A Study on Moral Reasoning among Indian Police officers

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this research is to find out the moral reasoning levels of a sample of police officers in the North Zone in Tamil Nadu. Methods/Analysis: A descriptive research study has been used and the researcher used convenience sampling. The research instrument used is DIT2, the defining issues test 2. DIT2 instrument has been scored by the center for ethical development, University of Alabama. Findings: The respondents were found to be in the Maintaining Norms stage of moral reasoning. The police officers didn't have high score of moral reasoning as indicated by the poor N2 scores. Police officers are not using higher moral reasoning in their profession. There is an urgent need for training the police officers in facing moral dilemmas with higher levels of moral reasoning. This would provide inner satisfaction to the officer and help mould the society into having higher standards of ethics. Novelty/Improvement: The research can be conducted by measuring the moral reasoning levels prior to a training program on ethics and post training program.

Keywords: DIT2, Dilemma, Moral Reasoning, N2, Police Officer, Postconventional Level

1. Introduction

Moral reasoning is a part of an internal component process involved in judging which action would be most justifiable, in a moral sense, that leads to moral behavior[1]. The development of moral reasoning is believed to be a "gradual and continuous process" as the individual advances through a sequence of increasingly complicated moral stages. It forms the cornerstone of ethical behavior[2–7].

Ever since Piaget[2] and Kohlberg[3] conducted their pivotal studies on moral development, scholars have studied how children develop moral reasoning and how they learn the social and moral norms that regulate human interaction. In particular, Kohlberg identified three levels of moral reasoning: a preconventional level (i.e., a morality focused on the self in an egocentric manner), a conventional level (i.e., a morality totally affected by society's conventions and expectations), and a postconventional level (i.e., a morality based on ethical principles that protect basic human rights such as the right to life, liberty and justice). Individual reasoning should manifest itself as a single dominant stage across a wide spectrum of situations[8]. However, some studies showed that the level of moral reasoning a person uses is sensitive to context. For instance, people do not use their highest level of moral judgement when they reason about an everyday moral dilemma[9] or those involving drunk driving[10]. Thus, moral dilemmas possess properties that may change the participant's decision[11].

Rest's (1986) Defining Issue Test is the most often used instrument for measuring moral development. Many studies have found support for its psychometric quality[12].

In his paper in "Police Stress: An Examination of the Effects of Stress and Coping Strategies" showed as to how police officers deal with stress that greatly affect as to how

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they carry out their daily lives and how they treat family and friends[13].

In general, the conduct and moral values of police officers, both on and off duty have been guided by a professional set of standards or "code of ethics". A review of these standards indicate that overall, police officers are entrusted with special authority and responsibility to enforce laws and serve the welfare of the public through believing in the dignity and worth of every individual and the constitutional rights of each individual. Police officers place a high value on objectivity, integrity, honesty and achieving the highest standards of professional service. It has been suggested that the use of psychometric instruments to measure job appropriate qualities, including values in the selection of police officer, is important[14]. Hence, police officers should possess characteristics associated with moderate to high levels of moral reasoning.

The purpose of this research is to find the moral reasoning of police officers in Tamil Nadu.

2. Method

2.1 Procedure

This research study involved the voluntary participation of police officers. The North Zone police officers were circulated the questionnaire from the North Zone Inspector General of Police office. The permission to conduct the survey was obtained from the Director General of Police in police headquarters.

During the month of June, 2014 the researcher contacted the ADGP (Additional Deputy General of Police) Law & Order and submitted a petition explaining the purpose of the research study, permission to distribute research materials to police officers in North Zone, the usefulness of the study and a set of questionnaire to be circulated. The ADGP forwarded the request with a note to DGP. The questionnaire was scrutinized and approved by the Chief of Police to distribute the questionnaire to North Zone Police officers. The researcher was asked to contact the IGP (Inspector General of Police) North Zone for the purpose of collecting data. The researcher met the IGP North Zone and explained the purpose of research and asked him about the number of officers in North Zone. He told to submit 500 questionnaires as it required voluntary participation. So on July 10th 2014 a total of 500 sets of questionnaires were submitted to the North Zone IGP office. Each police officer was to receive a large envelope containing a cover letter, the research materials (DIT2) and a pencil with eraser and sharpener. The dispatch clerk was responsible to distribute the questionnaires to the 6 districts of North Zone. The subjects were asked to complete and submit the questionnaire to the district police quarters.

Subjects were informed through a cover letter of the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary and that the questionnaires were strictly for research purpose. They were also told that the information provided would be kept confidential. The subjects were advised that it would take approximately 75 minutes to complete all the questions. Subjects were advised to complete the research materials all at once or within several sittings as per their convenience when they were free from duty. Each subject was asked to read the instructions carefully and to be as honest as possible in responding to the data items. Upon completion of their research materials, participants were asked to submit it to their officer incharge.

The first set of responses was received from the district of Cuddalore in the month of September, 2014. Out of 80 questionnaires sent, 53 responses were received. Next from Villupuram district out of 80 questionnaires sent, 55 responses were received. A reminder was sent to the remaining 4 districts from the North Zone office. Since there was a delay in returning the questionnaires, the researcher was asked to telephone the SP (Superintendent of Police) in the 6 districts. The researcher contacted the Thiruvanamalai SP and requested for the return of research materials. She took action immediately and returned back 50 responses out of 80 questionnaires dispatched to them. The researcher then contacted Vellore DSP and he arranged for return of 60 responses out of 80 questionnaires dispatched to them. Researcher contacted Kancheepuram SP and he gave his assistant's details to coordinate the return of questionnaires. The inspector from kancheepuram district returned 40 responses out of 92 questionnaires dispatched to them. Last of all the researcher contacted Thiruvalur SP and requested him for return of questionnaires. Unfortunately, there were no responses obtained from 88 questionnaires sent to them. So out of 500 questionnaires sent the researcher could get back 258 responses. Out of 258 responses received 102

responses were fully filled up. So roughly there has been a response rate of 20%.

The researcher was informed by the female inspector from Villupuram district were the researcher attended the crime meeting of a coming up 2-month training program in TNPA in december 2014 of 600 special sub inspectors. The researcher immediately consulted the North Zone IGP and got his consent to approach the TNPA. In November 2014, the researcher met the SP in TNPA and she advised me to get permission from ADGP Training in Ashok Nagar Police training college. The researcher wrote a petition to ADGP Training and met him in November in person and explained to him the purpose of research and the questionnaire. He immediately approved the petition and researcher was asked to contact TNPA Vandalore. By contacting ADSP in TNPA, the researcher was asked to circulate the questionnaire on 5th of January 2015 to the group of 600 trainees who had assembled in the parade ground. The researcher was able to get 425 responses by January 25th. Out of 425 responses the researcher could consider only 197 filled in responses for the study.

Once the data were collected and checked for completeness, the data was coded and entered in excel sheet for statistical analysis.

2.2 Instrument

This study used Rest and Narvaez's (1998) DIT-2. Rest indicated that the DIT measures moral reasoning at Stages 2 through 6.

Constructing a way to assess moral judgement is fundamental in moral judgement research; assessment precedes and is presupposed in every research operation. The four major sets of decisions in constructing a test of moral judgement are as follows: a) what features of thinking are to be used in characterizing someone's moral judgement? b) What information –collecting procedure will be used? Rest, 1969, used subjects' discussions of prototypic stimulus statements. c) Once data have been collected from a particular subject, then how does one use this information to index the subject's development? And d) how does one validate a test of moral judgement? What kinds of studies count in establishing reliability and validity?

Kohlberg's[3] theory of moral development asserts a six-stage sequence in which person's progress from lower to higher stages by a series of transformations. Each transformation produces qualitative changes that move the person toward more comprehensive, complex modes of reasoning about moral issues. This development progression is marked by the replacement of lower stage, less comprehensive modes of reasoning by higher stage, more comprehensive modes.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Various stages of Moral reasoning

Score	Personal Interest (Stage 2/3)	Maintain Norms (Stage 4)	Post Conventional (P score)	N2 Score
Mean	31.46	38.33	19.71	19.35
Std Deviation	11.67	12.20	8.32	9.15

The various stages of moral reasoning indicated in Table 1 shows that the police officers are mainly in the Maintaining Norms stage. The maintaining norms schema score represents the proportion of items selected that appeal to Stage 4 considerations. Stage 4 considerations focus on maintaining the existing legal system, maintaining existing roles and formal organization structure.

Type Indicator: Depending on schema preference and whether the profile is consolidated or transitional, it is possible to envision seven different types.

Type 2 refers to profiles that are predominant in personal interests schema, but are transitional. Type 3 refers to profiles that are predominant in maintaining norms schema, but are transitional; and in personal interests

Table 2. Experimental Indices

Score	Utilizer score	Humanitarian Liberalism	Number of cannot Decide choices	Religious Orthodoxy
Mean	0.11	1.47	0.39	5.14
Std. Deviation	0.13	0.89	0.61	2.75

Number of "Can't decide choices" is a variable to represent the decisiveness with which an individual selects action choices on the DIT. Because indecision is thought to be a product of the ease with which moral information is processed, there is the expectation that indecision will co vary with developmental phase[1]. Specifically, transitional phases should be associated with increased indecision given the multiple and potentially conflicting interpretations associated with transition.

Humanitarian/ Liberalism is a variable which indicates a humanitarian liberal perspective on moral issues. This variable measures to what extent individuals are similar to professionals in political science and philosophy who obtain highest P scores.

The Utilize score represents the degree of match between items endorsed as most important and the action choice on that story.

Table 3. Developmental Profile

Type Indicator	N
Type 1	5
Type 2	96
Type 3	125
Type 4	28
Type 5	32
Type 6	9
Type 7	1

secondary schema. Type has been used by Yeap (1999) and Bebeau (2002) to provide a finer grained evaluation of pretest/ posttest change scores.

The research findings indicate that majority of the police officers fall in the Maintaining Norms stage of moral reasoning. Also most of the police officers are in Type 3 developmental indice, which means they are in maintaining norms schema and transitional profiles. As officers strictly follow the rules and regulations it's logical to accept their moral reasoning levels. They have poor N2 score which shows that they are not having higher levels of moral reasoning like philosophers. The humanitarian/ liberalism exhibited by the officers is also very low. Which shows they aren't having a universal attitude while dealing with moral dilemmas.

This research study proves that police officers do not have high levels of moral reasoning. It's advised that ethical training be given to officers not only during initial entry training, but throughout their career progression.

The study needs to be taken after giving the respondents training on ethics. Larger sample can be used to find out the moral reasoning levels of police officers.

4. Conclusion

The research aimed at finding the moral reasoning level of a sample of police officers and found that they are not having higher levels of moral reasoning. As per the profession of police officers they can be expected to be in the

maintaining norms stage. But in order to improve the efficiency and satisfaction of the police officer we need to take steps to increase their moral reasoning level.

It would in turn fasten the judicial procedures and also lead to increase in public faith in the police service.

5. References

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