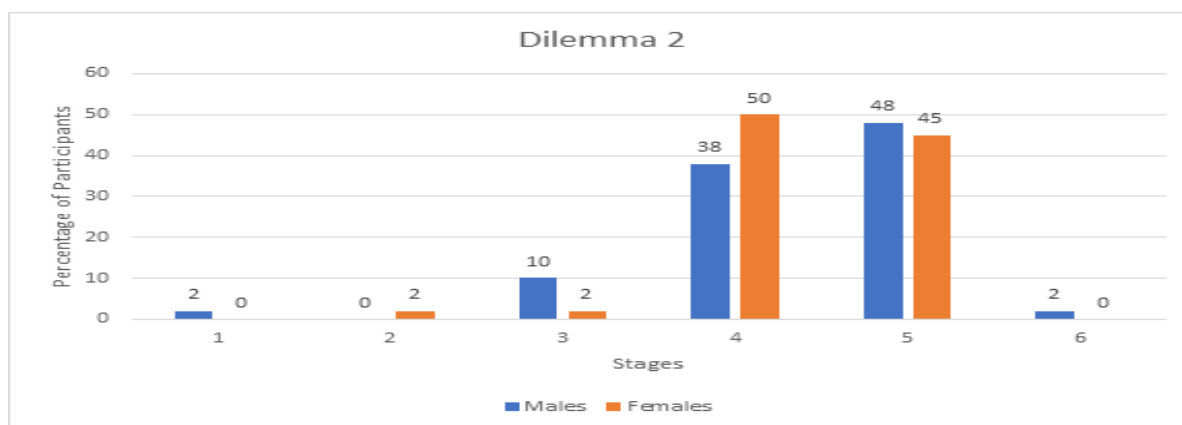
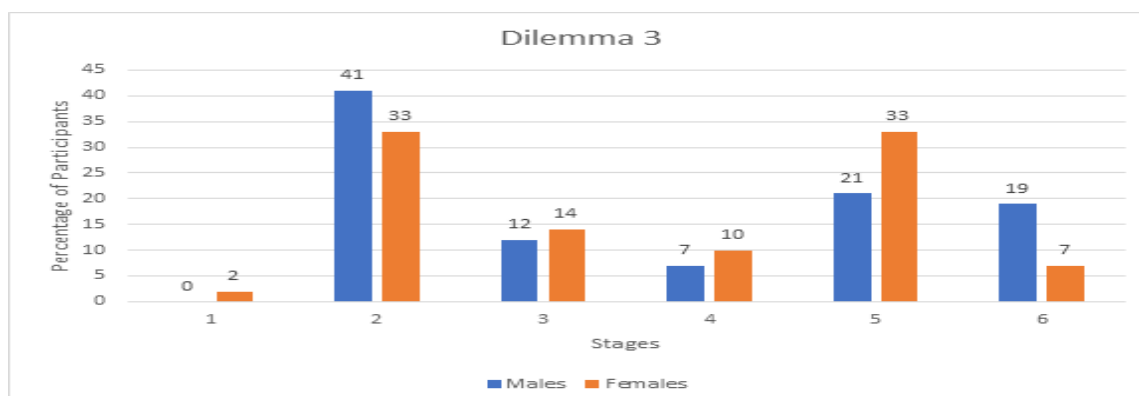


Figure 2 Comparison between males and females on various stages of moral development for dilemma 2

Dilemma 3: Table No. 3 Number of participants in each stage of moral development for dilemma 3

Level	Stage	Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	0	0	1	2
	2	17	41	14	33
II	3	5	12	6	14
	4	3	7	4	10
III	5	9	21	14	33
	6	8	19	3	7



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Figure 3 Comparison between males and females on various stages of moral development for dilemma 3

Dilemma 4: Table No. 4 Number of participants in each stage of moral development for dilemma 4

Level	Stage	Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	14	33	7	17
	2	3	7	4	10
II	3	2	5	3	7
	4	6	14	9	21
III	5	6	14	2	5
	6	11	26	17	40

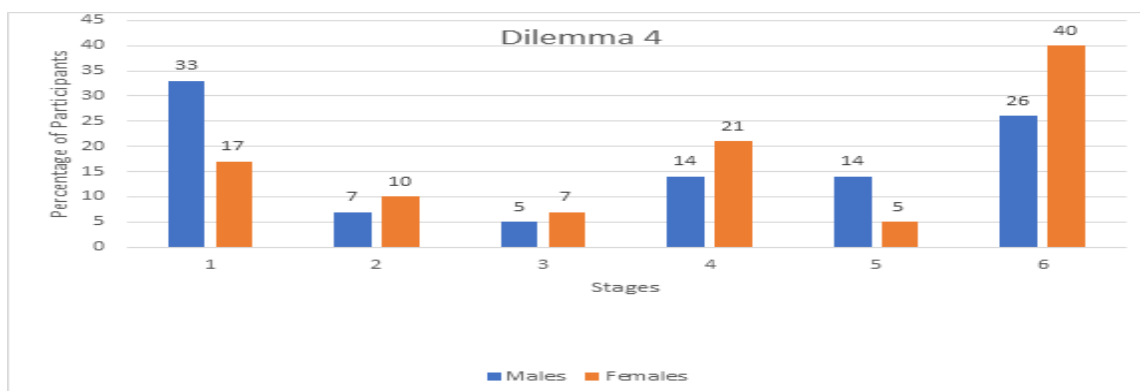
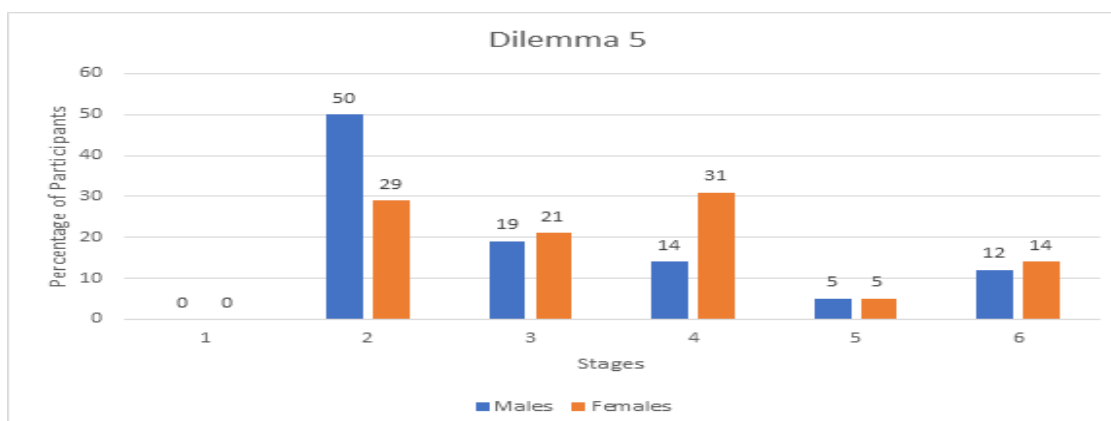


Figure 4 Comparison between males and females on various stages of moral development for dilemma 4

Dilemma 5: Table No. 5 Number of participants in each stage of moral development for dilemma 5

Level	Stage	Males		Females	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	0	0	0	0
	2	21	50	12	29
II	3	8	19	9	21
	4	6	14	13	31
III	5	2	5	2	5
	6	5	12	6	14

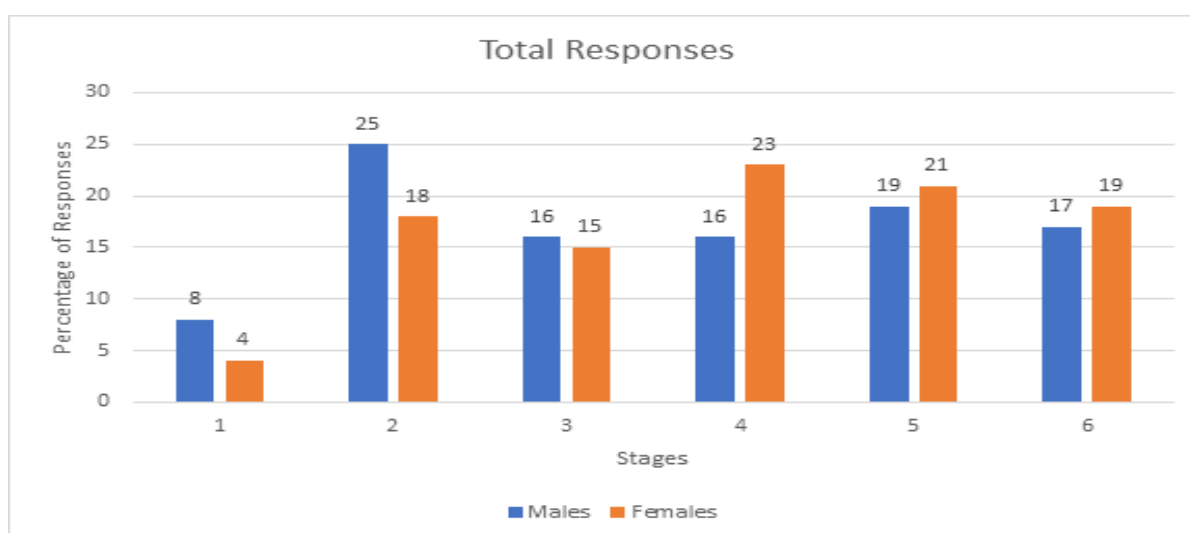


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Figure 5 Comparison between males and females on various stages of moral development for dilemma 5

Table No. 6 Total number of responses in each stage across entire dilemma (210+210 = 420)

Level	Stage	Males (210 responses)		Females (210 responses)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I	1	16	8	8	4
	2	52	25	38	18
II	3	33	16	32	15
	4	33	16	48	23
III	5	40	19	44	21
	6	36	17	40	19



DISCUSSION

Gender and morality concerns have piqued public interest throughout the last four decades, not just in the study of moral psychology, where they have been a prominent concern, but also in the social sciences, humanities, and even in society at large (Walker, 2005). The foundations of moral concepts are social; hence, it is reasonable to assume that different social upbringings (for males and females) will result in various conceptions of what is moral and to what extent, which may then translate into different behaviours or beliefs.

The discussion below is based on five hypothetical dilemmas, which were used to assess gender differences in morality, as well as additional trends, which emerged from the data.

Comparison between the moral development in males (n=42) and females (n=42) for each dilemma.

Dilemma 1: Euthanasia: “Your father just had a major cerebral attack and the doctor said that there is a 10% chance that he may survive, and that he is under the ventilator in a vegetative state. After a month of seeing your father suffer, you have the choice to either continue with the present treatment plan, or consent to give him medicine to remove the pain and facilitate a peaceful death.”

The results indicated that there were no significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 4.219, p = .518$) in the stage in which males and females fell, based on their response and reasoning.

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However, Figure 1 shows that there was a tendency for more females to give post-conventional responses (stage 5 or 6) compared to males, whereas males gave stage 2 responses more than females. Overall, the most frequently occurring responses fell in stage 3 and 6 responses.

In post-conventional level (stages 5 and 6), people operate from an idealistic and conscience driven frame of reference and look at how people might coordinate their interests in a more idealistic way. One of the female participants said that she is in favour of facilitating a peaceful death because, *“I think you would want to live a life with dignity and ..., it would be very selfish to choose to keep him alive or in a vegetative state and it would prolong his suffering”*.

In stage 3, people become adept at interpersonal interactions with more empathy, depth, and sensitivity to the sentiments of others. One of the male participants said, *“Because he is my father and it is my moral duty to support him in any situation. I don't think that I will let him die”*.

Bank robbery: “You are an eyewitness to a crime, a man has robbed a bank, but instead of keeping the money for himself, he donates it to an orphanage in need of funds- that can now afford to feed, clothe, and care for its children. You know who committed the crime. If you go to the authorities with the information, there's a good chance the money will be returned to the bank.”

The results indicate that there were no significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 5.501$, $p = .358$) in the stage in which males and females fall. In this dilemma, most of the respondents fell in stage 4 or 5. Stage 4 signifies obeying the laws in order to ensure societal order. Those participants who gave responses as per stage 4, emphasized that a crime must be reported even if it is for a good cause as it will create chaos in the society. As reflected in their verbatims, *“a crime is a crime and hiding a crime is a bigger crime”, “chahe who achhe kaam ke liye kar raha tha par uska raasta galat tha (even if you're putting it to good cause, but the method he used was faulty)”*.

Those participants, who gave stage 5 responses, highlighted that laws and rules should be flexible for the benefit of those in need. For instance, one of the participants said, *“...by law it may be wrong but, in my opinion, morally he is doing the right thing”*.

Train track: “Imagine you are standing beside a train track. In the distance, you see a train hurtling down the tracks towards six construction workers who are unable to hear the train coming. Even if they do spot it, they will not be able to move out of the way in time. There is a lever connected to tracks. If you pull the lever, the train diverts down another path away from the workers. However, down the second path stands your best friend.”

The results show that there were no significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 4.884$, $p = .430$) in the stage in which males and females fell. In this dilemma, stage 2 responses were predominant. Stage 2 responses signify self-interest as the primary motive. Peer group influence and friendship is a dominant factor in determining the choices college students make. Participants, who chose not to pull the lever in order to save their best friend, cited their own emotional needs as the primary reason for doing so. As this excerpt indicates - *“I'll get out and save my best friend because 6 construction workers mere kuchh nai lagte (6*

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construction workers are not related to me)". One participant gave the logic that, *"many people die anyway. And I don't care about those six people whom I do not know anyway"*.

In contrast, the participants who were in higher stages mentioned that their conscience would not permit them to kill the 6 workers, *"I don't want to kill six people even hypothetically"*. A female participant gave a unique response where she said, she would definitely save six lives, and will also try to save her friend even if it costs her life.

Car crash: "You are involved in a car crash with another car, on your way to work one morning, in which you accidentally hit and kill a pedestrian. As you get out of the car, you are intercepted by a tearful woman who was driving the other car, and seems to think that she hit and killed the pedestrian. You are not sure why she thinks that she hit the person, but she seems rather convinced. There is only you, the woman and the person you hit on the road; there are no witnesses. You know whoever is deemed responsible will probably be sent to jail."

Although there were no significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 6.562, p = .255$) in the stage in which males and females fell, most respondents chose either to avoid punishment (stage 1) or confess to the crime due to guilt or conscience (stage 6). Hypothetical dilemmas are likely to elicit morally appropriate responses, if the person in question does not have much to lose. For example, in this dilemma, the choice was tough because if a person chooses to act morally, they end up going to jail.

In stage 1, avoidance of punishment is the reason for behaving morally. For instance, one of the participants said, *"to be honest I will let her be responsible for car crash or accident. Because as you know whoever is responsible will sent to jail, so I cannot spend rest of my life in jail and I want to be with my family. I don't want to stay away from my family, friends, relative and I don't want to get punishment. So, I will save myself and may be I will give some amount of money to that woman. In order to save myself I will blame that lady. I know it looks so selfish but going in jail I can't do that."*

People in the highest stage of moral development (stage 6) have the capacity to take into consideration multiple perspectives, and act in accordance with principles of justice. An example of stage 6 response is, *"It's always better to tell the truth! My entire life I will be in a guilt situation from which I will not be able to overcome and that is worse than going to jail for few years!"*

Doctor's profession - "You are a doctor that has just been called to the scene of an accident. When you arrive, you see that the car belongs to your wife. Fearing the worst, you rush over to see that she is trapped in the car with another man. She sees you and although barely conscious, she manages to mouth the words, "I'm sorry..." You don't understand, but her look answers your question- the man next to her is her lover with whom she's been having an affair. You reel back in shock, devastated.

As you step back, the wreck in front of you comes into focus. You see that your wife is seriously hurt and needs immediate attention. Even if she does get help, there is a very high chance she will die, while her lover is bleeding heavily and it will take about 5 minutes to treat him, but it will mean your wife will definitely die. If you tend to your wife however, the man will bleed to death."

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The results indicate that there were no significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 5.183, p = .269$) in the stage in which males and females fell. In this dilemma, stage 2 responses were predominant. 50% males, compared to 29% females, chose to save the life of their wife instead of her lover, despite knowing that she was having an affair with another man.

The male respondents who gave stage 2 responses cited equal exchange of favours for selfish reasons like, needing their wife in future, helping a known person rather than an unknown person, saving the wife because lover is a competitor, and saving the wife to seek an explanation from her later. One male participant gave a response reflecting typical Indian male mentality. He wanted to save the man, instead of saving a woman who never cared about his feelings when he would discover her affair. He would have killed her himself since he believed that it was his wife, not the man, who was at fault. He was grateful that they had an accident.

Participants who gave stage 4 and above responses, emphasized their professional duty to save a human life, irrespective of who the person is. More females were in stage 4 than men were. Typical stage 4 response reasoning in this dilemma was following the doctor's professional protocol. For instance, *"I will follow the Hippocratic oath where I will save the life of a person who has greater chances of survival"*.

In this dilemma, the man had a greater chance of survival compared to the wife. The dilemma assumes that the respondent is a male. Hence, it might have been difficult for the female respondents to relate to it.

So far, it can be concluded that no significant gender differences were found in any of the five dilemmas. The analysis presented so far does not support Gilligan's (1982) claim that Kohlberg's (1958) theory underestimates female morality. One reason could be that the socialization practices over the generations have become more equitable, especially in an urban, metropolitan, educated, and economically advantaged sample.

Comparison based on all the responses given by males (210 responses given by 42 males) and females (210 responses given by 42 females)

This section has been examined from a different vantage point, throws new light on the findings of the present study. Each respondent was given five hypothetical dilemmas and each response was assigned one of the six stages based on Kohlberg's theory. There were a total of 42 males, hence the total number of responses given by all the males were 210; and the same is true for female respondents. In this section, the results are examined from this vantage point.

It can be seen from Figure 6 that the male participants gave more number of responses in stage 1, 2, and 3, compared to females. In contrast, the female participants gave more responses in stage 4, 5, and 6, compared to males. Hence, the results indicate that females have a greater tendency to give morally mature responses in processing hypothetical moral dilemmas.

These data support the claims of some researchers that both males and females have similar moral maturity, or that females have higher moral maturity than men (Mohr, Sprinthall, & Gerler, 1987; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Bruess & Pearson, 2002; Cordellieri, et al., 2020; Singh, 2020). As shown in one of the excerpts of a female respondent in response to the bank robbery dilemma, *"why go for the risky way when you can just choose a more protected and*

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safer plan? Like you can go for some donation programs, ask help from business institutions etc.”

The above results can be explained in the context of differential socialization practices for boys and girls in the Indian culture. Moral boundaries are fluid for males but they are rigid for females. Hence, females are more likely to be ethically evolved with different moral standards than males. This conclusion was also corroborated by previous research (Upadhyaya, 2015; Singh, 2020). Some researchers also indicate that women tend to be more averse to risk-taking than men are (Hurley & Choudhary, 2020; Hsu, Chen, Huang, & Lin, 2021).

Apart from the above two sections, there were some additional trends observed by the researchers, and are presented below.

Post-conventional level and Indian Morality

According to Kohlberg (1971), stage 4 is the dominant stage of moral development in many countries. Subsequent research, which supported his claim, stated that stage 4 thinking becomes the default reaction among college educated young adults. Few people progress beyond stage 4, and post-conventional morality is extremely rare (Tapp & Kohlberg, 1971; Crain, 1985; Puka, 1990; Berk L. , 2013; Bouhmama, 2020). Cross-cultural scholars frequently assert a constant lack of certain stages in certain cultures indicating that the missing stages are culturally relative, rather than universal (Simpson, 1974; Edwards, 1981; Snarey, 1985).

In the present study, it was found that the dominant style of 39% of the participants was stage 5 or 6. Post-conventional reasoning is defined in terms of self-chosen abstract principles and values that apply to all situations and societies.

This can be explained in terms of ancient Indian wisdom known to guide communities across the world. Indians are known for their strong moral and ethical values since time immemorial. *Dharma* is a concept of central importance in Hindu religion and philosophy. It emphasizes the need to perform one's duty with sincerity. For instance, in Bhagavad Gita, the revered scripture of Hinduism. Arjuna's decision to inflict violence on his cousins Kauravas was therefore, in accordance with his *dharma*. The concept of *nishkam karma* (action performed with detachment and without any expectation for results) is one of the highest principles of morality. The narrative between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, described in the great Indian epic, Mahabharata, is an eloquent illustration of a fundamental moral dilemma which human beings face (Srivastava, Dhingra, Bhardwaj, & Srivastava, 2013). When a person has to make a choice between ethically and morally correct action and the well-being of their loved ones, generally they become weak due to emotional attachment, and choose the latter. In dilemma 3, many participants chose to save their friend even if the six workers lost their life, for instance, one respondent said, "I will save a friend and not some stranger over him". In dilemma 5, most respondents wanted to save the life of their wife and not her lover, even if they were duty bound to do so., e.g., "I can't let her go, I know of my Doctor's Oath, but she's my partner, my wife... I have to save her." These trends show that the participants in this study exhibited greater attachment towards their loved ones, even at the cost of life of unknown people.

Vasudev (1983) observed that "although the Heinz dilemma is posed as a hypothetical dilemma, for many Indians it is an immediate and real dilemma. Heinz's predicament parallels mass deprivation, poverty and social injustice suffered by an overwhelming number

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of individuals" in India (1983). Vasudev and Hummel (1987) conducted interviews with Indian urban middle-class people (11-50 years). 20% of adults responded in a post-conventional way. New themes surfaced, such as a focus on collective solutions to moral difficulties rather than private conscience appeals. Indian moral reasoning is much richer and diverse than the limited principles of Kohlberg's theory, such as moral reasoning about animal life, the Gods, and respect for the caste system. Such reasoning is in contrast to North American moral values, however, that it is not scorable using Kohlberg's model. There are so many people like Heinz around us who have faced conflicts related to the life and death of their loved ones. On a big scale, it makes no difference if one or two individuals perish. The issue must be addressed at a macro level.

Similarly, in the present study, some responses reflected such unique Indian concerns. In the dilemma on euthanasia, one participant said "*(I will) take consent of a lot of people. I cannot decide this on my own. I would like to take consent of my father, my mother, my... all the core family members, and everyone to whom my father is associated and whose life my father plays a major stake or he's a stakeholder*". Some respondents referred to God and destiny in life and death matters. Most of the respondents wanted to go for win-win solutions where they wanted to save the life of both parties, e.g., train track and doctor's dilemma.

Unlike the West's abstract and absolute ethical terms, Indians focus on contextual and relational elements for determining the 'right' and 'wrong' (Saraswathi & Pai, 1997). The 'in-group', hence, becomes a salient factor. In research studies by Miller et al. (Miller & Luthar, 1989; Miller & Bersoff, 1992), Indians prioritized beneficence prescriptions ahead of justice prescriptions compared to Americans. Along with justice concerns, Indians used role-oriented obligations and contextual information as important factors to judge social issues. The general concept of a 'good' child included the attributes of obedience, loyalty, sincerity, politeness, modesty among others (Saraswathi & Pai, 1997).

Morality depends on the nature of the dilemma

Kohlberg was convinced that the moral dilemmas evoked universal concerns such as the issues of life versus law, conscience versus punishment, and contract versus authority (Snarey, 1985). Every individual, therefore, should use the same level of moral reasoning across many tasks and situations (Edwards, 1981; Crain, 1985; Snarey, 1985). However, the findings of the present study do not support this proposition. The nature and content of the dilemma affected the responses given by the participants.

In dilemma 2 (bank robbery), 43% of the participants fell in stage 4, which implies that they were in favour of reporting the theft in order to abide by the law. 24% of the participants, who belonged to stage 5, emphasized that the well-being of the orphans was more important than reporting the crime. In dilemma 4 (car crash), more than 50% of the participants were either in stage 6 or stage 1. The nature of this dilemma evokes extreme responses. On one hand, participants wanted to confess that they killed the pedestrian because it would be unfair to the lady (stage 6); and on the other hand, the participants wanted to save themselves from going to jail at any cost (stage 1). In dilemma 5 (doctor's dilemma) there was no participant who was in stage 1. In dilemma 2 and 5, the most frequent responses were in favour of saving their loved ones (friend or wife). This is understandable in view of the collectivistic nature of the Indian culture, where relationship centrality may be more important than justice principles.

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76% of the participants did not have any dominant style across dilemmas. In other words, the stage that was assigned to them varied from dilemma to dilemma. The findings of the present study regarding the content of the dilemmas, are in line with the other studies. McLeod (2013) proclaimed that a person who justified a judgement using post-conventional morality in one context would frequently use conventional reasoning in another context. It appears that deciding what is right and wrong is more dependent on the circumstances than on generic norms. Wark and Krebs (2000) also reported that “there was relatively little within-person consistency in moral orientation.”

Out of all the dilemmas, the most perplexing was the train track dilemma as killing six lives versus one life was not an easy choice to make. One participant said, “*will you be able to sleep with either of that (killing one versus six) on your conscience?*” Hence, the content of the specific moral issue had a considerable influence on moral reasoning.

It can be said that the findings of the present study are largely in line with the previous research. Although statistically significant gender differences were not found on each dilemma separately, some plausible trends can be seen. Based on the total number of responses given by all the participants, the females tend to respond to hypothetical dilemmas in a slightly more morally mature way than the males.

Since our sample was from a collectivistic culture, which emphasizes on community interest and social harmony, the level of post-conventional responses were higher than the Western counterparts.

The data was collected using convenient sampling and was self-reported. The risk of sampling and testing bias could have influenced the results. An inherent limitation of hypothetical dilemmas is that it may elicit responses, which may not corroborate with real life. Other variables that may be relevant for gender variations in moral development were not explored in the present study. Keeping in mind the limitations of the present study, there are some suggestions for future investigations. Care versus justice is a cultural centric concept; future research can explore its dichotomy or lack of it in the context of morality. Child-rearing practices, parental attitudes, stakeholders in the education system, role models, peers, colleagues, and other societal variables, which can have a major impact on moral development, can be explored. Future researchers can also explore interventions in the socialization processes for males and females to facilitate equitable levels of moral development.

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Conflict of Interest

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