

EVALUATING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN RELATION TO MORAL DISENGAGEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG ADULTS

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Abstract

Objective - The objective of the study is to investigate the mediating role of emotional regulation in the relationship of moral disengagement and psychological well-being among the adults. **Material and Methods**-The sample of study was (n=550) university students and they were selected through purposive sampling technique. The age range of participants was from 18 to 25 years. Urdu version of Moral disengagement scale for adults, Emotional regulation scale and Psychological wellbeing scale were administered for the data collection. **Results**-Hayes Process version 4 mediation analysis revealed the significant negative direct effect of moral disengagement on psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation. Further, a significant indirect effect of moral disengagement B (-0.312, $p < .001$) on psychological wellbeing through emotional regulation was appeared which confirmed the partial mediation of emotional regulation. **Conclusion**- It is concluded that moral disengagement has a decreased negative impact on psychological wellbeing through emotional regulation. Emotional regulation has a positive impact on psychological wellbeing as a mediator even in the presence of moral disengagement.

Keywords: Moral Disengagement, Emotional Regulation, Psychological Wellbeing, Adults.

INTRODUCTION

Moral disengagement is a process in which people convince themselves that ethical standards do not apply on them in a particular situation or they portray that their socially unacceptable behavior has some moral purpose. They use this method of disengagement for making their negative behaviors or acts acceptable in the society. In this process the individual learns to eliminate the self condemnation in case of involving in an immoral act by separating their reactions to these behaviors.¹ In short moral disengagement refers to the process of cognitive re-framing or re-structuring of wrong rather destructive behavior or acts as being morally acceptable without altering the behavior or the moral standards. The cognitive restructuring involves in the process of moral disengagement may ease or remove the emotional burden which is associated with that immoral behavior. They may justify and make legalize their conduct by disengaging themselves from immoral deeds which can be the main reasons of bringing negative consequences in their own as well

as in others lives. Their activities of moral disengagement can be a cause of mental illness, poor mental well being at personal as well as the community level ²

Recently moral disengagement has been studied in the context of many harmful behaviors like death penalty and cruel behavior with animals. The process of moral disengagement makes the individual's emotional regulation skills poor and poor emotional regulation skills have been recognized as a cause of destructive, violated, socially unacceptable and immoral behaviors. A good emotional regulation skill encourages the persons to direct their emotions in a positive way. Several investigators have reported that poor emotional regulation skill is one of the major signs of moral disengagement.³ Furthermore, the development of self and society, the crucial component of psychological wellbeing is damaged due to the process of moral disengagement. Psychological wellbeing is a multifaceted which involves positive intra and interpersonal relationships.⁴ The healthy and positive relationships cannot be established and maintained by the good emotional regulation skills. Good emotional regulation skills encourage persons to control their emotions and authenticate their performance by freeing self-sanctions from individuals anti-social deeds, letting them to preserve a reasonable level of well-being,. Consequently, in the current study, it is assumed that the intervening part of emotional regulation can lower the adverse impact of moral disengagement on psychological well-being.⁵

Adult stage of life is an important time period for any individual. At this phase individual faces different ups and downs of life. At the early adult stage people do struggle for success in professional career and practical life. They put every effort to change their dreams in reality and to achieve their goals. In this effort they may involve in the process of moral disengagement. However, the good skill of emotional regulation leads towards adopting the reasonable and socially acceptable ways to attain the goals of their lives. Many researchers who work in the branch of positive psychology declared that psychological wellbeing can be enhanced through the positive and pro-social behaviors. Thus people who exhibit moral disengagement need to improve their emotional regulation skills in order to improve their psychological wellbeing. ⁶

The positive use of emotions is an important skill that is helpful to decrease the level of moral disengagement and improve the psychological wellbeing of the people. One who has ability to control their emotions has proper knowledge to identify the emotional state that can be damaging for oneself as well as for others. Emotional regulation skill involves in identifying oneself own as well as other emotions in a correct manner. This skill will lead to avoid exhibiting harmful behaviors. Emotional regulation is an important skill to achieve a good wellbeing state. Without the ability to control emotions in a reasonable way an individual may harm himself as well as to others.⁷ The findings of recent studies revealed that moral disengagement has negative relationship with psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation.⁸ These researches reported that emotional regulation play an important role in the life of individual and also has a positive effect on the moral disengagement and psychological wellbeing of adults.⁹

Moral disengagement is the main alarm for the entire inhabitants and is frequently examined in psychological viewpoint because often law breaking act is found to be associated with the poor psychological wellbeing. In other words individuals who show moral disengagement are further vulnerable for deprived psychological wellbeing due to impaired relationships with others and other legal penalties.¹⁰ The literature provides us enough evidences that moral disengagement runs by morally qualifying negative conduct with an influence of immoral and rational.¹¹

Emotional regulation play crucial role in the psychological wellbeing of the person. Emotional regulation is a skill which enables one to influence one's own emotional state. Through this skill one can reduce negative or undesirable emotions like anger and sadness by exerting control over their emotional state because negative emotions can direct one to socially unacceptable behaviors that may damage one as well as others. Emotional regulation skill enables one to rethink about their emotional state and to manage it in socially desirable and beneficial manner. The findings of recent studies indicated the positive relationship of emotional regulation with psychological well-being.¹² on the other side results of previous studies revealed that moral disengagement has negative relationship with psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation.¹³

Emotional regulation as well theoretically connected to psychological wellbeing by means of its emphasis on particular progress in addition self-actualization¹⁴. Study showed that individual who have good control on their emotional regulation abilities also has good impact on their psychological wellbeing because both variables has positive relation with each other.¹⁵

People with greater level of emotional regulation also has ability to deal with negative behaviors which impact in positive way on the mental health and maintain good level of psychological well-being, Likewise previous study also explored that capability of emotional regulation helpful to maintain psychological wellbeing of participants because there was significant positive correlation of emotional regulation with the wellbeing of participants. Little emotional intelligence is associated to susceptibility to new psychological wellbeing matters, for example anxiety, disquiet and sadness. Firsthand confirmation has too exposed that emotional regulation helps to use managing the emotions to improve particular wellbeing and shows an important part in psychological health¹⁶.

In this study researchers quantitatively explore the mediating role of emotional regulation between moral disengagement and psychological well-being. It is assumed that emotional regulation as a skill enables one to change their negative emotions that may the result of the process of moral disengagement which eventually lead towards socially unacceptable behaviors. Therefore considering the above mentioned literature following hypotheses have been developed.

Hypotheses

- H1.* Emotional regulation is likely to have a significant mediating role in moral disengagement and psychological well being among adults.
- H1.* Moral disengagement is negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation whereas Emotional regulation is likely to have a significant positive relationship with psychological wellbeing of the participants.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Correlation survey research design was used to investigate the mediating role of emotional regulation between moral disengagement and psychological wellbeing among adults. Emotional regulation is mediating variable and moral disengagement is independent as well psychological wellbeing is a dependent variable. Every participant has to fill the questionnaire as part of data collection for research purpose. Sample of study was consisted of (n = 550) males (279) and female (271) students with age range of 18 to 25 years. They were selected by purposive sampling technique from two public universities (Lahore University and Punjab University) of Punjab, Pakistan. The investigators fulfilled all of the ethical standards regarding research. After the study approval from the institutional research review board the researcher obtained permission from the concerned authorities of the universities for data collection. The researchers provided comprehensive information about topic, purpose and objectives of study to the participants and obtained their informed consents before collection of data. They were also told that they can quit from study at any stage without penalty. Three standardized instruments (Urdu version) were used for data collection. The alpha reliability of the instruments was checked for each scale in a try out phase (n=100) which turned to be 0.981 for moral disengagement scale¹⁶ and 0.945 for psychological wellbeing scale.¹⁷ Further, emotional regulation scale¹⁸ was translated in Urdu language with the permission of author. Its internal consistency was estimated to be 0.92 in try out phase.

RESULTS

Hayes Process version 4 was employed to test the above mentioned first hypothesis. Results are mentioned in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-value	Conclusion
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
*MD->EM**-> Psychological wellbeing	-1.06***	-0.748***	-0.312***	-2.684	-0.344	-12.35	partial mediation

*Moral development**Emotional Regulation

***p<.001

First hypothesis of the study was to test the mediating role of Emotional Regulation between Moral disengagement and Psychological wellbeing. A significant direct effect of Moral disengagement was observed in the presence of the mediator, emotional regulation which shows the competitive partial mediation of emotional regulation. Figure 1 explains the results more clearly.

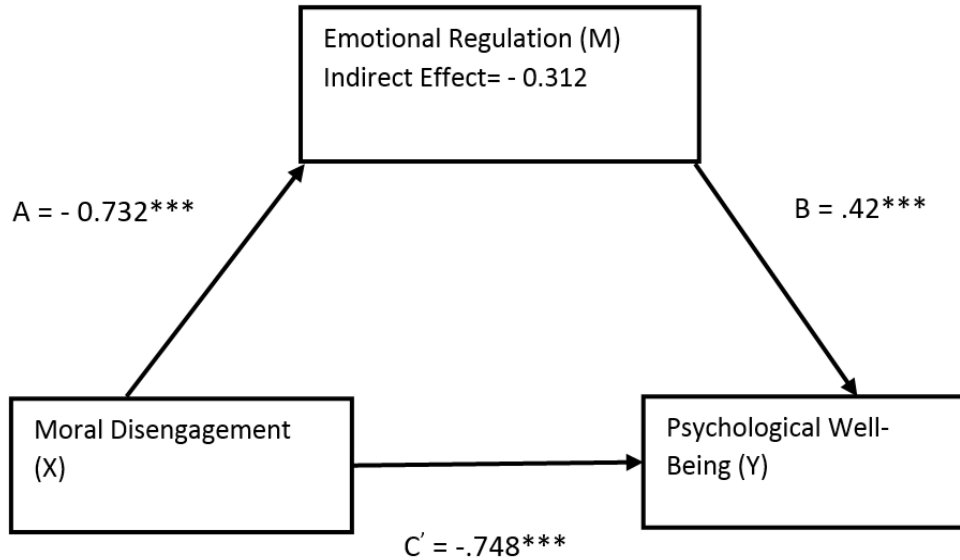


Figure 1: Summary of coefficients for mediation analysis

Figure (1) depicts the Path A, a significant direct negative effect of moral disengagement on emotional regulation ($B = -0.732$, $p < .001$). Path C' reveals a significant direct but negative effect of moral disengagement on psychological well being (-0.748 , $p < .001$). Whereas Path B shows a significant positive direct effect of emotional regulation on Psychological well being ($B = .42$, $p < .001$).

Table 2: Correlation among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
Moral Disengagement	-		
Psychological well-being	-.980***	-	
Emotional Regulation	-.815***	.854***	-

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2 revealed that moral disengagement has a significant negative relationship with psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation whereas emotional regulation is positively correlated with psychological wellbeing of the participants. Thus second hypothesis of this study has been also accepted.

DISCUSSION

The objective of present study was to investigate the mediating role of emotional regulation for the relationship between moral disengagement and psychological wellbeing among adults. The sample of study was consisted of 279 males and 271 female students from the university of Lahore and Punjab University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Hayes Process version 4 and Pearson correlation were used to test the hypotheses in this research.

The major aim of study was to test the effect of moral disengagement and psychological wellbeing mediating through emotional regulation. For this purpose mediation analysis was run through Hayes Process version 4 on IBM SPSS 26. The results showed an indirect effect of moral disengagement on the psychological wellbeing through emotional regulation -0.312 ($p < .000$). In other words the indirect effect of moral disengagement (-0.387) through emotional regulation on the psychological wellbeing of adults, is almost half of the direct effect which reveals that emotional regulation lowers the negative effect of moral disengagement on psychological wellbeing of the participants. Results indicated that moral disengagement has significant negative direct effects on psychological wellbeing. In other words it showed that the people with high level of moral disengagement possess the lower levels of psychological well being.

Similarly the results in Figure (1) showed the direct and indirect paths of independent variable moral disengagement and mediator emotional regulation on the dependent variable psychological well being. the Path A, a significant direct negative effect of moral disengagement appeared to be directly and negatively effect the emotional regulation and psychological well being however Path B reflects a significant positive direct effect of emotional regulation on Psychological well being .

In short results mentioned in Table 1 and Figure 1 concluded that the first hypothesis of study which stated that the emotional regulation is likely to have mediating role between the relationship of moral disengagement and psychological wellbeing among adults was acceptable. The findings of the study support the hypothesis and results of study indicated that emotional regulation showed significant positive indirect effects on moral disengagement and psychological well-being. Which means emotional regulation decrease the level of moral disengagement which in turns to increase the level of psychological well-being.

The previous research also revealed that emotional regulation plays mediating role between moral disengagement and psychological well-being. Research results of also revealed that emotional regulation as a positive predictor of psychological well being.¹⁹ But emotional regulation has negative direct effect on moral disengagement as well as have direct positive effect on psychological well-being. The outcomes are in the streak with preceding findings also revealed that emotional regulation play mediating role between the relationship of moral disengagement and psychological well-being.

Furthermore results of correlation analysis which are acquired correlation coefficient $r = -.980, -.815, p=0.001, (p < 0.005)$. These values revealed significant negative relationships of moral disengagement with psychological wellbeing and emotional regulation however a significant positive correlation between emotional regulation and psychological wellbeing has been emerged. Individuals who engage in immoral deeds which may cause the feelings of shame and guilt and in turn these emotions effect the psychological wellbeing of individuals. The findings of current study also in line with prior studies revealed there was significant negative correlation of moral disengage and emotional regulation as well also revealed that there was significant positive correlation of emotional regulation and psychological well-being.²⁰ The results of previous researches also revealed that emotional regulation skill can be improved and it effects psychological wellbeing positively which further leads to better social adjustment at homes, schools and workplaces. Consequently, individuals with good emotional regulations will have better level of psychological well-being.²¹

CONCLUSION

It is concluded on the basis of the findings of the study that that moral disengagement has a direct negative effect on psychological wellbeing of the adults however the significant positive outcomes have been observed when the mediating role of emotional regulation was examined. In other words the negative effect of moral disengagement will be reduced or managed by improving the emotional regulation ability of the adults which further enhance their psychological wellbeing. Thus the results are valuable in designing the intervention programs for the adults to enhance their ability of emotional regulation. It is recommended that emotional regulation shall be wisely observed, mainly among adults, as well as intervention strategies for improving emotional regulation skill shall be devised to deal with moral disengagement in order to minimize its negative effect on the psychological well-being. In this way adults can regulate their emotions in a positive way which will be helpful in achieving the goals of their lives in a social acceptable or appropriate manner.

limitations

In the present study only quantitative research design was used to explore the mediating role of emotional regulation in the psychological wellbeing of the adults.

recommendations

In the future studies the factors of moral disengagement are recommended to be explored in depth by employing mixed method design. Further, more mediating and moderating variables in the relation of moral disengagement and psychological well being should be investigated.

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Conflict of Interest The authors claim no conflict of interest.

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