

# The Relationship between Authoritarian Character and Kohlberg's Moral Stages among Shopkeepers in Tehran

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the present research is to investigate the relationship between authoritarian character and Kohlberg's moral stages among shopkeepers in Tehran. The study method was correlational. The study population consisted of merchants working in the bazaar of Tehran. For sampling, random sampling was used. Morgan Table was used to select the number of the sample. The sample size was 36 people. Authoritarianism test of Altemeyer was used to assess authoritarianism and Lind moral judgment test was used to assess morality. To analyze the data, SPSS 20 software was used. Pearson correlation test was used to analyze the data. The results showed that the correlation between authoritarianism of Altemeyer and Lind moral index at the level of 99% ( $P < 0.01$ ) was significant.

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, Moral Stages, Moral Development, Moral Judgment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the concepts which were clear especially after World War II was totalitarian and authoritarian character. It was the same character that such events were occurred. Additionally, what is a cause of concern and reflection is wide attendance and influence of the authoritarian character among classes, varied social people and classes especially in societies in which the rule of law has not been established and also traditional societies in which the authorities enjoy the weight, credibility and special privileges. This character could result in considerable loss of social damages (Tehrani, 2004).

On the other hand, the authoritarian personality in relation to ethics is important from the perspective that this potentially dangerous character has talent and readiness which is imposed under duty to any action the immoral action simply with many excuses and justifications both national moral ideological (Qasemi, 2011).

On the other hand, we always think that ethics at least roots in man intuitively, but psychologists consider moral development process depending on several factors, including cultural ones which the person, emotional development however intellectual one. Now the question that arises is that the moral development of authoritarian is experiencing particular problems which are very prone to violence compared with non-authoritarian people (Allahdadi, 2007).

The main feature of the power authoritarianism is strongly centralized and integrated established with political repression and exclusion of potential opponents. The power uses political parties and mass organizations to mobilize people toward the goals of the regime (Vestal, 1999).

Authoritarianism focuses on the law of the rule and not the rule of the law. This form of government often includes electoral mechanisms. Political decisions are taken by an elite group of officials and behind the closed doors. A kind of bureaucracy that sometimes acts independently of the rules does not have on the elected officials of the supervision and they fail on addressing the concerns of their constituencies supposed to be a representative. In authoritarianism, there is the tendency to informal and non-framed measures such as political power. Self-styled leadership that even if it is also elected is not interchangeable with the free choice of citizens among the electoral competitors. Arbitrary deprivation of the citizens from civil liberties and weak suffering of significant oppositions is evident in the form of the government (Vestal, 1999).

Teymouri (2011) concluded in his research that there was a significant relationship between authoritarianism and external source of moral authority.

Qasemi et al (2011) concluded that there was a significant relationship between age and authoritarianism.

Zareian (2006) concluded that the authoritarian personality of parents and low political participation of the students was a meaningful relationship and also, this had a positive significant relationship with a sense of equality and freedom and positive belief to freedom in higher female students.

Morality has always been in non-breakable connection with philosophy and religion. From the great philosophers of Greece to the present era and in all religions, morality has always been a central and controversial issue. Ethics and consequently, ethic psychology retained its philosophical background when psychology separated its way from philosophy and attempted to take objective and empirical form and despite all efforts, the shadow of philosophy was never resumed from morality as all schools of psychology of ethics affect a philosophical theory (Jahangirzadeh, 2011).

By analyzing the subjects to his stories, Kohlberg succeeded to determine the stages of moral development in people in three levels and six steps as follows:

1. Pre-conventional level of morality
2. Conventional level of morality
3. Post conventional level of morality

For each of these levels, two stages were considered. Therefore, in total, the moral development of each person can pass six stages.

Kohlberg's theory like any other stage theory is set such that first, it is more complex and more complete in each of the previous stage and second, the sequence of the steps is the same in the majority (Colby et al, 1987).

According to Henry (1983), the content of moral reasoning (the sources of moral authority documents) is distinct from Kohlberg's theory stages. Other people such as Johnston, Brown and Christopher (1990) and Langford and Claydon (1989) had a critical approach to Kohlberg and they claimed that Kohlberg had not had a proper emphasis on the content of moral thinking. Other researchers such as Gibbs and Schnell advise that Kohlberg approach be completed with social attitudes. Formalistic ideas such as Kohlberg's theory tended that the explanations of the individual from development of moral judgment was explained according to the cognitive development while the view based on the content of moral judgment for the individual provides the opportunity attempting for a social explanation logically.

Ahmadpanah (1998) concludes on studying and comparing cognitive and moral development in rural and urban children that the significant differences in cognitive and ethical development are not reported.

Valibeigi (1999) finds out a significant and positive correlation between these two variables on studying the relationship between self-esteem and moral judgments of third year high school students.

With regard to the proposed cases, the research question is that is there a relationship between the authoritarianism and moral development.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study method was correlational. The study population consisted of merchants working in the bazaar of Tehran. For sampling, random sampling was used. Morgan Table was used to select the number of the sample. The sample size was 36 people. Authoritarianism test of Altemeyer was used to assess authoritarianism and Lind moral judgment test was used to assess morality.

### Authoritarianism questionnaire of Altemeyer

This questionnaire was made by Bob Altemeyer (2006). He defines the authoritarian character with the following three components:

1. They follow people of the authorities.
2. They do dangerous tasks by appealing and supporting the authorities.
3. They are traditionalist people.

Altemeyer has estimated the reliability of the questionnaire 0.72.

### Ethic questionnaire of Lind

This questionnaire is made by Lind (1999). Moral judgment questionnaire is designed to assess the moral attitudes and merits of the moral judgments of the participants in a cross-cultural study (Lind, 2002).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this test among different cultures has reported 0.7 and higher than it.

In order to collect data, three questionnaires were given to individual participants. Education and information required were given to people to fill out the questionnaire. Information was not given to any of the participants on what the questionnaire assessed so that they could have any effect on them. While filling out the questionnaire, any questions and ambiguities which the participants had were answered. To analyze the data, SPSS 20 software was used. Pearson correlation test was used to analyze the data.

## RESULTS

The average age of the participants was 39.5. 9.8% of the participants had high school Diploma, 50% of them had Diploma, 11.1% Associate Degree, 23.3% bachelor and 5.8 had MA. 80% of them were married and 20% of them were single.

To test the hypothesis, Pearson correlation test was used. The results show that the correlation between authoritarianism of Altemeyer and Lind moral index at the level of 99% ( $P < 0.01$ ) is significant.

**Table 1.** Correlation between authoritarianism and moral development.

	Ethical development	
Authoritarianism	Pearson correlation coefficient	-0.749
	Sig.	0.000
	Number	36

## CONCLUSION

In the present research, there was seen a strong correlation between authoritarianism and moral development. In fact, the higher the degree of authoritarianism is in the person, the less he is his moral development. The correlation between authoritarianism and moral development in this study was  $r = 0.749$ . The correlation enjoys high power and this indicates very strong relationship between the two variables. However, other studies have also confirmed the relationship between authoritarianism and moral development (Heydari et al., 2012). From the perspective of moral reasoning, whatever the attitudes of the person are more conservative or in other words, what he gets closer to right-wing authoritarianism, moral maturity of the person reduces and vice versa, what the person gets closer to democratic values, moral reasoning development increases in him (Candee & Kohlberg, 1987; Emler et al., 1983; Raaijmakers & Hoof, 2006).

On the other hand, the studies show that whatever the person shows less authoritarianism, he shows individualistic behavior in decision-making and whatever he has more authoritarianism, or he will not decide independently or his decision will be strongly influenced by the group, provided that he does not generally devolve decision-making to someone who is a leader (Leeuwen & Park, 2009). Consistent with the results obtained in this study, the other studies also suggest that whatever the person has higher morality in in the stages of the development; this means that he has moral reasoning, and this moral reasoning occurs in the context of strong abstract thinking and less likely to obey his authority (Kohlberg, 1984; O'Connor, 1977).

What should be considered in this case is to have a comprehensive view to the problem. In fact, psychoanalytical theories, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and developmental psychology all contribute to

explain authoritarianism and its relation to moral development. What is important is that we should not neglect from other areas available in psychology that they are able to have the explanation of the relationship.

For example, in the Milgram experiment, it was found that those who had more adherence to the directives of the testing, however, they were more authoritarian. In fact, those who follow most orders, they expect others that their orders are followed. Van IJzendoorn (1989) concluded in his research that moral development problems in childhood can lead to an authoritarian personality. These studies are all consistent with the results of this study; low moral development or in other words, the establishment in the early stages of moral development is equal to the authoritarian character.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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