

INFLUENCE OF GENDER ON THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN ADO EKITI LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF EKITI STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of gender (male and female) on the moral reasoning of adolescents in Ado Ekiti Local Government area in Nigeria. A total of 200 Adolescents were drawn by a systematic random sampling technique where a list of all secondary schools in Ado Ekiti was obtained from the Ministry of Education of the state and a total of ten (10) schools that fell on the even numbers in arrangement were picked from the total of twenty one (21) secondary schools. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select classes of adolescent in the study. The total number of students was randomly sampled from the strata of classes 1 to 6. Twenty (20) came from each of the 10 schools comprising 10 males and 10 females. 100 students came from the junior classes 1-3 and 100 students came from the senior classes. Their ages range between 10 and 19 with a mean age of 14.64. One hypothesis was tested to examine whether there will be a significant difference in the moral reasoning of male and female Adolescents. The Defining Issues Test (DIT) developed by Rest (1979) was used in the measurement of moral reasoning and development while a single item in the instrument was used to categorize gender. Data were analysed using the student's t - test. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between the moral reasoning of male and female adolescents ($t(198) = 0.082$, $P > 0.05$). Findings were discussed in line with previous Literature. It was concluded that gender is not a predictor of Moral Reasoning at Adolescence stage of development.

Keywords: Moral Development, Gender, Adolescents and Parenting

Introduction

Parents want their adolescent children to grow into socially and morally mature individuals. They feel frustrated in trying to discover the best way to accomplish this and it could be more frustrating when putting the sex of such children into consideration. Most parents have a vision of what they want their male and female adolescent child to be like, but sometimes this vision gets clouded by everyday pressures. Male and female experience many physical and social changes during adolescence and have to come to terms with new definitions of their gender roles. Thus, adolescence morality can be

defined and shaped as the adolescent's strives in the midst of his or her own developmental struggles to internalise and commit the self to prescriptive ideals within a situational context and one that incorporates the interplay of the developmental level. A major task every adolescent face is establishment of a role in society with a stable sense of wellbeing and contentment with the physical self. Achieving sexual maturity and satisfaction is part of this process but in contrast to biological maturation, cultural values limit some of the social opportunities for psychological maturation during Adolescence. During this time, most

adolescents become acutely aware of their appearance, and females more than males want to change their looks. Teenagers frequently imitate the dress and actions of movie stars, rock musicians, or sports figures having admirations for their Parents. In addition to their physical appearance, teenagers are sensitive about their beliefs and attitudes, and how other people regard them.

When Moral discipline is not properly instilled in adolescents, such inappropriate actions and attitudes that violate family expectations, society norms or values, personal or property right of others are involved (Gross, 2008). Predictors of such inadequate actions include identity (negative identity), self-control (low degree) age (early initiation), sex (male), expectations for education (low expectations), little commitment, school grades (low achievement in early grades), peer influence (heavy influence, low resistance), socio-economic status (low) and parental role (lack of monitoring, low support, and ineffective discipline). Adolescence has long been described as a time of emotional turmoil (Hall, 1904), it is a time when emotional highs and lows increase. Young adolescents may be on top of the world one moment and down in the dumps the next. The intensity of their emotions often seems out of proportions to the events that elicit them (Steinberg and Levine 1997).

A developmental Psychologist, Santrock (2001) defined adolescence as a developmental period of transition from childhood to early adulthood, entered at approximately 10 to 12 years of age and ending at 18 to 22 years of age. Adolescence begins with rapid physical changes and dramatic gains in height and weight, changes in body contour, and the development of sexual characteristics such as enlargement of the breasts, development of pubic and facial hair, and deepening of the voice. At this point in development, the pursuit of

independence and an identity are prominent. Thought is more logical, abstract and idealistic. More time is spent outside of the family.

Adolescence begins with puberty and a spur in growth. Physical changes in body build, hormone activity, and appearance of secondary sexual characteristics occur rapidly in early adolescence and can inspire both joy and anxiety. While this biological maturation is often taken as the definition of adolescence, cultural or psychological characteristics also mark the stage of development. Indeed, the transition from childhood to adulthood is considerably drawn out in western societies. Adolescence is a volatile combination of biological and behavioural changes. It begins at age twelve when the pituitary gland in the brain signals the body to produce sex hormones called androgens and oestrogens. All male and female at childhood stage of development have both types of hormones in small amounts, females produce more oestrogens and males increase their androgens considerably after puberty. These hormones control the appearance of distinctive sexual characteristics such as breast enlargement, pubic hair, voice changes and muscle development. These physical maturation influences personality and sense of identity. Late maturer boys are more likely to feel rebellious against parents, dejected, and socially immature. Girls on the other hand, tend to be less affected by the rate of maturation.

In the African society, adolescence is described with the general developmental traits such as helping the parents in the farm, assisting them domestically, attaining puberty and preparation for marriage etc. Age group classifications with social and traditional compliances are more pronounced (Olubayo-Fatieregun, 2003). Adolescence stage in a Yoruba community of which Ado Ekiti is one is that period in which the child gradually transits to maturity both in

roles, growth and development. Apart from the general biological characteristics in both male and female, boys are expected to participate in the harder chores of the home and to see themselves as potential father. They are encouraged to be responsible to keep the good name of the family.

The female on the other hand are expected to participate in the simpler tasks at home, taught to cook well and be more hospitable to all members of the family. Girls are taught on how to be future wives and mothers. In the contemporary world, both male and female adolescents in Ekiti are usually encouraged by parents, teachers or significant others to study well and excel in their studies paying less attention to the gender difference.

Walker (1996) conceives Morality as a "doctrine or a set of principles for action" or "a quality of an act deemed to be right and proper according to a particular moral code". Morality entails the existence of principles and rules by which behaviours are assessed (Adebayo 2007). Morality involves voluntary actions that at least potentially has social or interpersonal implications and are governed by internal cognitive and emotional processes. Moral involves thoughts, feelings, and behaviours regarding standards of right and wrong. It has an interpersonal dimension (a person's basic values & sense of self) and an intrapersonal dimension, (a focus on what people should do in their interactions with other people) (Walker & Pitts 1998). The interpersonal dimension regulates a person's activities when she or he is not engaged in social interactions. The intrapersonal dimension regulates people's social interactions and arbitrates conflict.

Statement of the Problem

The study investigated whether gender differences exist between male and female adolescents in relationship to

their moral development. Male and female experience many physical and social changes during adolescence. Parenting practises has great impact on the social, moral and emotional development of adolescents. How a parent interacts with a child is complex and are socially and culturally determined too. The complexity and centrality of parents in Ado Ekiti to their children's everyday life makes it extremely difficult to isolate any causal relationship between parenting and moral development, thus this research aims at finding differences, if any between male and female adolescents on the ground of moral development which is based on their parental influence.

Research Methods

The study employed a sample of participants obtained from Ado-Ekiti, the Capital town of Ekiti State, Nigeria. The research participants comprised a total of 200 Adolescents from 10 Secondary Schools located in Ado-Ekiti. The systematic random sampling technique was employed to select schools from 21 available secondary schools in Ado Ekiti Local Government picking only those that fell on the even numbers as arranged on the list obtained from the Ministry of Education in Ekiti State. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select classes of adolescent students in the study. The total number of students was randomly sampled from the strata of classes from classes 1 to 6. 20 students from each of the 10 schools comprising 10 males and 10 females students, 100 students from junior classes 1-3 and 100 students from senior classes 1-3 in all. The shorter version of Defining Issue Test (DIT) developed by Rest (1979) was used to measure moral reasoning. The shorter version has 3 stories version as against the longer version of 6 stories. The Students t-test was used in the analysis of the data collected for the purpose of the study.

Results

Table 1: Summary Table showing t-test analysis of the significant difference on gender of adolescents

Group	N	X	SD	df	T
Male	96	20.00	10.76		
Female	104	19.87	11.40	198	.082

The results presented in table 1 shows that there is no significant main effect of gender of adolescents on their moral reasoning scores. (The value of t critical is more than the value of t obtained). $t(198) = 0.082$ $p > 0.05$.

Discussion

The research work examined the influence of gender on moral development of adolescents in Ado Ekiti local government area. In looking at the influence of the independent variable, it was expected that there would be a significant difference between male and female adolescents on measures of their moral development. However, a significant difference was not found. This is supporting previous studies carried out by both local and foreign researchers on gender and moral development which gave no specific sex differences between the two groups.

Such studies involve those carried out by Kohlberg (1976) where he made a foreign review of research in 27 countries and concluded that moral reasoning and parenting are not sex specific, some other studies include the ones carried out by several other researchers (Whitenian & Kosier, 1964) they did not see any gender difference in adolescent's concepts of morals and justice. Also, in a research carried out by Adebayo (2007) where it was expected that male and female research participants would significantly score higher on moral variables, however; it was revealed from the research that females and males did not significantly differ on all the nine ethical moral consideration as identified by Adebayo (2007). This then suggests that gender is not a good predictor of moral reasoning. The implication of this finding is such that whenever the issue of moral

development and moral training in adolescents is on the focus especially in Ado Ekiti, there may likely not be a gender difference. This may be because of the socio-cultural nature of the area where most parents are literates and they have high expectations from both male and female children with little or no regard to the sex of such children.

Conclusion

Gender is not an important predictor of moral reasoning. It failed to predict a difference in moral reasoning of male and female adolescents in Ado Ekiti. This means that the gender of an adolescent does not necessarily predict his or her level of moral development.

Recommendations

It is recommended that in order to develop an adolescents' identity and morality, a collaborative process must occur among parents (fathers and mothers alike), educators, and society members.

This collaboration is a highly personal interconnected process that looks different for each child's moral identity. They may include observations and feedback from others regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, religious upbringing, cultural background, family, peer and school influences, the values promoted by mass media and self-reflections (reflecting upon one's actions). This process of determining the difference between what is right and what is wrong is constantly on-going in an adolescent's life. It is the responsibility of all the people in an adolescent's life to promote and guide moral behaviour by developing an adolescent's moral reasoning skills irrespective of their gender status.

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