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Chapter – 2

Relationship between Gratitude, Forgiveness and Moral Values among Middle School Children

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ABSTRACT

Moral competence is the ability to deal with problems and conflicts based on moral principles. This ability helps in maintaining harmony in society. Gratitude and forgiveness have been important factors in building moral values among children. The chapter aimed to know the relationship between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values among middle school children. The quantitative analysis showed no significant relationship between gratitude, forgiveness, and moral values. The qualitative analysis showed that gratitude has been in practice unknowingly. Culture, language, people influence expressing gratitude. Forgiveness has been given importance, yet differences of opinions were noticed among samples to forgiving people. Moral values have been in practice, irrespective of the acceptance of the values taught. Gratitude, forgiveness and moral values can be independently trained, yet there is an association identified between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values. Spirituality can be used as an effective tool to teach honesty, trust, gratitude, forgiveness and moral values as a whole.

Key Words: Gratitude, Forgiveness, Moral values, Spirituality,

can be measured according to the degree of genuineness (Enright & North, 1998). Genuine forgiveness requires compassion, benevolence, and love for the offender, together with the relinquishment of the right to revenge, resentment, and indifference. Forgiveness is important as a possible repair mechanism for the conflict that occurs in relationships. (Paul, et al.2016).

Revenge and avoidance motivations have been recognized as two established indicators for forgiveness (Orth, Berking, Walker, Meier, & Znoj, 2008) following an interpersonal transgression. Interpersonal transgressions generally result in negative feelings that precipitate emotional distress (Orcutt, 2006). Forgiving doesn't always speak about forgiving others, but self as well. Self-forgiveness is defined as a process of releasing resentment towards oneself for a perceived transgression. Lack of self-forgiveness might damage an individual's well-being or moral self (Lijo, 2018). Gratitude and forgiveness have been studied for years, for the benefit of mental health and well-being. Little has been focused on their impact on morality. Gratitude and forgiveness could be two actions, which would influence moral behaviour.

Several studies have shown the importance and implication of moral values among children. **Kaur (2016)** studied moral values among school-going students concerning their gender. The chapter was conducted on 50 boys and 50 girls. Results showed that girls had high moral values than boys. Scores in subdomains like cheating, lying, dishonesty, stealing were low. Overall both boys and girls had very low moral values. Another chapter by **Taneja (2017)** was on the moral values of government and private secondary school students. Results indicated that there is a significant difference between the moral values of government and private school students.

Aquino (2002) studied the self-importance of moral identity. The chapter showed associations among the self-importance of moral identity, moral cognition, and behaviour. Social identity measurement and the need to consider moral self-conceptions are associated with moral behaviour. **Yadav & Shukla (2017)** conducted a comparative chapter on moral values among the

Jennings, et al (2014) reviewed and integrated the moral self. The chapter showed that self-play a vital role in the moral agency of an individual. Though there is a better understanding of moral thought and behaviour, there is a lack of clarity as to the nature and functioning of the moral self. The chapter suggests more empirical researches related to moral self and shows an integrative framework to increase conceptual coherence among various relevant constructs. Kundu & Cummins (2012) studied morality and conformity: an Asch paradigm applied to moral decisions. Results showed a great association between morality and conformity. Permissible actions were deemed less permissible when confederates found objectionable and impermissible actions were judged more permissible if confederates judged them so. A review of the literature showed that there are few studies on the relationship of gratitude and forgiveness on moral values. The present chapter intends to focus on the relationship of gratitude and forgiveness on moral values.

The chapter intended to understand the relationship between gratitude, forgiveness, and moral values. A mixed-method research design has been used for the chapter.

Research Questions:

Children are taught moral values. Gratitude and forgiveness are the skills taught as a part of the culture. But is the teaching enough and children can follow the skills are major questions to be answered. What is the relationship between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values among middle school children? And what is the perception of gratitude, forgiveness and moral values among middle school children? Are some important questions need to be answered?

Objectives

Teaching moral values starts from a very early age. Children learn the skills required, but will they practice the learned skills are questionable. Statistical analysis would show an existing relationship between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values.

- **Focused Group Discussion:** The group of participants is guided by the facilitator who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in the discussion. FGD is used to explore the meanings of survey findings that cannot be explained statistically and get a wide range of opinions and views from participants.
- **Middle School Children:** Children pursuing their fifth to eighth standard/class/grade between 11 to 14 years age group.

Inclusion Criteria:

Children chaptering in Middle school (5th, 6th and 7th Std) in Urban Bangalore were considered for the chapter. Day scholars were considered for the chapter.

Exclusion Criteria:

Children diagnosed with any psychological disability were not considered for the chapter.

Sampling Technique & Sample:

Phase I: Convenient and random sampling technique was used for the chapter. Children between the age group of 11 to 14 yrs were the samples (N=150).

Phase II: Snowball sampling technique (N=15).

Tools of Assessment:

Phase I: The standardized tools would help in getting statistical analysis to assess the relationship between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values among middle school children. Details of the scales are given below.

- **Gratitude Questionnaire:** McCullough M developed a 6-item self-report questionnaire that measures proneness to feel and experiencing gratitude in one's everyday life. Respondents indicate how much they agree or disagree with each item on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale has adequate internal consistency reliability (cronbach's alphas = .76 to .87) and high temporal stability over approximately three months ($r = .59$ and

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Samples were facilitated with open-ended questions during the session by the scholar. Responses given by samples were noted verbatim.

Analysis of Data:

Descriptive statistics and Correlation was executed using SPSS 16.0 version for Phase I analysis. Thematic and content analysis was followed for Phase II analysis.

Results and Discussion

Morals and values are a very important component of the educational model. It's mandatory to focus on teaching moral values in schools. Negligence in teaching moral values would cause major damage to society. Family and education systems together can enable children to gain knowledge and moral values. Rahim and Rahiem (2012) explained that few teachers use stories as moral education in kindergarten. Second, teachers play an important role in helping children understand the story and capture the message of the story.

Table 1: Showing descriptive statistics and Correlation between gratitude, forgiveness and moral values.

Descriptive Statistics			
Grade Questionnaire	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Grade Questionnaire	28.487	7.05752	150
Heardand Forgiveness Scale	71.8887	25.21492	150
Test for moral values among school students	30.6400	10.47833	150

Correlations			
	Grade Questionnaire	Heardand Forgiveness Scale	Test for moral values among school students
Grade Questionnaire	1		
Heardand Forgiveness Scale	.021	1	
Test for moral values among school students	-.021	-.021	1
	111	103	175
	7421.473	-545.727	1228.580
	48.808	-3.883	8.232
	150	150	150
Grade Questionnaire			
Heardand Forgiveness Scale		1	
Test for moral values among school students			1
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Thanking was strictly taken by samples, as they have to thank irrespective of feeling it. The religious aspect was also brought into the discussion. Samples expressed by thanking God for everything. Thanks, are not only for people around but also to god and things around. Children are taught to express gratitude, but unaware of why expressing gratitude is important. When the question was raised by the scholars, samples said "it's good to tell thanks when someone helps". One sample expressed that "if we tell thank you, they will like it and will help us again".

The discussion showed that children were telling thank you for any help received, as it was taught to be their duty. It has so routine that, the word 'thank you comes out immediately' for any action of others, without feeling it. Gratitude could have its meaning more meaningful, when felt it, than orally expressing it. An interesting point put forth by a sample gave a new direction to think for them. The sample expressed that "Ma'am, we always tell thanks in English. I don't know the correct word for thank you in my language". One of the samples gave the right word for thank you in their mother tongue, others laughed, telling it sounds very different. This showed that, thank you word has been used like any other routine word. Culture plays a very major role in it. Each culture, language, or people have different ways or methods of expression of gratitude. Gratitude has been given the greatest importance in all cultures for a healthy way of life.

Theme II: Understanding Forgiveness:

Samples expressed forgiveness, as telling sorry for the mistake done. Forgiveness was a simple act of expression. Samples expressed few incidents, where their friends or family member had hurt them and asked for sorry. One of the samples said, "when my friend told me sorry, I told its ok, and we both are friends again". This shows that asking sorry for a mistake has helped in building relationships. Samples felt nice when someone tells for a mistake. One sample expressed that "ma'am, one of my friends lied to me and I came to know that, she had commented very badly about me with my other friends. I scolded her and stopped talking to her. She asked me, sorry, but I will not forgive". This lead to the discussion if it was fine not forgiving someone for their mistakes. Samples

aware of it. The consequences of immoral actions were based on the experiences they had. One of the samples expressed that "I was fighting with my brother, by mistake I hit him hard, which hurt him badly. I felt bad for what I did". This narration explains the actions out of emotions could cause harm to people. Not harming people is a moral value taught to children.

The practice of it can be noticed with strangers or others, but things can be taken for granted with close associates. Religion was brought into the discussion. Samples felt that their religious practices at times would make them practice few things even if they don't like it. One of the samples said, "I don't like to visit pilgrim places, as they are crowded, but I am forced to accompany my parents". It gives way to understand that, worshipping or praying god is a crucial part of moral behaviour. People are assessed based on these criteria too. The question arises that, the one who practices moral values can be called morally sound, even if they don't like it or should we consider the choice or willingness of people for their moral actions. Samples did exhibit their discomforts in certain moral practices. But they couldn't give reasons for their unwillingness. There is a requirement for properly training moral actions. Moral values are known; moral behaviour needs to be more conscious in practice. The term moral is familiar to children, with little awareness about its impact, importance and relevance.

Theme IV: Gratitude and Forgiveness as Moral Value:

The scholars tried to understand the perception of middle school children about gratitude, forgiveness and moral values. The fourth theme has been constructed based on the three themes. Gratitude is in practice with little knowledge about its importance. Forgiveness has been correlated with many factors like well-being, happiness, interpersonal relationships, or mental health. Very few studies have been correlated with mortality. The conscious practice of gratitude and forgiveness would make the concept clear to children about the intentions behind healthy practices. Gratitude can be considered as an effective tool of moral value. Being thankful is a positive feeling. The field of positive psychology has taken gratitude as one of the character strengths. Several studies

Honesty and Trust:

Prevention is always better than cure. With a similar motto, children can be taught and trained in practicing moral values at an earlier age, so that they would be able to handle situations effectively in later life. Morality is a belief system that helps to lead a good life. Children are taught either in school or at home about moral values, but not necessarily all would be practiced. This phenomenon is called Moral Core. It shows the extent to which an individual knows morality. Certain moral values would be a force on children to practice irrespective of their beliefs. It would be blind practice without any ideology about the value (for ex: when a child receives a gift would immediately tell Thank You, does the child know it's the expression of gratitude or the meaning behind telling thank you). Practicing moral principles would start as it is conditioned by parents or teachers at school. It's crucial to understand the meaning of these principles and consciously practicing.

Spirituality to teach Honesty and Trust:

Spirituality is the other aspect to be considered for effective training of moral values among children. Spirituality is being honest with oneself. Man can set values for life. Children can be trained with spirituality in building their strengths. Children should be able to identify their goals, values of life and consistent practices of strengths for a meaningful life. Honesty and trust are some of the other skills to be trained at an earlier age for a healthier future. Honesty teaches to be truthful, a quality that teaches to choose the right path of life. Honesty represents the internal states, intentions and commitments both publicly and privately. It is associated with the self-concordance-the extent to which goals represent the interests and values of an individual. It makes people responsible for their feelings and behaviour. Trust on the other hand speaks about having belief in others. Trust plays a major role in relationships. Honesty and trust together would be a great combination in building character strengths among children.

effectively not losing out on moral values, spirituality with honesty, trust, gratitude and forgiveness is a challenge. Parents, academicians, government, experts and stakeholders will have to come up with collaborative measures for the future of society. Measures could be studied through extensive research works. The holistic growth and development of children is the key to a healthier and successful society.

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