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MALAYSIAN ADOLESCENTS' MORAL AWARENESS AND CULTURAL CONFORMITY: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT¹

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Abstract

It has been reported in printed and electronic media that moral decadency among Malaysian adolescents is on the rise.² Such decadency is attributed by a host of “nature versus nurture” debatable factors. This study aims at describing the moral awareness and cultural conformity of Malaysian adolescents. A questionnaire was administered on 200 respondents. Preliminary findings indicated that the respondents’ conformed positively to their cultural expectations ($M = 3.92$; $SD = .92$) and have positive moral awareness is ($M = 4.40$; $SD = .85$). These findings were perceived instrumental to the current classroom managements, school counseling services and choice of parenting styles in Malaysia.

Keywords: Malaysian Adolescents, Moral Decadency, Moral Awareness, Cultural Conformity, School Counseling

¹ Article received: August 2018; Article submitted: November 2018; Article accepted: December 2018

² J. Jaafar, and et.al, “The Impact of Cultural Norms and Values on the Moral Judgment of Malay and American Adolescents: A Brief Report,” in *Ongoing Themes in Psychology and Culture*, eds. Bernadette N. Setiadi and et.al, (Online Ed.) (Melbourne, FL. International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology, 2004), 399-414. Retrieved from <http://www.iaccp.org>; Ting Soo Ting, “Antisocial Behaviors Among Malaysian Adolescents,” (An Unpublished research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University Tunku Abd Rahman. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2011); Shadiya Mohamed S. Baqutayan, “The Relationship between Religion, Knowledge, and Morality Development in Adolescence,” *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, no. 16 (2011): 126-131.

Introduction

Moral awareness among Malaysian adolescents is on the decline. Premarital sex in Malaysia is rampant despite being viewed as taboo since it conflicts with the local culture and most religions especially Islam which forbid its followers from engaging in activities that could lead to adultery, let alone committing it.³ Fauziah Ibrahim and et.al on the other hand, examined substance abuse and aggressive behavior among Malaysian adolescents and found that majority of the adolescents (95 percent) displayed aggressive behavior of moderate to high level. The result of the study also indicated that there was a significant correlation between drug and aggression. These are just glimpses of adolescents' moral decline in this country.⁴

On the brighter side, observations made by Akbar Husain on internalization of moral values⁵ and research findings by Shadiya Mohamed S. Baqutayan, and Maisarah Mohamed Saat, Porter and Woodbine indicated that empowerment of knowledge, internalization of spiritual and moral values would moderate and monitor adolescents from engaging themselves in any immoral behaviors.⁶ Similarly, Sakineh Mofrad and et.al found that mastery of social skills is important for the youngsters who will eventually lead healthy lifestyles and the mastery of this skill will reduce the likelihood of unwarranted immoral behaviors of the Malaysian youths such as premarital sex, alcohol and drug abuse, and aggression.⁷ Choice of

³ Mohd Rizal Abdul Manaf and et.al., "Pre-marital Sex and Its Predicting Factors among Malaysian Youths," *Comprehensive Psychiatry, suppl. Supplement* 55, no. 1 (2014): S82-S88.

⁴ Fauziah Ibrahim and et.al., "Substance Abuse and Aggressive Behavior among Adolescents," *Asian Social Science* 8, no. 9 (2012): 92-97.

⁵ Akbar Husain, "Alleviating Behavioral Problems of Adolescents through Cultivating Human Values, Character Development, and Value-oriented Education," *Journal of Psychosocial Research* 6, no. 1 (2011): 63-70.

⁶ Shadiya Mohamed S. Baqutayan, "The Relationship between Religion . . . ; Maisarah Mohamed Saat, Porter, S. & Woodbine, G., "An Exploratory Study of the Impact of Malaysian Ethics Education on Ethical Sensitivity," *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 7 (2010): 39-62.

⁷ Sakineh Mofrad and et.al., "Investigating Life Skills among Young Students in Malaysia," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 3 (2013):

parenting styles may also moderate and enhance adolescents' moral reasoning and awareness.⁸

Moral decline is attributed by a host of factors which is internal and external by nature. Internal may come in the form of gender,⁹ age and birth order, so to speak. External factors may be seen in the form of workaholic parents, parenting styles, peer and media influences, globalization,¹⁰ family socioeconomic statuses, parental statuses (married, divorced and single parent), neighborhood and school locations (urban, suburban and rural).¹¹

Conceptualizing Adolescence from the Islamic and Western Perspectives

Adolescence

Adolescence is viewed differently by Islam and its western counterparts. Islam sees adolescence, as a normal phase of life that everyone of us will enter naturally. Aisha Hamdan highlights that;

“... as Muslims, we need to contemplate the validity of this stage (adolescence) since we understand that accountability (Takleef) for our thoughts and actions begins at puberty (Buloogh). This means that even

210-213; J. R. Letchumanan, “Juvenile Delinquencies in Malaysia Raising Alarm Bell,” 2010. Retrieved January 14, 2011 from http://www.klik4malaysia.com/index.php?option=com_myblog&show=juvenile-delinquencies-in-malaysia-raising-a-larm-bell.html&Itemid=79&lang=en

⁸ Adnan Abd Rashid, Arifin Mamat, & Burhan Ibrahim, “Barriers to Moral Development of Adolescents and Parental Responsibility: The Case of Malay Working Parents,” *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* 1, no. 6 (2014): 40-48.

⁹ R. Opayemi, “Gender, Self-esteem, Religiosity and Premarital Sex among Young Adults,” *Gender and Behavior* 9, no. 1 (2011):3495-3512.

¹⁰ D. Griswold, “The Blessings and Challenges of Globalization,” *The World & I* 15, no. 9 (2000): 266-283.

¹¹ Nik Rosila Nik Yaacob, Najeemah Mohd Yusof and Aswati Hamzah, “Religious Orientation and Attitudes Among Muslim Students with Disciplinary Problems in Malaysian Secondary School,” *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 4, no. 11 (2011): 281-287.

though we may not be an “adult” socially, we are considered to be one spiritually”.¹²

It is apparent from this citation that adolescence from the Islamic perspective begins when a person is accountable for his or her thoughts and actions at pubescence. Adolescence marks progress of developmental changes in that parents need to be aware of their children’s well-being. There are instances that parents need to observe. She reiterates;

“... obviously this... bring up all kinds of red flags and warnings for parents as they realize that the task of parenting is mostly complete by the age of 12 or 13, depending on when a child reaches puberty”.¹³

Learned Muslim parents would unanimously disagree to relinquish their responsibilities in raising their children right upon pubescence. In western psychology, this is the point of “empty nest” where adolescents will leave their parents’ home to become independent individual with full lawful individual rights. Further, Islam emphasizes much on authoritative parenting style where continuous effective communication, constructive and practical guidance must be exercised until the youngsters are capable of handling and managing their emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, social and family lives effectively. Adolescents are exposed at all times to many negative influences around them and thus, must be reminded subtly and constantly to stay steadfast in Islam and remembering Allah at all times. In sum, adolescence is seen as a stage whereby;

“... the youth will be completely responsible to Allah for all that he/she does. This does not mean that being a parent ends at that time, but it does highlight the significance of those early years and the crucial role that parents play. We need to build a solid foundation so that

¹² Aisha Hamdan, *Nurturing Eman in Children* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2011).

¹³ Ibid.

our children will make appropriate choices when the time comes".¹⁴

It is apparent from this citation that Muslim youths at this stage will be accountable and answerable to Allah for everything that cross their heart (*niyyah*) and mind, display of their behavior and treatment towards others. Their love for Allah should surpass the love for God's creations. The importance of prioritizing Allah above all His creations is emphasized by *Surah Al Baqarah*: 165;

"... but those who believe are stronger in love for Allah..."

Parents' supervision of their own children continues despite the onset of puberty. Muslim parents need to be aware that their young adolescents will go through this distinct developmental phase that will affect their personality (identity formation), mindset, social competency, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy and crucial life decision- making. It is natural that they may fumble along the way but will learn from their mistakes to become better individuals. Through the sincere guidance and positive role-models around them, Muslim adolescents will grow and develop as responsible young Muslims.

In sum, adolescence from the Islamic perspective is a stage marked by pubescence, a "storm and stress" period as phrased by western theory and adolescents will be responsible to execute their responsibilities "*amana*" earnestly and honestly as they will be answerable to al Mighty Allah on the *Day of Resurrection*.

Morality from the Islamic Perspective

The Islamic moral system stems from its primary creed of belief in One God as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Islam considers the human race to be a part of God's creation, and as His subjects. From an Islamic perspective, the purpose of human existence and life is nonetheless to worship Allah, and to lead "*khalifatullah*" this worldly life in harmony as *khalifah* "a leader" who exercise Allah's Divine Will; hence, achieve peace "*sakinah*" in

¹⁴ Ibid.

this world, and eternal happiness and contentment in the hereafter. Muslims refer to the Glorious Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet, as their golden moral guidance, so as not to go astray from the right path. Its importance is emphasized in *Surah al Baqarah*: 177;

“... It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing.” (Al-Qur'an 2:177)

It is obvious from this Qur'anic verse that a Muslim personality and belief system are based on a set of virtues namely righteousness and piety. The key to sound and good conduct is the strong foundation and faith in Allah (S.W.T), “*iman*”, as Allah is our creator and knows, *Al knoweth*, what crosses our mind and heart, our intention “*niyyah*”, and monitor us at all times. Our good and bad deeds will be recorded by *Raqib* and *Athib*, His assigned angels, in our book of deeds. Having this deep sense of awareness will instill the sense of piety and humbleness in man and prevents them from engaging in any immoral acts, which are against Allah's will. On the contrary, man is created as a weak being who is readily exposed to all types of temptations, driven by our lower *nafs* “*ammarah*” internally and lured by “*syaitan*” or Lucifer (the fallen angel), externally. If man does not possess strong faith “*eeman*”, he will submit easily to all these temptations, thus increase the percentage of immoral acts such as premarital sex, substance abuse, and sexual activities and indecencies related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Heterosexual, (LGBT). Nurturing *eeman* must be accompanied by nurturing reasoning ability since childhood as this may forbid a

youngster from falling into these immoral traps. It is apparent that Islam teaches its followers to follow good deeds, to avoid destructive behaviors or violence against others and self. Such sound personality, depth of knowledge and wisdom will enable them to become effective Muslim individual, "*khalifah*" or leaders for their family and society as a whole.

Bassiouni relates that every Muslim is the recipient, guardian, and executor of God's will on earth; his responsibilities are all encompassing.¹⁵ It is also imperative of a Muslim to act in defence of what is right, which is act of his faith, "*emaan*", and as well as his duty to oppose wrong. In a hadeeth, the Prophet once said,

"If someone among you sees wrong he must right it by his hand if he can (deed, conduct, action). If he cannot, then by his tongue (speak up, verbally oppose); if he cannot, then by his gaze (silent expression of disapproval); and if he cannot, then in his heart. The last is the minimum expression of his conviction (faith, courage)."

It is a known fact in Islam that living the faith is an *ibada*, and servicing the mankind, *ummah*, is also seen as an *ibada*, acts that will please Allah or God. In the following Qur'anic verse, Allah mentions;

"... by no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye love; and whatever ye give, of a truth God knoweth it well. (Al-Qur'an 3:92).

What causes moral degradation then in society? A study of human history suggests that moral decline begins with prosperity, and the rise of individualism and secularism.¹⁶ It brings forth the separation of state from religious institution. The situation is worsening via

¹⁵ M. Cherif Bassiouni, "The Social System and Morality of Islam," last modified January 24, 2012, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/social-system-and-morality-islam>.

¹⁶ Kang'entu Geoffrey Kimathi, "The Rise of Secularization in Kenya and its Impact to the Church" (Master's thesis, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2017); Adibah Abdul Rahim, "The Impact of Secularism on Religious Beliefs and Practices," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 7, no. 1 (2010): 157-177.

break-ups in families through divorce and the spread of negative dogmas via electronic medias, have indeed affect the minds and behavior of youths which contribute to moral degradation in sum.¹⁷

Theoretical Framework

Most psychologists describe adolescence as the “storm and stress” period. It is a critical developmental period where adolescents struggle with the development of self-identity which may include self-concept, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth. Before they discover the right identity which fits them best, there is a tendency for many youngsters to experiment with new attractive ways of portraying themselves publically. Such experimentation may expose them to many positive and negative influences. Adolescents’ thinking and display of behavior are very much affected by their cognitive development which includes internalization of thinking skills and moral reasoning.

As regard to adolescents’ moral reasoning, psychologist such as Kohlberg classifies adolescents’ moral functioning at Level 2: Conventional Reasoning.¹⁸ Accordingly, morality enables adolescents to distinguish right from wrong.¹⁹ Internalization of this important cognitive process enables them to respect significant others and submit to institutionalized golden rules and regulations. Internalization of moral values is reflected in their reasoning and thinking ability about acceptable rules for ethical conduct.²⁰ This is then reflected in how adolescents actually behave in moral circumstances and finally describes how adolescents feel about matters related to morality.

On the other side of the coin, bad family communication, ineffective parenting styles and strong influences which come

¹⁷ Nurul Hanim Azahari, “Moral Decay among Muslim Teenagers in Malaysia,” 2015.

<https://www.scribd.com/.../Moral-Decay-Among-Muslim-Teenagers-in-Malaysia>

¹⁸ J. Santrock, *Educational Psychology* (New York: McGrawHill High Education, 2014).

¹⁹ Anne Colby and Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Measurement of Moral Judgment*, vol. I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁰ D. Hart and G. Carlo, “Moral Development in Adolescence,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 15, no. 3 (2005): 223-233.

externally would affect adolescents' reasoning ability and ethical conduct. Adolescents' failure to internalize moral values and possessions of lower self-esteem and self-worth would expose adolescents to all types of at-risk behaviors.²¹ In keeping abreast with this trendy lifestyle, some adolescents succumbed easily to these influences. Such description furnishes us with information on how adolescents think, perceive, display their attitude and behavior or react to positive or negative stimulus. Their thinking, display of pro-social or antisocial behaviors are very much determined by the *nature versus nurture* debate. These include hereditary traits (temperaments) and external factors such as schooling, parenting style, peer influence or influences which come from printed or electronic media and have strong bearing on adolescents' morality.

Members of a particular society are governed by their cultural values.²² Cultural values were created by our predecessors to safeguard the cultural traditions and beliefs systems. A cultural value synchronizes well with the individual's moral behavior. Members of a specific society are expected to conform well with their specific cultural values. A display of immoral behaviors is classified as non-conforming.²³

An interplay of moral awareness and cultural conformity would enable adolescents to justify the external influences and prompts them to make wise choices which may not jeopardize the rights of significant others around them. This is seen as mastery of morally upright behaviors and social competency.

²¹ Nurul Hanim Azahari, "Moral Decay Among Muslim Teenagers . . ." ; Adnan Abd Rashid, Arifin Mamat, & Borhan Ibrahim, "Barriers to Moral Development of Adolescents . . ." ; Adibah Abdul Rahim, "The Impact of Secularism on Religious Beliefs . . ."

²² Nurul Hanim Azahari, "Moral Decay Among Muslim Teenagers . . ."

²³ G. Trommsdorff, "Cultural Roots of Values, Morals, and Religious Orientations in Adolescent Development," in *The Oxford Handbook of Human Development and Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. L. A. Jensen (Oxford: Oxford Library of Psychology, 2005), 377-395, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199948550.013.23; Lakeesha N. Woods, Robert J. Jagers, "Are Cultural Values Predictors of Moral Reasoning in African American Adolescents?" *Journal of Black Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2003):102-118.

Literature Review

The era of globalization especially at the beginning of the millennium era brought along positive and negative values and impacted the Malaysian youth in multiple ways.²⁴ On one side of the coin, young Malaysians accept and emulate modern lifestyles which may contradict the traditional value system.²⁵ On the contrary, positive elements were also brought forth as globalization brought about advancement in high technology and communication system, great achievement in the country's economy and political stability.

To date, it is reported that moral awareness among Malaysian youth is declining.²⁶ The beginning of the millennium era marked this decline. Adolescence is actually known as the "storm and stress period, as youngsters are on the trail or quest for their true and stable identities."²⁷ This unstable phenomenon is attributed by their growth spurt and hormonal surge.²⁸

Rapid changes were obvious among Malaysian youths. New wave of thinking patterns, and lifestyles were spread via internet cafes, cellular phones, *wifi* services in homes, satellite and cable TVs. Young adolescents were easily exposed and embrace new lifestyles and thinking patterns. This gives rise to social issues namely; school refusal and truancy, runaways, contemporary and retro-urban dress code, pornography, drug and alcohol addictions, cohabitation, premarital sex, teen prostitution, heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transvestites (LGBT) (still perceived as taboo by most eastern culture). LGBT practices are permitted in some western cultures and have been legalized in certain states in America and European countries. LGBT is clearly prohibited in the Shariah Law. Prophet

²⁴ D. Griswold, "The Blessings and Challenges of . . ."

²⁵ Fariza Md Sham, Siti Zaleha Shafi'e and Syaidatun Nazirah Abu Zahrin, "Adolescent Lifestyles in Malaysia," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no.6 S1 (2015): 271-276.

²⁶ Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS, "Moral Competencies among Malaysian Youth," *Health and the Environment Journal* 3, no.3 (2012): 1-10; Sakineh Mofrad and et.al., "Investigating Life Skills among Young . . ."

²⁷ Santrock, *Educational Psychology* . . .

²⁸ Anne Green, "What Are the Causes of Teenagers' Lack of Moral Values & Self-Discipline?" *Livestrong.com*, 2017. <https://www.livestrong.com/article/1007053-causes-teenagers-lack-moral-values-selfdiscipline/>

Muhammad (S.A.W) himself forbade his companions from wearing attire similar to those worn by women. It is also obligatory for Muslims to observe the Law of Nature, *fitrah*.²⁹ Most of the Malaysian youths were insensitive to public opinions and acceptance of their changing trends in lifestyle.

Considering the above Malaysian youth scenario, a study on adolescents' moral awareness and cultural conformity is pertinent. This is to ascertain the degree of their moral awareness and cultural conformity to the existing cultural norms.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are to examine Malaysian adolescents' moral awareness and cultural conformity. It is also imperative for this study to ascertain differences in adolescents' moral awareness and cultural conformity by considering gender, school location, school streaming, and parental statuses as the independent variables.

The following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the levels of Malaysian adolescents' moral awareness?
2. What are their levels of cultural conformity?

Methodology

Questionnaires related to the two constructs (moral awareness and adolescents' cultural conformity) were administered on 200 selected Malaysian adolescents. The questionnaires consisted of 74 items which examines adolescents' moral awareness and as well as their cultural conformity. Only completed forms were finally addressed and analyzed in the final stage of this study. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to investigate mean scores differences by using gender, school locations (urban versus rural), streaming and parental statuses as the independent variables.

²⁹ Hanani Harun and Zulkifli Hassan, "The Challenge of Globalization to Muslim youth," 2001. <https://zulkiflihasan.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/microsoft-word-journal-education.pdf>

Discussion on demographic variables and analysis of findings on Malaysian adolescents' moral awareness and cultural conformity were tabulated in Table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

Demographic Variables

Frequency counts and percentages were employed to analyze the demographic variables. Table 1 describes the means and standard deviations of the various demographic variables undertaken by this study comparatively. The demographic variables examined were the students' age, gender, school locations, school streaming, number of siblings, birthday order, fathers' occupations, fathers' qualification, mothers' occupation and mothers' qualification, and parental statuses.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Malaysian Adolescents

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15	1	.6
16	163	93.1
Missing (99)	11	6.3
Total	175	100
Gender		
Male	67	38.3
Female	97	55.4
Missing (99)	11	6.3
Total	175	100
School Location		
Urban	121	69.1
Suburban	37	21.1
Rural	3	1.7
Missing (99)	14	8
Total	175	100
Streaming		
Science	73	41.7
Social Sciences	78	44.6
Missing (99)	24	13.7
Total	175	100
Siblings		
1	4	2.3

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2	4	2.3
3	20	11.4
4	30	17.1
5	33	18.9
6	28	16.0
7	15	8.6
8	10	5.7
9	-	-
10	2	1.1
11	1	.6
12	2	1.1
13	1	.6
Missing (99)	25	14.3
Total	175	100
Birth order		
1	35	20
2	34	19.4
3	30	17.1
4	15	8.6
5	16	9.1
6	12	6.9
7	7	4.0
8	8	4.6
9	-	-
10	-	-
11	1	.6
Missing (99)	17	9.7
Total	175	100
Father's occupation		
Civil Servant	47	26.9
Private Company	23	13.1
Others	68	38.9
Missing (9)	37	21.1
Total	175	100
Father's qualification		
Primary	8	4.6
PMR	12	6.9
SPM	28	16.0
STPM	15	8.6

Certificates	7	4.0
Diploma	9	5.1
Bachelor Degree	4	2.3
Others	1	.6
Missing (99)	91	52
Total	175	100
Mother's occupation		
Civil Servant	26	14.9
Private Company	7	4.0
Homemaker	93	53.1
Others	10	5.7
Missing (9)	39	22.3
Total	175	100
Mother's qualification		
Primary	19	10.9
PMR	8	4.6
SPM	41	23.4
STPM	16	9.1
Certificates	6	3.4
Diploma	6	3.4
Bachelor Degree	3	1.7
Master Degree	1	.6
Others	2	1.1
Missing (99)	73	41.7
Total	175	100
Parental Status		
Married	130	74.3
Divorced	7	4.0
Single - death of spouse	18	10.3
Missing (99)	20	11.4
Total	175	100

Description of Adolescents' Moral Awareness

Moral awareness was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) through 5 (strongly agree). The midpoint was set at 3. With respect to moral awareness among Malaysian adolescents, the mean scores ranged from a high of 4.51 (SD = .70) "in whatever circumstances, I still feel that stealing is gravely wrong" and a low of 2.61 (SD = 1.13) "I feel that society is having a misleading perception of our

adolescents” and 2.89 (SD = 1.18) “I feel awkward interacting with the opposite gender” which were below the midpoint. Overall all items have mean scores which go beyond the midpoint except for the 2 items.

Table 2: Adolescents’ Moral Awareness

	Items	Mean	SD
1	I am able to distinguish right from wrong.	4.23	.73
2	I can imagine how difficult it is for a person going through a sad situation.	4.06	.83
3	I am more than willing to extent my help to any friends in difficulties	4.06	.69
4	I feel that society is having a misleading perception of our adolescents.	2.61	1.13
5	In whatever circumstances, I still feel that stealing is gravely wrong.	4.51	.70
6	I assume that disturbing our neighbours at night is wrong	4.40	.85
7	I could imagine the repercussion of not reporting any crime to the authority concerned.	3.98	.87
8	I feel awkward interacting with the opposite gender	2.89	1.18
9	I honestly like to spend my entire life and time serving the needy	3.76	.85
10	I like to spend my time running household chores	3.62	.85

Scale 1 - 5, Midpoint = 3

Description of Adolescents’ Cultural Conformity

Cultural conformity was also measured using a 5 scale points (midpoint: 3). The highest was set at 5 (strongly agree) and the lowest is 1 (strongly disagree). Reflecting on Malaysian adolescents’ responses to their cultural conformity, the mean scores obtained ranged from a high of 3.92 (SD = .92) “My cultural practices enhance my family solidarity” and a low of 3.28 (SD = .99) “My culture monitors or control bad behaviors” and. Overall all items have mean scores which go beyond the midpoint.

Table 3: Adolescents’ Cultural Conformity

Items	Mean	SD
I concur with our my cultural practices	3.67	.93
I feel stressful with respect to our cultural practices	3.47	.96
I agree that our cultural practices is outdated	3.61	1.02
I feel that my culture forbids me from enhancing myself	3.62	.95
My cultural practices shape positive personality	3.81	.81
Internalization of my cultural values monitor or control bad behaviors	3.28	.99
My cultural practices enhance my family solidarity	3.92	.92
My cultural practices contradict my basic needs.	3.43	.92
I gain more respect due to my cultural practices	3.55	.75
My personality is very much shaped by my culture	3.41	.89

Scale 1 - 5, Midpoint = 3

***t*-tests and ANOVA Analyses**

A comparison was made to ascertain whether there were any significant gender and academic streaming differences with respect to adolescents' moral awareness and as well as cultural conformity. Independent *t*-test was employed to ascertain these differences. Table 4 tabulates the findings related to these two issues.

Table 4: Adolescents' Moral Awareness by gender & academic streaming

Variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	Male	67	3.81	.352	-2.68	162	.008*
	Female	97	3.96	.344			
Academic Streaming	Science	73	3.88	.390	-1.04	149	.299
	Social Science	78	3.94	.448			

*the mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

The *t*-test analysis indicated that Malaysian female students had higher mean scores as regard to moral awareness ($M=3.96$, $SD = .344$) and were significantly different from male ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .352$), $p = .008$ at $p < .05$. Inspection of the two indicates that the average score for moral awareness for female students (3.96) is

significantly higher than the score (3.81) for males. On the contrary there was no significant difference in moral awareness between science and social science students (academic streaming).

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also administered to examine significant differences in moral awareness among Malaysian adolescents who came from three different school locations (urban, suburban and rural schools). Table 5 displayed the findings via ANOVA analysis.

Table 5: Adolescents' Moral Awareness by school location & parental statuses

Variable		N	Mean	Std Deviation	df	SS	MS	F	P
School Location Btw. Grps. Within Grps.	Urban	130	3.887	.319	2	.243	.122	1.03	.360
	suburban	7	3.978	.423					
	Rural	18	3.972	.174					
Parental Status Btw. Grps. Within Grps.	Married	130	3.891	.328	3	1.246	.415	3.66	*.014
	Divorced	7	3.857	.485					
	Single	18	3.927	.342					

*the mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Adolescents' moral awareness were compared based on their school locations and as well as their parental statuses via ANOVA analysis. The findings indicated that significant differences in adolescents' moral awareness were found among adolescents with diverse parental statuses, $F(3,151) = 3.66, p = .014$. Comparatively there were no significant differences in the adolescents' moral awareness, $F(2,158) = 1.03, p = .360$ in regard to where their schools were located.

Table 6: Adolescents' cultural conformity by school location and parental statuses

Variable		N	Mean	Std Deviation	<i>df</i>	SS	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
School Location Btw. Grps. Within Grps.	Urban	121	3.1776	.41460	2	.486	.243	1.41	.247
	suburban	37	3.2548	.41532					
	Rural	3	3.5238	.43644					
Parental Status Btw. Grps. Within Grps.	Married	130	3.1730	.39417	3	1.578	.526	3.28	*.023
	Divorced	7	3.2857	.28571					
	Single	17	3.4454	.47884					

*the mean difference is significant at $p < .05$

Similarly, analysis of variance was also used to compare adolescents' cultural conformity using school location and parental statuses as independent variables. The findings indicated that significant differences in adolescents' cultural conformity were found among adolescents from diverse parental statuses, $F(3,151) = 3.28$, $p = .023$. Comparatively there were no significant differences in the Malaysian adolescents' cultural conformity, $F(2,158) = 1.41$, $p = .247$ as regard to their school locations.

Discussion and Recommendation

This study has included a host of independent variables such as respondents age, class, gender, school locations, number of siblings, birth order, academic streaming in school, parents' occupation and parents' qualification and as well as parental statuses as the researchers attempt to examine their moral awareness and cultural conformity.

However, in the final analysis, only four independent variables were included in the analysis. These were gender, school locations, academic streaming, and parental statuses. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) was employed to describe

items related to Malaysian adolescents' moral awareness and cultural conformity. *T*-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare means' differences in the two constructs and four independent variables were used to ascertain these differences.

As regard to the first research question, the overall mean scores suggested that the Malaysian adolescents still possessed high moral awareness. With respect to the second research question, the mean scores suggested that the respondents conformed positively to their cultural norms and expectations. These findings suggested that the Malaysian adolescents who participated in this study still have high moral awareness and conformed positively to their cultural values. These findings are consistent with Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS; Jaafar, Kolodinsky, McCarthy, and Schroder's research findings and Mat Saad Baki's opinion.³⁰

In relation to the third research question on the correlates of moral awareness and cultural conformity such as gender differences, school locations and parental statuses, the finding on gender differences is consistent with Coetzee, Louw and Jooste, Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS; and Galotti³¹ but is inconsistent with Jing Zhang's findings.³² The *t*-test analysis indicated that there were significant gender differences with respect to the Malaysian adolescents' moral awareness. In this study, female adolescents were found to have higher mean scores as opposed to males. There were no significant differences between science and social science students (academic streaming) in regard to moral awareness. This finding is consistent with Olatunji³³ and Opayemi³⁴ research findings.

³⁰ Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS, "Moral Competencies among . . . ; J. Jaafar, and et. al., "The Impact of Cultural Norms . . . ; Mat Saat Baki, "Tingkahlaku Tak Normal," in *Psikologi Melayu*, ed. Abdul Halim (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), 344-385.

³¹ J. Coetzee, D. A. Louw and J. C. Josste, "The Perceptions of Morality of Secondary School Learners: A Cross-cultural Studies," *Acta Theologica* 1 (2005): 1-27; Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS, "Moral Competencies among . . . ; K. M. Galotti, "Gender Differences in Self-reported Moral Reasoning: A Review and New Evidence," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 18, no. 5 (1988): 475-488.

³² Jing Zhang, "Factors of Chinese Adolescents' Moral Judgment Competence," *Ethics in Progress Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2012): 83-95.

³³ B. F. Olatunji, "Gender Differences Among Youths' Moral Maladjusted Behavior

However, it is pertinent to highlight that two items were spotted having mean scores which were below the midpoint: “I feel that society is having a misleading perception of our adolescents” ($m = 2.61$, $SD = 1.13$) and “I feel awkward interacting with the opposite gender” ($m = 2.89$, $SD = 1.18$). The low mean score for the former item indicates disagreement and is perceived as the reverse. In the true sense the respondents of this study perceived that the Malaysian society understand them and do not see adolescents as a threat to their existing status quo. Similarly, the latter item “I feel awkward interacting with the opposite gender” indicates disagreement which is just the reverse. In summarizing the two items, respondents had high perception of society’s opinion and were not having any difficulty interacting with the opposite gender.

Findings from this study implicate the teaching and learning of moral education in schools, counselling services in public schools and as well as parenting process in Malaysian home. As regard to the first finding, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia may continue to promote effective moral education and character building among school going children and adolescents as the former curriculum has shown positive effects and this is consistent with findings by H. K. Ma.³⁵ However, strong emphasis must be given to the understanding of the contemporary adolescents who differ in many ways. According to Holroyd the contemporary adolescents are classified as generation y (who were born between 1981 till 1994, and were described as: lazy, debt-ridden, programmed for instant gratification, portrayed as demanding and unrealistic in their career aspirations, “internet-addicted” and presumed “lonely”), generation z (born between 1995-2009, the first generation who did not experience the pre-internet world, presumed to be technology-focused, or perhaps known as the iPad generation) and alpha (born in 2010, predicted to be the most formally educated generation in history, beginning school

in Nigerian Secondary Schools,” *European Scientific Journal* 8, no. 15 (2007): 45-53.

³⁴ Opayemi, “Gender, Self-esteem, Religiosity and . . .

³⁵ H. K. Ma, “The Relation of Gender-role Classification to the Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour of Chinese Adolescents,” *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 166, no. 2 (2005): 189- 201.

earlier and studying longer, the children of older, wealthier parents with fewer siblings, and they are already being labelled materialistic).³⁶ If such descriptions are true, then each generation may have different needs, expectations and a set of behaviour attributes; hence an innovative, comprehensive moral education syllabus, reproductive health education, constructive mind and character building modules for understanding these generations are necessary. Teachers need to be informative, knowledgeable and well trained about these differences and needs as this will result in effective teaching and learning process and as well as counselling adolescence issues.

Effective communication between parents and children at home and between teachers and students in schools are perceived important as adults would be able to assist adolescents during the "storm and stress period".³⁷ An authoritarian style may suppress self-expressiveness. Communication breakdown in families may expose adolescents to peer influence. Highly at-risk adolescents are exposed to a situation of "peer acceptance and peer rejection" occurs. Adolescents who submit to their peer positively will not experience low self-esteem as opposed to those who gets to be rejected.³⁸ It is reported that peer may spread negative or positive influences. Negative influences may include substance abuse or perhaps initiating some unacceptable socializing patterns.³⁹

This study also found significant differences in moral awareness among adolescents who came from diverse parental statuses (married, divorced and single) through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). It is interesting to note that parental statuses have strong bearing on adolescents' moral awareness. The findings indicated that most of the youngsters came from intact families

³⁶ J. Holroyd, "Talkin' 'bout label," *The Sydney Morning Herald: Life & Style*, 2011. <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/diet-and-fitness/talkin-bout-my-label-20110720-1ho7s.html#ixzz310aJmhdr>

³⁷ Asbah Razali and Nur Azah Razali, "Parent-Child Communication and Self Concept among Malays Adolescence," *Asian Social Science* 9, no. 11 (2013): 189-200; Santrock, *Educational Psychology* . . .

³⁸ Olatunji, "Gender Differences Among Youths' . . .

³⁹ Nor Hafizah NH, Zaihairul I and Geshina Ayu MS, "Moral Competencies among . . . ; Ting Soo Ting, "Antisocial Behaviors Among Malaysian . . .

(parents were still married). This finding contradicted the general opinion that moral awareness among Malaysian adolescents is declining and it is attributed by broken homes.⁴⁰

As regard to adolescents and cultural conformity, interesting findings were derived from the t-test analyses. Significant differences were found among adolescents from different parental background or statuses (married, divorced and single). Interestingly, higher mean score in cultural conformity was found among adolescents who came from single parent home, followed by children from divorced and intact families. This finding is inconsistent with the view that children from broken and single family homes do not conform culturally.⁴¹

Considering the above arguments, it is apparent that family dyad can be the main cause of moral decline among youths as parents are responsible to raise their children. It is recommended that if parents are caring enough about the media effects on their children, they may consider internet filtering devices. Spending quality time with family members is necessary as children may internalize moral values and spirituality effectively. Both parents and teachers should be positive role-models to their children.

Speaking of Islamic parenting, a child is born as a clean slate, it will be the parents themselves who will shape their child to be a good Muslim or otherwise. Quoting the words of Bassiouni, "... every Muslim is the recipient, guardian, and executor of God's will on earth; his responsibilities are all encompassing. It is also imperative of a Muslim to act in defense of what is right is as much part of his faith as is his duty to oppose wrong."⁴²

In conclusion, every quarter of the society should play his or her roles effectively in order to minimize juvenile delinquencies and reduce moral decadency and crime rate effectively so that this world will become a better place to live in and for our children to grow wiser and better as the future stakeholder.

⁴⁰ D. Hart and G. Carlo, "Moral Development in Adolescence . . .

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bassiouni, "The Social System and Morality of Islam . . .

Conclusion

In summary, it is apparent that findings from this study which has included a host of independent variables such as respondents' age, grade level, gender, school locations, siblings, birth order, academic streaming in school, and parental statuses indicated that moral awareness and cultural conformity among Malaysian adolescents are still prevalent and intact despite contradicting reports from other studies on Malaysian adolescents. Further studies may focus on other correlates of adolescent's morality and cultural conformity.



AL-SHAJARAH

Special Issue

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