

## **Role of Moral Disengagement, Self-Regulation and Peer Attachment among College Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the current Era of generation Z mostly students experience moral challenges, peer pressure, and emotional stress while adjustment in their academics and in campus, which may later on affect their behavior and decision-making. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate how these particular factors affect college students. An equal number of students (N=400) were chosen from various Faisalabad colleges. The sample was drawn from the 15–19 age range (M = 17.35, SD =.81). Peer attachment has a negative correlation with moral disengagement ( $r = -.01^{**}$ ) and a significant relationship with self-regulation ( $r = .32^{***}$ ), according to the results of the Pearson product moment correlation. The regression analysis revealed that emotional self-regulation ( $r = .55^{***}$ ) is a significant predictor of peer pressure among college students. The t-test result indicated that male students are more prone toward moral disengagement than female students. The implication of the study is vast and may positive effect on the well-being of students.*

**Keywords:** Moral disengagement, peer attachment, self-regulation, students.

### **INTRODUCTION**

College students often face moral challenges, peer pressure, and emotional stress that may affect their behavior and decision-making. Moral disengagement can lead to unethical actions, while poor self-regulation increases impulsivity. Peer attachment also plays a key role in shaping students' values and coping abilities. This study aims to explore how these factors interact and impact college students' overall behavioral adjustment.

Peer attachment refers to the emotional bond established between individuals and their peers, characterized by feelings of intimacy, warmth, and mutual support (Liu and Chen, 2020). While existing literature found that secure peer attachment reduces the likelihood of moral disengagement, as emotional bonds promote empathy and responsibility in decision-making. Zhao et al. (2020). Peer relationships offer contexts where individuals learn and practice self-regulation through conflict resolution and emotional feedback (Laible et al., 2016). Self-regulation mediates the connection between moral disengagement and peer attachment. Strong peer bonds promote self-regulation, which in turn reduces tendencies toward moral disengagement (Bandura, 2016; Hyde et al., 2019).

Moral disengagement refers to the process by which an engages in the behaviors that violate their own moral standard (Bandura, 2016). In essence, peer attachment and self-regulation work together to mitigate moral disengagement: peer support provides emotional grounding, while self-regulation enables behavioral control. Self-regulation indirectly affects moral decision-making by reducing reliance on moral

disengagement strategies such as displacement of responsibility or distortion of consequences (Pelton et al. 2020).

Self-regulation is the capacity to keep an eye on and control one's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes in order to achieve personal goals, especially in challenging or goal-directed situations. It involves setting goals, employing strategies to achieve them, monitoring progress, and adjusting behaviors accordingly (Panadero, 2017). In the context of youth and college students, self-regulation also includes the capacity to resist peer pressure, manage stress, and maintain focus on long-term outcomes (Duckworth & Steinberg, 2015). Research suggested that strong peer attachment contributes to the development of adaptive self-regulation by enhancing emotional awareness, reducing impulsivity, and supporting identity formation during emerging adulthood (Moreira et al., 2020). Conversely, deficits in self-regulation increase susceptibility to moral disengagement by impairing impulse control and ethical decision-making. College students who struggle with self-regulation may be more likely to morally disengage to reduce cognitive dissonance when acting against their values (Hyde et al., 2020).

### Objectives of the Study

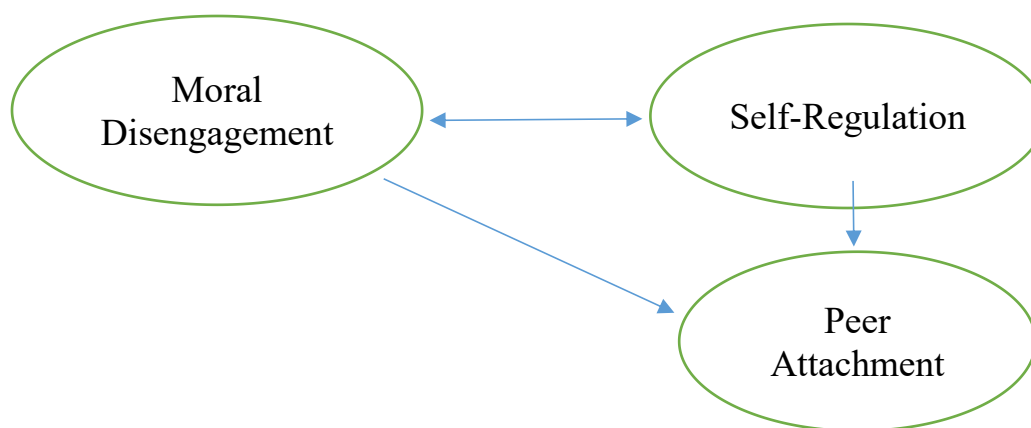
- To find out the role of college students' moral disengagement, self-control, and peer attachment
- To determine how the study variables, predict college students' attachment to their peers.
- To determine how college students' study variables, differ by gender.

### Hypotheses of the Study

- Among college students, there is a strong positive correlation between study variables and peer attachment.
- Among college students, demographic factors significantly correlate with study variables and peer attachment.
- Among college students, peer attachment is substantially inversely predicted by moral disengagement and self-regulation.
- Among college students, there are gender differences in moral disengagement, self-regulation, and peer attachment.

### Conceptualized Model

*Figure 1: According to the study's hypothesized model, college students' self-regulation and moral disengagement are related to peer attachment.*



## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Participants**

A purposive sample of ( $N=400$ ) with equal distribution of 200 boys and 200 females was recruited from different private and government sectors of Faisalabad. The age range of participants is 15-19. Regular students from Faisalabad's private and government sectors were selected for the current research. Students above age 19 were excluded. Students with disabilities and mental retarded were not included in the study.

### **Tools**

#### **Teenage Self-Control (Moilanen, 2007) Inventory**

Researchers interested in examining adolescent self-regulation can use the Adolescent Self-Regulation Inventory (ASRI) questionnaire, which assesses both short-term and long-term self-regulation. ASRI consists of 36 items that assess how much adolescents can direct, activate, manage, repress, and modify their feelings, sensations, awareness, and actions. Cronbach's alpha showed good reliability, .84 in short-term self-regulation and .72 in long-term self-regulation (Moilanen 2007). This scale was developed by Kristin L Moilanen in 2007. The main constructs of this scale measured interpersonal competencies. This scale was available in the English language but translated into Urdu most recently in 2016 by Attiqah 2016.

#### **Moral Disengagement (Bandura 1996, 2001)**

This scale was developed by (Bandura 2001). Bandura (1996) explained how self-regulation and socialization lead to the development of moral standards. The association between aggressive and delinquent behaviors in children and their parents was assessed using this scale. Notably, Bandura and his associates (1996, 2001) focused on internal consistency rather than this question. This scale was available in the English language but translated in Urdu 2018 by Majed 2018.

#### **Peer Attachment (Armsdon & Greenberg, 1987)**

Based on Bowlby's attachment theory, the IPPA is a self-report scale used to gauge adolescents' perceptions of their level of attachment to their peers (Bowlby 1969). Armsdon, Gray This scale is proposed by Mark T. Greenberg. To evaluate the behavioral and cognitive components of peer attachment, the authors created two unidimensional scales. There are 25 items in IPA. Peer attachment reliability for a sample of 18–20-year-olds was .86. Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for peer attachment in the updated version is .92.

### **Procedure**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the roles that peer attachment, self-regulation, and moral disengagement play among college students. Permission was obtained via email from the authors of each scale prior to data collection. Data collection was approved after requesting permission from various Faisalabad institutions. Prior to the scale being administered, each student was asked to sign an informed consent form and was made aware of their right to withdraw if they encountered any difficulties or issues filling out the questionnaires. Students were then informed about the study and the questionnaires, and they were given the assurance that the information they provided and their answers would be kept private. The questionnaire could be completed at any time. Every student finished three instruments. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 for Windows was used to enter the data. where a significant difference was shown on ( $P<.001$  or  $P<.05$ ).

## RESULTS

**Table 1**

*Correlation & Reliability Analysis for Study Variables (N=400)*

Scales	K	M	SD	1	2	3	$\alpha$
1.MDQ	32	99.07	20.23	1			.72
2.IPA	15	81.40	14.58	.07	1		.83
3.ASRI	36	1.17	18.44	-.01	.32***	1	.82

Table 1 showed that the Moral Disengagement Questionnaire had fair reliability ( $\alpha=.72$ ) Inventory for Peer Attachment, Adolescent Self-control Inventory had good reliability ( $\alpha=.83$ ) and ( $\alpha=.82$ ), respectively. Peer attachment and self-regulation highly important positive association ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.001$ ) with each other. It also indicates that peer attachment and self-regulation had a non-significant relation with moral disengagement.

**Table 2**

*Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables of Study (N=400)*

		Gender		Total (%)
		Men	Women	
		f(%)	f(%)	
Birth order	Only child	2(22.2)	7(77.7)	9(100)
	First order	55(43.7)	71(56.3)	126(100)
	Middle order	70(56.9)	53(43.1)	123(100)
	Last order	73(51.4)	69(48.6)	142(100)
Total		200(50)	200(50)	400(100)
Family system	Joint	95(59.0)	66(41.0)	161(100)
	Nuclear	105(43.9)	134(56.1)	239(100)
Total		200(50)	200(50)	400(100)
Family Member	1-5	74(57.4)	55(42.6)	129(100)
	6-9	116(45.1)	141(54.9)	257(100)
	10-13	10(71.4)	4(28.6)	14(100)
		200(50)	200(50)	400(100)
Monthly Income	10000-30000	73(54.5)	61(45.5)	134(100)
	31000-60000	92(47.4)	102(52.6)	194(100)
	61000-80000	16(36.4)	28(63.6)	44(100)
	81000-100000	19(67.9)	9(32.1)	28(100)
Total		200(50)	200(50)	400(100)
Residence	Urban	143(42.7)	193(58.3)	336(100)
	Rural	57(89.1)	7(10.9)	64(100)
Total		200(50)	200(50)	400(100)

Table 4.2 showed all the necessary demographic of the participants such as birth order, family system and monthly income etc.

**Table 3**

*T-test for Gender Differences on Self-Regulation, Moral Disengagement and Peer Attachment (N=400)*

Variables	Gender		<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	95% C.I		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Girls	Boys				LL	UL	
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>						
MDQ	1.01(21.92)	96.84(19.03)	2.16	398	.03*	3.99	8.32	4.66
IPA	81.76(14.87)	81.04(14.30)	.49	398	.62	-2.19	3.58	0.05
ASRI	1.09(11.11)	1.12(11.85)	-2.85	398	.005**	-5.53	-1.02	0.002

Table 4.4 showed significant gender differences on moral disengagement [ $t(398) = 2.16, p < .05$ ]. It indicated that boys were more involved in immoral activities than girls. There were also notable variations in self-regulation between genders [ $t(398) = 11.85, p < .005$ ]. It shows that boys have more self-regulation as compared to girls. The table also indicated a non-significant gender difference in peer attachment  $p = ns$ .

**Table 4**

*Linear Regression Analysis for Predicting Self-Regulation (N=400)*

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	P	CI	
						LL	UL
Gender	-22.13	2.01	-.61	-10.96	.21	-2.12	-18.15
Moral disengagement	3.43	3.05	.08	1.12	.26	-2.58	9.46
Peer attachment	-2.91	1.8	-.10	-1.58	.000***	-62.55	.71
R <sup>2</sup>	.55***						
△R	.53						
F	26.37						

**Note.** \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Findings indicated that Peer attachment is a strong predictor of one's behavior, thoughts, goals, and emotional self-regulation. It also indicated that Self-control and peer attachment had a non-significant relation with moral disengagement.

## DISCUSSION

The current study is to find the role of students' self-control, peer attachment, and moral disengagement. According to the study, peer attachment and self-regulation are very important to one another. In addition to being impacted by social relationships, self-regulation actively contributes to assessing the caliber of those relationships. Self-regulation is the capacity to manage one's feelings, ideas, and actions in reaction to external stimuli.

The study revealed that self-control was not strongly associated with moral disengagement. However Teenagers who struggle with self-control tend to engage more in risky behaviors, such as aggression and bullying. Prior research shows that low self-control during adolescence is positively linked with different types of antisocial behavior. The relationship between self-regulation and moral disengagement is multifaceted. Adolescents with stronger self-regulation are less prone to morally disengage, which lowers their chances of displaying unethical or aggressive actions. Evidence also suggests that self-regulation acts as a protective factor, buffering the influence of moral disengagement on antisocial tendencies. For instance, MacFarlane et al. (2021) reported that self-control and cooperation in early childhood were

connected to reduced moral disengagement in adolescence, highlighting that promoting self-regulatory skills from an early age can have long-term benefits in preventing moral disengagement and antisocial conduct.

Another finding revealed a significant relationship between peer attachment and self-regulation. Peer attachment and self-regulation have a complicated and reciprocal relationship. While positive peer attachments can improve self-regulation, adolescents with strong self-regulation skills are better able to establish and sustain healthy peer connections. A systematic evaluation of peer connections and parental attachment in adolescence was carried out by Delgado et al. in 2022. According to Delgado et al. (2022), they emphasized that stable attachment predicts and encourages the development of affective interactions with peers, which in turn facilitates positive psychological adjustment. Since healthy peer relationships encourage moral behavior, adolescents who have strong peer ties are less likely to participate in moral disengagement. On the other hand, teenagers who exhibit significant moral disengagement may find it difficult to establish and preserve positive peer relationships. Peer influence is important in the socialization of moral disengagement, according to Caravita et al. (2014), who also suggested that interventions that foster healthy peer interactions can lessen moral disengagement.

Previous literature has shown that boys are often more involved in immoral activities compared to girls. For instance, a study by Caravita et al. (2014) discovered that violent behavior was linked to higher levels of moral disengagement in boys compared to girls. In a similar vein, a study conducted in 2020 by Cordellieri et al. discovered that boys were more inclined than girls to accept moral transgressions and act unethically.

### **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

1. Some limitations with non-permission prevent the investigation of many aspects that could be of great value.
2. The sample was collected from colleges in cities, not from other cities.
3. Only three variables could be measured
4. More variables should be measured (such as mindfulness, psychological well-being, theory of mind)
5. The research findings should be gathered from other cities in the country as well.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

1. The current state of the relationship among students would be improved even more
2. There must be therapies to reduce moral disengagement
3. There must be more increase in relationships with peers
4. The research studies bring more self-regulation in students
5. They must be attached to peers on more occasions.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, we find out the relationship among self-regulation, moral disengagement, and peer attachment. It has been seen that there is a highly significant positive correlation between peer attachment and self-regulation. It also says that there is a non-significant relation of moral disengagement with peer attachment and self-regulation all among college students. This research will have a positive effect on students. The administration used different therapies and techniques to modify the behaviors of students.

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