

MORAL REASONING OF STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL CHOICES

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Abstract. *The goal of this research was to investigate the differences in moral reasoning among students of social, biomedical and technical sciences. The sample included 300 students of both genders (154 male and 146 female students). In order to investigate students' moral reasoning, we used a modified version of the DIT (Defining Issues Test, 1986) developed by Rest. Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which claims that there are six stages of moral development which are grouped into three levels of morality, was used as the theoretical foundation for the test. The results of the study show that there is a statistically significant difference at the postconventional level of moral judgment depending on the group of sciences: the level of postconventional moral reasoning is higher among the students of social and biomedical sciences than among the students of technical sciences. When it comes to the conventional level of moral reasoning, which is the modal level for the adult population, differences have not been observed. With regards to the individual stages of moral development, the results show that there are statistically significant differences in moral reasoning at stage 3, stage 4, stage 5A, stage 5B and stage 6. Stage 3 is more prominent among students of social and technical sciences than in students of biomedical sciences. Stage 4 and Stage 5A are higher in students of biomedical and social sciences than in technical science students. Stage 5B and stage 6 are more prevalent in biomedical sciences students than in students of the other two groups of sciences. Findings are discussed from the point of view of cognitive approach to morality and the contribution of educational and social factors to the moral development process of a person.*

Key words: *psychology of morality; cognitive-developmental approach; moral reasoning; Kohlberg's theory of moral development; students; professional orientation*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every day we have to make decisions and choices that have more or less impact on our lives and lives of other people, and some of these decisions have moral implications. When the consequences of our decisions and judgments directly affect the welfare of other people, moral questions arise. In such situations, we often make judgments and act without paying particular attention to what is right. We usually know what needs to be done because we are guided by existing laws or even by intuition, without going into further analysis of why a certain act is right or wrong. Most people get by with paying little attention to the reasons why some acts, rules, and laws are considered right. Laws and rules have to exist and need to be obeyed in order for the social system to remain stable; however, questioning the reasons behind these laws and rules is also of great importance. What motivates us to be moral? How does the process of moral reasoning occur? Why are some people willing to sacrifice themselves to help others?

When moral decision making is transferred to the domain of education and professional life, all these questions are added a new dimension. Being in a certain field of work, in addition to having knowledge about that profession, also requires the ability to observe the ethical aspect of that profession. Social changes and technological development have had a major impact on all professions and have made individuals face new moral decisions every day which are often not governed by existing laws, standards and rules. Universities prepare students for future professions, improve their knowledge and skills necessary for professional life, but the question is what values universities offer to them and how much guidance they provide on how to act ethically. It is doubtful that universities use all their capacities to make students more responsible and ethically conscious members of the future professional community and society as a whole.

Some studies on moral development of students (Self, Baldwin & Wolinsky, 1992; Self, Schrader, Baldwin & Wolinsky, 1993; Self & Baldwin, 1994; Morton, 1996; Branch, 2000; Patenaude, Niyosenga & Fafard, 2003) point to the necessity to include ethics in their professional education, as well as to the success of such educational interventions in the field of ethics. Specially designed courses and programs help students to develop a critical attitude towards social values, recognize the moral aspects of a situation, use ethical principles when making moral decisions and act in accordance with the adopted moral values. Educational interventions of this sort should be the priority for every higher education institution that wishes to educate competent and ethically conscious professionals. Our research assumes that specific faculty education, or the type of science that students deal with, is one of the sources of differences in their moral reasoning.

Since universities differ among themselves based on the importance they give to universal values of justice, equality and care, as well as based on the representation of specific subjects and course materials that are related to morality or ethics, it is expected that there will be differences among students in their levels of development of moral reasoning.

2. COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO MORALITY

Cognitive-developmental approach to morality is believed to be the most influential approach today. As its name says, this approach emphasizes two things: cognitive aspect of morality and its developmental side. Supporters of this approach believe that the essence of morality is moral reasoning that they define as an individual's ability to make moral decisions based on his/her own notion of justice and equality (Crain, 1985).

The development of moral reasoning is reflected in advancing through the stages of cognitive development, the order of which is constant and unchangeable (Stojiljković, 1998). Each subsequent stage is characterized by a better cognitive organization, because there is a parallel between the development of logical reasoning and moral judgment.

Cognitivists actually believe that the development of logical reasoning is a necessary precondition for the development of moral reasoning. Certainly, this is not the only precondition, since this development cannot take place without interaction with social environment, that is, without the social factor. Thus, the development of logical reasoning cannot guarantee that the development of moral reasoning of a certain level will also happen, which is why it is not surprising that a person may be at a higher stage of cognitive development than moral development (Stojiljković, 2009).

What distinguishes this approach from behaviourism and psychoanalysis is the view that morality is not imposed on children and does not occur as a result of a conflict between children's needs and demands of society (Hofman, 2003). Children form and discover moral norms in interaction with the environment, especially in situations of moral conflict and dilemma. Such conflicts and dilemmas, especially among peers, teach children moral rules, help them learn about the other person's perspective, as well as about the ability to reconcile one's own needs with the needs of others (Hofman, 2003). Child is seen as an active thinker who is able to formulate moral rules independently, without passively adopting moral norms imposed by society. Based on their knowledge about the development of moral reasoning, cognitivists have tried to formulate the appropriate concept of moral education. Believing that the development of moral reasoning has its own natural course, they believed that the goal of education should be reflected exclusively in encouraging that natural course (Stojiljković, 2009). By engaging children in discussions, and presenting them with moral dilemmas and conflicts, teachers allow them to experience cognitive dissonance, observe their errors in reasoning and move on to the next level of moral development (Stojiljković, 2009).

Historical beginnings of cognitive-developmental approach are linked to Jean Piaget. By studying children's perceptions of games and their use of rules in these games, Piaget was the first psychologist who drew significant conclusions about children's perception of justice and the course of child development (Hofman, 2003). The fact that he chose to use games in order to investigate the way children think was certainly not accidental. Namely, each of the games studied by Piaget implied the existence of a system of rules that children, without any pressure from adults and in order to successfully perform the game, must follow. By monitoring the children and the game, we discover how children perceive the rules, whether they understand these as something unchanging, or they choose not to take these seriously, and all of these observations allow us to make a conclusion about their level of development. Piaget tried to apply the concept of the development of cognitive structures to the field of morality. Cognitive development occurs in a series of distinct stages, thus, the development of morality linked with the changes in cognitive development also takes place in stages (Piaget, 1932).

Piaget (1932) suggested two phases, that is, two stages of moral reasoning development - *the stage of heteronomous morality* and *the stage of autonomous morality*:

Heteronomous morality is based on the respect of all rules made by some authority figure, where children consider these rules as being absolute and unchanging. The stage of heteronomous morality determined by the ages of 7 to 8 years old corresponds to the egocentric morality in children, while their way of thinking is dictated by moral realism. Being good means being obedient, and good actions are all those which reflect obedience to

authority. The consequences of actions are regarded objectively, without involving and considering intent.

Autonomous morality occurs in late adolescence and it is the orientation towards mutual respect and equality of all people. Being good means being righteous. Righteousness is reflected in the respect of social contract that relies on reciprocity. Moral reasoning takes place after other people's intentions are considered and interpreted. The attitude towards the rules also changes. The rules are no longer absolutes that are imposed by some authority and which must be followed.

According to Piaget, moral development occurs as a result of two distinct processes – biological (cognitive) maturation and interaction with the environment. Interaction with the environment allows children to change their attitude toward authority and to increase their ability to put themselves in someone else's place, which are all prerequisites for mature morality (Piaget, 1932).

3. KOHLBERG'S THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

The cognitive-developmental approach to morality by Lawrence Kohlberg has dominated the moral psychology field for over twenty years now. Kohlberg's approach to studying morality is interdisciplinary because it takes into account the issues and benefits of developmental psychology and normative ethics, and applies them to everyday issues of social justice. Based on a study he conducted on a sample of 75 American boys from early adolescence through young manhood, Kohlberg (1984) found definite and universal levels of development in moral thought by presenting them with hypothetical moral dilemmas. Differences in moral judgments at different ages were obvious. Children at the age 10 or 11 accepted the rules as something unchanging and sacred, prescribed by adults, while older children clearly showed an awareness that even the rules reached by social agreement can be changed. Kohlberg also found that younger children made their moral decisions based on potential consequences, while older adolescents' moral reasoning depended on intention. According to Kohlberg's model, there are three levels of morality: *pre-conventional*, *conventional*, and *post-conventional morality*. Each of these three levels has two stages, and each stage is a specific cognitive structure of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1984).

Kohlberg (1968) believes that at the *pre-conventional* level of morality, right or wrong are defined based on physical consequences of actions or physical power of the authorities that make the rules. Children aged 4-10 years are at this level (10 being the age the transition to conventional level of morality begins). A person at this level of morality internalizes and follows the rules of one's own family, group or nation.

The priority of the *conventional level* is to maintain and preserve social order. Focus of attention is the individual's relationship with the social group. An individual tries to maintain social order, follow the rules and laws, and act in accordance with expectations and roles.

Post-conventional level is characterized by the transition to autonomous moral principles. At the post-conventional level, individuals' moral judgments are independent of the authority of the groups to which they belong. A person at this level accepts social rules, however, he or she actually accepts the ethical principles that are at the core of those rules. In situations where ethical principles are conflicted with social rules, individuals try to be guided by ethical principles.

Kohlberg's *stage 1* resembles Piaget's first stage. Morality is imposed by external world in the form of absolute moral norms. Moral reasoning of this stage is characterized by *egocentrism, moral realism and heteronomy* (Kohlberg, 1976).

Egocentrism is reflected in the inability of children to put themselves in someone else's place and to realize that right and wrong can be viewed from other perspectives.

Moral realism is the belief that right or wrong are inseparable from a person's doings and actions.

Heteronomous morality reflects children's assumption that powerful authorities have set the rules that are absolute, that must be followed and if they are not followed, punishment will ensue. Punishment or reward are seen as the automatic consequence of certain actions. Kohlberg named this stage of moral reasoning *pre-conventional* because at this age children are still not active members of society.

At *stage 2*, called the *instrumental-relativist orientation*, it is recognized that there is not only one perspective, but that others as well have their own needs, interests and views that can also be equally valid. Since everything is relative, each person is free to make moral decisions based on his or her interests. Only those actions that satisfy one's own needs and interests are seen as right and proper. Morality is based on instrumental exchange, so at this stage moral reciprocity elements occur for the first time, and this reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" (Kohlberg, 1976).

Stage 3, or the interpersonal concordance implies behaviour which is in accordance with the rules set by one's family or society (Kohlberg, 1976). Good behaviour implies respecting mutual agreements, pleasing others, and meeting the expectations of society.

Stage 4 Kohlberg (1976) calls law and order, or societal conformity stage. At stage 4, being moral means being socially responsible and moral behaviour involves doing one's duty in society, respect for the law and authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake. A person makes moral decisions from the perspective of a society member, taking into account solely social welfare.

Stage 5 is the stage of prior rights and social contract. While at *stage 4* people want a society to function well, at *stage 5*, however, they are looking for a concept that will make society good. A person at this stage of morality believes that every good society relies on social contract and on the respect of certain standards, values and rights. Although all social groups within a society have different values, all members of society should agree on certain democratic values as well as some universal rights, such as the freedom of liberty and life (Crain, 1985). Unlike stage 4, where laws are not questioned, at this stage it is acceptable that morality and law come into conflict, since it is believed that laws might possibly be inadequate or imperfect.

At *stage 6*, which is the stage of universal ethical principles, moral reasoning is guided by the principles of justice and equality which are above society and law. Although universal, these rules are not always applied, which points to the rationality of the process of moral reasoning. Kohlberg (1976) believed that this stage of moral reasoning is purely theoretical, since this level of moral reasoning was found only in people dealing with ethics and philosophy.

Learning about these distinct stages is the basis of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Stojiljković (2009) claims that Kohlberg interprets morality using one principle – the principle of justice and equality. He uses this principle as a starting point, and then further derives the stages he sees as the sequence of different perceptions of justice and equality. Each subsequent stage has a better cognitive organization than the previous one, and has a more organized more comprehensive and balanced structure. Based on his 20 year-

long longitudinal study, Kohlberg found that advancement in moral development occurs when one acknowledges the inadequacy of the current cognitive structure to solve sociomoral dilemmas.

Based on numerous interviews with children and adults conducted in different cultures, Kohlberg found that these stages always occur in the same, *universal* order, that is, they are the same in all cultures. According to Kohlberg (1976), each individual has to pass through the same levels (however, there are differences among individuals as to the highest level of moral reasoning they reach). The argument that each culture nurtures and passes on different moral values through socialization cannot be considered in this case. Kohlberg explains that his stages do not relate to different, culturally-conditioned moral values, but to specific forms of moral reasoning (Kohlberg and Gilligan, 1971). This means that two people coming from two different cultures who are at the same stage of moral development can give different, culturally-conditioned, even contrary answers to moral dilemmas, but the same way of reasoning will be at the base of these answers.

In addition to the fact that cultural studies have confirmed the universality of the order of these stages, they have also emphasized the difference between the pace people from different cultures moving through these stages as well as those cultural factors can reach the ultimate peak of moral development. Kohlberg (Nisan and Kohlberg, 1982; according to Crain, 1985) explains this by referring to Jean Piaget's theory. Piaget argued that although culture does not directly affect the formation of children's moral reasoning, it can certainly encourage thinking in general. Through their interaction with the environment, children become more or less motivated and encouraged to actively think about the world around them. In some less developed, tradition-oriented societies, children will be encouraged to see the world around them through interpersonal relationships, empathy, and norms of care. The environment that such children are growing up in does not provide them with the opportunity to experience a different, more appropriate way of thinking, which is why their moral reasoning will remain at stage 3 of moral development. If children are relocated from such an environment and notice the inapplicability of group norms of care and empathy in a larger, urban environment, their moral reasoning will reach stage 4. An even more dramatic change in moral development can occur as a result of university education where they may take classes in which the professors deliberately question the unexamined assumptions of their childhoods and adolescences (Keniston, 1971; according to Crain, 1985).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Goal

The research goal was to identify the differences in the level of moral reasoning among students of biomedical, technical and social sciences.

4.2. Sample

The sample included the students at their final year at university (100 students from each of the three groups of sciences – social, biomedical and technical). The sample included 50 students from each of the following faculties from the University of Niš: Faculty of Philosophy (Department of Psychology), Faculty of Law, Faculty of Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. The sample was

mixed and it included 154 males and 146 females. Participants were first informed about the purpose of the research and that the results would be used in accordance with the Ethical Code of Psychologists of Serbia. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the research, that is, they gave their consent. Questionnaires were assigned to groups, and they were anonymous.

4.3. Variables

1. *The levels of moral reasoning (conventional and post-conventional) and the stages of moral reasoning (stage 2, stage 3, stage 4, stage 5A, stage 5B, stage 6).*
2. *Student's professional choice* – represents his/her choice to study some faculty at the University of Niš, Serbia.

4.4. Instrument

Rest's DIT (Defining Issues Test, Rest, 1986) was used to investigate moral reasoning. The DIT is an objective test, and it consists of six stories that are similar to Kohlberg's famous dilemmas, while Rest allowed a shorter version of the test to be used. A shorter version of this test, consisting of three stories, was used in this study. The stories describe situations where there is not only one, obvious, acceptable solution, and the circumstances trigger moral dilemmas. Each moral dilemma comes with 12 items that can help the participants decide on what is right, and each of these reflects a stage of development defined by Kohlberg's theory. The translation of Rest's test was first used in our region to assess moral reasoning in students - future teachers (Stojiljković and Dosković, 1989); the next time it was used to evaluate morality in high school students (Stojiljković, 1995; according to Stojiljković, 2009), but the factor structure of the test was somewhat different from the original version of the test (Stojiljković, 1995a), and there were also issues with the reliability of the scales (Stojiljković, 1995b). After that, the focus was to develop a modified version of Rest's test, as well as to improve its metric characteristics. The new version, used in the research of moral reasoning and empathy in teachers (Stojanović, 2010; according to Stojiljković, Stojanović and Dosković, 2012), was found to have satisfactory reliability.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of variance conducted using the sample of students of social, biomedical and technical sciences showed that at the conventional level of moral reasoning no statistically significant differences were found ($F_{(299)} = 2.433$, $p > 0.05$), while at the post-conventional level ($F_{(299)} = 23.166$, $p < 0.01$) there were statistically significant differences depending on the group of sciences.

These findings are fully consistent with the cognitive-developmental approach and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Conventional level of moral development is the predominant level of morality for most cultures, and it is generally seen as the model level for adult population. This level of moral reasoning requires an individual to identify him/herself with general social conventions, to meet the expectations of family, group or nation, and maintain social order (Kohlberg, 1976; Stojiljković, 2009). It is expected that the conventional level of moral development is most common in adults and it can also be found even in people with average intellectual abilities. Therefore, the results indicate that students

from all three investigated science groups have reached a certain level of logical and socio-cognitive functioning, which is a prerequisite for conventional moral reasoning; thus, there were no differences observed at this level of morality. The transition from the conventional to the postconventional level of moral reasoning is preconditioned by the development of thinking in formal logical terms, but other prerequisites are also needed to make this progress. Individuals at this level of moral reasoning show commitment to the preservation of human rights and freedoms and respect for human dignity (Popović, 1991).

Table 1 Differences in the degree of development of moral reasoning among students of social, biomedical and technical sciences (post hoc test)

Scale	Group of science		Mean Difference	p
Postconventional level	Social	Technical	4.010	0.000
	Biomedical	Technical	5.750	0.000

Table 1. shows us that the post-conventional level of moral reasoning is higher in students of social and biomedical sciences than in students of technical sciences.

The fact that post-conventional level of moral reasoning is higher in students of biomedical and social sciences can be partly explained by the specifics of the sciences they study. Since they opted for people-oriented professions, students of biomedical and social sciences acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge that will prepare them and teach them how to respect people and their individual rights. Students of law, psychology, medicine and dentistry, unlike students of electrical and mechanical engineering, often encounter various moral and ethical dilemmas during various courses, in literature, and eventually in practice. We should not ignore the fact that the discussions triggered by those dilemmas can significantly affect the development of moral reasoning. Therefore, we would like to reiterate the main premise of cognitive approach to morality, which claims that cognitive development is necessary but not sufficient for moral development. Kohlberg, as well as other supporters of this approach, emphasize that a person should also have enough experience in interpersonal relationships, and that the development of morality can be encouraged by presenting an individual with the arguments and views from the stage of morality subsequent to the one that person is currently at - all of which is mentioned in moral education programs (Popović, 1978; 1988; Miočinović, 2004; Stojiljković, 2000; 2009).

When it comes to the distinct stages of moral reasoning development, the results have shown that at stage 3 ($F_{(299)} = 7.260$, $p < 0.01$), stage 4 ($F_{(299)} = 11.831$, $p < 0.01$), stage 5A ($F_{(299)} = 24.176$, $p < 0.01$), stage 5B ($F_{(299)} = 6.229$, $p < 0.01$), stage 6 ($F_{(299)} = 8.051$, $p < 0.01$) there were statistically significant differences in the degree of development of moral reasoning.

Results in Table 2. have shown that stage 3 is higher in students of social and technical sciences than in students of biomedical sciences. Table 2. also shows us that at stage 4 as well as stage 5A, there are statistically significant differences among the groups of sciences, meaning that these stages are higher in students of biomedical and social sciences than in students of technical sciences. Stage 5B and stage 6 are more prevalent in students of biomedical sciences than in students from other two groups of sciences.

The differences among students were noticed at stage 3, and indicate that this stage is higher in students of social and technical sciences than in students of biomedical sciences. Stage 3 of moral development primarily relates to care for others, respecting expectations and meeting the requirements of society. It is assumed that students of social sciences, due to the specifics of

Table 2 Differences in the degree of development of moral reasoning among students of social, biomedical and technical sciences (post hoc test)

Scales	Group of science		Mean Difference	p
Stage 3	Social	Biomedical	2.770	0.001
	Technical	Biomedical	2.590	0.002
Stage 4	Social	Technical	2.310	0.003
	Biomedical	Technical	3.740	0.000
Stage 5A	Social	Technical	3.500	0.000
	Biomedical	Technical	4.170	0.000
Stage 5B	Biomedical	Social	0.400	0.040
	Biomedical	Technical	0.680	0.001
Stage 6	Biomedical	Social	0.670	0.043
	Biomedical	Technical	0.900	0.007

their future professions that involve working with people, will care for other people. On the other hand, students of technical sciences, whose professions are not directly linked to other people, can have a pronounced second characteristic of stage 3 which relates to the tendency to meet certain social expectations. This is one possible explanation for the differences observed regarding the stage 3 of moral reasoning, but it is certainly not fully satisfactory.

Statistically significant differences occurred for stage 4, as well as stage 5A, which were higher in students of biomedical and social sciences than in technical sciences students, which was expected.

Stages 5B, as well as stage 6, the highest stage of moral functioning, are more prominent in students of biomedical sciences than in students of the other two groups of sciences. This also explains the fact that stage 3 moral reasoning was not so frequent among students of biomedical sciences. Given the level of responsibility their future profession carries, it is encouraging that stage 5B which relies on principles of conscience is higher in students of biomedical sciences. Stage 6 implies orientation towards universal ethical norms, so certain moral principles, such as Kant's categorical imperative, are considered universal and binding at this stage of morality (Kohlberg, 1976; Popović, 1973; Miočinović, 1988). This result can be explained by the fact that moral principles of justice, reciprocity, respect for human life and dignity are simply some of the moral principles and ethical requirements that students of biomedical sciences are introduced with during their studies; when they take the Hippocratic Oath, they commit to these ethical requirements. "I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity" is something that students of biomedical sciences prepare for during their university days.

6. CONCLUSION

The goal of this research was to investigate the differences in moral reasoning among students of social, biomedical and technical sciences. The research started from the premise that the specific educational goals, educational programs and guidance received during schooling would cause significant differences to occur among students of the three groups of sciences.

After summarizing the results, we concluded that the initial assumption that there would be differences in moral reasoning among the students of the three groups of sciences was partially confirmed. No differences among these groups were found with regards to the

conventional level of moral reasoning, which is in accordance with numerous findings which suggest that this is the modal level for the adult population.

This research showed that there were differences among students at the post-conventional level of moral reasoning. As it was expected, postconventional level of moral reasoning was higher in students of biomedical and social sciences than in students of social sciences. It is safe to assume that the reason for this difference lies in the fact that students of biomedical and social sciences are more exposed to specific theoretical and practical knowledge during their studies, which affect the formation of a universal system of values and universal ethical principles which imply respect for universal values and treating people with respect.

Differences in moral reasoning among students were also found in terms of certain stages of moral development. Stage 3 of moral development was more prominent in students of technical and social sciences than in students of biomedical sciences. Stage 4 and stage 5A were higher in students of biomedical and social studies than in technical sciences students. Stages 5B, as well as stage 6, the highest stage of moral functioning, were more prevalent in students of biomedical sciences than in students of the other two groups of sciences.

These results can be used as a direction for future educational interventions when it comes to encouraging moral development in students. Certain practical exercises and specially designed courses within study programs, or extracurricular activities can help students adopt basic ethical knowledge and develop criteria needed to evaluate moral correctness of one's own behaviour and behaviour of other people. Maybe the time has come to start thinking about some type of moral education at a young age due to the crisis of values that has been present for so long, and due to the conflicting messages that confuse young people. It seems to be getting increasingly difficult to know what is desirable and proper behaviour, not only from the perspective of an individual, but also from the standpoint of long-term best interests of society. This type of education could help and enable moral development in students and youth population in general, as well as the development of their prosocial orientation, which would then bring welfare to the wider community.

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MORALNO RASUĐIVANJE STUDENATA RAZLIČITOG PROFESIONALNOG USMERENJA

Cilj istraživanja odnosio se na ispitivanje razlika u izraženosti moralnog rasuđivanja studenata društvenih, biomedicinskih i tehničkih nauka. Uzorak je činilo 300 ispitanika, oba pola (154 ispitanika muškog i 146 ispitanika ženskog pola). Za ispitivanje moralnog rasuđivanja korišćena je modifikovana verzija Restovog testa DIT. Teorijsku osnovu testa čini Kolbergova teorija stadijalnog moralnog razvoja, prema kojoj se moralni razvoj odvija kroz tri nivoa i šest stadijuma. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da na postkonvencionalnom nivou moralnog rasuđivanja postoji statistički značajna razlika s obzirom na grupu nauka: veća je izraženost postkonvencionalnog rasuđivanja kod studenta društvenih i biomedicinskih nauka nego kod studenta tehničkih nauka. U pogledu konvencionalnog nivoa moralnog rasuđivanja, koji predstavlja modalni nivo za populaciju odraslih, razlike nisu utvrđene. Kada su pojedinačni stadijumi u pitanju, rezultati pokazuju da na stadijumu 3, stadijumu 4, stadijumu 5A, stadijumu 5B i stadijumu 6 postoje statistički značajne razlike u stepenu izraženosti moralnog rasuđivanja. Stadijum 3 je izraženiji kod studenata društvenih i tehničkih nauka nego kod studenata biomedicinskih nauka. Stadijum 4 i stadijum 5A su zastupljeniji kod studenata biomedicinskih i društvenih, nego kod studenata tehničkih nauka. Stadijum 5B i stadijum 6 su izraženiji kod studenata biomedicinskih nauka nego kod studenata druge dve grupe nauka. Nalazi se diskutuju iz ugla kognitivističke paradigme o moralnom razvoju i doprinosa obrazovnih i socijalnih faktora procesu moralizacije osobe.

Ključne reči: *psihologija morala; kognitivno-razvojni pristup; moralno rasuđivanje; Kolbergova teorija moralnog razvoja; studenti; profesionalna orijentacija*