

Concern for Others and Perspective Taking on Moral Disengagement: Social Values as Moderator

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Abstract

Previous reports have shown that there are several inconsistencies in the results of studies on the effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement, moderated by social values among Islamic boarding school students in West Java. A causal correlation was used along with a structural design, involving 370 respondents. Data collection was carried out using the concern for others (CoF), perspective taking (PT), social values (SV), and moral disengagement (MD) scales. The results showed that social values played a significant role as a moderator variable in the effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement. Based on the results, social values had a role in reducing moral disengagement.

Keywords: concern for others, perspective taking, social values, moral disengagement

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi inkonsistensi pengaruh concern for other dan perspective taking terhadap moral disengagement pada beberapa penelitian terdahulu, yang terkadang menunjukkan pengaruh namun terkadang juga tidak berpengaruh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh concern for other dan perspective taking terhadap moral disengagement dimoderatori oleh social value pada santri di Jawa Barat. Metode penelitian menggunakan korelasi kausalitas dengan rancangan structural, melibatkan jumlah responden sebanyak 370 orang. Pengambilan data menggunakan skala concern for other (CoF), perspective taking (PT), social value (SV), dan moral disengagement (MD). Hasil menunjukkan bahwa social value berperan signifikan sebagai variabel moderator pada pengaruh concern for other dan perspective taking terhadap moral disengagement. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa social value berperan efektif sebagai variabel moderator dalam menurunkan moral disengagement.

Kata Kunci: *concern for others, perspective taking, social values, moral disengagement*

Introduction

The concept of morality is derived from the Latin language and encompasses habits, manners, and customary behavior. According to KBBI (2022), it is defined as the teaching of what is generally considered good and bad. Furthermore, Ichendu (2020) defined morality and ethics as concepts that promote the consideration of good and bad in managing life. Rachmawati et al. (2020) stated that morality is a habit that can guide human actions through reason, hence, moral values must be reflected in people's behavior and personality.

Sevim (2021) defined morality as the character and etiquette that described the

established character structure of humans in behaving on their own will. According to Smyth (2017), it often helps to reduce social tension, allowing the community to promote the well-being of its members. Audi (2022) also stated it served 3 functions for humans, namely 1) guiding what to carry out, 2) shaping good character, and 3) motivating individuals to judge behavior.

In social life, morality serves as a reminder for humans to carry out good for themselves and others. From a legal perspective, it serves as a tool for controlling and regulating behavior, protecting common interests, and ensuring that people do not violate applicable legal norms.

Based on the explanations of experts, morality is an essential aspect in maintaining the harmony and well-being of human life in the society. It can also be used as a reference and control for human behavior in achieving a dignified life.

Although morals are essential for humans to live a dignified life, there are instances where individuals engage in behavior that contradict the moral values within their environment. Siregar and Ayriza (2020) reported that moral violation behavior was prevalent among 97 senior high school students in Yogyakarta, with an average moral disengagement score of 82.14. Sarbini et al. (2019) also reported similar behavior among 482 senior/ vocational high school students in West Java, which was categorized as high, with average and maximum scores of 53.7 and 97, respectively. Furthermore, Malihah and Allfiasari (2018) found that 42.7% of students in one of the junior high schools in Bogor engaged in cyberbullying.

A preliminary study was carried out using observation and interviews with the managers of several Islamic boarding schools in West Java regarding the moral violation behavior of their students. The results showed that behaviors indicating a disengagement from moral values were found in 5 schools. Interviews with the managers revealed that many students exhibited a reluctance to follow the rules and values implemented. Some of the behaviors reported were students leaving without permission, playing outside designated areas, smoking within the school premises, skipping classes, leaving for school without attending classes, engaging in verbal violence, bullying, and minor oppression from seniors towards juniors. Furthermore, interviews with several students showed that some did not adhere to the dress code, engaged in dating, did not complete their homework, and used their mobile phones against the rules.

According to the managers of the Islamic boarding schools, the violation of the rules was not caused by the lack of knowledge or understanding of the rules but was due to

several factors. These include considering the rules as a constraint, being influenced by defaulting friends, experimentation, perceiving the violation as a minor or non-fatal consequence, and following the lead of friends who live outside the school area.

The behavior of the students in Islamic boarding schools contradicts the goal of the institutions of producing obedient, knowledgeable, disciplined, and responsible individuals. This phenomenon must be studied, as it highlights the fact that some students continue to behave immorally despite receiving education in an Islamic setting. Furthermore, this behavior can be explained by Bandura (2016)'s concept of moral disengagement, which refers to the cognitive mechanism individuals use to justify unethical or immoral behavior. Sarbini et al. (2019) stated that moral disengagement was a cognitive mechanism used by individuals to find logical reasons to justify immoral attitudes. According to Neal and Cramer (2017), it is a socio-cognitive phenomenon where individuals harm others and use their reasoning to avoid punishment.

Moral disengagement is a social and psychological phenomenon that can be influenced by several factors. According to Bandura (2016), it often occurs when an individual's self-regulation fails to function properly. Furthermore, self-regulation is the process of regulating morality and involves monitoring whether an action aligns with moral values, personal standards, and environmental conditions. It also involves the affectionate evaluation of individuals' behavior by themselves (Bandura, 2016).

The findings of recent studies showed that moral disengagement positively correlated with dishonesty, a cynical personality, and an external locus of control. Meanwhile, it negatively correlated with moral reasoning, identity, and idealism, as well as empathetic concern, guilt, honesty, humility, awareness, and kindness (Moore, 2015).

Wu et al. (2020) reported that empathy had a significant negative effect on moral

disengagement among Business and Education students in America. This suggests that individuals who can respond affectionately to the affections of others are less likely to engage in this behavior. A previous study on 10 to 15-year-old adolescents in the UK showed that among female adolescents, cognitive empathy or perspective-taking had a significant negative effect on the dehumanization behavior of bullying, while affective empathy or concern for others had no significant impact. However, perspective-taking and concern for others had no significant effect on moral disengagement in bullying among males (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

In a study in Northern Italy, the results revealed that cognitive and affective empathy had an indirect negative effect on bullying through the perception of popularity among 6 to 10-year-old children. For adolescents aged 11 to 14 years, affective empathy had a direct but insignificant negative effect, while cognitive empathy was found to have a direct and significant positive impact (Caravita et al., 2009). Another study on 357 delinquent adolescents aged 14-26 found that empathy negatively correlated with moral disengagement and bullying (Wang et al., 2017).

According to Israelashvili et al. (2020), concern for others refers to a sense of empathy towards individuals, particularly the ability to share experiences or indirectly feel the suffering of others. The ability to feel the experiences and suffering of people makes individuals behave ethically in community life and avoid moral disengagement.

Perspective-taking is a social-cognitive ability that helps humans understand other individuals (Erle & Topolinski, 2017). According to a recent study, it refers to people's behavior to take on (Cuneen, 2019) or change the perspective of others, thereby making conclusions about their situation, beliefs, and intentions (Morawetza et al., 2022). Furthermore, Aprilia and Solicha (2012) stated that trait cynicism, internalized moral identity, symbolic moral identity,

concern for others, and perspective-taking were insignificant factors affecting moral disengagement.

Previous reports on these influential factors have shown inconsistencies and contradictions. Studies on various ages, including children, adolescents, delinquent adolescents, and college students (Moore, 2015; Wu et al., 2020; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Caravita et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2017) showed that moral disengagement or its types, such as dehumanization in the form of bullying, was related to empathy in general or specific, such as cognitive and/or affective empathy. These empathy factors have been found to have a negative relationship with moral disengagement, ranging from correlation contexts to direct or indirect effects through the perception of popularity.

Several studies have obtained varying results regarding the same variables, such as the insignificant effect of cognitive and affective empathy on moral disengagement (Aprilia & Solicha, 2012), including bullying and dehumanizing behavior among male adolescents (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Affective empathy was also shown to have a direct negative but insignificant effect (Caravita et al., 2009)

Due to the contradictions in previous studies regarding the factors affecting moral disengagement, it is suspected that perspective-taking and concern for others are insufficient to become influential factors. Therefore, a moderator variable that mediates the relationship between exogenous variables (concern for others and perspective-taking) and the endogenous variable (moral disengagement) is needed. Social values have been selected as the moderator variable because Tomlins (2017) stated that they are a broad concept of values used in a beneficial environment for life. According to Risdi (2019), they are a set of rules agreed upon by the community to achieve order. The choice of social values is also based on preliminary studies through interviews with the managers of Islamic boarding schools that they can prevent immoral behavior. These values

include justice, solidarity, responsibility, mutual cooperation, togetherness, mutual respect, and loyalty to friends.

Social values are instilled to foster sympathy, empathy, togetherness, and mutual respect. Therefore, it is assumed that they can reduce moral disengagement behavior, and encourage concern for others and perspective-taking among students.

Social values serve a variety of functions in community life, including serving as 1) a guide and unifier for individuals in their behavior, 2) a protective barrier for individuals against harmful and damaging actions, and 3) a motivator for individuals to carry out good (Risdi, 2019). These values also function as principles that shape the life perspective, understanding, and goals, as well as the decision-making of an individual, and they are reflected in attitude and behavior (Bolat & Korkmaz, 2021).

Previous studies showed that social values had a positive and significant correlation with the level of moral maturity (Dogan, 2018). This indicates that these values can enhance morality, and individuals without them are likely to commit moral violations. These results further strengthen the importance of placing social values as a moderator variable. This can also be seen as a novelty in this current study, as it includes social values as a variable that provides an indirect effect from concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement. Previous reports generally focused on the direct effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement, with several inconsistencies in the results. Therefore, this study aims to determine the role of social values as a moderator variable in the effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement.

Methods

This study used the causal correlation with a structural design to determine the direct and indirect effects of concern for others, perspective-taking, and social values on moral disengagement. The sample population

consisted of 2600 students from 5 Islamic boarding schools in West Java based on data obtained from the administrative department. Among these students, a total of 370 were then selected using the proportional random sampling technique.

The measurement tool for moral disengagement was a modified scale developed by Detert et al. (2008), consisting of 8 dimensions, including moral justification, attribution of blame, dehumanization of the victim, distortion of consequences, advantageous comparison, euphemistic labeling, displacement of responsibility, and diffusion of responsibility. The measurement tool consisted of 36 items, such as "To protect my friend's reputation, it is better for me to lie than tell the truth about my friend's situation." The item discriminating power index ranged from .36 to .87, with validity and reliability values of .7 and .9, respectively.

The variable of concern for others and perspective-taking was measured using a modified instrument from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Tahir et al. (2021). Concern for others was a variable possessing a single or dimensionless attribute, with a total of 13 items (example: "I can easily feel the feelings of others, even if they try to hide them"). The item discriminating power index ranged from .44 to .77, with validity and reliability values of .8 and .93, respectively.

Perspective taking also had a single or dimensionless attribute, with a total of 13 items (example: "I can imagine what others are thinking when they experience a disaster"). The item discriminating power index ranged from .63 to .73, with validity and reliability scores of .75 and .95, respectively.

The measurement tool for social values referred to Bolat and Korkmaz (2021)'s theory, which consisted of 6 dimensions, including family, scientific, work-job, religious, traditional, and political values, with a total of 12 items (example: "In the Islamic boarding school area, I consider friends and *ustadz* as my own family"). The item discriminating power index ranged from

.53 to .73, with validity and reliability values of .78 and .91, respectively.

Results and Discussion

Results

Respondent Demographics Data

Based on the demographic data in Table 1, most of the respondents were females (88%), aged 13 years (40%), and in grade VIII (51%). In terms of ethnicity, most of them were Sundanese (52.16%), followed by Javanese (42.97%).

Descriptive Analysis

Based on Table 2, the moral disengagement, social values, and perspective-taking of most of the respondents were in the moderate category, with percentages of 77%, 58%, and 60%, respectively. However, their level of concern for others was in the high category (93%).

Inferential Analysis

This study proposed a total of 6 hypotheses, including ‘social values have a negative and significant effect on moral disengagement’ (H1), ‘concern for others has a negative and significant effect on moral disengagement’ (H2), and ‘perspective taking has a negative and significant effect on moral disengagement’ (H3). Furthermore, the results showed that the R for each variable was negative, with $t_{count} > t_{table}$ 1.65, and $sig. < \alpha$.05, indicating the acceptance of these three hypotheses. The variables of social values, concern for others, and perspective-taking had a significant negative effect on moral disengagement. The R Square showed the contribution of each variable in reducing moral disengagement, namely 96.7%, 88.1%, and 96.2% for social values, concern for others, and perspective-taking, respectively.

The fourth hypothesis showed that concern for others, perspective-taking, and social values had a simultaneous significant negative effect on moral disengagement. The multiple linear regression analysis results revealed an R of -.997, $F_{count} -26.476 > F_{table}$ 2.41, and $sig. .000 < \alpha$.05, indicating the

acceptance of the hypothesis. Based on these findings, these variables had a significant negative effect, with a contribution of 99.5% (R Square .995).

Table 1
Respondent Demographics Data

Demographics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	45	12%
Female	325	88.9%
Age		
11	18	5%
12	18	5%
13	148	40%
14	59	16%
15	48	13%
16	51	14%
17	25	7%
18	3	1%
Tribe		
Sundanese	193	52.16%
Javanese	159	42.97%
Others	18	2.16%
Grade		
VII	24	6%
VIII	190	51%
IX	35	9%
X	56	15%
XI	37	10%
XII	30	8%

Table 2
Variable Categorization

Category	Number	Percentage
Moral disengagement		
High	54	15%
Moderate	286	77%
Low	30	8.1%
Social values		
High	54	15%
Moderate	214	58%
Low	102	27.6%
Concern for others		
High	345	93%
Moderate	24	6%
Low	1	.3%
Perspective taking		
High	5	1%
Moderate	223	60%
Low	142	38.4%

Table 3
Regression Test Results

Variable	R			
	R	Square	t	Sig.
Social values	-.983 ^a	.967	-104.144	.000
Concern for others	-.939 ^a	.881	-52.170	.000
Perspective taking	-.981 ^a	.962	-96.784	.000

Table 4
Moderation Test Results

Variable	R	R Square	T	P
Concern for others → Moral disengagement	.487	.238	-2.4	.017
Perspective-taking → Moral disengagement	.60	.37	-7.19	.000

Data in Table 4 were presented to answer the fifth (social values are a moderator variable in the effect of concern for others on moral disengagement) and sixth (social values are a moderator variable in the effect of perspective taking on moral disengagement) hypotheses. Based on the Process analysis results, the R Square of 0.238 (23.8%) indicated that concern for others and social values simultaneously affected moral disengagement. Furthermore, to determine the moderation effect of social values on the relationship between concern for others and moral disengagement, a t_{count} of $-2.4 > t_{table}$ 1.65 and sig. of $0.017 < \alpha$.05 was obtained, which indicated the acceptance of the fifth hypothesis. Social values have a 23.8% role as a moderator variable in reducing moral disengagement behavior among students at 5 Islamic boarding schools in West Java.

For the sixth hypothesis, an R Square of 0.37 (37%) was obtained, indicating that perspective-taking and social values simultaneously affected moral disengagement. The moderation effect of social values on the relationship between perspective-taking and moral disengagement could be seen from t_{count} $-7.19 > t_{table}$ 1.65 and sig. of $0.000 < \alpha$.05. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis was accepted, indicating that they played a role in strengthening the negative

effect of perspective taking on moral disengagement. Social values have a 37% role as a moderator variable in reducing the moral disengagement behavior of students in 5 Islamic boarding schools in West Java.

The linear role of social values as a moderator variable was assessed, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. In Figure 1, the brown, green, and blue lines showed a high, moderate, and low linear decreasing effect of the social values score, respectively. All three lines sloped downward, indicating that the linear effect of the variable on the relationship between concern for others and moral disengagement was decreasing. These findings showed that the higher the social values score, the lower the moral disengagement score.

In Figure 2, the brown, green, and blue lines showed a high and moderate linear effect of the social values score, while the blue line indicated the absence of a linear effect. The three lines showed that the higher the social values score, the greater or stronger the linear effect on the relationship between concern for others and moral disengagement, and vice versa.

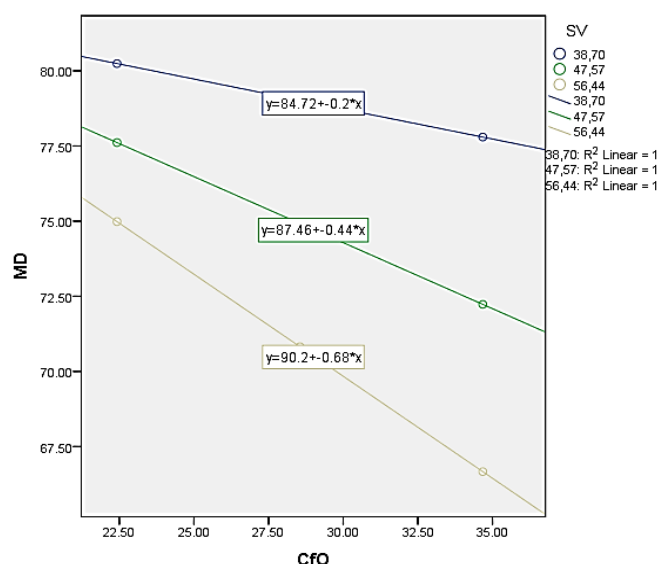


Figure 1. The linear effect of social values on the relationship between concern for others and moral disengagement

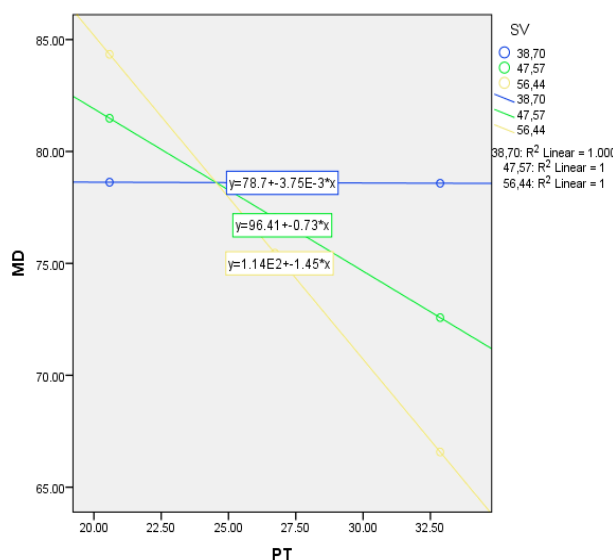


Figure 2. The linear effect of social values on the relationship between perspective-taking and moral disengagement

Discussion

Moral disengagement is a cognitive mechanism that allows individuals to justify unethical and immoral behaviors until they become logically acceptable to others (Bandura, 2016). Other studies suggested that moral disengagement involved reconstructing immoral behaviors using various justifications to make them seem (As'ad, 2022). Furthermore, it could also be defined as the process of reconstructing or changing beliefs about immoral attitudes to make them seem moral (Schaefer & Bouwmeester, 2021). According to Salgado et al. (2022), moral disengagement is a cognitive reconstruction process that allows individuals to detach themselves from internal moral standards and engage in unethical behavior without feeling guilty or pressured.

Bandura (2016) identified 8 mechanisms that contributed to moral disengagements, such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame. According to González-Fuentes et al. (2022), the most common mechanism used by students at Extremadura University was the displacement of

responsibility for moral violations committed. Meanwhile, Francisco et al. (2022) stated that blaming others and euphemistic labeling were dominant among adolescents in Portugal.

A previous study revealed that moral disengagement was not only caused by individual factors, but also affected by other factors, including personality type, social environment, empathy (concern for others and perspective-taking), self-control, and critical thinking ability. Tabares and Palacio (2021) stated that empathy played a significant role in reducing moral disengagement among adolescents who have been released from illegal armed groups in Colombia.

Sarbini et al. (2019) found that moral disengagement in senior high school or equivalent adolescents in West Java Province was affected by concern for others, perspective-taking, internal locus of control, and critical thinking. These results are consistent with Mascia et al. (2021) that this variable negatively and significantly correlated with empathy.

Based on the results of this study, concern for others had a significant negative effect on moral disengagement among students. This indicated that the moral disengagement of students could be minimized if they have concerns for others. These results were consistent with Zych and Llorent (2018) that the variable had a negative correlation with empathy. Furthermore, Raboteg-Šarić and Sanja (2019) found that affective empathy or concern for others negatively and significantly correlated with moral disengagement among 325 junior high school students in Zagreb, Croatia.

Israelashvili et al. (2020) stated that individuals with high concern for others had various characteristics, such as considering the needs and feelings of others, respecting their rights, needs, feelings, and perspectives, involving them in decisions, supporting them in difficult situations, and showing respect in daily affairs. According to Simas et al. (2019), concern for others referred to the tendency to experience emotions directed toward others.

Students with high concern for others were less likely to engage in morally disengaged behaviors, such as hurting others, blaming others, displacing responsibility, and disregarding the consequences of their wrongdoings. They also had the ability to consider the impact of their action on others, as well as themselves.

The results of this study showed that perspective taking had a significant negative effect on the moral disengagement of students. Furthermore, moral disengagement of students could be minimized through the possession of high perspective-taking. This finding was consistent with Pozzoli et al. (2017) that high it had the ability to dehumanization. Mascia et al. (2021) also found a significant negative correlation between cognitive empathy and moral disengagement in the aspect of dehumanization behaviors, such as cyberbullying. According to Utomo (2022) cognitive empathy had a significant effect in reducing moral disengagement among 1,223 adolescents at Surabaya Private School.

Stietz et al. (2019) stated that perspective-taking involved the capacity to make conclusions as well as represent the intentions, purposes, and motives of others. It could also be used to measure the extent to which individuals see daily events from the viewpoint of others. Perspective-taking was a crucial factor in promoting non-egocentric behavior, which was more oriented toward the interests of others. This ability could promote individuals to reduce harmful and unethical actions. The ability to take on the perspective of others and not being self-oriented facilitated ethical conduct among people.

According to Israelashvili et al. (2020), individuals with high perspective-taking had the ability to imaginatively put themselves in other people's positions, see situations from other's perspectives, accurately feel what others feel and think, and understand what they want or need. In this study, the possession of these abilities enabled students reduce behavior, such as hurting others, blaming others, displacing responsibility, and

disregarding the consequences of wrongdoings.

The simultaneous test results for the effect of concern for others, perspective taking, and social values on moral disengagement showed that the 3 independent variables had a negative and significant effect. This indicated that the combination of these variables could reduce moral disengagement among students in 5 Islamic boarding schools in West Java Province.

The results of this study revealed the causes of the inconsistencies in previous reports on the effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement. Although Wu et al. (2020), Wang et al. (2017), Moore (2015), Caravita et al. (2009), as well as Jolliffe and Farrington (2006), obtained similar results, they were inconsistent with Aprilia and Solicha (2012), Jolliffe and Farrington (2006), and Caravita et al. (2009).

Based on the results, social values had a negative and significant effect on moral disengagement among students in 5 Islamic boarding schools in West Java. This was because these instilled values had become part of the student's identity. Furthermore, they were reported to be closely related to individuals' behavior patterns in the community (Ghufroni et al., 2021). According to Filho et al. (2022), social values were not developed in isolation but were always instilled and socialized in the community and social relationships.

The social values embedded within the students were reflected in their behavior of showing affection towards one another, helping those who are in difficulty, keeping each other's secrets, selfless care, following agreed-upon rules, empathizing with the difficulties of their colleagues, resolving problems through discussion, accepting differences, eliminating selfish attitude, and prioritizing group decisions. These values were closely related to the attitude of individuals or groups that were applied in community life, thereby determining the extent of individuals' role in the society

(Zaman et al., 2020). Furthermore, they played an important role in the community and could serve as a control over behavior that deviated from moral values (Hutabarat et al., 2019).

The behavior exhibited by students who possess social values could be used as a means to reduce moral disengagement. Therefore, students with high social values were more likely to reduce immoral behavior in their lives.

The limitation of this study was the lack of diversity in the schools used as data sources, hence, the results cannot be generalized for all types of Islamic boarding schools in West Java. This was reflected in the homogeneity of the students, the small sample size, and the potential for bias.

Conclusion

Based on the results, social values played a role in strengthening the negative effect of concern for others and perspective-taking on moral disengagement. This indicated that moral disengagement among students in Islamic boarding schools could be reduced by helping them to develop concern for others and perspective-taking, as well as through intensive and consistent cultivation of social values.

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