

Barriers to Moral Development of Adolescents and Parental Responsibility: The Case of Malay Working Parents

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Abstract: *Over the last decade, parental education in Malaysia has been the focus of increased attention by the government and non-government organizations. Despite the numerous studies discussing parental roles and responsibilities for the emotional and physical development of adolescents, there remains a paucity of research concerning the impediments to the moral development of adolescents and the necessary parental practices to overcome such problems of morality. It is to this end that this study is aimed. For this purpose, the study examines the dimensions of awareness concerning the impediments to the moral development of adolescents among Malaysian parents, and the extent to which the 'parental awareness-practice scale' (PAP) is a reliable measure for this issue. The researcher lists the barriers impeding the moral development of adolescents as derived from a review of the relevant empirical literatures. Similarly, the practices and activities preferred by parents to overcome this challenge are also listed. The study developed two scales viz. PAIMD and PP, translated them into 'Bahasa Malaysia' and piloted the scale to improve reliability and validity to better suit the Malaysian context. The dimensions of parental awareness ($\alpha = .80$) include awareness of improper parenting ($\alpha = .79$), ideological problem ($\alpha = .64$), internal characteristics ($\alpha = .84$), and situational influences ($\alpha = .65$), while dimensions of parental practices ($\alpha = .90$) are mastering learning resources ($\alpha = .85$), authoritative communication ($\alpha = .87$), teaching morality ($\alpha = .70$), and self-regulation ($\alpha = .80$). The study identified and discussed the relationship of parental awareness of the barriers to adolescents' morality and parental practices ($r = .186, p = <0.01$). In the data set, no systematic pattern and hierarchical trends were observed among the parents in terms of morality awareness and their parenting practices across gender, level of education, type of working organization, and location of residence. The findings have implications for raising parental awareness on protecting adolescents from the agents of moral decline. It is hoped that this study will contribute in its own unique way to fostering greater wellbeing in Malaysian society in line with tenth Malaysia plan 2011-2015.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Moral development concerns the development of moral action, moral character, and moral behaviour. The barriers to moral development include: lack of self-consciousness about moral emotions, an authoritarian parenting style, permissive parenting style, neglectful or uninvolved parenting style, single parenting, non-collectivist society, drug use, and improper education among others. Among the strategies to overcome such obstacles are education in general, especially parenting education, and ensuring that children are surrounded with a healthy and positive environment. Parental responsibility towards the proper upbringing of children is one means to address morality problems among adolescents. If parents are aware of the obstacles impeding the moral development of adolescents, this is the first step towards formulating solutions that target the root problem.

This study identifies the obstacles challenging the moral development of adolescents in Malaysia and examines the ways parents address those issues. Malaysia has a specific vision regarding social development as articulated in the tenth Malaysia plan (2011-2015). This plan focuses on moral development as an integral component of youth development. To imbibe a greater sense of morality and moral conduct among Malaysian youths, the tenth Malaysian plan focused on the role of educational institutions while the role of parents went largely ignored. There is an obvious shortcoming with this plan as doubtless good moral behaviour begins at home. Although the

government has arranged national awareness programs aimed at promoting a healthy identity and educating them on avoiding the plethora of social ills such as crime and drug addiction, the contribution of the family in this regard is crucial. In the age of sophisticated technology, complex social system, and enormous economic development, the role of parents towards their children must be revised. In view of being a majority Muslim country but with a multi-cultural and multiracial demographic, it is difficult to design a youth development program to suit all sensibilities. The apparent failure to effectively address youth issues has resulted in the increased frequency of crime.

Factors to Minimise the Morality Problem Among Adolescents

Parenting Styles, Practices and Morality

Parenting styles are understood in terms of the relationship between the parents and their children. One style differs from the other based on the degree of parent demands and responsiveness. The typology of parenting was first proposed by Baumrind (1966, 1967). Baumrind began by discussing parenting prototypes and later extensively discussed parenting styles. According to her, permissive parents behave towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions in a non-punitive, acceptant and affirmative manner. The authoritarian parent attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behaviour and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, is theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority. The authoritative parent attempts to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. Children who are brought up under each of the above mentioned parenting styles are different in terms of achievement. For example, children of authoritative parents are lively and often have a happy disposition, are self-confident about their ability to master tasks, well developed emotion regulation, developed social skills, and are less rigid. While, children of authoritarian parents are anxious, withdrawn, and unhappy disposition, poor in reactions to frustration, do well in school, not likely to engage in antisocial activities such as drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, gangs etc. Finally, children of permissive parents are poor in emotion regulation, rebellious and defiant when desires are challenged, have a low persistence to challenging tasks, and engage in antisocial in behaviours. Parenting styles and practices greatly influence the moral behaviour of adolescents.

Parenting as an Agent of Moral Development

Since the inception of psychology, parenting has been a focus of much interest and research. Parenting has been almost universally acknowledged as being an essential part of child development (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parenting techniques, styles, and level of involvement have been shown to have significant effects on child development outcomes in areas as far ranging as academic achievement, social maturity, and emotional stability (Alizadeh, Abu Talib, Abdullah, & Mansor, 2011; Jeynes, 2003, 2005). The children take their parents as models. Their conscience develops based on the variation in parenting (Kochanska & Aksan, 2004). While the children learn from the society, they also learn from their parents and siblings. The household is the immediate environment to shape their personality. As such, parent responses to children transgressions and immoral action may influence the child's moral development (Smetana, 1999).

Parental practices of Malay Working Parents

Parenting is a big issue in industrialized Malaysia due to greater participation of women in the workforce (Lee & Bowen, 2006), and the growing phenomena of single parenting and adolescent antisocial behaviours (Baharudin, Krauss, Yacoob, & Pei, 2011). In the traditional Malay family context, the father and other male adult members play a role in nurturing adolescents and the mother's role is nurturing the young children. This complies with Islamic family values and socialization patterns. In Muslim Malay families women spend more time and effort in care giving and men in economic activities (Hossain et al., 2005).

Baharudin et al. (2011) describe family process variables, i.e., parenting, parental monitoring, family values and family competency. Baharudin et al. identified the relationship between family processes and their influence on adolescent behaviour in Malaysia. Their findings indicate that in Malaysia only two family process variables, i.e., parenting behaviour and family competency, are predictors of adolescent anti-social behaviour but the family characteristic variables such as

family income or economic hardship does not directly predict anti-social behaviour among Malaysian adolescents. Keshavarz & Baharudin (2009, p. 71) suggests that parental behaviour and involvement plays a crucial role in the development of social and cognitive competence in children.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

This study consists of a research sample of Malay working parents. The survey was Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia. To represent the various classes of working parents, 362 (three hundred sixty two) participants (Mother = 173, Father = 189) participated in the research by completing the survey questionnaire. We initially categorized the respondents based on their organizational involvement such as whether they are working in their own business, government, semi-government or private organization; secondly, their location of residence; thirdly, their attendance in any parenting course at least once in a life; and fourthly, their academic qualification. The average age of the participants was 44 years and the average number of children was three.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into two subsets to cover the scope of the hypothesis. We developed an instrument to measure the level of parent awareness of impediments to moral development (PAIMD) and parents' practice (PP). While PAIMD had 25 (twenty five) statements measuring four sub-constructs, PP had 21 (twenty one) statements measuring four sub-constructs. However, all sub-constructs were reliable.

2.3 PAIMD Scale

The researcher conducted a pilot test among Malay parents living in Gombak, the results of which assisted in determining the number of factors to be retained for the final survey. We extracted four factors (table 1). The dimensions under PAIMD were subdivided into four, namely improper parenting (IP), ideological problem (IdP), internal characteristics (IC), and situational influences (SI). The level of parent awareness was measured on a 5 (five) point scale ranging between very high, high, moderate, low, and none. The results of the reliability and internal consistency tests of the four subscales under PAIMD were: α for IP = .79, α for IdP was .64, α for IC = .84, and α for SI = .65. Here α for IdP and SI were relatively lower than the other two subscales.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, and Reliabilities for PAIMD

Measure	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Alpha
PAIMD	-	-	-	-	-
Improper parenting	3.98	.571	1.50	5.00	.79
Ideological problems	3.95	.454	3.00	5.00	.64
Internal characteristics	3.95	.482	3.00	5.00	.84
Situational Influences	4.02	.606	1.80	5.00	.65

2.4 PP scale

The PP scale was developed employing the 'Delphi process'¹ (Brown, 1968). In this process we selected three fathers and three mothers working in schools, banks, and government offices. They were asked the following questions:

¹In the Delphi process experts answer the questionnaires in two or more rounds. After each round, a facilitator provides an anonymous summary of the experts' forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. Thus, experts are encouraged to revise their earlier answers in light of the replies of other members of their panel. It is believed that during this process the range of answers will decrease and the group will converge towards the "correct" answer. Finally, the process is

01. How do you know what to do for protecting your children’s morality?
02. What do you do first in order to teach your children morality?
03. How do you understand your children’s feelings and emotions?
04. How do you communicate with your children in teaching your children discipline?
05. What do you do when you spend your time at home?
06. How do you teach your children religious knowledge and practice?
07. How do you practice and regulate your life at home?
08. How do you balance both the physical and moral development of children?

We divided respondents into three groups and asked them questions in three rounds so that we could construct the correct answers while removing incorrect answers. Answers from selected respondents were used to make a list, which was then translated into Malay and included in the survey form. Back to back translation was performed by specialists in the Malay language. A pilot test was then conducted among Malay parents living in Gombak. The results of the pilot test assisted in determining the number of factors to be retained for the final survey. We extracted four factors in the PP scale. The dimensions under the PP scale were subdivided into four, namely mastering learning resources (MLR), authoritative communication (AC), teaching morality (TM), and self-regulation (SR) (table 1.1). In this scale, the level of practice among parents was measured on a 6 (six) point scale consisting of always, often, sometimes, seldom, never, I don’t know. The results from the reliability and internal consistency tests of the four subscales under PP was as follows: α for MLR = .85, α for AC = .87, α for TM = .70, and α for SR = .80. Examples of statements included in the PP scale are “I observe my children’s relationship with their peers”, “I do not behave aggressively with any member of my family”, and “I find time to spend with my children at home”.

Table 1.1 Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, and Reliabilities for PP

Measure	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Alpha
PP	-	-	-	-	-
Mastering learning resources	4.64	.784	2.60	6.00	.85
Authoritative communication	4.94	.878	2.00	6.00	.87
Teaching morality	4.85	.794	2.00	6.00	.70
Self-regulation	5.24	.784	2.00	6.00	.80

2.5 Method of Analysis

This research employed descriptive statistics and analysed sample characteristics based on the data and checked the correlations among the study variables. The T-test technique was used to examine the difference between those who attended parenting courses, talks, training etc. and those who never attended on both the PAIMD and PP scale. Using the same analysis technique, we investigated the differences among father and mother, the highly and lowly educated, as well as urban and rural residents. Finally, we ran multiple regression analysis to check the extent to which PAIMD predicts PP.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive

Table 2 below indicates the mean scores on several dimensions of PAIMD and PP scales as reported by parents. Table six calculates the scores separately for mothers and fathers, urban and rural parents, different education levels, different job sectors, and attendance or non-attendance of parenting courses. No significant gap between groups was detected.

stopped after a pre-defined stop criterion and the mean or median scores of the final rounds determine the results.

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Table 2. (Means of PAIMD and PP)

Constructs*	Parents		Parenting Training/ Course		Education Level				
	Father	Mother	Attended	Not Attended	Secondary	Diploma	Bachelor	Master	PhD
	n 189 (52%)	n 173 (48%)	n 269 (75%)	n 91 (25%)	n39 (11%)	n 56 (16%)	n146 (40%)	n 103 (29%)	n 12 (4%)
IP	4	3.98	3.92	4.16	3.99	3.98	4	3.95	4.01
IdP	4	3.91	3.91	4.06	4	3.89	3.93	3.99	4.03
IC	3.9	3.96	3.96	3.94	3.93	4	3.92	3.96	4.19
SI	4	4.01	4.04	3.98	3.79	4.11	4	4	4.21

MLR	4.58	4.69	4.70	4.47	4.26	4.68	4.67	4.71	4.38
AC	4.89	5.00	4.97	4.90	4.55	4.93	5	5	4.79
TM	4.80	4.91	4.86	4.82	4.63	5.05	4.83	4.87	4.91
SR	5.22	5.25	5.25	5.19	4.93	5.29	5.25	5.33	5.25

* IP = improper parenting, IdP = ideological problem, IC = internal characteristics, SI = situational influences, MLR = mastering learning resources, AC = authoritative communication, TM = teaching morality, SR = self-regulation.

3.2 Group Differences on PAIMD and PP Scales

Table 3 shows gender differences on various dimensions of PAIMD and PP. No statistically significant difference is found between fathers and mothers on any dimensions.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test: Difference between Father & Mother

	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Mean Difference	<i>SE Difference</i>
IP	.219	.827	.01309	.05992
IdP	1.871	.062	.08882	.04748
IC	-.362	.718	-.01839	.05086
SI	.311	.756	.01979	.06372
MLR	-1.294	.196	-.10654	.08231
AC	-1.196	.233	-.11047	.09239
TM	-1.343	.180	-.11214	.08348
SR	-.327	.744	-.02702	.08256

Note: IP = improper parenting, IdP = ideological problem, IC = internal characteristics, SI = situational influences, MLR = mastering learning resources, AC = authoritative communication, TM = teaching morality, SR = self-regulation.

Table 4 shows the differences in various dimensions of PAIMD and PP among those who participated in parenting courses and those who did not do. Statistically significant differences were found in IP, IdP, PAIMD overall, and MLR.

Table 4. *Independent Samples Test: Differences between Parenting Training participants*

	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Mean Difference	<i>SE</i> Difference
IP	-3.730	.000	-.24409	.06543
IdP	-2.823	.005	-.14843	.05259
IC	.431	.667	.02513	.05833
SI	.686	.494	.05334	.07774
PAIMD	-2.007	.046	-.07851	.03912
MLR	2.352	.020	.22419	.09534
AC	.615	.539	.06491	.10555
TM	.522	.603	.04791	.09185
SR	.573	.568	.05722	.09985
PP	1.243	.216	.09856	.07931

Table 5 indicates the differences in various dimensions of PAIMD and PP among urban and rural parents. No statistically significant difference is found between these two groups.

Table 5. *Independent Samples Test: Differences between Urban and Rural Residents*

	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Mean Difference	<i>SE</i> Difference
IP	-1.131	.261	-.09350	.08265
IdP	-.774	.442	-.05624	.07270
IC	.031	.976	.00203	.06599
SI	-.697	.488	-.05876	.08428
PAIMD	-1.138	.258	-.05162	.04536
MLR	.562	.576	.06034	.10745
AC	.212	.832	.02715	.12779
TM	-1.532	.129	-.15792	.10306
SR	-.858	.393	-.08074	.09408
PP	-.444	.658	-.03779	.08521

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if several factors of PAIMD and PP were different for groups with different educational qualification. Participants were classified into five groups: secondary (n = 39), diploma (n = 56), bachelor (n = 146) and master (n = 103), and PhD (n = 12). All scores are presented in terms of means in the table 6. A symbol “{” is used in order to show the two extreme scores (the lowest and the highest). However, we avoided the table of multiple comparison yielded by Bonferroni Post Hoc test as the table is very large and ANOVA did not indicate any significant differences based on the educational differences except in a few cases. For example, in the case of MLR we found that people with a secondary degree significantly differ ($p = .038$) from those who have a master degree. Similarly, in the case of AC we found that people with a secondary degree significantly differ ($p = .042$) from those with a bachelor degree. Besides, we found that in the overall score of PP, the secondary education group significantly differs from diploma, bachelor and master groups. What is understood from this

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analysis is that there is no noteworthy difference and there is no significant increase or decrease of scores with the variation of educational qualification.

Table 6. Analysis of Variance: Differences in Education Qualification

Edu Level	IP	IDP	IC	SI	MLR	AC	TM	SR
Secondary	3.99	4.03	3.93	3.79	4.26	4.55	4.63	4.93
Diploma	3.98	3.89	4	4.11	4.68	4.93	5.05	5.29
Bachelor	4	3.93	3.92	4.02	4.67	5.02	4.83	5.25
Master	3.95	3.99	3.96	4.02	4.71	5.01	4.87	5.33
PhD	4	4.03	4.19	4.21	4.38	4.79	4.91	5.25

3.3 Relationship between Age, No. of Children and PAIMD and PP

In Table 7, the results from the Pearson correlations analysis indicate that age and No of children as well as PAIMD and PP are positively and statistically significantly correlated. In contrast, both age and No. of children are negatively and not statistically significantly correlated (except No. of children) with both PAIMD overall and PP overall.

Table 7. Pearson correlations for age, children, PAIMD and PP

		Age	No of children	PAIMD Overall	PP Overall
Age		-			
No of children	Pearson Correlation	.336**	-		
PAIMD Overall	Pearson Correlation	-.053	-.107*	-	
PP Overall	Pearson Correlation	-.102	-.013	.186**	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. DISCUSSION

There is no systematic pattern and hierarchical trend observed among the parents in terms of morality awareness and their parenting practice, as if they are only biological parents and bread earners for their children. While in fact they must contribute to the development of their children. The findings have implication for raising parental awareness on protecting adolescents from the agents of moral decline. It is hoped that this will pave the way for constructing a happy and safe society. The moral development of adolescents is an ongoing issue in the field of education. Media reports of increased violence have caused many to declare a nationwide moral crisis. Adolescent problems are more related to moral and behavioural development. Their problems include smoking in public, misbehaving in the class, drug addiction, misconduct in the household, and juvenile delinquency to name a few. They are therefore in dire need of moral developed. Morality is a code of conduct put forward by society and family.

Much literature has focused on combating the moral decline. For instance, Ryan and Dziurawiec (2001) found that materialism was negatively related to life satisfaction. People seek wealth, social status, and material goods while ignoring their children's morality. Tam, Lee, Har, & Chua(2011) found that materialistic parents loose parental relationship which leads to several social ills. It is not the schools that teach moral education to the children, rather it is the parents who must take primary responsibility for the moral development of the future generation.

According to Keshavarz and Baharudin (2009, 2013), Malaysia represents a collectivist culture and values such as: cooperation, helpfulness, obedience, dependence and interpersonal relationships. These can promote child socialization. Similarly, family socialization begins as a process through which children practice and learn rituals, traditions, religion, and activities in their daily life. In the Malay culture, parents have very important roles in directing the children toward the right behaviour and attitude. Parents are also responsible for transmitting the teachings

of religion and culture to their children. Malay parents are regarded as clear authority figures and are obeyed without question. They pay attention to the spiritual growth in the development of their children. Exposure to Western popular culture via media constitutes a challenge for traditional Malay parents. For these parents who are mostly trained in traditional norms, Western behaviour is largely unacceptable. Though there are many studies on parenting practices, they often focus on the social wellbeing of children and their biological upbringing. However, parenting should also aim toward securing the morality of children because it is the essence of human beings (Damon, 1999; Hafizah, Zaihairul, & Ayu, 2012; Hashim, 2006). As children learn by observing their environments, especially the family or home environment, parents must serve as exemplar role models. However, the research findings did not reveal a significant impact of awareness on the parent practices.

In such a circumstance, the answer of how children and adolescents should learn morality can be given in line with the social learning and social cognitive theory. Social learning theory explains that people can learn through observation whereby internal mental states are an essential part of the process of learning. For instance, if the parents hold materialistic and individualistic thinking, their moral behaviour might be shaped in a way that influences the morality of their children (Flouri, 1999). Learning something does not mean that it will change the behaviour. People learn and behave within a social context which is facilitated through modelling and observational learning (Bandura, 1971; Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988). Therefore, moral development is the outcome of learning whereby children watch the actions of others and receive reinforcement. The Bobo doll experiment of Albert Bandura in 1961 showed that children not only learn by being rewarded or punished but also learn from watching somebody being rewarded or punished. This means that children are influenced by social influences (Bandura, 1965). This experiment demonstrated Bandura's social learning theory, which prompted research on the effects and implication of observational learning on children.

Children can learn through observation; children learn and imitate behaviours moral or immoral they observe in the society through a live model, a verbal instructional model or, a symbolic model (Bahn, 2001; Bandura, 1971). Furthermore, mental states are important to learning. Bandura (1971) explained the idea of external, environmental reinforcement vis a vis intrinsic reinforcement as a form of internal reward, such as pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment. He mentioned children do not always imitate the actions of others merely because they have observed them. Besides children's own observation, this study suggests the parents to teach their children morality consciously and effectively.

5. CONCLUSION

Although, the tenth Malaysia plan is concerned with the moral development of Malaysian youth, it assumes that the school that will perform the responsibility of moral and character development. However, given that children spend more time at home with their parents, than they do in schools, parents are the prime agent of the moral development of their children and must therefore be aware of the impediments to moral development. They are role models for their children and as such should ensure that they are working towards begin exemplary human beings exhibiting high levels of morality. This study suggests along with spending money in protecting the society from social ills, crime, violence etc., parenting education should be encouraged as a means to ensure that parents are sufficiently competent in nurturing their children into moral agents.

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