

Correlates of moral development among university students in Jordan

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Abstract: Moral development and internalization has been connected to individual's future adaptive skills and performance. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between motivation for academic accomplishment, moral development, perceived social support, and psychological distress among university students enrolled in humanities schools in Jordan. This is a descriptive correlational study. A convenience sample of 241 university students enrolled in humanities schools filled and returned a self-administered questionnaire. Data collected in regards to moral development (IMTA), motivation for academic accomplishment, perceived stress and perceived social support. Students had a low level of moral development ($M = 31.4$, $SD = 3.7$), low to moderate level of IMTA, moderate level of perceived social support from family ($M = 13.1$, $SD = 4.3$) and friends ($M = 12.1$, $SD = 5.1$), and moderate level of stress ($M = 22$, $SD = 7.7$). Moral development has positive correlation with IMTA and negative with stress. There were no significant difference in students' moral development related to age and gender ($p > .05$). The study has an implication for academics and counselors at the high education systems. It is recommended that faculties and administrators need to enhance student-faculty interaction at the universities, and that faculties' significant role is to provide support and promoting students' growth and development; mentally and psychologically that will in turn enhance their level of academic performance.

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1. Introduction

Moral development and internalization has been connected to individual's future adaptive skills and performance. However, for university students, who are at their late adolescence and early adulthood period of life, moral development is assumed to influence their social and emotional stability. Thus, moral development and motivation has been liked and became concepts of interest for behavioral and cognitive scientists for their significant contribution to human behaviors and conducts (Deci and Ryan, 2008). The concept was linked to learning stimulation and academic success particularly among individuals (Kusurkar et al., 2010) On the other hand, Piaget (1965) believed that it is necessary to study the factors that contribute to the emergence of central moral concepts. While, Kohlberg (1963) viewed moral development as a result of a deliberate attempt to increase the coordination and integration of one's orientation to the world. This infers that university students' academic accomplishment is largely affected by their psychological health status and their moral development.

According to Sumari and colleagues (2010), academic achievement and moral development had a reciprocal relationship that is affected and mediated by family relationship. Previous studies reported that parents' way of thinking has been associated with their son's moral development (White and Matawie, 2004). In addition, previous reports showed that moral development involved children's increasing compliance with social norms, thus parenting behaviors and attitudes promote conscience development in their children.^[15] However, literature reported that college students are at risk for a number of mental and psychosocial problems such as stress, depression, substance use, hostility, and anger that have a direct impact on their academic performance and social functioning (Hamdan-Mansour et al., 2012; Hamdan-Mansour and Dawani, 2008; Marmorstein and Iacono, 2004). Jordanian studies also found that university students have moderate perception of social support and stress, moderate level of perception of psychological wellbeing, and number of physical complaints (Hamdan-Mansour and Dawani, 2008; Hamdan-Mansour and Marmash, 2007). The studies,

in general, indicate that university students are at risk for number of psychological and physical health problems that may interfere with their ability to adapt and be motivated to academic accomplishment. Malkoush (2000) maintained that academic adjustment and degree of available social support were associated positively among university students in Jordan, which emphasizes the importance of psychological wellbeing to students' academic achievement.

Although number of previous studies explored academic achievement and accomplishment factors, few studies have address factors that interrelated academic accomplishment to moral development among university students (Kusurkar et al., 2010; Nieuwhof et al., 2004), studies that connect motivation for academic accomplishment to psychosocial health status among university students had also not been addressed sufficiently. Therefore, the *purpose* of this study was to examine the relationship between motivation for academic accomplishment, moral development, perceived social support, and psychological distress among university students enrolled in humanities schools in Jordan. The research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between motivation for academic accomplishment, moral development, perceived social support, and psychological distress among university students enrolled in humanly schools in Jordan?
2. Is there a difference in motivation for academic accomplishment and moral development related to selected demographic characteristics among university students enrolled in humanly schools in Jordan?

2. Materials and Methods

Design: this is a descriptive correlational study. Data collected using a self-administered questionnaire from six governmental and private universities. A package of four self-reported questionnaires, in addition to the author-developed demographic profile sent to students who expressed interest in participation. Prior to data collection, the primary investigator obtained approval from the Research Committee at the University of Jordan and the targeted universities. Subject's identification number assigned for each subject at the beginning of the study. The information obtained about the subjects of the study kept confidential. All files kept in locked cabinets at the University of Jordan. All projects electronic versions kept in the primary investigator's computer. The package introduced to students translated into Arabic language.

Sample and sampling: About 241 university students selected conveniently in humanities schools

filled and returned a battery of four self-reported questionnaires. Data collected in regards to moral development, motivation for academic accomplishment, stress and social support. The students represent three governmental universities and three private universities. Students from governmental universities represented 58% (n = 140), while 42 % (n = 101) came from private universities.

Measurements: For the purpose of this study, instruments translated into Arabic language. Numbers of procedures used to determine the reliability and validity of the tool. The tools was first translated into Arabic language by a research assistant and back translated into English language another independent research assistant as described by Brislin (1970) and Champan and Carter (1979). The two English forms (the original and the translated) compared in terms of conceptual rather than literal meaning of the items. The translator and the back translator met to examine the differences in the two forms. Pilot testing was conducted using students (n = 20) who are bilingual requesting their appraisals for the appropriateness of the translation. The scales checked for cultural variation. In addition, the research package included an author-developed profile that used to obtain demographic and personal information.

1. Motivation for Academic accomplishment measured using the Intrinsic Motivation to accomplish subscale of the Academic Motivation Scale (IMTK) (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992). The AMS consists of 28 items, in which students respond to the question stem "Why are you going to college?" the Intrinsic Motivation to Accomplish (IMTA) is formed of four items that are rated on a scale, ranging from one (does not correspond at all) to seven (corresponds exactly). A high score on a subscale indicates high endorsement of that particular academic motivation. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was 0.76.
2. Moral development has been measured using the moral development Scale (Söderhamn et al., 2011). The scale has been developed to measure moral development among professionals and students for whom it is essential to have a well developed ability for behavioral, moral and ethical thinking and decision making. The scale is a 12 Likert-type scale items ranging from 1(not agree at all) to 5 (agree completely). Range of responses is 12 to 60, a higher score indicating a higher degree of moral development. The scale has good validity and reliability with Cronbach's alpha of.64. in this study, Cronbach's alpha was.71.
3. The Perceived Social Support Scale (PSS) was used to measure the perceived social support

(Procidano and Heller, 1983). The PSS is a 40-item scale that measures the nature of the perceived social support from family and friends, and consisted of two subscales, perceived social support from family (PSS-Fa) and perceived social support from friend (PSS-Fr). Each of the subscales' scores ranges from 0–20. Lower scores point to lower perception of perceived social support, while higher scores suggest higher perception of perceived social support. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ranging from 0.88 to 0.91 for the family subscale and from 0.84 to 0.90 for the friends subscale. Test– retest reliability ranged from 0.80 to 0.81. In this study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.71 for PSS-Fr, and 0.74 for PSS-Fa.

4. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983) was used to measure perceived stress. The PSS is a ten-item questionnaire that measures the degree to which life situations are appraised as stressful. One-half of the items are written in positive form (e.g., in the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?). The other half of the questionnaire is written in a negative form (e.g., in the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?). Item responses range from never (0) to very often (4). The PSS can be completed in 2–4 min. In this study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the total scale was 0.68

Potential covariates: variable such as gender, age group, and university academic year, treated as covariates. The demographic information obtained from an investigator-developed subject profile.

3. Results

Demographic data

The sample consisted of 241 university students after screening and cleaning. One hundred and eleven students (46%) were males and 130 (54%) were females. Almost 60% of the students were in the second and third academic year while 24 % were in their fourth-academic year. About 12% (n = 29) students reported that they work besides studying, while 79% (n = 212) reported not.

Moral development

The analysis showed that students had a mean score of moral development of 31.4 (SD = 3.7) with scores ranging from 23.0 to 51.0. The analysis also showed that 50% of the students had a score of 29.0 to 33.0, and 75% of them had a score of 33.0 or below indicating the students in general had low level of moral development. Regarding differences in moral

development among student related to demographic characteristics, the analysis showed that there was significant difference between students related to their working status (working vs. not working) ($t = 2.28$, $p = .03$) with mean score for working student (31.9, SD = 3.9) higher than mean score for none working ones ($M = 30.1$, $SD = 2.8$). While, there were no significant differences between student related to, age, gender and smoking status ($p > .05$).

Motivation for Academic accomplishment

Regarding student' intrinsic motivation, the analysis showed that the mean score for students was 17.2 (SD = 2.1), with scores ranging from 14 to 18. About 50% (n = 109) of the students had a score of 17 or less, and 75% of them (n = 164) had a score of 19 or less indicating that students had moderate to low level of intrinsic motivation. Regarding differences in IMTA related to demographic characteristics of students, the analysis (see table 2) showed that there was a significant difference between students in regards to their age group ($F_{3, 218} = 4.47$, $p = .005$). The results indicate that students at their first and second year of university life had higher level of motivation for academic accomplishment than those who are at higher academic levels. However, the analysis showed that there were no differences in IMTA between students in regards to their gender, students' faculty or their working status.

Psychosocial health status

Regarding perceived social support, the mean score for all students on the perceived social support from Friends (PSS-Fr) was 13.1 (SD = 4.3) and perceived social support from family (PSS-Fa) was 12.1 (SD = 5.1). For females, the mean scores of PSS-Fr and PSS-Fa were 13.5 (SD = 4.3) and 12.5 (SD = 5.2) respectively, while the male students' mean scores of PSS-Fr and PSS-Fa were 12.2 (SD = 4.0) and 11.4 (SD = 4.7). The analysis showed that male and female university students were significantly different in PSS-Fr ($t = -2.3$, $p = 0.02$), while no statistical difference was found between male and female university students in PSS-Fa. To investigate difference in PSS-Fa and PSS-Fr as related to any of the demographic and personal characteristics of subjects, the analysis showed that there were differences in perception of social support from friends related to their age ($F_{5, 239} = 3.1$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.02$) and marginally significant in their perception of social support from family related to parental divorce ($t = 1.95$, $p = 0.05$). The analysis also showed that only the number of smoked cigarettes has a significant negative correlation with PSS-Fr ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Neither PSS-Fr, nor PSS-Fa had statistical significant correlation with either the number of cups of coffee, or the number of cups of tea consumed per day.

Regarding perceived stress, the mean score of the perceived stress scale (PSS) for all students was 22 (SD = 7.7). For females, the mean score of PSS was 22.7 (SD =7.7) and for males was 21 (SD =7.6). Although the females' mean score of the PSS is slightly higher than that of the males' mean score, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($t = -1.67, p = 0.09$). The results also showed that there is no significant difference among university students related to age, academic level, and student's faculty, parental divorce, and parental separation. Examining the relationship between stress and life styles (smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, and drinking tea), the analysis showed no significant correlation (Pearson $r = 0.03, 0.07, \text{ and } 0.001$ respectively).

Bivariate Analysis

As shown in table 1, the correlations matrix using Pearson r , showed that there was a positive and significant correlation between moral development and intrinsic motivation to accomplishment (IMTA), and negative and significant correlation with stress ($p < .05$). While, no significant correlation found between

moral development and perceived social support from family or friends. The results infer that students with higher level of moral development are more likely have higher level of academic accomplishment and lower level of stress.

To examine whether social support, stress, academic accomplishment, and demographic characteristics (age, gender, working status) are significant predictors of moral development among university students, standardized multiple regression analysis was performed. The results (see table 2) showed that the model that contained all variables explained only 8% ($R^2 = .08$) of the variance in moral development. The model was not statistically significant ($F_{6, 241} = 1.50, p = .151$). However, the model showed that motivation for academic accomplishment (Beta, =.172, $p = .040$) and stress (Beta, = -.160, $p = .048$). The model infers that motivation for academic accomplishment is a protective factor against low moral development, while higher level of stress is a risk factor for moral development.

Table 2 Correlation matrix of moral development, IMTA, perceived stress, perceived social support social support, among university students in Jordan (N= 241)

Variables	PSSFR	PSSFA	IMTA	Moral Development	Stress
PSSFR	-				
PSSFA	.32**	-			
IMTA	.12	.17*	-		
Moral Development	-.02	-.01	-.21**	-	
Stress	-.15*	-.14	.01	-.18*	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

IMTA: Intrinsic motivation to accomplishment

PSSFR: perceived social support from friends

PSSFA: perceived social support from Family

Table 2 Standardized Multiple Regressing moral development on IMTA, perceived stress, perceived social support, and demographic characteristics among university students in Jordan (N = 241)

Variable	Model		Model fit		R^2
	Beta	P value	F test	P value	
PSSFR	-.023	.778			
PSSFA	.019	.822	1.50	.151	.081
IMTA	-.172	.040			
Stress	-.160	.048			
Gender	.005	.951			
Age group	.068	.513			
Education level	-.010	.919			
Working status	-.148	.082			
Smoking status	.035	.700			

IMTA: Intrinsic motivation to accomplishment

PSSFR: perceived social support from friends

PSSFA: perceived social support from Family

4. Discussion

This study came to address an important issue of concern for higher education systems. The study investigated the psychosocial, academic and demographic factors that associate with university students' moral development. A significant finding in this study showed that students had low level of moral development, low to moderate level of motivation for academic achievement, had moderate level of stress and social support. Moreover, the study found that moral development is associated positively with motivation for academic accomplishment and negatively with stress. The results, in general, do support previous international reports that moral development is influenced by the psychological status of individual and affects their behaviors and attitudes (Sumari et al., 2010). However, the results do not agree with previous reports that moral development is influenced by social support from family or by peer pressure. The results in this study found that moral development has no association with perceived social support from family or friends, while others (Smetana, 1999; White and Matawie, 2004).

On the other hand, this study found that student had low to moderate level of motivation for academic achievement that does not agree with previous studies that colleagues' students had high level for academic achievement (Hamaideh and Hamdan-Mansour, 2013). One possible explanation might be related to the difference in the education systems that our subjects came from although the two populations in this study and in Hamaideh's study share the same culture, Arabs. This difference between the two systems supported by Robbins and colleagues (2004) who reported that financial support and social involvement are among the main factors that influence students' motivation for academic accomplishment.

Another significant finding of this study is that there were no differences in moral development or motivation for academic accomplishment in regards to gender, age or smoking status. The only difference found was related to students' working status. Eventually, this is the first study in the Arab region that addresses the moral and academic issues among university students. The study adds to the body of knowledge in the field that sociodemographic variables may not influence or have an impact on moral development or academic achievement compared to psychological and social wellbeing. The study emphasizes the importance of investigating the environmental and sociocultural at high education institutions.

This study found that almost 75% of the students had low moral development and moderate to low intrinsic motivation for academic accomplishment, and that stress and motivation to academic

accomplishment are significant predictors of moral development of university students in Jordan. The study has an implication for academics and counselors at the high education systems. It is recommended that faculties and administrators need to enhance student-faculty interaction at the universities, and that faculties' significant role is to provide support and promoting students' growth and development; mentally and psychologically that will in turn enhance their level of academic performance. Also for health professionals at higher education system, it is recommended that health counselors screen students for psychosocial health status. There is a need to enact and implement legislations that allow for periodic psychological health assessment among university students and promote sustainable preventive programs. Instructors and academic personnel have also to consider the psychosocial and mental status and its impact on the student's moral development and academic performance. Further studies recommended addressing the sociocultural factors of students at the universities.

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