

## Abstract

The present study examined moral reasoning among children, adolescents and adults in India using the cultural-developmental approach. The first two studies were mixed methods studies that tested the cultural-developmental template hypotheses for the use of the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity among children ( $N=144$ ) and adolescents ( $N=72$ ). Using a cross-sectional and longitudinal design, in-depth interviews using hypothetical moral dilemmas were conducted with children and adolescents. Quantitative analysis illuminated distinct patterns of ethic use whereas qualitative analysis highlighted the type of moral concepts used prominently across childhood and adolescence. Findings revealed a significant increase in the degree and type of Autonomy concepts used between childhood and adolescence. The degree of use of the Ethic of Community remained consistent between the two age groups. Children and adolescents spoke of indigenous duty concepts (*faraj*, *zimmedari* and *kartavya*) and their moral reasoning reflected a concern for *beizzati* (the loss of honor). These findings highlighted the early awareness of an encompassing self, one that is embedded in social relationships, expectations and obligations. The Ethic of Divinity emerged as early as middle childhood, and its use decreased in the course of adolescence. The types of moral concepts used within this ethic also evolved with age, moving from a focus on Punishment avoidance (from God) in childhood to a more mature, abstract and positive relationship with God in adolescence. Social class differences among children revealed that High-SES children used the Ethic of Autonomy more than low-SES children. There was no significant difference in the use of the Ethic of Community between SES groups. High-SES participants showed greater use of the Ethic of Divinity compared to their low-SES counterparts. Lastly, in-depth interviews were conducted with adult participants ( $N=30$ ) about personhood, God and suffering. Qualitative analysis revealed fundamental aspects of the Indian moral worldview, more specifically the use of indigenous concepts of *karma*, *dharma*, and *shraddhā* and the interface between self and God. Overall, findings revealed aspects of Indian moral reasoning that are largely missing in Western studies, and pointed to new research directions in moral development and socialization.

*Keywords:* morality, ethics, India, children, adolescents, adults