

Moral Disengagement and Guilt Reactions

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to examine the bidimensionality of guilt and study its link with moral disengagement. A sample of 234 male respondents (taken from three subsequent generation) spread across rural and urban areas of Haryana was administered two guilt scales (fear of punishment and need for reparation and moral disengagement scale). Results were analysed by applying two-way ANOVA and computing correlations between the three scores. Results indicate higher moral disengagement among rural respondents. Further a relationship between guilt and disengagement was also observed

Keywords: moral disengagement, guilt reactions, reparation

Concept of guilt is much more than an uncomfortable feeling associated with the perception of having done something wrong. Depending on the antecedents and consequences of the wrongdoings, guilt may be considered to be the factual conviction for a crime, acceptance of responsibility, feeling of remorse need for reparation or fear of the impending punishment. The cognitive motivational and functional /dysfunctional outcome of individual adjustment mainly depend on whether it is empathy guided or fear driven. The early effective relationships are crucial in setting up the basis for expectations and for locus of control over the consequences of wrongdoings thereby further supporting the bidimensional nature of guilt. In a study conducted across 3 different European countries (Italy, Hungary and Czech Republic) need for reparation was found to be positively related to prosocial behaviour and negatively related to aggression while in case of fear of punishment, the relationship was reversed (Caprara, Manzi & Perugini, 1992). Analysis of the pattern of influence on aggressive behaviour revealed that anticipatory guilt and restitutive reactions influence detrimental behaviour through their restraining effect on such conduct and an impact on aggression proneness while prosocialness increases feelings of guilt. However, feeling of guilt and prosocialness are reduced by increase in moral disengagement. Moral standards are constructed in the course of socialization and serve as guides and deterrents to actions. The social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) proposes that a self-regulatory mechanism regulates and motivates moral conduct. Over the last decade, not only in India but across the globe there has been an unprecedented spurt in hegemony, fundamentalism, racialism, and weakening of social institutions for social, both social and personal, and glamorization of violence and corrupt practices. Since guilt reactions influence detrimental conduct and is in turn influenced by moral disengagement. The present study

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was conducted to study the relationship between guilt reactions and moral disengagement. The aim of the present investigation was to test the culture specificity of guilt reactions and moral disengagement and study the relationship between them.

The term culture is generally used as a label for observation in the form of similarities and differences among belief, attitudes, values etc. on one dimension and food, clothing and other physical entities on the other, as probable explanation for observable behaviours. Thus, comparisons were made across subsequent generations (subjective) and rural /urban societies (objective) in order to test the culture specificity of the variables used in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Design

An ex-post facto design was used to study variations in moral disengagement and guilt reactions among rural/urban respondents of three subsequent generations and to explore the relationship between these variables.

Sample

Multistage purposive sampling was used for the selection of the sample. Initially 4 districts in Haryana (Rohtak Jhajjar, Jind and Bhiwani) were selected on purposive basis. Male respondents were selected from urban (district headquarters)/ rural (village with a senior secondary school in the respective district) areas and three subsequent generations of the same family (Son, (students of class 10+1 and 10+2.), father and grandfather) in order to reduce within group variance. The total sample consisted of 234 respondents, 29 rurals and 105; urbans and equally divided in sons, father and grandfathers.

Tools

For obtaining a measure of moral disengagement and guilt reactions three scales were used. As these scales were available in English they were translated into Hindi.

- 1. Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement-** Mechanism of moral disengagement scale constructed by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Postorelli (1996) was used to access the proneness to moral disengagement. This is multifaceted skill which contains 32 items that measure its mechanism of moral disengagement represented by a set of 4 items. Since principal component factor analysis with varimax orthogonal rotation had revealed a single factor structure which accounted for 16.2% of the variance and no subfactor emerged, the use of the composite score has been recommended by the authors as a measure of moral disengagement. Scoring is to be done on a 3-point Likert scale on “Agree” “Disagree” and “Uncertain” “continuum”. Score 2 is given to agree, zero is to be given to disagree and 1 is to be given to uncertain. Thus, the score ranges from 0 to 64 for the original English version Alpha reliability coefficient is of 0.82 has been reported. For Hindi version reliability coefficient of correlation was 0.84 and validity 0.74.
- 2. Need for Reparation Scale** - Need for Reparation scale construction by Caprara, Manzi and Perugini(1992) was used to obtain a measure of empathy driven guilt reactions. It measures proneness to experiencing feeling of remorse, embarrassment, disturbance, tension and desires for justice that are linked to the need for reparation of negative results of guilt eliciting actions. There are 20 statements in this scale in which 15 statements are effective and 5 statements are control items Scoring is to be done on 6-point scale ranging from zero (completely false for me) to score 5 (completely true for me). The total score for the scale is the sum of effective items. The score range is from 0 to 75. An alpha reliability of 0.86 has been reported for

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English version (Original scale). Test - retest reliability coefficient of correlation was 0.80 and validity 0.75.

3. **Fear of Punishment Scale** - Fear of Punishment Scale by Caprara, Manzi Perugini (1992) was used to measure a proneness to experience feelings of persecution, oppression and tension that are tied to the anticipation and fear of pending punishment. These reactions are guilt driven. The scale contains 30 statements (23 effective +7 control) and scoring is to be done on 6-point scale ranging from 0 (completely false for me) to 5 (completely true for me). The total score for the scale was the sum of effective statements. The score range is from 0 to 115. Alpha reliability for English version is 0.91 and reliability for Hindi version is 0.74 and validity is 0.80.

Procedure

Initially the principles of Government senior secondary schools of the respective City/village were conducted with the request for permission to contact the students of 10 + 1 and 10 + 2 classes. A list of students who were residing with their parents and grandparents was prepared and their address was obtained. Then the family of these students were contacted and only those respondents whose father and grandfather agreed to participate in the study were finally included in the sample. The tools were administered to all the three members in a single setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perusal of the mean moral disengagement and fear scores (Table 1) showed that moral disengagement and need for Reparation was higher among the rural respondents while difference between the mean fear of punishment score was negligible. Across generations moral disengagement and fear of punishment was highest among the adolescents i.e., sons while need for reparation was the lowest. The differences between the mean scores of the adult (father's) and older (grand- fathers) generation on moral disengagement and need for reparation was negligible while that of fear of punishment was higher in the oldest generation.

Table 1 Mean moral disengagement (MD) and Guilt Reactions Need for Reparation (NR) and Fear of Punishment (FP) scores

	Rural			Urban			Grand Mean (Generation)
	MD	NR	FP	MD	NR	FP	
Adol.	34.60	58.66	64.34	28.33	53.29	58.63	MD: 31.415 NR: 55.97 FP:61.49
Adult	29.26	57.74	54.74	28.77	56.46	60.77	MD:29.015 NR:57.1 FP:57.76
Old	32.43	58.66	60.11	25.23	55.17	58.17	MD: 28.83 NR: 56.91 FP: 59.14
Grand Mean (Area)	32.10	58.35	59.73	27.41	54.97	59.19	

The possible significance of area and generation was explored by conducting 2;(area: urban/rural) × 3 (generation : son/father /grandfather) repeated measure (second variable) ANOVA using the total score of each scale as the dependent variable . Concerning moral

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disengagement, the analysis showed a significant effect of area ($F: 6.67, p < .05$), generation ($F: 5.41, p < .01$) and their interaction ($F: 8.715, p < .01$). As the mean scores of the rural respondents was higher it indicated that moral disengagement was more among the rural respondents.

Post hoc analysis (Newman Kuel's) showed that the mean of the rural respondents (Table 2) was significantly higher as compared to the three urban groups as well as adult rural group. The old (grandfathers)rural group differed significantly only from their urban counterparts, whose means score was the lowest. These results show that contrary to general belief more disengagement is higher among the rural areas and the adolescents use the mechanism of moral disengagement more than the old generations. Surprising these mechanisms were used more by the older generation among the rural areas as compared to the urban elderly. Further comparisons across the remaining two dependent variables i.e., need for reparation and fear of punishment read that only need for reparation was significantly higher among the rural respondents as compared to their urban counterparts. None of the remaining differences were found to be significant.

Table 2 Significance of Difference between the Mean Moral Disengagement Scores of the Six Groups by Applying Newman Kuel's Test

Group mean	Old (U) 25.23	Adolescent (U) 28.33	Adult (U) 28.77	Adult (R) 29.26	Old (R) 32.43	Adolescent (R) 34.6	Comparison Across	q.95(r,204) MS error N
25.23	-	3.1	3.54	4.03	7.2	9.37	6	5.92
28.33			.44	.93	4.1	6.27	5	5.67
28.77				.49	3.66	5.83	4	5.33
29.26					3.17	5.34	3	4.86
32.43						2.17	2	4.07

The significantly higher level of moral disengagement observed among the rural adolescents and old is respondents appears to be paradoxical as traditional values and social systems have been poisted to foster prosocialness (Garnier, Helen & Stein ,1998; Palermo, & Simpson ,1994) and rural masses and old generations are considered to epitomize the traditional customs and values. Further the traditional India value system propagate humanistic and benevolent values in an earlier study (Yadav, Sharma and Sunita 2002) the present authors had also found that humanistic and familial values were higher among rural masses while materialistic values were more in the urban. In the present study a higher need for reparation was observed in the rural sample which can be taken as a indicator of higher empathy. These results are in line with those of the social cognitive theory (Bandura 1991) where it was proposed that self-sanctions and moral reasoning can be this disengaged from inhumane conduct. Thus, it appears that the restrictive unstimulating rural experience is does limits analytical thinking which could have furthered self-understanding (Damon and Heart ,1992). In the present study lowest level of moral disengagement was observed in the urban old which further support the fact that traditional value system and extensive experience is lead to better self-understanding thereby fostering moral engagement.

The relationship between the dependent course was further investigated by computation of correlation between the three dependent scores. When computed across the total sample (N=210), no significant relationship was observed between the two guilt reactions ($r = .005, p > .05$). Fear of punishment was found to have a significant relationship with moral

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engagement ($r=.298$, $p<.01$) while that of need for reparation ($r=0.189$, $p>.05$) was not significant. These results are independent of the guilt reactions in the Indian context and indicate that increase in fear of punishment is associated with the higher moral disengagement. Since fear of punishment and need for reparation differ in terms of the locus of control over consequences and beliefs and expectations (fear/ empathy).

The relationship between the three variables was further probes across the rural and urban samples and the trend was found to be same (r_{MD-FP} :Rural 0.269,;Urban 0.319, $p<.01$). When examined across the three generations again no significant relationship was observed between the guilt reactions thereby strengthening the independence aspect of these reactions. However, a significant relationship between fear of punishment and moral disengagement was observed only among the adult (Fathers) generation ($r=0.483$, $p<.01$). Among the sons and grandfathers no significant relationship was observed between moral disengagement and fear of punishment, while a significant positive relationship was found between moral disengagement and need for reparation (r : Sons: .248, $p<.05$; Grandfathers :0.33, $p<.01$). These results currently put the question on the bidimensional aspect of the guilt reactions. However, the present moral disengagement scale was a multifaceted scale assessing eight different psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement. Thus, it is probable that both the guilt reactions could lead to moral disengagement via an influence on different mechanisms. Further investigation of the relationship between the individual mechanisms and fear reaction could help in understanding the relationship between guilt and moral disengagement. Thus, the present study supports the independence and universality of the guilt reactions and their relationship with moral disengagement at least across the objective aspect of the Indian culture.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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