

THE EFFECT OF MORAL REASONING ON ADOLESCENT DEVIANT BEHAVIOR: THE ROLE OF MALTREATMENT MODERATION

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Abstract

Adolescence is an important period in the development of moral reasoning that serves as the basis for behavioral decision-making, but the experience of maltreatment in parenting can increase the tendency for deviant behavior. This study aims to examine the influence of moral reasoning on adolescent deviant behavior and examine the role of maltreatment as a moderator variable in these relationships. The research uses a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The research subjects amounted to 222 students of SMK Tamansiswa Jetis Yogyakarta aged 15–19 years who were selected using *cluster sampling techniques*. Data analysis was carried out with the help of the Jamovi application version 2.7.12 at a significance level of 0.05. However, the results of the moderation test The results of the study showed that moral reasoning had a negative and significant effect on deviant behavior ($p < 0.05$), while maltreatment had a positive and significant effect on adolescent deviant behavior ($p < 0.05$). Simultaneously, moral reasoning and maltreatment were able to explain 49.9% of the variation in deviant behavior. However, the results of the moderation test showed that the interaction between moral reasoning and maltreatment did not have a significant effect on deviant behavior ($p = 0.261 > 0.05$). Thus, the first and second hypotheses are accepted, while the third hypothesis is rejected, so that maltreatment does not act as a moderator variable in the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior, but rather as an independent predictor.

Keywords: Moral Reasoning, Deviant Behavior, Maltreatment, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of transition characterized by rapid changes in the way we think, interact, and make decisions. According to Andrayani (2024), adolescents are in a transition phase characterized by a process towards sexual maturity, psychological changes from children's mindsets to adulthood, and a shift in economic conditions from dependence to more independence. Similar to development in childhood, adolescent development is formed through a combination of biological, genetic, environmental, and social factors that interact with each other (Santrock, 2012). In this phase, adolescents begin to evaluate themselves more complexly and build an understanding of the rules and social expectations that apply around them. Therefore, family conditions and the quality of the social environment are important determinants in the process of forming adolescents' identity and self-concept (Lestari, 2013; Satya Yoga et al., 2015).

An unsupportive family environment can create psychological tension and hinder adolescents' ability to adjust healthily. The information that adolescents receive about positive and negative behaviors from those closest to them will be absorbed and potentially become the basis for the formation of their character, personality, and cognitive abilities (Christiana, 2023). One of the most common negative experiences is *child maltreatment*, which is an act of violence or neglect by parents or caregivers that causes serious threats or losses to children (Robinson & Breaux, 2019). In addition to environmental factors, adolescents' behavior patterns are also influenced by moral reasoning. Moral reasoning is the ability of individuals to use the thought process in determining the reason for doing or not doing an action (Kohlberg in Mansyur et al., 2021). Individuals who have mature moral reasoning are able to think independently, understand rules, and place justice based on equality of rights and obligations (Piaget in Mammen & Paul, 2023). When moral reasoning is low, especially in adolescents who have had negative experiences in parenting, the tendency to engage in deviant behavior usually increases. Deviant behavior refers to actions that are not in accordance with social norms or rules that apply in society and schools (Setiadi, 2020). The form can be in the form of aggressiveness, brawls, wild races, irritability, and interest in pornographic content (Een et al., 2020).

Based on the KPAI Annual Report (2024) published in February 2025, this condition is in line with data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission which reported 2,057 complaints of violations of children's rights throughout 2024, with the majority of cases coming from family and parenting problems (1,097 reports). In addition, there were 240 cases of physical or psychological violence and 40 cases related to pornography and cybercrime. In terms of age, adolescents 15–17 years old occupy the second highest number with 409 cases, indicating that the late adolescent phase is a vulnerable group both as victims and perpetrators of risky behavior. In fact, 85 cases occurred in schools and 70 cases involved law enforcement officials.

Previous studies have shown that parenting and family conditions play an important role in shaping adolescent behavior. Panggabean, Hastuti, and Herawati (2022) found that maternal rejection increases the tendency to moral disengagement which ultimately triggers cyberbullying, while moral identity decreases the tendency to moral disconnection. Research by Simbolon et al. (2023) revealed that the quality of parenting is negatively related to adolescents' deviant behavior. Meanwhile, Ernawati (2023) identified that adolescent delinquents experience four to five forms of *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs) on average, with emotional neglect and physical neglect as the most dominant experiences. The findings confirm that the accumulation of ACEs contributes strongly to the risk of deviant behavior emerging.

The three studies (Panggabean et al., 2022; Simbolon et al., 2023; Ernawati, 2023) emphasizes the importance of parenting and childhood experiences in influencing adolescent behavior and the cognitive mechanisms that accompany it. However, previous studies have not examined the role of *maltreatment* (ACEs) as a moderator variable in the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior. In fact, theoretically, maltreatment has the potential to change the strength or direction of the influence of moral reasoning on deviant behavior, because negative parenting experiences can interfere with adolescents' cognitive and moral development. Thus, there are research gaps that need to be filled.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by offering a new understanding of the mechanism of the role of *maltreatment* in the dynamics of the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior. In addition, this research also has a practical contribution for schools, counselors, and child protection institutions in designing strategies to prevent risky behaviors in adolescents based on cognitive factors and childhood experiences. Therefore, this study aims to test whether *maltreatment* moderates the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior in students of SMK Tamansiswa Jetis Yogyakarta. To achieve this goal, this study uses a quantitative approach with standardized measurements to obtain an objective empirical picture related to the relationship between variables.

METHOD

This study involved three main variables, namely moral reasoning as a predictor variable, deviant behavior as a bound variable, and maltreatment as a moderator variable. The three variables were used to see the direct relationship and moderation interaction in adolescents in the vocational high school environment. The research participants consisted of 222 students of SMK Tamansiswa Jetis Yogyakarta with an age range of 15–19 years. The selection of subjects using *cluster sampling techniques*, according to Azwar, (2011) The cluster sampling technique is a sampling method by randomizing groups or classes that have been formed, with a random range of classes from levels X, XI, and XII and willing to participate in research. The recruitment procedure is carried out through coordination with schools and accompanying teachers, All participants fill out the questionnaire voluntarily after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research and the guarantee of confidentiality of all information provided. The maltreatment scale is used to identify negative parenting experiences,

This scale was developed based on the framework of child maltreatment proposed by Wekerle et al. (2006), which includes four main aspects, namely physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence, and neglect of the child's basic and emotional needs. The moral reasoning scale is compiled to measure students' ability to understand and assess moral situations, referring to the aspects of moral reasoning proposed by Budiningsih (2004), which include aspects of obedience, aspects of order, aspects of punishment, and ethical aspects. The scale of deviant behavior The scale of deviant behavior includes 4 aspects according to Zulkhairi et al (2018) stating that aspects of deviant behavior include, aspects of *non-conform behavior*, aspects of anti-social or associative behavior and aspects of criminal behavior The scale uses a likert scale and has gone through internal reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, using a validity index limit of 0.25, according to Azwar (2013) explaining that 0.25 is the minimum tolerance limit that is still acceptable. Indicates that the instrument is feasible to use in data retrieval. The data collection procedure was carried out directly at the school under the supervision of the researcher. The questionnaire was distributed through the google form and distributed through the class group accompanied by the

BK teacher. After the filling process is complete, the researcher checks the completeness of the answers, coding, and compiles the data before entering the analysis stage. The data analysis technique is carried out through several steps. The Descriptive test describes the characteristics of the data before the follow-up analysis. The statistical assumption test to ensure the feasibility of the regression model, includes the normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. The basic relationship between variables was tested using correlation analysis, while hypothesis testing was carried out using moderate regression *through Moderated Regression Analysis* (MRA) to assess the role of maltreatment in strengthening or weakening the influence of moral reasoning on deviant behavior. All analyses were performed at a significance level of 0.05. All instruments used in this study have gone through a quality testing process and show an adequate level of validity and reliability, in line with the test results in previous studies. Thus, the three scales are suitable for use as a measuring tool in data collection. After the data is collected, the analysis is carried out using the Jamovi application version 2.7.12. The analysis technique used is multiple linear regression to test the relationship between variables and see the role of moderation in the research model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of a descriptive analysis of 222 respondents, an overview of the three research variables was obtained, namely behavioral deviations, moral reasoning, and maltreatment.

Table 1. Descriptive

Descriptives			
	Behavioral Deviations	Moral Reasoning	Maltreatment
N	222	222	222
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	38.2	109	33.4
Median	38.0	109	33.5
Standard deviation	5.03	13.2	8.97
Variance	25.3	175	80.5
Range	25	57	44
Minimum	25	83	17
Maximum	50	140	61

The behavioral deviation variable had an average value of **38.2** with a standard deviation of **5.03**, indicating that the respondents' behavioral deviation rate was in the moderate category with relatively homogeneous data variation. The minimum score obtained was **25** and a maximum of **50**, with a score range of **25**, indicating a difference in the level of deviant behavior between respondents. The moral reasoning variable showed an average value of **109** with a standard deviation of **13.2**. The minimum score on this variable is **83**, while the maximum score is **140**, with a score range of **57**. This shows that there is a wide variation in moral reasoning skills in the study respondents. Meanwhile, the maltreatment variable had an average value of **33.4** with a standard deviation of **8.97**. The minimum score was recorded at **17** and the maximum score was **61**, with a score range of **44**, which indicates a significant difference in maltreatment experience between individuals. In general, the results of descriptive statistics show that the data of the three variables are sufficiently dispersed for further analysis. The results of the categorization showed that the majority of respondents were in the **medium** category for behavioral deviation variables, namely **89 students (40.1%)**. Furthermore, **60 students (27.0%)** were in the low category and **58 students (26.1%)** were in the high category. Meanwhile, the very low and very high categories were represented by **11 students (5.0%)** and **4 students (1.8%)** respectively. This distribution indicates that most respondents show a tendency to deviant behavior at a moderate level.

Table 2. Categorization of Behavioral Deviations

Frequencies of Behavioral Deviation			
Behavioral Deviations	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
LOW	60	27.0%	27.0%
MEDIUM	89	40.1%	67.1%
HEIGHT	58	26.1%	93.2%
VERY LOW	11	5.0%	98.2%
VERY HIGH	4	1.8%	100.0%

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In the moral reasoning variable, the majority of respondents were also in the **medium** category, namely **107 students (48.2%)**. Respondents with the high category amounted to **44 students (19.8%)**, while the low category was **46 students (20.7%)**. The very low and very high categories included **14 students (6.3%)** and **11 students (5.0%)** respectively. These results show that most students have a level of moral reasoning that is at an intermediate level.

Table 3. Categorization of Moral Reasoning

Moral Reasoning	Frequencies of Penalaran Moral		
	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
HEIGHT	44	19.8%	19.8%
MEDIUM	107	48.2%	68.0%
LOW	46	20.7%	88.7%
VERY LOW	14	6.3%	95.0%
VERY HIGH	11	5.0%	100.0%

As for the maltreatment variable, most of the respondents were in the **medium category**, namely **91 students (41.0%)**, followed by the low category as many as **67 students (30.2%)** and the high category as many as **53 students (23.9%)**. The very high category includes only **10 students (4.5%)**, while the very low category includes only **1 student (0.5%)**. These findings show that the majority of respondents have experienced maltreatment at low to moderate levels.

Table 4. Categorization of Maltreatment

Maltreatment	Frequencies of Maltreatment		
	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
LOW	67	30.2%	30.2%
MEDIUM	91	41.0%	71.2%
VERY HIGH	10	4.5%	75.7%
HEIGHT	53	23.9%	99.5%
VERY LOW	1	0.5%	100.0%

The results of the normality test using Shapiro-Wilk showed that the behavioral deviation variable had a significance value of **p = 0.102 (p > 0.05)**, so it can be concluded that the data is normally distributed. However, the moral reasoning variable showed a significance value of **p = 0.005 (p < 0.05)** and the maltreatment variable had a value of **p = 0.001 (p < 0.05)**, which indicates that the two variables were not uniformly normally distributed.

Normality Test Results

Table 5. Normalities

Variabel	Statistics	P	Remarks
Behavioral Deviations	0,989	0,102	P > 0,05 (Normal)
Moral Reasoning	0,981	0,005	P < 0,05 (Abnormal)
Maltreatment	0,977	0,001	P < 0,05 (Normal)

Multiple linear regression tests were performed to test the direct influence of moral reasoning and maltreatment on deviant behavior. The test results showed that the regression model was significant overall ($F(2.219) = 109$, $p < 0.001$) with a determination coefficient of $R^2 = 0.499$. This means that moral reasoning and maltreatment are simultaneously able to explain 49.9% of the variation in adolescent deviant behavior.

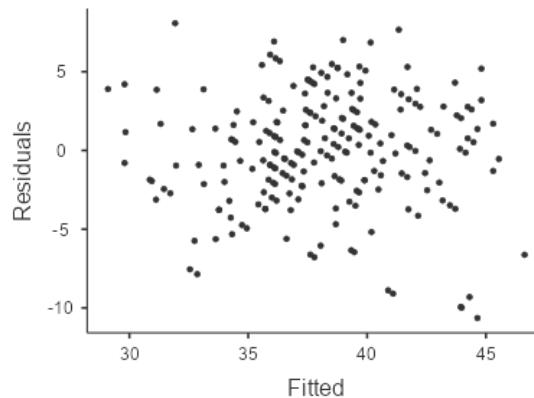


Figure 1. Regression Assumption Test

Based on the *Residuals vs Fitted graph* on the moderation regression model, it can be seen that the residuals are randomly spread around the zero line and do not form a specific pattern. This shows that the relationship between independent variables (Moral Reasoning), moderation variables (Maltreatment), and the interaction between Moral Reasoning and Maltreatment with dependent variables (Behavioral Deviation) is linear. In addition, the relatively constant residual distribution across the entire predicted value indicates that the homoscedasticity assumption is met.

Table 6. Multicollinearities

Collinearity Statistics	
	LIVE Tolerance
Moral Reasoning	1.18 0.847
Maltreatment	1.18 0.847

The decision-making criteria for the multicollinearity test were based on tolerance values and variance inflation factor (VIF). The test results showed that the variables of moral reasoning and maltreatment had a tolerance value of **0.847** and a VIF value of 1.18. The value met the criteria of tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10 , so that the regression model was declared not to experience multicollinearity. The results of the moderation regression analysis were conducted to test the role of maltreatment in the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior. This analysis was carried out by incorporating the interaction variables between moral reasoning and maltreatment into the regression model.

Table 7. Moderation Hypothesis

Moderation Estimates				
	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Moral Reasoning	-0.20277	0.01801	-11.26	<.001
Maltreatment	0.16535	0.02656	6.23	<.001
Penalaran Moral * Maltreatment	0.00211	0.00187	1.12	0.261

Based on the results of the moderation regression analysis in Table X (*Moderation Estimates*), moral reasoning showed a negative and significant influence on deviant behavior ($B = -0.20277$; $SE = 0.01801$; $Z = -11.26$; $p < 0.001$). A p-value smaller than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that moral reasoning has a significant influence on deviant behavior. Furthermore, maltreatment also showed a positive and significant influence on deviant behavior ($B = 0.16535$; $SE = 0.02656$; $Z = 6.23$; $p < 0.001$). A p value smaller than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that maltreatment has a significant effect on deviant behavior. However, the results of testing the interaction variable between moral reasoning and maltreatment showed a coefficient value of $B = 0.00211$ with a significance value of $p = 0.261$. Since the p value is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), it can be concluded that the interaction between moral reasoning and maltreatment does not have a significant effect on deviant behavior. Based on these results, the first and second hypotheses were accepted because of the $p <$ value of 0.05, while the third hypothesis was rejected because the p value = $0.261 > 0.05$. Thus, maltreatment does not act as a moderator variable in the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that moral reasoning and maltreatment are two important factors that directly affect adolescents' deviant behavior. Based on an analysis of 222 students of SMK Tamansiswa Jetis Yogyakarta, the two variables were simultaneously able to explain almost half of the variation in adolescent deviant behavior, showing that cognitive-moral dynamics and parenting experiences have a substantial contribution in shaping adolescent behavior in the school environment. Moral reasoning acts as a protective factor, where the higher the adolescent's ability to consider values, norms, and consequences of actions, the lower their tendency to engage in deviant behavior. In contrast, maltreatment serves as a stand-alone risk factor, where negative parenting experiences increase adolescents' vulnerability to deviant behavior. However, the findings of the study suggest that maltreatment does not moderate the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior, so the influence of moral reasoning on deviant behavior is relatively consistent regardless of the level of maltreatment experience experienced by adolescents. Overall, the results of the study show that moral reasoning and maltreatment each have a significant direct influence on adolescent deviant behavior. However, the interaction between moral reasoning and maltreatment did not show a significant influence, so maltreatment did not change the strength of the relationship between moral reasoning and deviant behavior, but rather acted as a risk factor that acted independently.

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