

Research Articles

Predictors of the Moral Behavior among Early Adolescents*

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Received : June 29, 2022

Revised : July 9, 2022

Accepted : August 8, 2022

Abstract

Addressing moral characteristics and various factors affecting the inculcation of moral behavior in early adolescents is significant. This study aimed to examine the predictors of moral behavior among early adolescents. 121 participants were recruited using stratified random sampling from junior high school students in extended opportunity schools in Chonburi province. The research instrument was a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of 1) Demographic data, 2) Self-esteem, 3) Parenting styles, 4) Game addiction screening test, and 5) Moral behavior. The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were 0.91, 0.85, 0.88 and 0.91 respectively. Descriptive statistics and stepwise multiple regression were used for data analysis.

The results revealed that the mean score of moral behavior was at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.36$, $SD = 0.63$). Predictors were authoritative parenting style, self-esteem and internet gaming addiction, which together accounted for 40.1 % of the variance in moral character ($p < 0.001$). The strongest predictor was authoritative parenting style ($\beta = 2.308$, $p < 0.001$), followed by self-esteem ($\beta = 0.975$, $p = 0.010$) and internet gaming addiction ($\beta = -0.321$, $p = 0.016$).

These findings suggest that the tailored intervention program should be emphasized by promoting an authoritative parenting style and self-esteem, and ways to prevent internet gaming addiction to cultivate better moral behavior in early adolescents.

Keywords: adolescents, internet gaming addiction, moral behavior, parenting style, self-esteem

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* Research granted by Faculty of Nursing, Burapha University

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บทคัดย่อ

ลักษณะทางจริยธรรมและปัจจัยต่าง ๆ มีผลต่อการปลูกฝังพฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมในเด็กวัยรุ่นตอนต้นเป็นอย่างมาก การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยทำนายพฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมของวัยรุ่นตอนต้น กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้นในโรงเรียนขยายโอกาสทางการศึกษา จังหวัดชลบุรี จำนวน 121 คน คัดเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างโดยการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบแบ่งชั้น เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล คือแบบสอบถาม ซึ่งประกอบด้วย 5 ส่วน คือ 1) แบบสอบถามข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล 2) แบบวัดการเห็นคุณค่าในตัวเอง 3) แบบวัดรูปแบบการอบรมเลี้ยงดู 4) แบบวัดการติดเกมสื่อนเทอร์เน็ต และ 5) แบบวัดพฤติกรรมจริยธรรมซึ่งมีความเชื่อมั่นเท่ากับ 0.91, 0.85, 0.88 and 0.91 ตามลำดับ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้สถิติพรรณนา และสถิติวิเคราะห์การถดถอยแบบพหุคูณ

ผลการศึกษา พบว่า พฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมมีค่าเฉลี่ยอยู่ในระดับปานกลาง ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, $SD = 0.63$) รูปแบบการเลี้ยงดูแบบให้อิสระอย่างมีขอบเขต การเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง และการติดเกมสื่อนเทอร์เน็ต สามารถร่วมกันทำนายพฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมได้ร้อยละ 40.1 ($p < 0.001$) ตัวแปรที่ทำนายได้มากที่สุดคือ รูปแบบการเลี้ยงดูแบบให้อิสระอย่างมีขอบเขต ($\beta = 2.308$, $p < 0.001$) การเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง ($\beta = 0.975$, $p = 0.010$) และการติดเกมสื่อนเทอร์เน็ต ($\beta = -0.321$, $p = 0.016$)

ผลการศึกษาครั้งนี้มีข้อเสนอแนะว่า การจัดโปรแกรมส่งเสริมพฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมในวัยรุ่นตอนต้น ควรให้ความสำคัญกับการส่งเสริมการเลี้ยงดูแบบให้อิสระอย่างมีขอบเขต และการเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง รวมทั้งต้องคำนึงถึงวิธีการป้องกันการติดเกมสื่อนเทอร์เน็ตเพื่อปลูกฝังพฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรมที่ดีให้กับวัยรุ่นตอนต้น

คำสำคัญ: วัยรุ่น การติดเกมสื่อนเทอร์เน็ต พฤติกรรมด้านจริยธรรม รูปแบบการเลี้ยงดู การเห็นคุณค่าในตนเอง

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Introduction

Most early adolescents from extended opportunity schools belong to poor socioeconomic status. Since their parents are poor, they cannot take care of their children. An opinion survey conducted among school administrators and teachers found that parents' lack of conscience, care, warmth, and attention towards their children and responsibility for resolving behavioral problems led to aggressive behaviors in early adolescents (Dasri, 2012). In addition, a population and social institution survey reported that 30% of adolescents have emotional and mental problems. In total, 37 out of 100,000 had attempted suicide and aggression, low educational attainment levels, school dropouts, and consumed alcohol and drugs (Vorasiriamorn, Rittirong, Chuanwan, & Hunchangsith, 2014).

Moral behavior refers to good behavior compliance social rule and laws, rational thinking, interacting with others appropriately, able to control their emotions and behavior and help others (Boonyaparakob, 2014). Moral character can be conceptualized as an individual's characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior in an ethical versus unethical manner (Funder & Fast, 2010). The interpersonal and environmental factors influence the moral development of adolescents. These include appropriate parenting, learning from the external environment, cultivating the moral value and being a role model distinguishing right from wrong or being ethical (Boonyaparakob, 2014). Based on Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, ethical learning is social learning, and the interaction between person and environment affects individual learning and their character or behavior development.

Kohlberg's theory (1964) focused on children's development in morality and moral reasoning. Conflict may arise in adolescents if they fail to adapt during their stages of moral development and cause mental confusion, anxiety, and feelings of low self-worthlessness. Their lack of control over expression leads them to indulge in inappropriate and risk-taking behaviors (Steinberg, 2017). This is in line with a previous study on junior high school students by Wonginjun et al. (2021) that found a moderate level of moral characteristics among students. This could be explained that early adolescents from extended opportunity schools had poor socioeconomic status. Their parent must be work hard to earn enough, making them unable to take care their children. Based on social learning theory and literature review, this study found factors such as self-esteem, parenting styles, and internet gaming addiction to affect moral characteristics.

Factors such as self-esteem, adolescents' feeling, and perceptions of self-acceptance, self-worth, and confidence are related to moral behavior. Adolescents with low self-esteem and social acceptance may have violent behavior, stealing tendencies, and violates the rules. In addition, they also exhibit risk-taking behaviors such as drug abuse, crime, and unwanted pregnancy. A study found self-esteem to have positive association with moral characteristics (Wonginjun et al., 2021), and the influence of moral character attributes on adolescents' life satisfaction was mediated by adolescents' responsible behavior (Zhou, Shek, Zhu, & Lin, 2021).

Parenting styles and parents' socialization process affect a child's personality, emotions, and behavior, build conscience and cultivate their moral values and ethics. Parenting style is crucial in developing moral characteristics that facilitate adolescents to grow physically, mentally, and socially (Klaykaew, 2014). Baumrind (1971) postulated four types of parenting styles such as 1) Authoritarian parenting style (controlled but not responsive to the child's feelings), 2) Authoritative parenting style (control and responsive to child), 3) Neglectful parenting style (uncontrolled and unresponsive), and 4) Indulgent parenting style (non-controlling but response to children's feelings). Several studies indicated that only authoritative

parenting style was a positive associated with moral characteristics, while the neglectful, authoritarian and indulgent parenting styles were negative relationship (Fatima, Dawood, & Munir, 2020; Wonginjun et al., 2021).

Internet gaming addiction refers to excessive indulgence in online gaming for a prolonged period of time. Adolescents may feel irritable or angry and are less interested in other activities. Even though online games improve learning, they negatively impact the health, lifestyle, development, and behavior of early adolescents. The fun and exciting online games keep them engrossed and drive them to play constantly. Gaming addiction causes mood swings, low self-control, self-indulgence, aggression, or lack of correctness among teenagers (Cash, Rae, Steel, & Winkler, 2012). Some studies showed that internet gaming addiction negatively correlated with moral characteristics (Wonginjun et al., 2021) and a significantly positive correlation with aggressive behavior (Heng & Rabbani, 2020; Kim, Namkoong, Ku, & Kim, 2008). In addition, the correlational results indicated that internet gaming addiction affected to inappropriate behavior and unethical characters.

Since existing studies examining the factors affecting moral behavior are limited, this study assesses the factors influencing moral behavior among early adolescents and thus could serve as a guideline to develop good moral behavior and psychosocial adaptation. Also, it aids school health nurses in counseling on promoting psychosocial adjustment in early adolescents at the family and school levels.

Objective

To examine predictors of moral behavior among early adolescents including self-esteem, parenting styles and internet gaming addiction.

Conceptual framework

This study was guided by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986). The key variables influencing adolescents' moral behavior included interpersonal and environmental factors. The literature review revealed self-esteem as an interpersonal factor and parenting style and internet gaming addiction as an environmental factor. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the predictors (self-esteem, parenting styles, and internet gaming addiction) of moral behaviors among early adolescents.

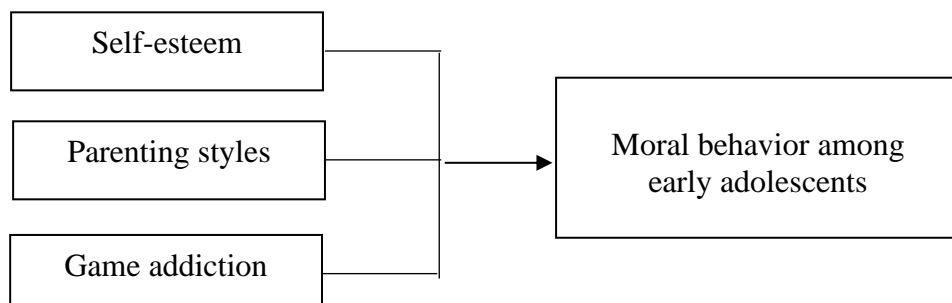


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Methods

Study sample

This cross-sectional study was conducted from January to March 2019. The participants were junior high school students from extended opportunity schools educational service area office 1, Muang, Chonburi province. The sample size was calculated based on the formula for testing a regression model: $n=104+k$ ($k=3$) = 107 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Using stratified random sampling, four schools were selected from a total of eight schools, and the number of participants were determined in proportion to the number of students in each class. In this study; 30-31 students of junior classes from each of the four schools. A total of 121 participants were selected by random sampling technique from four schools. Inclusion criteria for participants were (1) no physical or psychological illness by teacher assessment; (2) able to speak in the Thai language; and (3) willing to participate in the study and have parental consent.

Data collection

The data were collected after receiving the Burapha University Institutional Review Board and the school administration. The participants who met the inclusion criteria and had agreed to participate were enrolled in this study. Prior to distribution in class room, the researchers explained objectives of this study and how to complete self-administered questionnaires. It took about 40-60 minutes per student.

Measurement

An expert panel validated the content validity of all the instruments. The reliability of the questionnaires was assessed using a pilot study of 30 junior high school students from extended opportunity school.

The research instrument comprised five self-administered questionnaires:

Demographic questionnaire: For students: sex, age, education level, grade point average (GPA), leisure activities, using the mobile application and tablet. For family: marital status and family income.

The Thai version of the Self-esteem scale was developed from the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale by Wongpakaran and Wongpakaran (2011). It comprised of 10 items: 5 in positive and negative statements. It was a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree), with the range of total score was 10-40. The higher scores indicating increased self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.91.

Parenting styles were developed by Aroonjit and Gunthong (2016). It consisted of 16 items and four domains including, 4 items each in authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful, and indulgent parenting styles. This was a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). Each domain score was in the range of 4-16. The higher score on each domain; the greater the students' perception about their respective parent to be fit in the given parenting style. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.85.

The Game addiction screening test (GAST) was developed by Pornnoppadol, Sornpaisarn, Khamklieng & Pattana-amorn (2014) to measure the degree of internet game addiction tendency. The GAST is composed of 16 items rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3 (0 = not at all to 3 = always). The total score was in the range of 0-48. Higher score implied a tendency toward addictive usage. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.88.

Moral behavior was developed by Juntipwaree, Hongchayangkool & Watthanasit (2015). It consisted of 26 items and is measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = never to 5 = almost always). The mean score was in the range of 1-5. A higher score indicated higher level of moral behavior in children. Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study was 0.91.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software version. The sample demographic characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictors of moral behavior. All variables met the assumption of normality, linearity, no outliers, no multicollinearity (Tolerance = 1.202, VIF = .832), and no autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson = 1.838).

Ethical considerations

This study obtained ethical approval from the Burapha University Institutional Review Board (BUU-IRB) with an approval number (HU 060/2561). Formal permission was received from the school administration. Following the parental consent, the participants were contacted to seek permission and informed about their rights of participation and withdrawal.

Results

Most participants were females (51.2%). Their mean age was 14.3 ± 0.83 years old, and their GPA was 3.15. More than half of the parents (55.4%) were married. Regarding their monthly income, one-third (33.9%) of the parents' income ranged from 5,001-10,000 baht/month, and 28.1% had 10,001-15,000 baht/month.

The participants spent their leisure time playing games (55.4 %), listening to music (46.3 %), and watching movies (44.6 %). Most participants used mobile applications and tablets and spent 3.12 hours per day ($SD = 2.62$) watching movies/ cartoons/ YouTube, followed by spending 2.41 hours per day ($SD = 2.42$) on social media networking sites such as Facebook, Line, Instagram. The participants played online games for 1.99 hours per day ($SD = 2.20$).

Table 1 shows the mean score of the moral behavior of the participants was at a moderate level ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, $SD = 0.63$). The mean score of predictors such as self-esteem was 28.05 ($SD = 3.51$), parenting styles such as authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful, and indulgent were 7.36, 11.87, 7.51, and 7.80 ($SD = 2.85$, 3.07, 2.64 and 2.78), and internet gaming addiction was 17.18 ($SD = 9.66$).

Table 1 The mean score, standard deviation and range of variables (n=121)

Variables	Possible range	Actual range	\bar{X}	SD
Moral behaviors	1-5	1.23-4.77	3.36	0.63
Self-esteem	10-40	19-37	28.05	3.51
Parenting style				
- Authoritarian parenting style	4-16	4-16	7.36	2.85
- Authoritative parenting style	4-16	4-16	11.87	3.07
- Neglectful parenting style	4-16	4-16	7.51	2.64
- Indulgent parenting style	4-16	4-16	7.80	2.78
Internet gaming addiction	0-48	0-37	17.18	9.66

Table 2 shows the predictors of the moral behavior in which authoritative parenting style, self-esteem, and internet gaming addiction accounted for a total variance of 40.1%. The strongest predictor of moral behavior was the authoritative parenting style, followed by self-esteem and internet gaming addiction.

The predictive equation was expressed as follows:

Moral behavior = 38.108 + 2.308 (authoritative parenting style) + 0.975 (self-esteem) – 0.321 (internet gaming addiction).

Table 2 Stepwise multiple regression analysis of predicting factors and overall moral behavior (n = 121)

Moral behavior	β	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>	R ² change
Authoritative parenting style	2.308	0.420	0.431	5.491	< 0.001	.314
Self-esteem	0.975	0.374	0.208	2.605	0.010	.056
Gaming addiction	-0.321	0.131	-0.188	-2.448	0.016	.031
Constant = 38.108, R ² = 0.401, R ² _{adjust} = 0.386, F _{3,117} = 26.111, <i>p-value</i> < 0.001						

Discussion

This study's findings revealed that three predictors were significantly related to early adolescents' moral behavior ($p < 0.001$). Authoritative parenting style was found as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 2.308$, $p < 0.001$) followed by self-esteem ($\beta = 0.975$, $p = 0.010$) and internet gaming addiction ($\beta = -0.321$, $p = 0.016$). The three variables together explained a total variance of 40.1% in moral behaviors.

In this study, parent with authoritative parenting style predicted moral behavior among early adolescents. This could be explained by the fact that parents use reasoning over emotion, spend ample time with children and care for them. They act as role models and make children feel they are loved and given the best. This parental care could lead the children to develop positive attitude towards exhibiting ethical behaviors. This is consistent with a previous study that found the authoritative parenting style to have a positive correlation with moral characteristics, while the other parenting styles, such as neglectful, authoritarian, and indulgent, had a negative correlation (Fatima et al., 2020; Wonginjun et al., 2021).

This study indicated that self-esteem predicts moral behavior among early adolescents. An overall sense of self-satisfaction, self-esteem and optimism aid teenagers in facing obstacles and handle problems with confidence. They also can adapt to live with others effectively. Self-esteem acts as a catalyst for teenagers to exhibit appropriate behaviors and to socialize morally and ethically. This is consistent with the previous studies that found self-esteem to have a positive correlation with adolescents' moral characteristics (Wonginjun et al., 2021) and a negative correlation with their aggressive nature (Lee, & Jang, 2018).

Internet gaming addiction predicted moral behavior among early adolescents. Gaming addiction leads to violent behaviors and highly influences an individual's personality traits. Teenagers tend to be disobedient, aggressive, violent, and irresponsible, creating conflict with parents when forced to stop playing. This is in line with a study by Wonginjun et al. (2021), which revealed a negative correlation between internet gaming addiction and moral characteristics. Furthermore, video games promote youths' violence and aggression (Igba, Oka, & Chidimma, 2016). They could also lie, steal, and deceive others.

Therefore, this study concluded that promoting an authoritative parenting style, increasing self-esteem and decreasing internet gaming addiction could improve the moral behavior among early adolescents.

Recommendations

The study findings could aid in developing moral behavior intervention programs for early adolescents focusing more on self-esteem and internet gaming addiction. The significance of promoting an authoritative parenting style and self-esteem should be recognized and integrated into the program to prevent internet gaming addiction. However, the limitations must also be considered. Since the study was conducted among the early adolescents in an extended school, it could affect the generalizability to other adolescents and settings. Future research can be conducted in large sample size and in different contexts. Furthermore, using the longitudinal design might aid in studying the trends in behavioral changes, as a cross-sectional design is used in this study.

Acknowledgements

This research received financial support from the Faculty of Nursing, Burapha University. The researchers express their heartfelt gratitude to the mentor and funding source. We would also like to thank the participants for their involvement in the study.

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