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Moral disengagement: measurement and correlates, a systematic review

Desconexión moral: medición y correlatos, una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify both measurement instruments and the variables linked to moral disengagement. Twenty-five scientific articles were analyzed, composed of 5 instrumental and 20 related, published in Spanish and English between the years 2011 and 2022. These texts were evaluated by experts and were entirely available in databases such as EBSCO, Scopus, ProQuest, Scielo and Redalyc. A documentary analysis of these articles was carried out using an information systematization matrix to record the most relevant data. The results highlighted that the Spanish version of the Moral Disconnection Mechanisms Scale (MMDS-S) has solid psychometric evidence for its application in a young population. Likewise, a direct association was confirmed between moral disengagement and bullying, as well as cyberbullying, in addition to an inverse relationship with prosocial behaviors. Finally, it was observed that moral disengagement also presents significant associations with gender and age.

Keywords: systematic review, moral disengagement, measure instruments, related variables, associated factors.

Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación fue identificar tanto los instrumentos de medición como las variables vinculadas a la desvinculación moral. Se analizaron veinticinco artículos científicos, compuestos por 5 instrumentales y 20 relacionados, publicados en español e inglés entre los años 2011 y 2022. Estos textos fueron evaluados por expertos y estuvieron íntegramente disponibles en bases de datos como EBSCO, Scopus, ProQuest, Scielo y Redalyc. Se realizó un análisis documental de estos artículos mediante una matriz de sistematización de la información para registrar los datos más relevantes. Los resultados resaltaron que la versión española de la Escala de Mecanismos de Desconexión Moral (MMDS-S) tiene evidencia psicométrica sólida para su aplicación en población joven. Asimismo, se confirmó una asociación directa entre la desvinculación moral y el bullying, así como el ciberbullying, además de una relación inversa con las conductas prosociales. Finalmente, se observó que la desconexión moral también presenta asociaciones significativas con el género y la edad.

Palabras clave: revisión sistemática, desconexión moral, instrumentos de medida, variables relacionadas, factores asociados.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, there has been extensive debate on ethical issues, especially among religious scholars and philosophers, who have investigated the origin of ethical principles (Barra, 1987). It is argued that morality arises with the development of the social nature of human beings, that is, when they become members of a community. Therefore, it is essential that, when interacting with other individuals, people are aware of their role in society and adjust their behavior in accordance with community norms (Sanchez, 1981).

Several authors have approached the explanation of immoral behavior from a philosophical perspective. Socrates postulated that wisdom constituted a virtue and that ignorance was the root of evil in human beings, proposing the possibility of educating to promote goodness and justice (Pérez, 2011). In contrast, Plato conceived justice as a balanced virtue that harmonized with other virtues, linking good with truth and guided by this principle (Silva, 2004b). However, the definition of justice is complex, as it lacks an exact criterion that delimits what is just from what is unjust (Méndez, 2012). This complexity underlines that justice is a subjective moral and spiritual value, which varies according to the individual perspective (Olivari, 2008). Aristotle conceived the human being as a rational and social being who seeks happiness through education, practice, experience and the acquisition of habits (Garcés, 2015). For him, achieving personal happiness is closely linked to harmonious coexistence in society. From his perspective, the fundamental purpose of the human being lies in the development of reason, a capacity that facilitates self-realization and progress towards virtue (Margot, 2008). He also argued that the good does not exist as an independent entity, neither in reality nor in the plane of ideas, but is intrinsically related to action (Abril, 2001). Similarly, Nietzsche claimed that the 'true world' of morality is a fictitious construct. In his view, authenticity resides in the sensible world, characterized by appearance and falsity (Heidegger, 1961). Nietzsche argued that value systems are illusions, human constructs that lack absolute truth (Serrano, 2016). In criticizing Christianity, he emphasized that Christian morality is based on judgment and punishment, and on the need to find culprits and hold them accountable for their actions, considering it a product of mental fragility (Llácer, 2015).

On the other hand, Rousseau argued that intrinsic goodness resides only in primitive man, who retains an innate empathy towards others, and maintains that it is society that corrupts him (Trujillo, 2009). Rousseau asserted that human beings become slaves to the sensations they experience in civilized life. Despite his ability to overcome adversity, human weakness is a contributing factor to widespread misfortune. Therefore, Rousseau proposes not to strengthen reason, but to diminish sensibility in order to return to a more natural state (Domingo, 2002).

In agreement with this idea, Kant shared the same vision, adding that the development of a person's humanity takes place through the learning of skills, knowledge and cultural values (Silva, 2004a). Likewise, he claimed that morality is regulated by thought, self-sanctions, behaviors and social influences (Martinez *et al*., 2020), as well as the perception of ethical norms (Allison & Bussey, 2017). Although previously, the topic of morality used to be discussed mainly by philosophers or religious devotees, over time it has become a common topic of debate and concern (Betancur, 2016). Society often lacks reflection and sensitivity, which makes it difficult to create a morality that does not ignore the suffering caused by individual actions (Bauman, 2000).

The scientific analysis of morality, especially from the perspective of psychology, had a relatively late beginning (Barra, 1987). The first advances in this field occurred with the publication in 1935 of Piaget's 'Moral Judgment in the Child' (Dobles, 1994). Piaget presented a moral concept centered on what ought to be, limiting its scope by considering it as a set of rules, among which the notion of the good stood out as the most complex. He also emphasized that the formation of this morality is associated with the autonomy developed by each individual (Villegas, 1998).

According to Kohlberg, each person gradually develops his or her own moral foundations, which enables him or her to discern in ethical circumstances and dilemmas (Palomo, 1989). However, when there is a conflict between individual principles and intuitions, there is an opportunity to adjust either of them with the aim

of reaching a balance (Linde, 2009). Festinger (1957) introduced the concept of cognitive dissonance, explaining that people tend to generate new beliefs when their behavior does not align with their principles, with the aim of reducing emotional discomfort and recovering a sense of internal coherence (Rosero & Montalvo, 2015).

Subsequently, the concept of moral disengagement emerged, which describes the process in which a person distances himself from his norms and values, using arguments to rationalize his socially inappropriate behavior. This phenomenon involves a cognitive reorganization that avoids feelings of shame, guilt, self-censorship, and self-restraint, allowing self-esteem to be preserved when violating the ethical-moral norms of society (Bandura, 2002; Doyle & Bussey, 2017). In addition, personal sanctions can be suppressed by using moral disengagement mechanisms, which encompass moral justification, use of euphemistic language, favorable comparison, diffusion and displacement of responsibility, distortion of consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanization of the victim (Bandura, 1990).

The moral faculty, referred to as the capacity, conscious control and direction that people exercise over their behavior, is not always active (Richart, 2016). Therefore, the moral domain becomes essential to regulate social behavior, as its rules operate in different contexts without the need to rely on authority figures, rewards, punishments or pressures to guide behavior in social settings (Levasseur *et al.*, 2017). In short, in order for a person to adopt a moral mandate and autonomously guide his behavior based on them, he must give his rational and internal approval (Malishev, 2014).

Although the principles adopted by people have their origin in a natural inclination and in the learning process, most of them are obtained mainly through observation and instruction from those who are part of their cultural environment. However, the ability to adopt moral norms varies significantly (Mayr, 2008), given that these norms represent a set of guidelines that reflect a particular and specific lifestyle. On occasions, these guidelines may not align with the ideologies and traditions of the social group to which one belongs (Cortina & Martínez, 2001).

What is the role and relevance of ethics in human behavior? Ethics is not simply reduced to a personal commitment that arises and develops in each individual (Yubiry and García, 1999), but has a broader scope. Its purpose is to facilitate coexistence among people by reflecting on what is considered right to do and the motivations behind those actions. This implies a reflective process about the kind of life one aspires to, since that choice will guide one's ethical conduct (Savater, 2012).

Although ethics does not always have an immediate impact on daily life, its objective is to morally guide those who seek to act rationally throughout their existence and to reflect on the actions they take (Cortina and Martínez, 2001). It can be best illustrated using the metaphor of a tree: the base represents morality, i.e., the principles that govern the social context; the roots symbolize the values obtained in social interaction; and ethics is manifested in the branches, encompassing the desirable attitudes and behaviors of the individual (Vargas, 2004). It is noteworthy that, due to the constant changes experienced by human beings in all areas of their existence, ethics and morality are in a continuous process of change and adaptation, adopting positions to respond to new demands and requirements (Betancur, 2016).

Indeed, a brief analysis of the academic literature suggests a possible relationship between moral disconnection and behaviors that could affect both the integrity of the disconnected person and those around him or her (Gómez & Narváez, 2019b), as these actions could enter into conflict with their own norms and values (Urquijo, 1999). Therefore, it is proposed that moral disconnection could be a risk factor in early stages of life, such as adolescence, for the development of harmful behaviors in the social environment (Férriz *et al.*, 2019). It is essential to have tools that simplify the identification of this variable (Bautista *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to examine whether these instruments have sufficient psychometric support (Radu, 2020) to ensure the accuracy of the data. These instruments are used in a variety of contexts, and it is essential that they accurately measure the attribute for which they were designed (Argibay, 2006). It is especially relevant to understand the psychometric characteristics of self-reports, which tend to be influenced by biases

in participants' responses. These instruments are not only used for diagnostic purposes, but are also crucial in scientific research (Díaz et al., 2003). Therefore, scientific advances derived from measurement must be coherent and originate from instruments with adequate psychometric attributes (Domínguez-Lara, 2016; Zimmerman, 2015).

It is important to understand the variables and factors that may influence the appearance or prevention of this phenomenon in order to reduce or enhance its effect. It is also crucial to take into account sociodemographic factors and individual particularities that may predispose the prevention and intervention processes, in order to improve them. In this context, the question arises: What are the most commonly used instruments to measure moral disengagement and the associated psychosocial variables or sociodemographic factors?

METHOD

Design and type of investigation

It is a study of theoretical design (García-González & Sánchez-Sánchez, 2020), specifically classified as a systematic review. This type of study allows the updating of knowledge, organizing primary studies about a particular topic (Salinas, 2020).

Selection of articles

The research was carried out using various databases, such as EBSCO, Scopus, ProQuest, Scielo and Redalyc. Search terms such as "moral disengagement", and "moral disconnection" were used to identify relevant studies. For the search for measures, keywords such as "measurement", "scale", "questionnaire", "instrument", "test" and "inventory" were used. As for correlates, terms such as "related variables", "associated factors", "sociodemographic variables" and "psychosocial variables", among others, were used. The Boolean operators "OR" and "AND" were applied to construct search equations, restricting the selection exclusively to articles in Spanish and English. Despite the extensiveness of the search, which yielded a total of 128,330 studies, the majority (128,305) were discarded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. This process resulted in the selection of 25 articles that met the established criteria for their inclusion in the research.

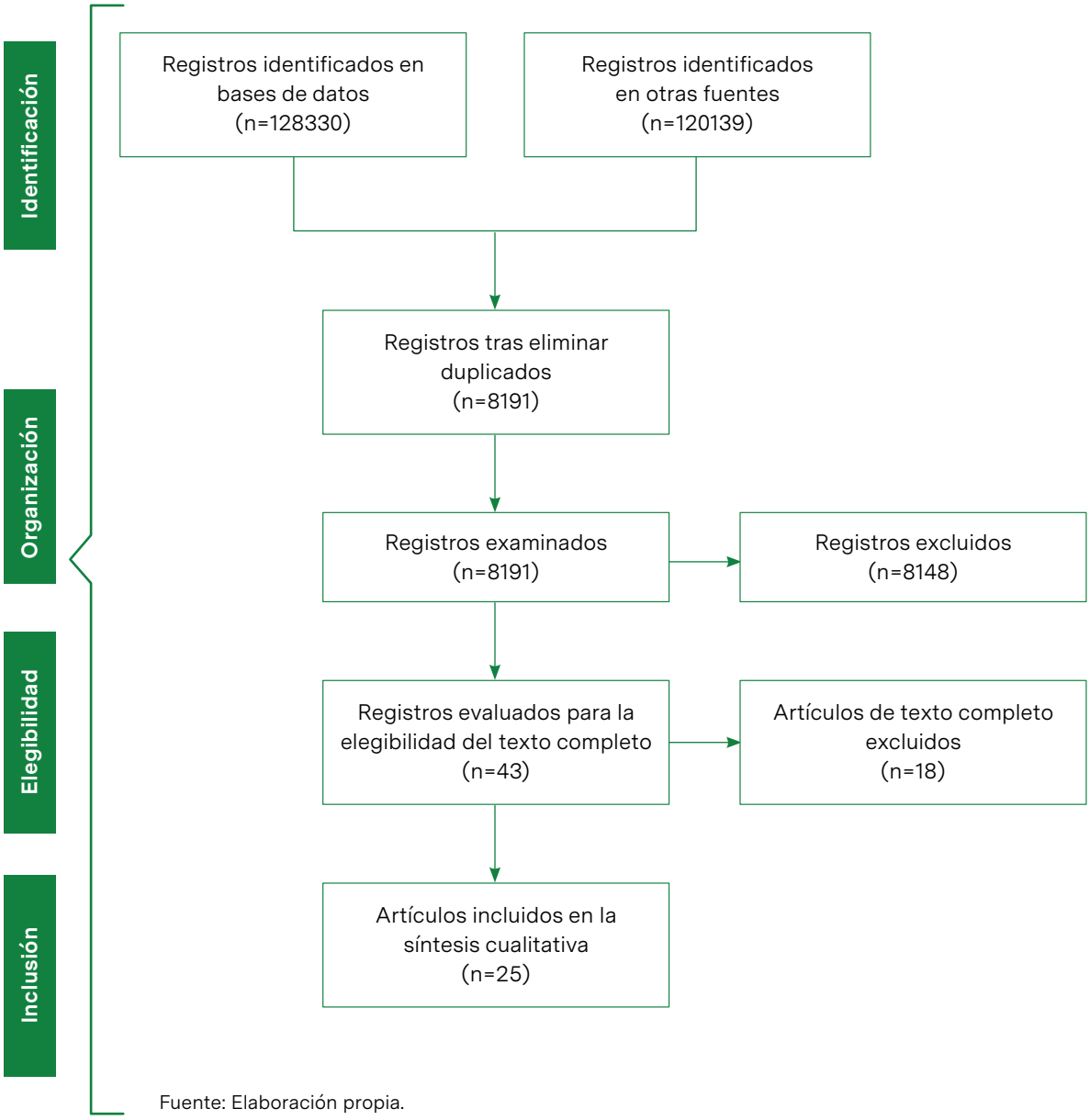
Criteria for inclusion

The criteria used to select the articles were as follows: 1) scientific articles written in Spanish and English, 2) empirical research, 3) refereed publications, 4) available in their entirety as full text, and 5) published between the years 2011 and 2022. Table 1 and Figure 1 summarize the information search and filtering processes.

Table 1
Database and processes for information gathering

Base de Datos	Identificados	Selección	Elegibilidad	Inclusión
Scopus	60	28	3	1
Scielo	4	4	4	4
EBSCO	9683	900	24	16
Proquest	1144	355	6	2
Redalyc	117439	6904	6	2
Total	128330	8191	43	25

Figure 1
Flow chart



Fuente: Elaboración propia.

Extracted information

The documentary analysis technique was used to evaluate the content of the articles (Escudero and Cortez, 2018; Dulzaides and Molina, 2004). In addition, a detailed information matrix was used to analyze each article that met the inclusion criteria. This matrix included aspects such as the names of the authors, year of publication, scientific journal, sample used and the main results obtained in each study examined. This rigorous methodology guaranteed the selection of relevant studies and the exclusion of those that did not meet the standards of quality and relevance to the research topic.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows that most of the instruments focused on measuring the level of moral disengagement among participants. However, one of them focused on children's perception of their parents' moral disengagement (Zych *et al.*, 2020). In addition, a variation in the structure of each instrument used is noted. It is relevant to note that all the studies presented evidence of validity and reliability, except one that also included evidence of fairness, and another that performed mean comparisons.

Table 2

Instrumental studies / psychometric research

Nº	Authors/ year/journal	Dimensionality / internal structure	Evidence of validity	Evidence of reliability	Evidence of equity
1	Saif y Riaz / 2021 / Pakistan journal of psychological research	One second-order factor: moral disengagement. Six first-order factors: moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility and distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame.	AFE: Varimax AFC: estimator ML; X^2/gl= 1.585; GFI= .95; AGFI= .93; CFI= .95; TLI= .94; IFI= .95; PCLOSE= .99; RMSEA= .04. Concurrent validity (r): F1= .80, F2= .72, F3= .67, F4= .83, F5= .75, F6= .67	Internal consistency: FG (α= .90), F1 (α= .73), F2 (α= .68), F3 (α= .75); F4 (α= .82), F5 (α= .78), y F6 (α= .86)	Does not report
2	García-Vásquez et al. / 2020 / Acta Colombiana de Psicología	Three correlated factors: moral justification, diffusion of responsibility and attribution of blame.	AFC: estimator ML; X^2/gl= 1.328, SRMR= .03, AGFI= .95, CFI= .98, RMSEA= .04, AIC= 122.23. Concurrent validity: empathy, compassion (F1= -.56, F2= -.38, F3= -.26)	Internal consistency: F1 (ω= .74), F2 (ω= .70) y F3 (ω= .76).	($\Delta\chi2$ M2-M1= 9.96, gl= 8, *p*< .267; $\Delta\chi2$ M3-M1= 15.7, gl= 14, *p*= .332; $\Delta\chi2$ M4-M1= 44.29, gl= 26, *p*= .014). Equivalent for both sexes (ΔCFI <.001)
3	Bautista et al. / 2020 / European Journal of Education and Psychology	Eight factors: moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, diffusion of responsibility, displacement of responsibility, distortion of consequences, dehumanization and attribution of blame.	AFC: estimador ML; X^2/ gl= 2.427; *p*= .000; CFI= .98; RMSEA= .06 IC 90 [.039-0.081]; SRMR= .03; AIC= 80.53. Validez concurrente: alentador de la agresión (β= 0.53; *p*= .001)	Consistencia interna: FG (ω= .93)	Does not report
4	Zych et al. / 2020 / Child Indicators Research	One-factorial model in both populations	AFE: primary (KMO= .81, items explained 52% of the variance), and secondary (KMO= .89, items explained 62% of the variance). AFC: estimator ULS; primary (SB-X^2= 36.43, gl= 35, *p*= .40, CFI= .99, NFI= .99, RMSEA (IC90%) = .012 [.000-.040], AVE= .71, CR= .91, y secundaria (SB-X^2= 103.65, gl= 35, *p*= .00, CFI= .984, NFI= .976, RMSEA (IC90%) = .068 [.053-.083], AVE= .66, CR= .93	Internal consistency: elementary (α= .90, Ω= .90), and high school (α= .93, Ω= .93) students.	Comparison of means: Student's t test
5	Rubio-Garay et al. / 2017 / Revista de Psicopatología y Psicología Clínica	One second-order factor: moral disengagement. Three first-order factors: disengagement due to depersonalization, disengagement due to irresponsibility, and disengagement due to depersonalization.	AFC: estimator ULS; χ^2= 19.35; RMSEA= .016; GFI= .99; AGFI= .98; ECVI= .11; CAIC= 156.92. Validity in relation to other variables: aggression (r= .57) and empathy (r= -.23).	Internal consistency: FG (α= .87), F1 (α= .73), F2 (α= .70) y F3 (α= .79)	Does not report

Table 3 shows that most of the studies were carried out in Spain, followed by those conducted in Colombia. As for the samples used, these were mainly made up of adolescents, followed by groups of children. A direct relationship was observed between moral disengagement and variables such as bullying and cyberbullying, while an inverse relationship was found with prosocial behavior. In addition, among the associated factors, age and gender were identified as relevant elements in these studies.

Table 3

Empirical studies / relational or associative investigations

Nº	Authors/ year/journal	Sample	Results
1	Jiang et al. / 2022 / Psychology Research and Behavior Management	491 students from Fuján-China: 191 women and 300 men	Moral disengagement mediated the relationship between normative beliefs about aggression and bullying (ab= 0.13, 95% CI [0.07, 0.21]). The association between normative beliefs about aggression and moral disengagement was moderated by self-control (β= -0.08, t= -2.25, p< .05). The association between moral disengagement and bullying was moderated by self-control (β= -0.09, t= -2.42, p< .05).
2	Nocera et al. /2022 / Cyberpsycho-logy: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace	404 participants: 237 females and 167 males, aged 18 to 29 years (M= 25.16, SD= 2.76, SD= 2.76).)	Moral disengagement mechanisms and cyberbullying experiences (CES) subscales suggested significant associations (rs= .56-.78). The regression model examining moral disengagement mechanisms and perpetration (PT) of CES was significant (F(8, 395)= 113.48, p< .001), with R2= .70. Dehumanization (β= .27, p< .001), advantageous comparison (β= .26, p< .001), responsibility displacement (β= .15, p= .023), and consequence distortion (β= .22, p= .002) predicted total CES perpetration scores.
3	Shen et al. / 2021 / Social Behavior and Personality	Chinese population 253 leaders: 149 men and 104 women. 253 employees: 103 men and 150 women	Leaders' power distance was negatively related to their integrity (-.26), leader moral disengagement mediated the relationship between power distance and integrity (β= -.20), and narcissism positively moderated the relationship between power distance and moral disengagement (β= .12).
4	Coleman et al. / 2021 / Journal of Projective Psychology & Mental Health	48 children from California: 22 boys and 26 girls (M= 12.5 years)	The means of the highest individual decentering score (M= 3.90, SD= 2.11) and the mean of the within-story averages (M= 2.72, SD= 1.21) fell in the particular sequential range. Girls decentered more maturely than boys, t(47)= 2.12, p= .04, for both the highest (girls M= 4.48, SD= 2.22, boys M= 3.23, SD= 1.82) and average decentering, t(42.82)= 2.34, p= .025, (girls M= 3.06, SD= 1.41, boys M= 2.31, SD= .81).
5	Gómez & Duran / 2021 / Revista Criminalidad	Manizales-Colombia: Group I (35 adolescents disengaged from illegal armed groups), Group II (60 adolescent offenders), and Group III (108 young people with no criminal record).	Group II adolescents presented more use of moral disengagement mechanisms (Me= 2.11, Rp= 125.63). Intra- and intergroup gender differences were found: G1 (WEF: Me= 1.92, Rp= 76.13; MAS: Me= 1.78, Rp= 40.00), G2 (WEF: Me= 1.53, Rp= 54. 43; MAS: Me= 2.81, Rp= 70.85) and G3 (FEM: Me= 1.53, Rp= 49.90; MAS: Me= 1.75, Rp= 35.10), with a higher score in men, especially group II.
6	Gómez & Landinez-Martínez / 2021 / Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	221 high school students in Manizales-Colombia: 102 boys and 119 girls, between 11 and 17 years old (M= 13.52; SD= 1.739).	Significant positive correlations (p< .001) were evidenced for moral disengagement, aggressive (rho= .504) and bullying behavior (rho= .228).
7	Navas et al. / 2020 / Revista Latinoamerica-na de Psicología	800 Spanish high school students: 401 boys (13 to 18 years old), and 399 girls (12 to 18 years old).	Structural equation modeling indicated that the dark triad and moral disconnection are directly and strongly related to antisocial behaviors in the girls (β= .57, p< .001) and boys (β= .54, p< .001) groups.

8	Zych et al. / 2020 / Child Indicators Research	1483 Spanish students: 598 primary school students (46.3% girls and 53.2% boys), and 885 secondary school students (48.8% female and 50.6% male).	Significant indirect effect: high induction of perceived parental moral disengagement on high Bullying perpetration, mediated by high moral disengagement (SEC: β= .12, p< .05; PRIM: β= .18, p< .05), by low moral emotions (SEC: β= .03, p< .05), and by both (β= .02, p< .05) in the two samples. And high induction of perceived parental moral disengagement on Cyberbullying, mediated by high moral disengagement (SEC: β= .10, p< .05; PRIM: β= .17, p< .05), by low moral emotions (SEC: β= .02, p< .05), except in primary (β= .01, p> .05), and both mediators (SEC: β= .01, p< .05; PRIM: β=. 02, p< .05).
9	Cuadrado-Gordillo et al. / 2020 / Environmental Research and Public Health	2576 Spanish students, 14 to 18 years old (M= 16.17; SD= 1.20)	Perception has a statistically significant influence on moral disengagement (β= .18; p< .05). Moral disengagement and acceptance of violence have a statistically significant influence on victimization (β= .51; p< .001).
10	Romera et al. / 2021 / Psychosocial Intervention	1274 Spanish students: 48.6% girls and 51.4% boys, aged 11 to 17 (M= 13.63, SD= 1.31).	Relationship between bullying and cyberbullying with moral disengagement mechanisms: Responsibility minimization (.30 and .29, respectively). Distortion of consequences (.37 and .36, respectively). Dehumanization (.41 and .32, respectively).
11	Gómez y Narváez / 2019a / Revista de Psicología	60 teenagers from Manizales-Colombia: 30 males and 30 females	Statistically significant negative correlations (p< .01) between perspective taking and empathic concern with moral disengagement mechanisms. The fantasy dimension correlates negatively with moral justification (rho= -.36), euphemistic language (rho= -.42), distortion of consequences (rho= -.28), dehumanization (rho= -.46) and advantageous comparison (rho= -.33).
12	Gómez y Narváez/2019b/ Psicología del caribe	35 adolescents disengaged from the armed conflict: 19 males and 16 females (M= 16.34 years).	Prosocial tendency for complacency or obedience correlates negatively with global moral disengagement (r= .388; p< .05).
13	Rubio-Garay et al. / 2019 / Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica	72 Spanish adolescents and young adults: 36 males and 36 females, aged 16 to 25 years (M= 19.01, SD= 2.15).	Statistically significant relationships (p<.05): A moderately significant relationship was found between perpetrated aggression and moral disengagement only in males (.35). A moderate significant correlation was found between moral justification and victimization in the younger group (.34).
14	Larrañaga et al. / 2018 / Comunicar	1062 Spanish secondary school, vocational training and Bachillerato students: 46% men and 54% women, aged 12 to 19	Online victimization (β= 1.94), bullying aggression (β= 1.10), moral disengagement (β= 1.19), perceived support from friends (β= 0.76) and satisfaction (β= 1.92), are some of the statistically significant explanatory variables of cyberbullying aggression.
15	D'Urso et al. / 2018 / Psychiatry, Psychology and Law	49 criminals in Italian prisons, 30 drug traffickers and 19 criminals who attacked other people	Drug dealers (MD= 2.80, SD= 0.78) reported higher levels of moral disengagement than offenders against other people (MD= 2.37, SD= 0.51). Drug dealers (MD= 2.74, SD= 0.78) reported higher levels of dehumanization than offenders toward other people (MD= 1.92, SD= 0.92). Drug abusers (MD= 3.36, SD D= 0.98) reported higher levels of advantageous comparison than aggressors toward others (MD= 2.71, SD D= 0.85). Those who used drugs as adolescents reported higher levels of advantageous comparison (MD= 3.41, SD D= 0.88) than those who did not (MD= 2.63, SD D= 0.95).
16	Carrera-Fernández et al. / 2018 / Revista de Psicodidáctica	1245 students: 57% from Spain and 43% from Portugal, 54.9% girls and 45.1% boys, from 14 to 19 years old.	Structural equation models, equivalent by gender and country, confirm that hostile sexism, homophobia towards gays, moral disengagement towards bullying and, to a lesser extent, benevolent sexism, together explain 53% of the variance in negative attitudes towards cultural diversity.

17	Levasseur et al. / 2017 / Journal of Moral Education	626 students from Canada: 53% male and 47% female, 12 to 15 years old	Advocates (M= 1.98, 95%CI= 1.90/2.06) scored lower on moral disengagement (p= .01, d= .27) than bullies (M= 2.24, 95%CI= 2.14/2.34), and also scored slightly lower (p= .03, d= .16) than outsiders (M= 2.14, 95%CI= 2.07/2.21).
18	Petruccelli et al. / 2017 / Psychiatry, Psychology and Law	362 Italian men: 268 in the control group, 42 sex offenders and 52 non-sexual offenders	The comparison between sex offenders and non-sex offenders proved to be statistically significant, F (1, 349) = 1.79, p= .029, but explains only 1.4 % of the variance in moral disengagement.
19	Martínez-Gonzáles et al. / 2016 / Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud	48 parents and/or caregivers with 48 children in their care from Barranquilla (7 to 9 years old)	Positive (> .338) and negative (> -.338), and statistically significant (p< .05), correlations were found between some parenting practices and cases where children became morally disengaged.
20	Górriz et al. / 2011 / INFAD Revista de Psicología	268 preadolescents from Spain: 159 boys and 109 girls from 13 to 15.11 years old (M= 13.7)	Significant differences between the different roles and the distribution by gender [-2(4) = 52.6, p< .000]; stalker and follower are mostly male (77.8% and 86.1% of boys), defender of the victim are usually girls (65.2%), and victims are usually boys (86.7%). Significant differences are only found between the figure of the stalker and the defender (p= .004) and that of follower and defender (p= .014) in the factor Blame others; in the Immoral Attitude factor, the girls are followers (M= 3.67, SD= 0.52) and the boys defenders (M= 2.77, SD= 0.76) those who obtained the highest scores.

DISCUSSION

Moral disengagement is a cognitive process that allows a person to perform actions contrary to his or her ethical principles without feeling shame, guilt or remorse. It is achieved through justification mechanisms that separate those actions from their sense of moral responsibility.

The purpose of this study was to identify, through an exhaustive analysis of the scientific literature of the last 12 years, the measurement instruments and associated variables or factors related to moral disengagement. The main findings obtained in this research are presented and analyzed in detail below.

Five investigations related to assessment instruments were identified: one dedicated to the development of a scale to measure moral disengagement in individuals, three focused on the analysis and adjustment of existing instruments, and one specifically focused on bullying situations. In addition, one study was found that examined the perception of moral disengagement among children with respect to their parents (Zych et al., 2020). The instruments used in these studies adhered to Bandura's (1991) social cognitivist approach and conceptual framework. However, each one exhibited a different internal structure: one presented one second-order and six second-order factors (Saif & Riaz, 2021); another revealed three interrelated factors (García-Vásquez et al., 2020); one showed eight factors (Bautista et al., 2020); another reflected one second-order and three first-order factors (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017); and one more conformed to a unifactorial model (Zych et al., 2020). Although they all showed adequate fit indexes, suggesting the simplicity of these models, not all of them fully conformed to the theory proposed by Bandura (1996), which postulates the existence of eight mechanisms of moral disengagement grouped into a general factor. In summary, not all instruments managed to capture a single construct. Validity evidence based on internal structure was obtained mainly by confirmatory factor analysis in all studies (Saif & Riaz, 2021; García-Vásquez et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2020; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2020). In addition, two of the studies also used exploratory factor analysis (Saif & Riaz, 2021; Zych et al., 2020).

Three of the matrixes used were based on Pearson correlation (Saif & Riaz, 2021; García-Vásquez et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2020), while

two others opted for polychoric correlation (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2020). The latter alternative is more suitable for ordinal data and in contexts where the assumption of normality is not applicable, a common situation in psychological research (Domínguez, 2014). Regarding the estimation methods, Maximum Likelihood (ML) was the most widely used (Saif & Riaz, 2021; García-Vásquez et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2020), followed by Unweighted Least Squares (ULS), implemented in two studies (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017; Zych et al., 2020). Despite this, the ULS is more appropriate when normality is not met, since its estimation is not influenced by this assumption (Ximénez & García, 2005).

In most of the studies analyzed, validity tests were observed that were based on the relationship with other variables. For example, García-Vásquez et al. (2020) found links with Compassionate Empathy (F1=-.56, F2=-.38, F3=-.26); Bautista et al. (2020) evidenced relationships with Aggression Incentive (β = .53); Rubio-Garay et al. (2017) noted correlations with Aggression (r=.57) and Empathy (r=-.23). However, Zych et al. (2020) did not provide this specific information. These connections are significant, as they empirically validate the proposed theories (Martinez et al., 2009) by confirming the direction and strength of the relationships among variables.

The reliability of the instruments was examined using the internal consistency method. Two studies chose to employ the Omega coefficient (García-Vásquez et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2020), while two others used the Alpha coefficient (Saif & Riaz, 2021; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). In addition, one study combined both coefficients (Zych et al., 2020). The Omega coefficient (McDonald, 1999) is considered to be more appropriate for instruments that employ ordinal measurement scales, since it uses the factor loadings obtained from Factor Analysis (FA) as a basis. On the other hand, the Alpha coefficient is preferable when the tau-equivalence principles are met (i.e., similarity in factor loadings among items) and when working with continuous variables on an interval or ratio scale (Ventura-León & Caycho-Rodríguez, 2017).

Regarding equity, only the study by García-Vásquez et al. (2020) indicated that the instrument showed invariance according to sex, suggesting that it assessed the variable fairly between men and women. However, no evidence of this fairness was found in the other four studies. Although one of them (Zych et al., 2020) performed a comparison of means using Student's t-test, it is more appropriate and widely accepted to conduct an invariance analysis. These analyses operate at several levels, including configural, metric, strict, and scalar (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), and do not focus solely on direct instrument scores (Merino & Willson, 2013).

In general terms, these instruments exhibited appropriate psychometric qualities that guarantee a more accurate and faithful measurement (Polit & Hungler, 1997). This precision is crucial, since they are used in a variety of contexts (Arguibay, 2006) to assess aspects linked to human behavior (Marín, 1986). The conclusions drawn from these measurements will significantly influence the decisions taken to intervene in these areas.

Several variables were found to be closely associated with moral disengagement, with bullying being the most recurrent. Four studies addressed this phenomenon in a general way (Jiang et al. 2022; Gómez & Landinez-Martínez, 2021; Romera et al., 2021; Zych et al., 2020), while one focused on bullying related to negative attitudes towards diversity (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2018). In addition, two investigations analyzed the roles played by those involved in such situations (Levasseur et al., 2017; Górriz et al., 2011), concluding that perpetrators exhibited a greater moral disengagement, mostly men (Górriz et al., 2011). Another variable highlighted was cyberbullying (Nocera et al., 2022; Romera et al., 2021; Zych et al., 2020; Larrañaga et al., 2018). In addition, a relationship with antisocial behavior was observed (Navas et al., 2020; Gómez & Duran, 2021), especially in terms of the type of crimes committed (Petruccelli et al., 2017). An association was also identified with aggression (Coleman et al., 2021; Gómez & Landinez-Martínez, 2021), the 'dark triad' of personality (Navas et al., 2020), narcissism (Shen et al., 2021) and normative beliefs about aggression (Jiang et al., 2022), factors that could contribute to the justification and acceptance of aggressive behaviors (Andreu et al., 2001).

It was found that the victim's acceptance of violence and his or her perception of being victimized were identified as relevant factors (Cuadrado-Gordillo et al., 2020). In addition, a connection was established with violence (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019) and substance use in adolescence (D'Urso et al., 2018). It was observed

that moral disengagement in children and adolescents is influenced by how they perceive their parents' moral disengagement (Zych et al., 2020). Ultimately, it was concluded that, during the early stages, an individual is more likely to exhibit this type of behavior, since he or she has not yet reached his or her full moral development, maintaining a heteronomous morality and being susceptible to the influence of significant external agents (Piaget, 1932).

A negative correlation was found with self-control (Jiang et al., 2022), integrity of leaders in different domains (Shen et al., 2021), dispositions towards prosocial behaviors (Gómez and Narváez, 2019b), as well as with empathy and the performance of prosocial behaviors in themselves (Gómez and Narváez, 2019a). It was also evidenced that appropriate parenting practices, which focus on communication and expression of affection (Martínez-González et al., 2016), could reduce moral disengagement in young individuals.

Meanwhile, the studies by Gómez and Duran (2021) and Górriz et al. (2011) noted gender disparities in related factors. Both concluded that men exhibited higher levels of moral disengagement. Likewise, two additional investigations (Romera et al., 2021; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019) pointed out that gender, together with age, represented a significant factor, showing a higher prevalence in younger groups.

In synthesis, this article has examined moral disengagement, a complex phenomenon that allows individuals to act against their ethical principles without feeling remorse. Measurement instruments, correlates and associated factors, such as bullying and violence, were reviewed. Despite the complexity, the studies reviewed highlight the importance of addressing this problem from multiple perspectives, promoting ethical and moral values to cultivate connection and empathy in society.

However, this study about moral disengagement has several limitations. Although an exhaustive analysis of recent scientific literature was conducted, some relevant research may have been omitted. In addition, the diversity in the internal structure of the measurement instruments makes comparison among studies difficult. The lack of information on equity in the assessment of moral disengagement is also an important limitation. Although numerous associated variables were identified, most were based on correlational findings, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships. These limitations highlight the complexity of the phenomenon and underscore the need for future research to address these shortcomings and improve our understanding of the issue.

CONCLUSIONS

On the one hand, four instruments were identified that showed solid evidence of validity, both in their internal structure and in their relationship with other variables, in addition to demonstrating reliability. One of these instruments also showed evidence of fairness. On the other hand, 14 variables linked to moral disengagement were found, with bullying standing out as the most recurrent in direct association, while prosociality showed a significant inverse relationship. In addition, it was observed that the associated factors were age and sex. Then, it is crucial to consider moral disengagement as a relevant area of research, given its influence on the development of different violent behaviors that undermine social harmony, individual integrity and collective well-being. Consequently, further studies are urged to develop intervention strategies at the community level and individual treatment programs. These actions should focus on reducing this problem by addressing the risk factors and strengthening the associated protective elements.

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