



Original Article

## Predicting moral intelligence based on parenting styles and six HEXACO personality traits

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The present study aimed to predict moral intelligence based on parenting styles and six HEXACO personality traits.

**Materials and Methods:** The sample size of this descriptive-correlational study included 300 students of Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamadan, Iran in the 2018-2019 academic year. They were selected through the multistage cluster random sampling method. They fulfilled Moral Intelligence Scale, HEXACO Personality Traits Scale, and Parenting Styles Scale. We analyzed the data using analysis of variance, stepwise regression, and SPSS-25.

**Results:** The results showed that the relationship between decisive parenting style ( $r=0.486$ ), honesty-humility ( $r=0.407$ ), extroversion ( $r=0.379$ ), agreement ( $r=0.321$ ), conscientiousness ( $r=0.444$ ), and openness to experience ( $r=0.344$ ) with moral intelligence was positive and significant, and the relationship of authoritarian parenting style ( $r=-0.249$ ) with moral intelligence was negative and significant. The relationship between emotionality ( $r=-0.004$ ), permissive parenting style ( $r=-0.054$ ), and moral intelligence was insignificant. The results showed that decisive parenting style, conscientiousness, extroversion, honesty-humility, openness to experience, and agreeableness were the predictors of moral intelligence among university students, respectively, and these variables were able to predict 45.4% of the variance of moral intelligence ( $R=0.67$ ,  $R^2=0.45$ ).

**Conclusion:** Based on the results, factors such as decisive parenting style and personality traits (honesty-humility, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) play an important role in predicting moral intelligence.

**Keywords:** Intelligence, Morality, Parenting, Personality

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### Introduction

In recent decades, unethical behaviors have become common among students of higher education institutions (1). Such behaviors can be called unproductive behaviors. The researchers propose ten dimensions for academically unproductive behaviors: cheating, substance use, lying, plagiarism, discriminatory behavior, absenteeism, passive

attendance, procrastination, laziness, and peer pressure. In this regard, a moral crisis can only be prevented if moral education is provided in every lesson in the school and university environment. Because good social interactions in school and university are possible through morality (2). When moral behaviors are institutionalized at home, schools, universities, and society, it becomes easy for people to

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conduct their personal and social lives (2). Understanding morally right and wrong behaviors allows people to work together in different situations and live together in communities.

Following moral principles guarantees respect and social affairs; in contrast, unethical behavior leads to disrespect and social exclusion (3). Therefore, this research aimed to answer whether parenting styles and personality traits are predictors of moral intelligence.

Moreover, among these, which are the most important predictors of moral intelligence? The results of conducted studies indicate a relationship between parenting styles, personality traits, and moral intelligence. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to moral intelligence. Moral intelligence is one of the individualistic factors that directly determine students' academic and personal behaviors; that is, it reflects the ability to apply moral principles in goals and actions (4). High levels of moral intelligence motivate students to acquire knowledge appropriately and reduce the possibility of academic dishonesty (5).

Moral intelligence is one of the main aspects determining students' behavior in the learning environment and social context. From Borba's point of view, moral intelligence is the ability to understand right from wrong, have strong moral beliefs, and act on them to behave in a right and honorable way (6).

Researchers have identified various components of moral intelligence. Lennick and Kiel stated that moral intelligence has four components: 1- Integrity: a strong desire for governing moral values such as truth/honesty; 2- Responsibility: the ability, and readiness to accept mistakes and show willingness to face the consequences caused by the mistakes that happened, 3- Compassion: expressing patience in arguing and being ready to leave at any time, 4- Forgiveness: being ready to accept people's shortcomings and tolerate them despite the mistakes they have made. Forgiveness has two components: Forgiveness of those who wronged us many times and self-forgiveness despite self-evaluation and discovery of injustice (7).

From the point of view of Eysenck and Seligman, moral intelligence includes three components: cognition, emotion, and behavior (1). Borba introduces seven values for moral intelligence: 1- Empathy: the capacity to identify people's problems; 2- Conscience: identifying the right way to do something; 3- Self-control:

the ability to control and regulate oneself against tempting choices that ultimately moment, it may cause unfortunate consequences, 4- Respect: valuing others and behaving in a respectful and considerate manner, 5- Kindness: having a genuine interest in the welfare and well-being of others, 6- Tolerance: respecting the rights of all people, even those whose beliefs and behavior are different from ours, 7- Fairness: behaving justly and rationally, acting honestly and impartially (8). Lennick and Keil have stated ten competencies for moral intelligence: 1- Acting based on principles, values, and beliefs, 2- Truthfulness, 3- Perseverance and pushing for the truth (standing for the truth), 4- Keeping promises, 5- Taking responsibility for personal decisions, 6- Admitting mistakes and failures, 7- Accepting responsibility to serve others, 8- Being interested in others, 9- Ability to forgive one's mistakes, and 10- Ability to forgive others' mistakes (9).

Research shows that parenting styles are important in developing moral intelligence and shaping people's personality (10). In this regard, the results of some studies indicate a relationship between parenting styles and moral intelligence and reasoning (6,10,11).

Parenting styles are classified based on two dimensions: 1- Responsiveness: Warmth, support, nurturing individuality, and self-regulation. 2- Demandingness: It means control, supervision, and disciplinary efforts. Based on this, the three parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) affect children's development differently. Authoritative parents show a balance between responsiveness and control. They encourage independence and rely on explaining rules rather than emphasizing strict obedience. Therefore, their teenagers are more self-reliant and intrinsically motivated. Authoritarian parents exercise more control and a lower degree of accountability, requiring rules with punitive consequences for disobedience.

Adolescents from authoritarian families are less self-reliant and depend on authority figures to make decisions.

As such, they are less likely to engage in exploratory and challenging behaviors. Permissive parents provide high responsiveness and exercise little control over children's behavior.

Those teenagers usually do not rely on themselves and have little tolerance for disappointment. Therefore, they are less likely to persist in learning tasks (6).

Another factor that can play a role in predicting moral intelligence is personality. Because research results show that personality traits are related to moral intelligence (12,13). Personality in the framework of the HEXACO model covers six dimensions of personality. These dimensions are as follows: honesty-humility (such as fairness, honesty, underprivileged), emotional (such as empathy/dependence, harm avoidance, help-seeking), extroversion (such as sociability, leadership, presentation), agreeableness (such as tolerance, forgiveness, low conflict), conscientiousness (effort, organization, planning) and openness to experience (curiosity, imagination, depth) (14,15).

### Materials and Methods

In this descriptive-correlational research, the statistical population included all students of Bu-Ali Sina University in Hamadan (age range 20-40 years) in the first semester of the 2018-2019 academic year, according to Morgan and Kerjsi's table, which suggests 384 individuals as the highest sample volume (16). Three hundred people (233 women and 67 men) were selected through the multistage cluster random sampling and completed the scales of moral intelligence, parenting styles, and HEXACO personality traits. The inclusion criteria included the desire to participate and be a student at Bu-Ali Sina University in the first half of the 2018-2019 academic year.

The exclusion criteria included being unwilling to participate in the research, distorted scales, and being educated. Also, the ethical considerations in this research were informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw from the research, non-disclosure of information, and respect for privacy.

#### Research instruments

*A) Moral Intelligence Scale:* This scale was developed by Lennick and Kiel based on a 5-point Likert scale (1= never to 5= in all cases) in 2005, which includes 40 items (17). The validity and reliability of this scale have been verified in Iran by Arasteh et al. They reported Cronbach's alpha of moral intelligence as 0.85 (18). In the present study, the reliability of the scale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha=0.91$ ).

*B) Parenting Styles Scale:* This scale was created by Diana Baumrind based on a 5-point Likert scale (1= completely disagree to 5= completely agree). Parenting methods include

three authoritative (decisive), authoritarian, and permissive styles (19). The validity and reliability of this scale in Iran have been reported favorably (authoritative 0.69, authoritarian 0.77, and permissive 0.73) (20). In the present study, the reliability of the scale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha was obtained for the permissive parenting style at 0.62, the authoritarian parenting style at 0.77, and the authoritative parenting style at 0.85.

*C) HEXACO Personality Scale:* This scale (60 items) was created in 2000 by Ashton and Lee based on a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree: 5 to strongly disagree: 1). Lee and Ashton reported Cronbach's alpha for honesty-humility 0.92, emotionality 0.90, extroversion 0.92, agreeableness 0.89, conscientiousness 0.89, and openness to experience 0.90 (21). In the Iranian sample, Ilbeigi, Abolghasemi, and Rostami reported the reliability of this scale from 0.66 to 0.88 (22). In the present study, the reliability of the scale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha=0.77$ ).

We analyzed data through the Pearson correlation method, stepwise regression, and SPSS-25. The assumptions related to the regression model were checked. For this purpose, independence of errors with the Durbin/Watson test, normality of data distribution with the Kolmogorov/Smirnov test, kurtosis and skewness, histogram and indices of tolerance coefficient, and variance inflation were checked and confirmed with the collinearity test.

### Results

The results showed that among 300 participants, 233 were women (63.3%) and 67 were men (18.2%). 127 (34.5%) of them had a bachelor's degree, 122 (33.2%) had a master's degree, and 51 (13.9%) had a doctorate.

One hundred forty-one people (38.3%) were in the age range of 20-25, 81 people (22%) were in the age range of 26-31, 30 people (16.6%) were in the age range of 31-35, and 17 people (4.6%) were in the age range of 36-40.

The mean score of moral intelligence for women was 1.497 with a standard deviation of 1.667; for men, it was 1.317, with a standard deviation of 1.714. In general, the participants' mean score of moral intelligence was 1.457, with a standard deviation of 1.835.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of predictors of moral intelligence with their correlation coefficients (n= 300)

Components		Mean	Standard deviation	Correlation Moral intelligence	P
Parenting styles	Decisive	39.57	7.04	0.486	0.001
	Authoritarian	23.40	6.40	-0.249	0.001
	Permissive	27.52	5.21	-0.057	0.162
	Honesty-humility	34.28	5.85	0.407	0.001
Personality traits	Emotionality	32.61	6.02	-0.004	0.473
	Extroversion	33.29	6.09	0.379	0.001
	Agreement	32.15	5.22	0.321	0.001
	Conscientiousness	33.84	5.68	0.444	0.001
	Openness to experience	33.04	5.62	0.344	0.001
Moral intelligence	-	1.457	18.34	1	

Based on the correlation matrix between the variables (Table 1), all the correlation coefficients obtained between the research variables (decisive parenting style, authoritarian parenting style, honesty-humility,

extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) except for the permissive parenting style and emotionality personality trait were significant.

**Table 2.** Statistical characteristics of step-by-step regression for predicting moral intelligence based on parenting styles and personality traits

Step	Predictor variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	df	F	B	Beta	T	P
1	Decisive	0.48	0.23	298.1	0.92	1.26	0.48	9.6	0.001
2	Decisive	0.58	0.33	2.297	42.87	1	0.38	6.55	0.001
	Conscientiousness					1	0.32		
3	Decisive	0.38	3.296	22.23	0.84	0.95	0.36	4.73	0.001
	Conscientiousness					0.69	0.23		
	Extroversion					0.84	0.32		
4	Decisive	0.64	0.41	4.295	14.51	0.71	0.22	3.81	0.001
	Conscientiousness					0.63	0.21		
	Extroversion					0.59	0.19		
	Honesty-humility					0.74	0.28		
5	Decisive	0.57	0.43	5.294	12.51	0.57	0.18	3.54	0.001
	Conscientiousness					0.56	0.19		
	Extroversion					0.67	0.21		
	Honesty-humility					0.55	0.17		
	Openness to experience					0.75	0.29		
6	Decisive	0.67	0.45	6.293	6.34	0.53	0.16	2.52	0.001
	Conscientiousness					0.53	0.17		
	Extroversion					0.56	0.18		
	Honesty-humility					0.52	0.16		
	Openness to experience					0.42	0.12		
	Agreeableness								

As seen in Table 2, the decisive parenting style variable entered the regression equation in the first step, and 0.23 of the variance of moral intelligence was explained. The value of F for model 1 equals 92, with a significance level of 0.001, has been obtained.

Therefore, the model is significant, and the independent variable explains the dependent variable well. In the second step, decisiveness and conscientiousness variables were entered into the regression equation and totaled 0.33 of the variance for moral intelligence explained; the value of F for model 2 is equal to 42.87 with a significance level of 0.001, so the model is significant, and the independent variables

explain well the changes in the dependent variable. In the third step, decisiveness, conscientiousness, and extroversion entered the regression equation and totaled 0.38 of the variance for moral intelligence explained; the F value for model 3 equals 22.33 with a significance level of 0.001 that has been done; therefore, the model is significant, and the independent variables explain well the changes of the dependent variable. In the fourth step, decisiveness, conscientiousness, extroversion, and honesty-humility entered the regression equation and totaled 0.41 for the variance for moral intelligence explained; the value of F for model 4 is equal to 14.51 with a significance

level of 0.001; therefore, the model is significant, and the independent variables explain well the changes in the dependent variable. In the fifth step, decisiveness, conscientiousness, extroversion, honesty-humility, and openness to experience were entered into the regression equation and totaled 0.43, explaining the variance for moral intelligence; the value of F for model 5 is equal to 12.51 with a significance level of 0.001; therefore, the model is significant, and the independent variables explain well the changes in the dependent variable. In the sixth step, decisiveness, conscientiousness, extroversion, honesty-humility, openness to experience, and agreement were entered into the regression equation and totaled 0.45 of the variance for moral intelligence explained; the value of F for model 6 is equal to 6.34 with a significance level of 0.12 that has been done; therefore, the model is significant, and the independent variables explain well the changes of the dependent variable.

### Discussion

This research was conducted to predict moral intelligence based on parenting styles and personality traits among students of Bu-Ali Sina University in Hamadan, Iran. The findings indicated a positive and significant relationship between decisive parenting style, honesty-humility, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience with moral intelligence. There is a negative and significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and moral intelligence. However, the relationship between permissive parenting style and emotionality personality traits with moral intelligence was insignificant. Also, the results indicated that the decisive parenting style, conscientiousness, extroversion, honesty-humility, openness to experience, and agreement were, respectively, predictors of moral intelligence among university students, and these variables were able to predict 0.45% of the variance was moral intelligence ( $R = 0.67$ ,  $R^2 = 0.45$ ). To explain the findings of this research, it can be stated that among the parenting styles, the assertive style plays an important role in predicting moral intelligence. When the parents behave according to the authoritative parenting style in the family environment, the children will develop emotionally, morally, and personally. In the authoritative parenting style, an

appropriate level of independence and two-way relations between parents and children are formed. Therefore, it becomes possible to predict moral intelligence from people raised in families with authoritative parenting methods. At the same time, this is not the case in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Also, personality traits such as honesty-humility, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience can significantly predict moral intelligence. In this regard, the ground for developing moral intelligence is provided as long as people are at a favorable level regarding the above personality traits. Because people's personality traits can provide patterns for predicting their behavior and mental states, individual differences are an important factor that shows why some people cope better than others with environmental conditions and have different levels of motivation, satisfaction, and mental health (23).

In line with these results, Mohagheghi, Farhadi, Rashid, and Delfan Beiranvand, investigated the prediction of moral behavior based on moral intelligence and personality traits with the mediating role of the ego construct. Their results showed that the construct of self-efficacy plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between moral intelligence and personality traits with moral behavior (12). Farhadi and Delfan Beiranvand designed a model for predicting moral behavior based on educational styles and ego strength with the mediation of self-transcendence among the students of Bu-Ali Sina University. Two hundred eighty-five people were selected by multistage cluster sampling. Their findings showed that the effect of educational styles on moral behavior and self-realization and the effect of ego strength and self-realization on moral behavior are significant, and the variable of self-realization has an important mediating role in the relationship between educational styles and ego strength with moral behavior. Also, their results indicated that authoritative parenting style can predict moral behavior in addition to the relationship between parenting styles and moral behavior (24).

In research, Alhadabi et al. examined the relationship among three styles of maternal and paternal parenting, moral intelligence, academic self-efficacy, and learning motivation in three consecutive mediation models. The

sample size included 296 Omani middle and high school teenagers. The path analysis results showed a direct relationship between the three parenting styles of fathers (dominant, authoritarian, and permissive) and moral intelligence and an indirect relationship with learning motivation. Two maternal parenting styles (authoritative and authoritarian) were directly related to learning motivation but not related to moral intelligence (6). Boyes and Allen investigated parent-child interaction styles and moral reasoning in teenagers. The sample size included 141 students who completed the moral reasoning and parental behavior scales. Their results showed that teenagers with authoritative parents prefer post-contractual moral reasoning more than those with permissive or authoritarian parents (11). Asghari, Kazemi, and Mousavi investigated the role of personality traits in predicting the spiritual intelligence of 181 secondary school students in Bostanabad city, Iran.

Their results showed that extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness correlate positively and significantly with spiritual intelligence; and neuroticism had a negative and significant correlation with spiritual intelligence. Also, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness can significantly predict students' spiritual intelligence (25). Edobor and Ekechukwu studied the effect of parenting styles on the personality traits of 560 high school students in Rivers State. The results indicated that the extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism of high school students depend on the parents' parenting style (26).

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Huver, Otten, and Vries investigated the relationship between parents' personality traits and their parenting styles in 668 Dutch parents. The results showed that extroversion and agreeableness were related to the supportive parenting style, and emotional stability was associated with a lower extreme control style (27). The present study has some limitations, such as paper and pencil method for gathering data and the limited sample of the students.

According to the theory of ecological systems that considers a person as growing in a complex system of relationships and several levels of the surrounding environment that affect him/her, such as micro-system, inter-system, external system, and macro system, the desired question is which of these systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner can better predict moral intelligence. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies investigate this issue.

### Conclusion

Based on the results, two factors, parenting styles, and personality traits, should be considered in the education system to provide the ground for developing moral intelligence because moral intelligence can facilitate the possibility of persuading people to perform moral behavior and social interaction in various life situations.

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