

# Moral Competencies among Malaysian Youth

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**ABSTRACT:** Based on recent crime trends and media portrayals, it seems that a problem underlying social ills in Malaysia is moral decay among the Malaysian youth. The purpose of this research is to identify the levels of morality among a group of Malaysian youth using an adapted version of the Moral Competency Index (MCI) through a pilot study. The hypotheses were 1) there is no difference between genders with regard to moral competencies and 2) there is no difference between religion affiliations with regard to moral competencies. The MCI was also examined for its internal reliability and factor analysis. The sample comprised of 75 youths (male=19, age mean 22.00 SD 4.69; female=55, age mean 20.49 SD 4.52; unknown gender=1) staying in Kelantan. For hypothesis one, out of the ten dimensions, gender difference was only significant for “admitting mistakes and failures”. For hypothesis two, religious affiliation was significant for three competencies - “Admitting mistakes and failures”, “Actively caring about others”, and “Ability to let go of others’ mistakes”. Internal reliability using Cronbach alpha was between ‘moderate’ and ‘good’ for seven of the scales (0.62 to 0.77). For the entire MCI, split-half reliability produced  $\alpha = 0.86$  for Part 1 and  $\alpha = 0.90$  for Part 2 and Spearman’s correlation  $\alpha = 0.89$ . Factor analysis established ten dimensions of moral competencies. The findings of this study have implications for moral education and as a rehabilitation effort for social ills among the youth.

**Keywords:** Factor analysis, moral competencies, Malaysian youth, psychometric properties, reliability.

## Introduction

People constantly try to adapt to internal and external changes in their environment such as becoming successful in life, career and relationships. These internal and external changes result in positive and negative impacts on attitudes and behaviour. For some people, behaviour is based on a sound moral compass while for other people; moral values are not key factors in decision making relating to successful careers and lives.

In life-development research, the span of adolescent and young adulthood is critical stages that are shaped attitudes, moral and social behaviour in adult life (Martin *et al.*, 2007; Diewald and Mayer, 2008). One of the impacts of the shaped attitudes and morals are their influences on a nation’s range of social norms. To an extent, this includes the integration of moral values in everyday living and what constitutes moral decay.

Pertinent to this paper is Malaysia’s Vision 2020. Vision 2020, introduced by Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991; calls for the nation to achieve a self-sufficient industrialized nation by the year 2020

(Economic Planning Unit, 2008). This Vision encompasses all aspects of life, from economic prosperity, social well-being, world class education, political stability, as well as psychological balance (Ibid). This means that a national agenda is for Malaysia to create a moral and ethical society. A symptom of social constraints to actualise Vision 2020 is the growing concern of moral decay.

According to Wikstrom and Treiber (2007) all human action which includes acts of crime and deviance, is mainly a product of individual perceptions of action alternatives and choices. The primary characteristic that affects how individuals perceive their action alternatives is morality. Based on Kohlberg’s theory of moral development (1981), moral in a person arises from the processes of socialization, education, culture and custom. It is defined as the acceptable standards of general behaviour as judged by an average person or collectively by the society (Superson, 2009). In other words, morality is about all appropriateness or goodness of what an individual thinks and does.

The development of moral values has been extensively studied in philosophy and theology. For

example, Imam Al Ghazali (Mohamed, 1975) formulated character building which includes the learning of moral values; as relating to the theory of education for children. Imam Al Ghazali's theory was premised on a *sahih* (correct) and popular a *hadith*, translated as: "every baby is born in the form of the holy and clean. It is up to parents to make them Jewish, Christian or Zoroastrianism". Imam Al Ghazali used the *hadith* to explain that children are likened to white and clean fabric, clear from dirt. The design and colour of the fabric pertaining to a religious and just life is the responsibility of the child's parents.

Religion is another source of learnt moral values. Many religions have guidance for people to make decisions relating to appropriate and inappropriate ways of living. It is interesting to note that this code may vary widely, yet there are common denominators that many religions share. For example, many religions agree that it is immoral to murder, perform atrocities, and perform perverted sexual acts (Brier and Wright, 2001; Chapouthier, 2004).

Research in criminology also acknowledges an inverse relationship between religion and crime (Johnson *et al.*, 2000; Doris, 2007). Baier and Wright's (2001) meta-analysis of 60 studies on religion and crime concluded that religious behaviors and beliefs exert a moderate deterrent effect on criminal behaviour. Peterson and Martin (2004) explained that characteristics underlying virtues are able to deter individuals from immoral acts.

According to Clarcken (2009) moral intelligence is newer and less studied than cognitive, emotional and social intelligences; however it has the potential to improve understanding of learning and culturally acceptable behaviour. In a study investigating the moderating influence of morality on deviancy, morality shows strong, significant negative associations with crime and violence indexes (Antonaccio and Tittle, 2008).

Based on the above, the purpose of this study was to investigate the viability of Lennick and Kiel's (2005) Moral Competency Index (MCI) for use in Malaysia. A pilot of the MCI was carried out to determine two hypotheses. The hypotheses were 1) there is no difference between genders with regard to moral competencies and 2) there is no difference between religion affiliations with regard to moral competencies. The main importance of the study is to identify the moral competencies of a normal Malaysian population and the psychometric properties of the MCI. The preliminary findings would enable a larger study to be conducted to

compare moral competency levels among normal and offender populations.

### Methodology

A pilot was conducted to gauge the viability of the MCI to measure moral competencies among normal Malaysian youths. To this end, items in the MCI were adapted to the Malaysian context prior to distribution. The original MCI contained items either its meanings have no similar reference in the Malaysian context or are not understood among people whose first language is not English. For example, item no 33: 'my co-workers would say that I am the kind of person who stands up for my convictions' and item no 19: 'I was resisting the urge to dwell on my mistakes'. Such items had to be adapted at the language level while retaining their meaning at the essence level.

The MCI contains 40 items organized into ten competencies or scales. The response format followed a 5-point likert scale, ranging from 1 = 'never' and 5 = 'in all situations'. Total scores ranged from 40 to 200. Each scale contained four items with a possible score range of 4 to 20.

Participants were students from a university in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 75 valid undergraduate students (men = 19, women = 55, and unknown gender = 1) who volunteered in this study. The age ranged from 19 to 25. Descriptive statistics for participants are presented in the following section (Table 1).

### Procedure

Distribution and collection of data was done in a group session in a learning environment focusing on the problem of human trafficking in Malaysia. Voluntary agreement was obtained from participants prior to commencement of the survey. Participants took between 25 to 30 minutes to complete the test.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then conducted to investigate gender differences in the normal population. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare differences across religious affiliation (Islam, Christian, and Buddhism). Internal reliability using Cronbach alpha was conducted to determine the reliability of each MCI scale. For the entire MCI, Spearman's correlation and split-half reliability were conducted. Factor analysis was carried out to determine whether the MCI among the Malaysian sample would result in the ten dimensions of moral competencies posited by Lennick and Kiel (2005).

## Results

Basic descriptive statistics and reliability estimates for the MCI scales were established for the scale and are reported in Table 1-4. Section a) presents participant demographics, section b) presents findings relevant for hypothesis one, section c) presents findings relevant for hypothesis two, section d) presents reliability estimates, and section d) presents findings of the factor analysis.

### a) Participant demographics

Among the respondents, 74% were women, 25% were men and one participant did not mention his or her gender. The age range of respondents was between 19 and 25. The mean age for men was 22.00 and SD 4.69. The mean age for women was 20.49 and SD 4.52.

Most of the respondents were Christians (60%), followed by Muslims (30%) and Buddhists (9%). With regards to ethnicity, 68% were Chinese, 29% were Malays, and 1% each for Indian, other (Limbawang), and unknown. Analysis of ethnicity was not carried out due to insufficient group affiliation for meaningful comparison. The results are presented in Table 1.

### b) Hypothesis One: there is no difference between genders with regard to moral competencies.

Among the ten MCI scales, only scale A indicated a significant difference between men and women. Using case summaries, it was found that women are more likely than men to 'act consistently with principles, values and beliefs' (Items 21). Across the other items in this scale, men and women have similar response patterns. Table 2 below presents the results of ANOVA.

### c) Hypothesis Two: there is no difference between religion affiliations with regard to moral competencies

In comparing religious affiliation, significant differences were noted for three scales. The scales were scale F "Admitting mistakes and failures", scale H "Actively caring about others", and scale I "Ability to let go of others' mistakes". Across the other items in this scale, similar response patterns were observed for all three religious groups.

Using case summaries, it was found that Muslims tend to be more ready in admitting mistakes and failures compared to Christians and Buddhists. Muslims were also more active in caring about others. Muslims as a group found it easier to let go of their own mistakes compared to other religious

groups. Table 3 depicts the results of MANOVA used for this hypothesis.

### d) Reliability Estimates

Two types of reliability tests were conducted for the MCI. The first was internal consistency for each of the ten competencies. The second was a reliability testing for the entire MCI instrument. This involved conducting a Spearman-Brown coefficient and a split-half reliability.

i- Internal consistency for each scale using Cronbach alpha results are displayed in Table 4 below. Only two scales had good levels of internal consistency – scale C and scale F (0.72 and 0.77 respectively). Subtracting some items from the original MCI will improve the internal consistency of the remaining scales. For most scales except for scale C and scale F, subtracting one item would increase the internal consistency. For scale B, D and H, despite removing one item, the internal consistency value is still less than 0.60.

Previous researchers used the same MCI to compare moral values in cross-cultural studies. One noteworthy study was by Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana (2011). This team investigated university student samples from Indonesia, Poland, and United State of America. A comparison is made in Table 5 with regards to mean responses for each scale.

From Table 5, it seems that the Malaysian pilot sample has lower mean values across all ten moral scales, especially in scale C "standing up for what is right" and scale G "Embracing responsibility for serving others". The means for the entire MCI are similar for the Malaysian pilot, Indonesian, and Polish samples. The American sample is the most moralistic in comparison although as a group, Americans have been perceived as being immoral by Eastern cultures.

The highest mean in the Malaysian pilot study was for scale D "Keeping promises" (7.9). This was followed by scale F "Admitting mistakes and failures" (7.8). For both scales, the values were still lower compared to the other three countries. The scale with the lowest mean for the Malaysian sample was scale C "standing up for what is right"(6.7).

ii- Reliability testing for the entire MCI instrument involved conducting a Spearman-Brown coefficient and a split-half reliability. For the Malaysian pilot sample, the equal length Spearman-Brown coefficient result was .89. The equal length split-half reliability for Part 1 was .86 and Part 2 was 0.90.

**Table 1:** Participant demographics

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
No. of Respondents	75 (100)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	19 (25)
Female	55 (74)
Unknown	1 (1)
<b>Age Range</b>	
19-21	31 (41)
22-24	39 (52)
25-27	3 (4)
Unknown	2 (3)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Malay	22 (29)
Chinese	50 (68)
Indian	1(1)
Other	1(1)
Unknown	1(1)
<b>Religion</b>	
Islam	22 (30)
Christian	45 (60)
Buddhist	7 (9)
Unknown	1 (1)

**Table 2:** Gender differences across MCI scales

<b>Subscales of the MCI</b>	<b>Men (n= 19)</b>	<b>Women (n= 55)</b>	<b>t-value</b>
<u>Scale A</u> Acting consistently with principles, values and beliefs	14.10 (2.4)	15.61 (1.8)	-2.889*
<u>Scale B</u> Telling the truth	15.00 (2.1)	15.29 (1.9)	-.561
<u>Scale C</u> Standing up for what is right	12.89 (2.4)	13.43 (2.3)	-.847
<u>Scale D</u> Keeping promises	15.31 (2.1)	16.05 (1.80)	-1.458
<u>Scale E</u> Taking responsibility for personal choices	14.63 (2.3)	15.07 (2.0)	-.789
<u>Scale F</u> Admitting mistakes and failures	15.16 (3.0)	15.71 (2.1)	-.868*
<u>Scale G</u> Embracing responsibility for serving others	14.16 (2.4)	13.74 (2.2)	.683
<u>Scale H</u> Actively caring about others	14.00 (2.0)	14.62 (2.2)	-1.133
<u>Scale I</u> Ability to let go of one’s own mistakes	14.95 (2.4)	14.78 (1.9)	.302
<u>Scale J</u> Ability to let go of others’ mistakes	14.63 (2.5)	15.00 (2.2)	-.606

\* P < 0.05

**Table 3:** Religious affiliation differences across MCI scales

<b>Subscales</b>	<b>Islam (n= 22)</b>	<b>Christian (n= 45)</b>	<b>Buddhist (n=7)</b>	<b>F</b>
<u>Scale A</u> Acting consistently with principles, values and beliefs	14.82 (2.4)	15.51 (1.9)	14.71 (.76)	.347
<u>Scale B</u> Telling the truth	15.23 (2.3)	15.16 (1.8)	15.57 (1.7)	.873
<u>Scale C</u> Standing up for what is right	14.05(2.68)	13.13 (2.2)	12.00 (2.0)	.110
<u>Scale D</u> Keeping promises	16.23 (2.1)	15.80 (1.9)	15.14 (1.7)	.406
<u>Scale E</u> Taking responsibility for personal choices	16.23 (2.1)	14.82 (2.0)	15 (.8)	.763
<u>Scale F</u> Admitting mistakes and failures	16.59 (2.5)	14.91 (2.2)	16.57 (2.1)	.011*
<u>Scale G</u> Embracing responsibility for serving others	14.77 (2.2)	13.49 (2.3)	13.29 (1.1)	.071
<u>Scale H</u> Actively caring about others	15.41 (1.9)	14.64 (2.2)	14.29 (1.4)	.042*
<u>Scale I</u> Ability to let go of one’s own mistakes	15.82 (1.8)	14.23 (2.1)	15.14 (1.3)	.013*
<u>Scale J</u> Ability to let go of other’ mistakes	15.82 (2.9)	14.56 (1.9)	14.29 (1.4)	.076

**Table 4:** Internal consistency of MCI scales

Subscales	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha If item deleted
Scale A Acting consistently with principles, values and beliefs	.67	Item 1 = .71
Scale B Telling the truth	.51	Item 2 = .54
Scale C Standing up for what is right	.72	
Scale D Keeping promises	.54	Item 34 = .56
Scale E Taking responsibility for personal choices	.63	Item 5 = .68
Scale F Admitting mistakes and failures	.77	
Scale G Embracing responsibility for serving others	.67	Item 7 = .74
Scale H Actively caring about others	.55	Item 8 = .56
Scale I Ability to let go of one's own mistakes	.62	Item 19 = .66
Scale J Ability to let go of other's mistakes	.67	Item 30 = .65

**Table 5:** Comparison of MCI responses across Indonesian, Polish, American, and Malaysian samples

Competence	Indonesia*	Poland*	USA*	Malaysia	Question No.
Scale A	8.2	8.4	8.3	7.6	1,11,21,31
Scale B	7.9	8.8	8.6	7.6	2,12,22,32
Scale C	7.2	7.4	7.5	6.7	3,13,23,33
Scale D	8.3	8.8	8.4	7.9	4,14,24,34
Scale E	8.0	8.3	8.2	7.5	5,15,25,35
Scale F	8.6	8.0	8.2	7.8	6,16,26,36
Scale G	7.7	7.1	7.8	6.9	7,17,27,37
Scale H	7.8	7.4	8.2	7.2	8,18,28,38
Scale I	7.8	7.9	7.9	7.4	9,19,29,39
Scale J	7.1	7.8	7.1	7.5	10,20,30,40
MEAN	7.86	7.99	8.02	7.41	

\* Data adapted from Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana (2011).

**Table 6:** Rotated component matrix of factor analysis for the MCI

Item	Factor									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My friends know they can depend on me to be truthful to them	.687									
My leadership approach is to lead by serving others.	.675									
My co-workers would say that I have a realistic attitude about my mistakes and failures.	.660	-.396								
My co-workers would say that my behaviour is very consistent with my beliefs and values.	.657									
My co-workers would say that I take ownership of my decisions.	.649									-.307
When things go wrong, I do not blame others or circumstances.	.641									
My friends would say that my behaviour is very consistent with my beliefs and values.	.640		.370							
If I knew my company was engaging in unethical or illegal behaviour, I would report it, even it could have an adverse effect on my career.	.639	-.465								
I am willing to accept the consequences of my mistakes.	.637		-.348							
I spend a significant amount of my time providing resources and removing obstacles for my co-workers.	.634		-.425							
I use my mistakes as an opportunity to improve my performance.	.631		-.315							
I pay attention to the development needs of my co-workers.	.615									

I truly care about the people I work with as people- not just as the 'human capital' needed to produce results.	.615								
When a situation may prevent me from keeping my promise, I consult with those involved to renegotiate the agreement.	.609								
When I make a mistake, I take responsibility for correcting the situation.	.603	-.304							
My friends and co-workers know they can depend on me to keep my word.	.600								
I own up to my own mistakes and failures.	.589								
I appreciate the positive aspects of my past mistakes, realizing that they were valuable lessons on my way to success.	.585		-.336	.312					
My co-workers would say that I am the kind of person who stands up for my convictions.	.585				.407				-.340
Because I care about my co-workers, I actively support their efforts to accomplish important personal goals.	.577		-.336						
My co-workers think of me as an honest person.	.567								
I discuss my mistakes with co-workers to encourage tolerance for risk.	.555		-.358						
If I believe that my boss is doing something that isn't right, I will challenge him or her.	.554					-.471			
I will generally confront someone if I see them doing something that isn't right.	.544							.355	
I accept that other people will make mistakes.	.536	.377							
My co-workers would say that I am a compassionate person.	.489	-.339				.439			
When I forgive someone, I find that it benefits me as much as it does them.	.455	.392		.316					
Even when people make mistakes, I continue to trust them.	.438								-.414
When I agree to do something, I always follow through.	.421	.403							
I can clearly state the principles, values, and beliefs that guide my actions.	.397								-.336
Even when I have made a serious mistake in my life, I am able to forgive myself and move ahead.	.384		-.327						
I resist the urge to dwell on my mistakes.	.345								
When someone asks me to keep a confidence, I do so.	.342			.315	.332				
I am able to deliver negative feedback in a respectful way.									
When faced with an important decision, I consciously assess whether the decision I wish to make is aligned with my most deeply held principles, values, and beliefs.	.348	.481							
My colleagues would say that I go out of my way to help them.	.367		.431	.395					
My first response when I meet new people is to be genuinely interested in them.	.413			.517					
I am able to 'forgive and forget', even when someone has made a serious mistake.	.365			.489					
I tell the truth unless there is an overriding moral reason to withhold it.							.349		
When I make a decision that turns out to be a mistake, I admit it.	.423	.362						.484	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Varimax. Rotation converged in 22 iterations.

e) Factor Analysis

In order to extract factors and better understand the structure of the MCI for use in Malaysian populations, we used Principle Axis Factoring procedure with Varimax rotation. This approach differs from Martin and Austin's (2008) study where they used Direct Oblimin Rotation for extracting the factors. In reference to the eigenvalues, we expected factors to be extracted for eigenvalues greater than 1.

The factor analysis established ten viable factors similar to the ten posited by Lennick and Kiel (2005). The first factor accounted for 30% of variance. The ten factors accounted for 70% of the total variance. Table 6 provides information regarding the rotated component matrix of factor analysis for the MCI.

Discussion

This section elaborates the findings of the data analyses in response to the hypotheses postulated. In general, analyses results for both hypotheses were mixed. However, it can be said that moral competency is largely not impacted by demographic variables.

a) Hypothesis One

In hypothesis one, nine out of the ten scales evidenced no difference between genders. We performed an ANOVA on the scales with gender as a fixed factor. This technique was also utilised by Martin and Austin (2008) and Stachowicz-Stanush (2011).

The results herein provide some evidence that the MCI is somewhat gender-bias free when it comes to response patterns. Regardless of gender, both young Malaysian men and women in the sample responded similarly to telling the truth, standing up for what is right, keeping promises, taking responsibility for personal choices, actively care about others, and admit to mistakes and failures.

The above finding contradicted an earlier study. Using the MCI, Christensen, Barnes and Rees (2007) explored ways to develop moral courage. They conducted a post-test study with control group design by exposing 91 students to stories of moral exemplars to increase moral courage. Results indicated that resolve to have moral courage increased significantly and was sensitive to differences in gender, class standing, religiosity, and prior-service experiences. A study by Martin and Austin (2008) suggested potential problems with the assertion that demographic variables do not impact the moral construct.

#### b) *Hypothesis Two*

As for hypothesis two, there was no difference between religion affiliations in seven of the ten moral competency scales. Muslims were seen as being more moral in only three scales. The results tentatively indicate that most moral competency scales are not religious-biased.

One cross-cultural research found similar results. A study to compare cultural differences was conducted by Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana (2011) on 122 students from Poland, Indonesia, and the United States of America. The researchers found that the average level of moral scales in the three countries were similar. The study did not mention whether the results were linked to religious affiliation.

Ballantine (2000) earlier reported the effect of culture on the perception of moral identity of students from Malaysia and New Zealand. In another study, Zhang, Straub, and Kusyk (2007) report differences between Canadian and French students' work and life values. In these studies, culture was identified as a factor in moral value differences.

A more in-depth research is needed in Malaysia to establish the moral competency baseline of the population according to age range or occupations. In addition, a comparison with prison populations would help to determine the percentage of deviation expressed by criminals. Such information are essential for Malaysian to actualise its Vision 2020 as a means to screen for early symptoms of

moral decay and strategize programmes for appropriate intervention for at risk groups.

#### c) *Psychometric properties of the MCI for the Malaysian sample*

Similar to Martin and Austin's (2008) and Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana's (2011) studies, this current research examined some psychometric properties of the MCI. Individually, the scales have moderate to good Cronbach alpha values ranging from .54 to .77. Martin and Austin's (2010) study of 171 graduate and undergraduate students yielded better values ranging from .69 to .84. The differences may be due to cultural differences or that the Malaysian sample had comprehension problems relating to the level of English.

With regards to factor analysis, this study supports Lennick and Kiel (2005) ten scales of moral competency accounting for 70% of variance. However, Martin and Austin's (2010) study resulted in eight viable factors. In that particular study the eight factors accounted for 65% of variance.

A comparison of means with Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana's (2011) study of Indonesian (n=46), Polish (n=50), and Americans (n=26) indicated that the Malaysian pilot samples have lower moral values in all ten moral scales. This is despite 93% religious affiliation among members of the public (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010).

The scale with the lowest mean for the Malaysian sample which is scale C "standing up for what is right" may shed light into the possible reasons why young Malaysian do not readily participate in election polls. The low response in scale G "Embracing responsibility for serving others" may be indicative of an increasing trend of self-interest and lack of manners among the youth. It must be taken into consideration that the pilot sample may not be representative of the Malaysian population. As such, a more in-depth and population-wide study needs to be conducted before any concrete conclusions may be drawn.

#### d) *Implications*

In line with the aspirations set out in Vision 2020 (Economic Planning Unit, 2008), the findings of this study have implications for moral education and as a rehabilitation effort for social ills among the youth and incarcerated offenders. High moral values may increase a person's self concept. For example, it serves as a guiding principle that determines how a person behaves and is perceived

by others, which may reduce the likelihood of involvement in crime.

The agents of education that include the family, school, religious organisations, and the society play important roles in ensuring that moral values are passed on to the next generation as they come in contact with them. The integration and practice of moral values by an individual depends on the way he/she has been brought up by his/her first point of contact (the parents) with the world (Antonaccio and Tittle, 2008).

Unfortunately, the influence of religion in the lives of the young may be fading as these institutions of morality have become more obsessed with form rather than substance. Comments made by scholars for example Mohamed (1975), Boyer (2001) and Baron (2010) suggest an increasing interest among believers in observing elaborate rituals to attain rewards in life rather than following the true teachings of respective faiths with regards to humane social communication and relationship interactions.

In the fight against the moral decay it is important to ensure that as elders we are ourselves morally upright. Leading by example is not only by preaching or formal education, but also includes exemplary lifestyles and experience sharing. This is because as a learning mechanism, leading by example may have a profound influence on shaping moral values and behaviour (Boyer, 2001).

With regards to the role moral values have in rehabilitation of deviancy and criminal behaviour, some researchers provide evidence for reducing misconduct by improving moral standards. For example, Bird (2007) found that rehabilitation programmes focusing on moral rights are more compatible with the American socio-legal theories than previously believed. According to Palmer (2003), the common consensus is that criminal behaviour is somewhat influenced by low moral values. The findings in this current study may serve as a comparative foundation that may shape future rehabilitation programmes for deviant youths and criminals undergoing institutionalised sentences.

Arbuthnot and Gordon (1986) had stressed the need to include improving moral values in the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders, especially among delinquents. In their study, intervention utilising moral reasoning significantly reduced school absenteeism. In a study of 166 delinquent boys, Trembley *et al.* (1995) found that social skills training which included role modelling and moral behaviour reduced self-reports of delinquent behaviours between one to six years after intervention.

## Conclusion

Youth seem to lack moral values which may increase their risk of crime involvement. Based on the postulation that moral decay is increasing among the Malaysian youth, a pilot study was conducted with two hypotheses. This study indicates that generally, there are no gender or religious biases in the MCI. Comparatively, levels of moral values among participants for the Malaysian pilot sample were lower than Indonesian, Polish, and American samples.

The MCI was used to evaluate its applicability among Malaysian youths and later among Malaysian prison samples. Tests of reliability and factor analysis were conducted. The items of the MCI require some adjustments in order to improve its psychometric properties, especially its internal reliability.

A vital consideration is the level of understanding Malaysians have with regards to the level of English and meaning conveyed in each MCI item. It is likely that a Malay version of the MCI would evidence better psychometric properties. This forms the justification to develop and validate a Malay version of the MCI for use in Malaysia.

There is a need to address the issue of moral decay noted in this area of research. Although this knowledge may be of limited use when designing effective treatment programmes for young offenders, it is needed for preventive measures. There is also a need to conduct a similar study among incarcerated criminals to better gauge whether low moral values are a) indicative of criminal behaviour, b) poses a risk of crime involvement among the Malaysian youth, or c) indicative of a larger problem of moral decay in the Malaysian society. In the long term it is through these initiatives that the social ills and crime problems may be reduced and help the government actualise Vision 2020.

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