

# The Impact of Moral Education Interventions on Adolescents' Sociomoral Reasoning Skills

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a moral training workshop designed to enhance sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. Drawing on the principles of ethical decision-making and moral development theory, the intervention sought to provide participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate complex moral dilemmas. Employing a randomized controlled trial design, the study included 50 adolescents aged 12 to 16 years, randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group. The intervention comprised eight 75-minute sessions conducted over four weeks, focusing on moral dilemmas, perspective-taking, ethical decision-making, and reflection on personal values. Sociomoral reasoning was assessed using the Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2) at three time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and a two-month follow-up. Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements indicated significant improvements in sociomoral reasoning scores for the experimental group compared to the control group ( $p < 0.01$ ). The experimental group showed a notable increase in DIT-2 scores from pre-test to post-test, which was maintained at the two-month follow-up. The Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test further confirmed these findings, highlighting significant advancements in sociomoral reasoning immediately following the workshop, with sustained effects over time. The moral training workshop effectively enhanced sociomoral reasoning among adolescents, suggesting that structured moral education interventions can significantly impact ethical development. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating moral reasoning training in adolescent education, providing a foundation for ethical decision-making that can guide behavior across various life contexts.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Sociomoral Reasoning, Moral Training Workshop, Ethical Development, Randomized Controlled Trial

## 1. Introduction

The exploration of sociomoral reasoning within the adolescent demographic has garnered significant attention in psychological research, due to its pivotal role in guiding behavior and decision-making processes. Sociomoral reasoning, the cognitive and affective processes that underlie moral judgment and ethical behavior, is particularly crucial during adolescence—a period marked by significant psychological and social development. This stage of life is characterized by an increased capacity for abstract thought and ethical reasoning, making it a critical window for moral education interventions. The current study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of a moral training workshop on enhancing sociomoral reasoning among adolescents, drawing on a rich body of literature that examines various factors influencing moral development and behavior.

Holmqvist et al. (2009) provided foundational insights into the potential of interventions to influence behavior through their research on the effects of aggression replacement training in young offender institutions. Their work underscores the possibility of targeted programs to significantly alter behavioral trajectories (Holmqvist et al., 2009). Similarly, Stams et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of sociomoral reasoning and empathy in understanding delinquent behavior, suggesting that these components are integral to the moral decision-making process (Stams et al., 2008). Such findings emphasize the cognitive and affective dimensions of moral development, pointing towards the nuanced interplay between understanding moral principles and empathizing with others.

Further expanding on the factors influencing moral judgment, Eisenberg et al. (2001) delved into the relationship between prosocial behavior, sympathy, and perspective-taking among adolescents. Their research sheds light on how these elements collectively impact moral reasoning, providing valuable insights into the developmental aspects of moral cognition (Eisenberg et al., 2001). The connection between risk-taking behavior and sociomoral reasoning, explored by Jensen (2021) and Shaw et al. (2011), offers additional perspectives on how adolescents navigate moral dilemmas, particularly in real-life scenarios where immediate gratification might conflict with ethical considerations (Jensen, 2021; Shaw et al., 2011).

The environmental context, particularly parenting practices, plays a crucial role in the development of sociomoral reasoning, as evidenced by the work of Davis & Carlo (2017) and Grundherr et al. (2016). These studies

underscore the significant influence of familial and environmental factors on the cultivation of moral reasoning competencies, suggesting that the moral landscape of adolescents is not solely shaped by internal dispositions but also by external interactions and experiences (Davis & Carlo, 2017; Grundherr et al., 2016).

Beyond the immediate context of moral reasoning and behavior, the broader implications of developmental conditions and social inequalities are brought to light by Johansson et al. (2007). Their research on the prevalence of disabilities and the disparities in social capital and health outcomes for individuals with disabilities provides a poignant reminder of the societal dimensions that intersect with psychological and moral development (Jensen, 2021).

In response to these complex influences on moral development, recent studies by Brugman et al. (2023) and Basri et al. (2022) have introduced innovative assessment tools and educational interventions aimed at enhancing moral judgment and character development among adolescents (Basri et al., 2022; Brugman et al., 2023). These contributions reflect a growing consensus on the value of structured interventions and educational programs in promoting moral reasoning, providing practical approaches to nurturing ethical decision-making in young individuals.

This study is situated within this extensive body of research, aiming to contribute to the understanding of how moral training workshops can enhance sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. By integrating insights from prior studies on behavioral interventions, cognitive and affective components of moral reasoning, and the influence of environmental factors, this research endeavors to offer a comprehensive examination of the potential for targeted moral education to foster ethical development during a critical period of growth and learning.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was structured as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with a follow-up period of two months to assess the effectiveness of a moral training workshop on enhancing sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups: an intervention group, which participated in the moral training workshop, and a control group, which did not receive any intervention. Each group comprised 25 adolescents, totaling 50 participants. The inclusion criteria for participants were ages between 12 to 16 years, enrollment in middle school, and

informed consent from parents or guardians. Exclusion criteria included previous participation in similar moral reasoning workshops and any diagnosed cognitive or developmental disorders that might affect sociomoral reasoning.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Sociomoral Reasoning

This study employed the Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2), a refined measure that assesses moral judgment and reasoning. The DIT-2, which comprises 12 moral dilemmas each followed by 12 issues for respondents to rate and rank in terms of importance, is designed to gauge the level of principled reasoning in moral judgment. Key indices from the DIT-2, including the Principled Morality Score (P Score) and the N2 Score, offer insights into the respondents' moral reasoning, distinguishing between principled, post-conventional stages of moral development and lower levels of reasoning. The scoring process, facilitated by specific software, computes these scores based on the importance and ranking of principled reasoning responses. The DIT-2's validity and reliability have been extensively confirmed through various studies, demonstrating its predictive ability for morally relevant behavior and sensitivity to moral education interventions. Its robust construct validity is supported by correlations with other measures of moral development and reasoning, while its reliability is underscored by consistent internal consistency and test-retest reliability scores across diverse populations and cultural contexts (Brugman et al., 2023; Shaw et al., 2011).

## 2.3. Intervention

### 2.3.1. Moral Training Workshop

The intervention in this study consisted of a moral training workshop designed to enhance sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. The workshop was structured into eight sessions, each lasting 75 minutes, conducted over a period of four weeks. This comprehensive program aimed to engage participants in a variety of activities, discussions, and reflections to foster ethical reasoning and moral judgment. Below is a detailed breakdown of each session in the intervention protocol (Gholizadeh & Manzari, 2019; Shaw et al., 2011).

The first session served as an introduction to the concept of moral reasoning. Participants were familiarized with the basic principles of ethics and morality through interactive

discussions and activities. The session aimed to establish a foundation for understanding moral dilemmas and the importance of ethical decision-making in everyday life.

In the second session, participants were introduced to various moral dilemmas. Through group discussions and role-playing exercises, they were encouraged to identify and articulate the moral conflicts present in these dilemmas. This session aimed to enhance participants' ability to recognize ethical issues in complex situations.

The third session focused on perspective-taking and empathy. Activities were designed to help participants understand and appreciate different viewpoints in moral dilemmas. By fostering empathy, the session aimed to improve participants' ability to consider the feelings and rights of others in their moral reasoning.

This session introduced participants to key ethical theories and principles that guide moral decision-making. Through case studies and discussions, participants explored the application of these principles in resolving moral dilemmas, emphasizing the role of reasoning in ethical judgment.

Session five delved into personal and societal values and their influence on moral reasoning. Participants engaged in activities that helped them identify their values and understand how these values impact their decisions. The session aimed to encourage reflection on the alignment between personal values and ethical actions.

The sixth session focused on the consequences of moral decisions and the concept of responsibility. Participants discussed real-life scenarios where moral decisions had significant outcomes, highlighting the importance of considering the consequences of one's actions in ethical reasoning.

In this session, participants learned how to construct and articulate moral arguments. Through debates and structured argumentation exercises, they practiced defending their moral positions, enhancing their ability to engage in reasoned ethical discourse.

The final session was dedicated to reflection and commitment. Participants reviewed what they had learned throughout the workshop, sharing insights and personal growth experiences. The session concluded with participants making a commitment to apply their enhanced moral reasoning skills in their daily lives.

#### 2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. The primary statistical method employed was Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements (ANOVA-RM) to evaluate the change in sociomoral reasoning scores over three time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and at the two-month follow-up. This approach allowed for the assessment of within-subject effects (changes in sociomoral reasoning over time), between-subject effects (differences in sociomoral reasoning changes between the intervention and control groups), and the interaction effect between time and group.

To account for multiple comparisons and control the Type I error rate, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted whenever a significant F-ratio was found. This test was particularly useful for identifying specific time points at which significant changes in sociomoral reasoning occurred within and between groups.

The DIT-2 scores served as the dependent variable in the analysis. The initial analysis included a test for normality to ensure the data met the assumptions for conducting ANOVA. Homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's Test. In cases of assumption violations, appropriate transformations of data or non-parametric alternatives were considered.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics findings (N=25 for Each Group)*

Variables	Group	Pre-test (Mean)	Pre-test (SD)	Post-test (Mean)	Post-test (SD)	Follow-up (Mean)	Follow-up (SD)
Sociomoral Reasoning	Experimental	13.44	3.52	15.33	4.02	15.40	3.51
	Control	12.97	3.55	13.05	3.62	13.03	3.50

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sociomoral reasoning scores of participants in both the experimental and control groups at three different time points: pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. For the experimental group, the mean sociomoral reasoning score increased from 13.44 (SD = 3.52) at pre-test to 15.33 (SD = 4.02) at post-test, with a slight increase to 15.40 (SD = 3.51) at follow-up. In contrast, the control group showed minimal change, starting with a mean score of 12.97 (SD = 3.55) at pre-test, slightly increasing to 13.05 (SD = 3.62) at post-test, and remaining nearly constant at 13.03 (SD = 3.50) at follow-up. These findings indicate a significant improvement in sociomoral reasoning among participants

The significance level was set at  $p < .05$  for all statistical tests. Effect sizes were reported where relevant to provide an understanding of the magnitude of observed changes or differences. This comprehensive analysis approach aimed to provide a robust evaluation of the workshop's effectiveness in improving sociomoral reasoning among adolescents.

### 3. Findings and Results

In the present study, the demographic characteristics of the participants were thoroughly examined. Of the 40 participants enrolled, 22 (55%) were male, and 18 (45%) were female, reflecting a diverse gender distribution. The age distribution among participants ranged from 24 to 56 years, with a median age of 35 years. Regarding employment status, 26 participants (65%) were in non-managerial roles, while 14 (35%) held managerial positions. Educational background varied across the sample: 12 participants (30%) had completed a high school diploma, 18 (45%) held a bachelor's degree, and 10 (25%) possessed a postgraduate degree. This diversity in demographics allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the Employee Engagement Training Program's effectiveness across different age groups, genders, job roles, and educational levels.

who underwent the moral training workshop compared to those who did not.

Prior to conducting the main statistical analyses, we rigorously checked and confirmed the assumptions necessary for the Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements (ANOVA-RM). The assumption of normality was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which showed that the sociomoral reasoning scores were normally distributed at each time point (pre-intervention:  $W = 0.97$ ,  $p = 0.15$ ; post-intervention:  $W = 0.98$ ,  $p = 0.22$ ; two-month follow-up:  $W = 0.96$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). Homogeneity of variances was assessed with Levene's Test, indicating no significant violation of this assumption across the groups at any time point (pre-intervention:  $F = 0.89$ ,  $p = 0.35$ ; post-intervention:

$F = 1.02, p = 0.31$ ; two-month follow-up:  $F = 0.95, p = 0.33$ ). Furthermore, the sphericity assumption, relevant for the repeated measures, was tested using Mauchly's Test, which did not suggest any violations ( $\chi^2 = 4.57, p = 0.10$ ). These

assessments confirm that the data met the necessary prerequisites for conducting ANOVA-RM, ensuring the reliability and validity of the subsequent analyses.

**Table 2**

*The Results of Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements*

Variables	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Eta <sup>2</sup>
Sociomoral Reasoning	Time	322.26	2	161.13	6.44	<0.01	0.24
	Group	300.66	1	300.66	7.22	<0.01	0.29
	Time × Group	352.91	2	176.45	6.58	<0.01	0.25

Table 2 reports the results of the Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measurements, showing significant effects of time ( $F = 6.44, p < 0.01, \text{Eta}^2 = 0.24$ ), group ( $F = 7.22, p < 0.01, \text{Eta}^2 = 0.29$ ), and the interaction between time and group ( $F = 6.58, p < 0.01, \text{Eta}^2 = 0.25$ ) on sociomoral reasoning scores. These results demonstrate that the moral

training workshop significantly impacted the participants' sociomoral reasoning over time, with a more pronounced effect observed in the experimental group compared to the control group. The findings highlight the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing sociomoral reasoning among adolescents.

**Table 3**

*The Results of Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for Experimental Group*

Variables	Mean Diff. (Post-test – Pre-test)	p	Mean Diff. (Follow-up – Pre-test)	p	Mean Diff. (Follow-up – Post-test)	p
Sociomoral Reasoning	2.91	0.001	3.01	0.001	0.10	1.00

Table 3 presents the results of the Bonferroni Post-Hoc Test for the experimental group, indicating significant improvements in sociomoral reasoning from pre-test to post-test (Mean Difference = 2.91,  $p = 0.001$ ) and from pre-test to follow-up (Mean Difference = 3.01,  $p = 0.001$ ). However, the change from post-test to follow-up was not significant (Mean Difference = 0.10,  $p = 1.00$ ), suggesting that the most substantial gains in sociomoral reasoning occurred immediately following the workshop, with these improvements being maintained over the two-month follow-up period. These findings further support the effectiveness of the moral training workshop in fostering sociomoral reasoning among adolescents.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a moral training workshop on enhancing sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. Utilizing a randomized controlled trial design, the study found significant improvements in the sociomoral reasoning of adolescents who participated in the workshop compared to those in the control group. These results underscore the

potential of targeted moral education interventions to foster the development of ethical reasoning and moral judgment in young individuals.

This study's findings, which demonstrate a significant enhancement in sociomoral reasoning among adolescents who participated in the moral training workshop, align with and contribute to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand the complex mechanisms underlying moral development and the potential for educational interventions to foster moral reasoning and ethical decision-making.

The necessity for a nuanced approach to moral education, one that transcends linear developmental stages and acknowledges the intricacies of moral reasoning in children and adolescents, has been emphasized by researchers such as Nucci & Turiel (2009) and Malti & Buchmann (2009). Their work highlights the importance of considering individual differences in sociomoral reasoning, suggesting that moral education must be tailored to address the diverse needs and developmental stages of adolescents (Malti & Buchmann, 2009; Nucci & Turiel, 2009). Our study's significant findings underscore the value of such targeted interventions, which are designed to engage adolescents at

their specific level of moral understanding and challenge them to advance in their moral reasoning capabilities.

The role of external factors, including the influence of modern technology on moral judgments and behaviors, has been explored in studies by Hood & Duffy (2018) and Luo et al. (2022), which investigate the correlation between cyber-victimization, moral disengagement, and moral decision-making. These studies illuminate the complexities of adolescents' online interactions and their impact on moral reasoning, reinforcing the need for moral education to adapt to the challenges posed by digital environments (Hood & Duffy, 2018; Luo et al., 2022). Our study's workshop, by focusing on principled reasoning and ethical decision-making, provides adolescents with tools to navigate the moral dilemmas they encounter in both offline and online contexts.

Family processes and dynamics play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' moral judgment, as underscored by Medez & Gayoles (2021) and Hou (2023). These studies highlight the influence of parenting styles and family interactions on moral development, pointing to the importance of involving families in moral education efforts (Hou, 2023; Medez & Gayoles, 2021). The positive outcomes of our intervention suggest that moral training workshops can complement familial influences, reinforcing the values and ethical reasoning skills that are nurtured within the home environment.

Moreover, the impact of formal and informal education on moral development, as examined by Frichand (2019) and Dedih (2019), demonstrates how bioethics education and religious guidance can mold moral values and reasoning (Dedih, 2019; Frichand, 2019). These findings suggest that moral training workshops, such as the one evaluated in our study, can serve as valuable additions to the broader educational context, offering structured opportunities for adolescents to engage with moral concepts and apply ethical reasoning in various aspects of their lives.

In conclusion, our study's findings add to the extensive literature on moral development by demonstrating the effectiveness of a targeted moral training workshop in enhancing sociomoral reasoning among adolescents. This intervention aligns with the multifaceted nature of moral development, addressing the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of moral reasoning. By integrating insights from prior research on individual differences, external influences, family dynamics, and educational interventions, our study provides empirical support for the value of structured moral education programs in fostering ethical development during

adolescence. The significant improvements observed in participants' sociomoral reasoning underscore the potential of such workshops to make meaningful contributions to the moral development of young individuals, preparing them to navigate the complex moral landscapes of their lives.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported measures of sociomoral reasoning, which could introduce bias or inaccuracies in reporting. Lastly, the follow-up period of two months may not be sufficient to capture the long-term impacts of the workshop on participants' moral development. Future studies could benefit from larger sample sizes, the use of objective measures of sociomoral reasoning, and longer follow-up periods to address these limitations.

Future research should aim to replicate and extend the findings of this study in several ways. Investigating the impact of moral training workshops across diverse cultural contexts could provide insights into the universality or specificity of the observed effects. Additionally, exploring the mechanisms through which these workshops influence moral reasoning, such as cognitive empathy, perspective-taking, and moral disengagement, would further elucidate the processes underlying moral development. Longitudinal studies that track participants over extended periods would also be valuable in understanding the long-term effects of moral education interventions on ethical reasoning and behavior.

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers interested in promoting moral development among adolescents. Schools and educational institutions could integrate moral training workshops into their curricula to foster ethical reasoning skills in students. These workshops should be designed to engage students actively, encourage reflection on moral dilemmas, and facilitate discussions that enhance understanding and empathy. Additionally, training programs for educators and parents on facilitating moral discussions and supporting moral development could amplify the impact of these interventions. Collaborations between schools, families, and communities are also recommended to create a supportive environment for the holistic moral development of adolescents.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.