Validation of Moral Authority Scale-Revised in Persian

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Abstract

The current study aims to assess validity and reliability of Moral Authority Scale-Revised (MAS-R) in Persian. Specifically, MAS-R examines “who” or “what” is more important during moral judgment. The instrument was translated using back-translation method and revised by three panels. The validity and reliability of the MAS-R were examined in two studies. Results yield that the Persian version of Moral Authority Scale-Revised has a satisfactory internal consistency. Validity was obtained when results showed that there were significant relationships between self-efficacy and principle source (society welfare and equality sources), authoritarianism and external source (family expectation and educators or peer sources) in the first study and between empathic concern, mother, father, and peer attachment with most of moral authority sources in the second study. These findings confirmed the applicability and validity of the Persian version of MAS-R in Iranian community.

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Keywords: moral authority, reliability, criterion validity;

1. Introduction

Psychologists have studied morality from different perspectives such as moral judgment (Kohlberg, 2008/1963), moral orientation (Gilligan, 1982), moral authority (Henry, 1983) and so on. During the second part of twentieth century, the cognitive school was the dominant approach to moral psychology. However, since the 80s, this approach has received a lot of criticisms not only because of stressing cognitive aspects and ignoring emotions, but also because of its structural, impersonal, universal, and sequentially invariant model of moral development (Locke, 1979; Bandura, 1991; Henry, 1983, 1987). This body of research has led moral psychologists to pay more attention to other facets of moral development rather than merely focusing on cognition.

Henry (1983, 1987) proposed that moral decisions are based on the content of moral judgment. Content of morality refers to the notion of “who” or "what” is more important in moral decision making and more specifically, is about the attribution of moral authority to different sources of morality in which there is no priority between the sources. She identified five sources that have the most influential impact on individuals’ moral authority including family expectations, educators, self-interest, society welfare, and equality between individuals (White, 2000) which established the basic foundations of the Moral Authority Scale (MAS) by White (1996a, 1996b, 1997).

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Moral Authority Scale (White, 1996b, 1997) includes six moral questions in which for each question respondents choose between “yes”, “no” or “can’t decide” and then answer open-ended questions to note their reasons. Next, subjects are asked to rate the influence of the five sources on their judgment, using a 10-point Likert-format scale for each of the moral questions. MAS measures five sources of moral authority which are family, media and teacher or educators, society welfare, equality, and self interest sources. The total calculated score for each of the moral authority sources represents the individual attribution to that source in which the higher the score of that source, the stronger it influences moral judgment.

MAS-R has test-retest reliability for the subscales ranging from .75 to .93 over a period of four weeks and very high internal consistencies of subscales as well ranging from .95 to .98 (White, 1997). MAS-R has shown to have convergent validity with the second stage of DIT (Defining Issues Test) that shows the self-interest behaviors and also with the fifth stage and P index of DIT that touch on society’s welfare and equality between individuals. In addition, MAS-R has found to have discriminant validity with Vision of Morality Scale (see White, 1997).

2.1 Translation

MAS-R was translated into Persian by back-translation method. It was translated into Persian by one of the authors and then it was back-translated to English by someone who had very good proficiency in both English and Persian languages and has never seen the questionnaire. After comparison of original and back-translated versions, the final version of translation the test was prepared and validated by three panels.

3. First study

3.1 Participants and Instruments

Participants were 165 students from one high school and two colleges in Semirom city of Esfahan and Abade city of Fars, Iran. Six of the subjects were purged from the analysis due to the incomplete answers. Subject were from 15-24 years old (Mean age = 19.77, SD = 1.97; male = 74, female = 82, unknown = 6). Participants filled up three questionnaires including translated version MAS-R, Authoritarianism scale, and General Self Efficacy.

Authoritarianism Scale. Authoritarianism Scale has 12 items that were developed based on socio-cultural sphere of Iran by Heydari et al. Answers of items were in a 5-point likert format from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The scale has a reliability coefficient of 0.88.

General Self Efficacy Scale. General Self-Efficacy scale (GSE: Jerusalem and Schwarzer, 1981) has 10 items. The internal consistency of it in previous studies was among .75 to .91. Luszczynska, Acholz and Schwarzer (2005) confirmed the validity of scale by finding significant association between self efficacy and social cognitive variables like goal intentions, implementation intentions, outcome expectations, self regulation, domain-specific self efficacy, health behaviors, well-being, and coping strategies.
3.2 Results of First Study

The intercorrelation of the sources with each other was presented in Table 1. All of the sources were positively and significantly correlated. Similar to White et al (2004), the highest significant correlation was found between the society welfare and equality sources of moral judgment (r = .68, p < .01). White and Matawie (2004) combined these two sources and named them as the principle source of moral judgment. The next highest correlation was between family source and educators (r = .59, p < .01) that can be integrated as external source of moral reasoning based on White and Matawie (2004). This consistency of the intercorrelation of sources with original work of White and Matawie implies a good validity of the MAS-R in Persian language.

Table 1. Intercorrelation of moral authority sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family source</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Educators source</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Society welfare</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.68*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Equality Source</td>
<td></td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td>.52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01,  

The internal consistency of sources using alpha Cronbach showed moderate to good reliability with results for family source = .71, educator’s source = .68, society’s welfare = .59, equality source = .72, self interest = .58. For criterion validity of the MAS-R in Persian, the dimensions of external source and principle source of morality were correlated with self-efficacy and authoritarianism. Significant correlations were found between external source of morality (family and educators or media or peer) with authoritarianism (r = .22, p < .01). In contrast, only principle source of moral authority (society welfare and equality sources) was significantly correlated with self efficacy (r = .19, p < .05). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Criterion validity of the MAS with self efficacy and authoritarianism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self interest</th>
<th>External morality</th>
<th>Principle morality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self efficacy</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Authoritarianism</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05,  **p < .01

4. Second Study

4.1 Participants and Instruments

Two hundred twelve students were randomly chosen from Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran. Ten of the subjects were purged from the analysis due to incomplete answers. Subjects consisted of 95 males and 107 females ranging in age 18-25 (M= 20.61, SD = 1.42); they were asked to fill up three questionnaires including Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), and Persian version of MAS-R.

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). The IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) is a self-report questionnaire that was designed to measure the quality of positive and negative affective and cognitive aspects of adolescent relationships with their mothers, fathers, and peers. The IPPA assesses three important dimensions of attachment relationships with parent and peer including degree of mutual trust, quality of communication, and extent of anger and alienation. For reliability of IPPA, three week test-retest reliability of IPPA was .93 for the parent section and .86 for the peer section of attachment. The internal consistencies were mother attachment = .87, father attachment = .86, and peer attachment = .92. Criterion and convergent validity were used to assess the validity of the IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).
Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Davis (1983) developed the IRI scale to measure individual’s differences in empathy. This multidimensional questionnaire assesses empathy from both cognitive and emotional aspects. Davis constructed four separate but correlated constructs that contains seven items each. The IRI’s subscales are perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress.

Internal consistency of subscales ranged from .71 to .77, and test-retest reliability of subscales was from .62 to .71 (Davis, 1983). For validity of the test, Davis (1983) found significant relationship between IRI subscales with other empathy scales, indexes of social competence, self esteem, emotionality, and sensitivity to others.

4.2 Results of Second Study

Dimensions of moral authority were correlated with attachment and empathy. Attachment mostly correlated with the principle source (society welfare and equality sources) of moral authority (Table 3). In addition, mother and father attachment were significantly correlated with family source as well which were expected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family source</th>
<th>Educators source</th>
<th>Society welfare</th>
<th>Equality source</th>
<th>Self Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Att.</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Att.</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Att.</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

From empathy subscales only empathic concern was correlated with most of moral authority sources except educators source (r = 18, p < .01; r = 29, p < .01; r = 29, p < .01; r = 18, p < .01 for family, society welfare, equality and self interest sources respectively). In addition personal distress was only correlated with external source of moral authority (family source: r = .22, p < .01; educators: r = 18, p < .01).

The combination effect of empathic concern and attachment security of mother, father and peer could predict 16% of the variance of ascribed principle source of morality, R² = .16, B = 35.00, t = 3.53, p < .001, indicating that individuals who reported having secure attachment with mother, father, and peer also have high empathic concern have higher attribution to the principle source (society welfare and equality) while judging moral issues.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the validity and reliability of MAS-R in Persian. Two studies were administered with a battery of questionnaires each. Satisfactory internal consistency was obtained for sources of moral authority. In addition, results of two studies provided evidence for validity of MAS-R. The first study yielded that the principle source (equality and welfare) has significant correlation with self-efficacy and authoritarianism is significantly correlated to external source of moral authority. This result was in accordance with the Van IJzendoorn (1989, 1997) and Cockroft (1995) statement that authoritarians follow the authorities’ expectations even by sacrificing their own interest. Similarly, self efficacy was found to be significantly correlated with the principle source of moral authority which is consistent with previous studies (Bandura, 1991, 2001). In the second study, significant correlation was obtained between security of mother, father and peer attachment and moral authority sources especially with family source and principle sources. The correlation of mother and father attachment security with family and principle sources confirms the effectiveness of parent’s attachment on morality of individuals which is consistent with the socialization perspective. Hoffman (1975a, 1975b, 1979, 1994) asserted that the most important issues on moral internalization of individuals are discipline style of parent, type of experience and affective relation of child-parent, and expression of affect by parent. In other words, it has been remarked that parent’s supportive and positive emotional relation and secure attachment would enhance the acceptance of parental norms and values and assist moral development and foster conscience (Kochanska, Aksan, Knaack, & Rhines, 2004; Kochanska, Forman, Aksan & Dunbar, 2005; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Thompson, Laible, & Ontai, 2003).
Empathic concern had significant correlation with most of moral authority sources. This finding was consistent with Hoffman’s (1979, 2000) notion about empathy as emotional aspect of morality. Regression analysis showed that empathic concern and parents and peer attachment can significantly predicted the principle source of moral authority. This is consistent with the Thompson et al. (2003) findings regarding effectiveness of attachment security on internalization of morality and conscience development. In fact, attachment security supports early social, moral, and emotional development of individuals (Laible & Thompson, 2000; Thompson et al., 2003). The results of these two studies were consistent with literature and confirmed the criterion and predictive validity of the MAS-R-Persian, as well as its internal consistency.

References


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