

# Modeling Moral Behavior Based on Parent-Child Interaction and Perceived Social Support with the Mediation of Cultural Intelligence in High School Girls in Tehran

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to model the relationship between parent-child interaction and perceived social support with moral behavior, mediated by cultural intelligence, in adolescent female students in Tehran.

**Methods and Materials:** The research method is descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of this study includes all female high school students aged 12 to 16, with a total number of students in the academic year 2022-2023. Four hundred students were selected as the sample using cluster sampling. Data were collected using the Moral Behavior Questionnaire by Sabat and colleagues, the Perceived Social Support Questionnaire by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988), and the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire by Ang and Earley (2004). Data analysis was performed using SPSS.22 and Smart PLS software, employing descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation coefficient, multiple regression, and structural equation modeling.

**Findings:** The research results showed that the model explaining the parent-child interaction, perceived social support, and moral behavior with the mediation of cultural intelligence has a good fit. The results indicated that parent-child interaction has a direct effect on moral behavior ( $P < 0.01$ ). It was also found that perceived social support has a direct effect on moral behavior ( $P < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results confirmed that parent-child interaction does not affect moral behavior through the mediating role of cultural intelligence. Finally, other findings showed that perceived social support indirectly affects moral behavior through the mediating role of cultural intelligence.

**Keywords:** Parent-Child Interaction, Perceived Social Support, Cultural Intelligence, Moral Behavior.

## 1. Introduction

Students are the future generation of the country. Therefore, it is crucial that these students think carefully when making moral judgments, as "today's students may be tomorrow's criminals" (Parsakia, 2023; Parsakia et al., 2022). As adolescents become increasingly independent, they develop more nuanced thinking about ethics and the morality of right and wrong. During the course of their cognitive, emotional, and social development, adolescents expand their understanding of morality, aligning their behaviors with their values and beliefs. Thus, moral development describes the evolution of these guiding principles, demonstrated by the ability to apply these guidelines in daily life. Understanding moral development at this stage is important because individuals make many significant decisions and assume greater legal responsibilities. Adolescence is characterized by an increased ability to master complex academic, interpersonal, and emotional challenges while exploring new talents, social identities, and interests. Today, technological advancements and changing environmental structures have added dynamism and complexity, leading to more ethical dilemmas. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and enhance capacities that help students confront and respond to ethical challenges and behave morally (Azkhosh et al., 2024).

The moral sense of students essentially develops in society and the family, particularly through the emotional communicative process between parents and children. Parenting styles can be defined as a set or system of behaviors that describe parent-child interactions across a wide range of situations, creating an effective interaction space (Farzaneh et al., 2021; Mehr-un-Nisa et al., 2021). A lack of communication with parents in teenagers' lives leads to weaker and more superficial parent-child interactions, which in turn cause complex problems in the future (Rehder et al., 2020). The permissive parenting style has a negative effect on introjected religious orientation but no specific effect on internalized religious orientation. Ethics can solve many crises and problems at the societal level. The absence of ethical behavior in society can lead to serious abnormalities, including increased moral, financial, and organizational corruption. Unethical or bad organizational behavior reduces employees' motivation due to widespread distrust, decreasing the resilience and enthusiasm that can result from ethical commitment (Hashemi et al., 2013). Malekouti et al. (2017) showed that perceived parenting styles, deficiency/shame, inadequate self-discipline, and

punishment from the father, and emotional deprivation perceived from the mother, predict delinquency in adolescents. Ethical commitments create frameworks for individuals to fulfill their duties, but when ethics diminish, organizational indifference replaces active ethical behaviors aimed at achieving organizational goals (Mehr-un-Nisa et al., 2021). The spread of a lack of ethical commitment leads to anomalies such as deceit, fraud, hypocrisy, distrust, hypocrisy, violence, conflict, slander, lying, jealousy, selfishness, lawlessness, violation of others' rights, and financial corruption, which are increasing in a religious and ethically-oriented society. A survey conducted in 2015 on societal ethics revealed that about 80% of the population believed that people lie frequently. Approximately 70% believed that trustworthiness is very low, and about 70% acknowledged that hypocrisy and deceit are widespread, reflecting ethical behaviors. About 70% stated that deceit and fraud are high, and 66% perceived jealousy and selfishness as prevalent. Simultaneously, about 70% believed that fulfilling commitments and fairness are very low (Mokhtari Baye Kolaei et al., 2022).

The importance of examining ethics lies in the fact that if moral values are not internalized in a society and its organizations, neither law nor government policies and mechanisms can achieve positive individual, organizational, and social outcomes. This has always attracted the attention of scientists, educators, organizational managers, and communities to strive for its preservation and enhancement. The high school period is a growth stage between childhood and adulthood, during which relationships with peers expand. Independence in decision-making is primarily a period of exploration, selection, and the gradual process of moving towards a cohesive self-concept. Daily interactions with other students, constant and fragmented demands from classmates, and overwhelming pressures create challenges (Mokhtari Baye Kolaei et al., 2022).

Although numerous studies have examined moral behavior, parent-child interaction, cultural intelligence, and religious orientation separately or within other topics, no model has been found based on parent-child interaction and perceived social support with the mediation of cultural intelligence and religious orientation that shows students' moral behavior. Understanding this critical period, especially for high school girls, where hijab as a symbol of religious orientation and parent-child interaction are important, makes examining this issue more necessary. The lack of a coherent strategy from the government and society to address these challenges, which have not been deeply

considered so far, can be addressed by examining a sufficiently representative sample. If a practical need is felt, a comprehensive review of this issue can serve as a national strategy. It is crucial that the selected sample is large enough and well-representative of the hidden aspects of society, which can be compensated for by employing appropriate statistical methods.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method is descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of this study includes all high school girls in Tehran aged 11 to 16 (first-year secondary students) in the academic year 2022-2023. The sample size of this study is calculated to be 10 people for each observed variable in structural equations. Given that the number of observed variables, the number of questions in this study, is 21 variables, the sample size for this study was 400 people. After removing invalid questionnaires, it was reduced to 379 people, selected through accessible sampling in District 2 of Tehran and then two-stage cluster sampling. First, two education districts in Tehran were chosen, and then two schools from each district were selected. In the next stage, two classes from each school were selected, and students in these classes were asked to complete the questionnaire information.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Ethical Behavior

The Fixed Ethical Behavior Questionnaire was used to measure ethical behavior. The Ethical Behavior Questionnaire was developed by Sabat and colleagues in 2015 based on a five-point Likert scale. It has eight dimensions: respect for differences, consideration, responsible behavior, helping behavior, humility, aggression, cheating, and care. The 32-item questionnaire includes respect for differences (questions 1-4), consideration (questions 5-8), responsible behavior (questions 9-12), helping behavior (questions 13-16), humility (questions 17-20), aggression (questions 21-24), cheating (questions 25-28), and care (questions 29-32). Sarmead et al. (2011) evaluated the content and face validity of this questionnaire as appropriate. Regarding the reliability of the data collection tools, Sarmead et al. (2011) calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire to be above 0.7 (Azkhosh et al., 2024).

#### 2.2.2. Perceived Social Support

The Perceived Social Support Questionnaire was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988). This questionnaire measures perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others. It contains 12 items, with responses on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support, with scores ranging from 1 to 84. A score of 43 or higher indicates high social support, while lower scores indicate low social support. The Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire is reported to be 89%. The questionnaire comprises three components: social support from family (items 3, 4, 8, 11), social support from friends (items 6, 7, 9, 12), and social support from significant others (items 1, 2, 5, 10). The validity and reliability of this scale were reported as satisfactory by the developers. Internal consistency for this tool was reported as 90% to 86% for its subscales and 86% for the whole tool in a sample of 788 high school students. Salimi et al. reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three dimensions of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others to be 89%, 86%, and 82%, respectively (Erfan, 2018).

#### 2.2.3. Cultural Intelligence

The Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire by Ang and Earley (2004) was used to assess cultural intelligence. This 20-item questionnaire has four factors: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. Items 1 to 4 relate to the metacognitive factor, items 5 to 11 to the cognitive factor, items 12 to 14 to the motivational factor, and items 16 to 20 to the behavioral factor (Ang et al., 2007). Responses are on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The scores of the items are summed, and the test assesses participants' ability to communicate better in different cultures. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each factor are reported as 0.76 for metacognitive, 0.84 for cognitive, 0.76 for motivational, and 0.83 for behavioral. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by many researchers (Besharat, 2007; Khak et al., 2023).

### 2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis method is structural equation modeling. This method evaluates the relationships between latent variables and the indicators of each latent variable. Structural equation modeling is used to evaluate and validate models, not to construct them. The researcher must first

create an initial model, then validate it using this method. The initial model in this study is hypothesized based on previous studies on the subject and is optimized through trial and error. Calculations for this method were performed using SPSS and Smart PLS software.

### 3. Findings and Results

In this study, after using descriptive statistics, structural equation modeling was employed to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics for the research variables are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum and Maximum Scores
Moral Behavior	82.31	4.6	22-118
Parent-Child Relationship	93.42	5.2	62-124
Cultural Intelligence	81.53	7.50	27-132
Perceived Social Support	46.75	5.67	12-80

To examine univariate normality, a general criterion recommends that if skewness and kurtosis are not within the range of (-3, 3), the data are not normally distributed. The results showed that the skewness and kurtosis indices of none of the indicators fall outside the range of (-3, 3), so they can be considered normal or approximately normal. One of the assumptions of structural equation modeling is the normality of the multivariate distribution. For this purpose, Mardia's multivariate kurtosis coefficient is used in AMOS

software. Bentler (2005) suggests that values greater than 5 for Mardia's coefficient indicate a non-normal data distribution. The Mardia coefficient for the present study's data is 2.04, indicating that the assumption of multivariate normality is met. When continuous data do not significantly deviate from normality, the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method can be used. To test these hypotheses, direct and indirect effects were examined, and the results are reported in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Coefficients and Significance of Direct and Indirect Effects of Parent-Child Interaction on Moral Behavior*

Direct Paths	Beta Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	Significance
Parent-Child Interaction → Moral Behavior	-0.896	0.065	-22.66	0.001
Parent-Child Interaction → Cultural Intelligence	-0.750	0.063	-20.26	0.001
Cultural Intelligence → Moral Behavior	0.148	0.058	3.37	0.001
Religious Orientation → Moral Behavior	0.161	0.054	4.08	0.001

The results in Table 2 indicate that the hypothesis regarding the direct effect of parent-child interaction on the

moral behavior of female students is confirmed at the 95% confidence level.

**Table 3**

*Bootstrap Results*

Indirect Paths	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Path Coefficient
Parent-Child Interaction → Cultural Intelligence → Moral Behavior	-0.022	-0.186	0.011
Parent-Child Interaction → Religious Orientation → Moral Behavior	-0.022	-0.185	0.010

The model fit indices showed that the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ) is 1.052, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.012, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.998, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is 0.956, and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is 0.948.

These values indicate that the model is well-fitted and appropriate for explaining the data.

### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to model the relationship between parent-child interaction and perceived social support with

moral behavior, mediated by cultural intelligence, in adolescent female students in Tehran. The findings showed that parent-child interaction has a significant relationship with children's moral behavior. Kohlberg believed that family participation is not uniquely essential for adolescents' moral development, suggesting that parents have a relatively weaker relationship with the child's moral reasoning level compared to the environment. According to social learning theory, children learn moral behavior through observation and imitation of consequences, primarily modeling peers rather than adults with similar social status, hence having less impact on children's moral behavior. On the other hand, It is found that children's moral development has a positive and significant relationship with permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles. Additionally, multiple studies have shown that parental responsiveness is related to children's moral development (Carnes-Holt, 2012; Farzaneh et al., 2021; Mehr-un-Nisa et al., 2021; Milkie et al., 2008; Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015; Shakerinia & Asghari, 2016). Parents are a significant factor in children's moral behavior development, and parent-child interaction is associated with cognitive and moral development in children. Powers demonstrated that parental discussion styles are related to adolescents' moral development levels, and adolescents' cognitive and moral development levels are more predicted by parental support rather than cognitive stimulating behaviors by parents.

Other findings from this study indicated that perceived social support has a significant impact on moral behavior. According to the prior findings (Bruwer et al., 2008; Clara et al., 2003; Edwards, 2004; Friedlander et al., 2007; Ghoncheh & Golpour, 2022; Ghorbani et al., 2020; Hassani et al., 2017; Niknam et al., 2016; Stroebe et al., 2005; Tajalli et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2007; Zimet et al., 1988), perceived social support is related to moral behavior and reduced delinquency in adolescents, showing that adolescents perceiving higher social support exhibit more moral behavior and less delinquency. Stewart et al. showed that for children aged 5 to 11, lower perceived social approval is associated with a higher ability to judge a situation as a moral problem and the intention to show moral behavior. However, for adolescents aged 11 to 16, perceived social approval is related to social behavior, particularly moral problem judgment, and inversely related to the intention to show moral behavior. These findings indicate that understanding others' support influences adolescents' moral development.

Further analyses showed that parent-child interaction mediated by cultural intelligence does not relate to moral behavior, contradicting Extensive emotional, social development and responses to adolescents' needs with parental expectations show more complex reactions. These emotional and social developments and expectations from parents in living with children, friends, new experiences, and those in their social and cultural relations are related to creating more moral and value issues and their development in these areas. Adolescents face a wide range of internal and external changes and conflicts resulting from social, cultural, and religious values (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Niferklafehn, 2017).

The findings of this study showed that perceived social support mediated by cultural intelligence has an indirect impact on moral behavior. Perceived social support can predict prosocial behavior through the mediating role of social intelligence and moral behavior. Research examining moral development in the light of children's temperament shows that parental behaviors may have different effects when used with children with different temperaments. However, research on gentle discipline neglects differentiating various behaviors represented by this term and how different children might benefit from these behaviors. The context in which parenting occurs may also be a crucial predictor of its impact as a moderator of the relationship between child temperament and moral development, given that parent-child interactions occur in a wide range of situations with varying expectations. This study aimed to examine these topics, and the results showed that both parental behavior and context predict children's future moral behavior.

Thus, to strengthen the parent-child relationship, parents are advised to show love to their children; expressing love is vital and particularly significant in the early stages of a child's life. Expressing love can be through eye contact, hugging, kissing, talking, and showing attention and importance. This expression of love can help children feel secure and calm, experiencing good psychological growth. Therefore, expressing love and affection is crucial for children to develop a strong personality. Parents should always show love, affection, and appreciation in their interactions, attending to their needs to foster their psychological growth. Giving meaning to the child's surrounding world by attending to details and finding connections can improve parent-child interaction. This helps the child develop an integrated view of their world.



## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

Parents are advised to explain decisions and consequences to their children, showing how decisions are made and consequences managed based on values and ethics. Developing curricula emphasizing values and ethics can help students learn moral concepts. Subjects dedicated to ethics and social values can reinforce the moral learning process. The Ministry of Education is suggested to include such topics in their programs. Active engagement of schools and teachers with parents is also crucial for moral education. Coordination between educational settings and families can significantly impact students' moral upbringing. Parents and teachers can create a healthy moral environment for students through mutual exchange and cooperation. Teaching ethics in educational environments is essential for nurturing generations that embrace values and ethics as part of their personality and identity, applying them practically in their lives.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethical Considerations

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

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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