



Effect of religiosity and self-control on aggressive behavior through moral disengagement

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Religiosity, self-control, aggressive behavior, moral disengagement.	Aggressive behavior becomes a detrimental action in social interactions that has a negative impact on others, whether verbally, physically or psychologically. This research aims to analyze the effect of religiosity and self-control on aggressive behavior, with moral disengagement as a mediating factor among junior high school students in Bojonegoro. The research was conducted at five SMP Plus schools in Bojonegoro using the ex post facto method with a sample of 261 students (52% males and 48% females) selected through cluster random sampling. The results of path analysis and sobel test show that there is a significant effect of religiosity and self-control on aggressive behavior through moral disengagement. These findings have implications for counseling services in dealing with aggressive behavior.

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Introduction

Aggressive behavior is a prevalent issue among students that requires fully attention from parents, teachers, students, government, and society. This behavior is linked frequently to a lack of emotional regulation skills and difficulties in expressing emotions appropriately, leading to aggressive actions in students' daily life (Andryani & Margaretha, 2021). According to infographics from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), there has been a rise in cases over the years, with 481 cases in 2018, 321 cases in 2019, and a significant increase to 1,451 cases in 2020. Aggressive behavior likely occurs among students' peers involved in deviant groups, due to engagement in violent communities and a lack of school involvement (Lin et al., 2020).

The rapid development of technology and societal changes influence students' behavior through social media, along with the internal and external factors coming with it. Aggressive behavior among students, not only within school environments but also outside of school, is still observed. The instances of aggressive behavior students usually experience include inter-school fights, disruptive road convoys that cause traffic chaos, and the use of inappropriate language such as cursing, insulting, and mocking others (Oktober et al., 2022). Buss & Perry (1992) define aggressive behavior as the intention to cause harm to others, frequently as a means of expressing negative emotions like hatred, in order to accomplish a desired outcome. Aggressive behavior is categorized into various forms, such as: (1) Physical aggression, which involves physical attacks as an expression of anger by injuring or hurting others; (2) Verbal aggression, which involves causing harm through verbal attacks; (3) Anger, which is the emotional representation that physiologically

drives a person to prepare for aggression; and (4) hostility, which encompasses feelings of resentment and perceived injustice, leading to cognitive processes such as hatred, suspicion, and envy towards others.

Other than that, Guswani & Kawuryan (2011) identify emotional maturity, self-control, emotional intelligence, media influence, and religiosity as factors contributing to aggressive behavior. Students' behavior is significantly affected by their interactions within the school environment. Both positive and negative interactions in the school setting highly impact behavior and moral development. Education, especially religious education and the application of religious knowledge in daily life, is the source of the idea of moral development in students (Prasetya et al., 2019). Students who regularly attend religious classes tend to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior compared to those who do not participate in such classes (Hamid, 2018). According to the preliminary research, which included observations, interviews, and the distribution of aggressive behavior instrument among students in five junior high schools in Bojonegoro, 16% of students displayed low levels, 58% moderate levels, and 26% high levels of aggressive behavior. These findings indicate that a significant proportion of students at SMP Plus Bojonegoro fall within the moderate to high categories of aggressive behavior, suggesting that they struggle to control their aggression despite being in a highly religious environment at school and in their dormitories.

Religiosity becomes one factor affecting students' aggressive behavior. Students who engage in positive activities and religious practices within their peers experience an increase in religiosity. It is supported by Siroj et al. (2019) who argue that strong religious functioning within the family, supported by positive peer interactions, can enhance religiosity, enabling students to better cope with their problems. Furthermore, a school culture that fosters the development of religious character impact students' personality formation, enabling students regulate their speech, think positively, and exhibit good behavior (Arimbi & Minsih, 2022). In addition, Saroglou (2019) defines religiosity as individual differences in the extent of interest or involvement in religion, encompassing attitudes, cognition, emotions, and behaviors related to what is perceived as divine.

Students are undergoing lifestyle changes as a result of the current era of rapid technology growth, which affect students' moral deviations like violent behavior. The main factor contributing to students' violent conduct is their inability to regulate their emotions, which has detrimental effects on both the students and the people around them. Students' success is determined not only by their academic performance but also by their capacity to restrain their violent impulses (Atina et al., 2022). When students are able to maintain self-control in all aspects of their life—including their behaviors, disputes, and decision-making—they are regarded as acting in a mature manner. Well-regulated self-control can significantly reduce the occurrence of aggressive behavior (Madjid & Tajuddin, 2021).

Low levels of self-control are associated with making poor decisions, breaking rules without considering the consequences, whereas high levels of self-control play a crucial role in mitigating aggressive behavior (Rahayu, 2018). In addition, Tangney et al. (2018) defined self-control as the individual's ability to modify responses leading to undesirable behavior in reaction to a given situation. Self-control is characterized by the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behaviors, as well as to stop habitual patterns. Students with high levels of self-control are better equipped to reduce aggressive behavior when faced with stimuli that might otherwise trigger such responses.

Apart from self-control and religiosity, moral disengagement is another important aspect in treating aggressive conduct. Moral disengagement, according to Bandura et al. (1996), is the result of a person's inability to control their behavior, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in inhumane actions. Moral disengagement is the process by which an individual's internal regulatory mechanisms become inactive, leading to behavior that is inhumane and violates established norms. Moral disengagement might encourage immoral behavior; on the other hand, when a student's

self-regulation is inactive, identified by low moral disengagement, aggressive behavior may decrease (Caprara et al., 2014). A study by Cardwell (2017) discovered a connection between moral disengagement, deviant behavior, and spiritual-religious perspectives. Cardwell found that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between spiritual-religious attitudes and deviant behavior. In his research, Cardwell recommended that future researchers need to explore the connections between spirituality, religiosity, moral disengagement, and other forms of deviant behavior.

Building on the extend and respond to the recommendations from Cardwell (2017) by investigating the role of moral disengagement as a mediator between positive attitudes and deviant behavior, the research is conducted involving aggressive behavior as the deviant behavior variable, and religiosity and self-control as the positive attitude variables. The findings of this study on aggressive behavior are intended to assist school counselors in developing counseling programs to address students' aggressive behavior.

Method

The population of this study consisted of students from five SMP Plus schools in Bojonegoro, which are SMP Plus Al-Amanah, SMP Plus Ar-Rahmat, SMP Plus Maulana, SMP Plus Al-Maliki, and SMP Plus Miftahul Ulum, with a total of 742 students. The sample for this study comprised 261 respondents, selected using cluster random sampling.

The religiosity instrument was developed by the researcher, referencing the dimensions of religiosity as adapted from the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness (4-BDRS) by Saroglou (2019), which include four basic dimensions, such as believing (8 items), bonding (7 items), behaving (6 items), and belonging (5 items). The instrument consists of 26 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The validity test results ranged from 0.215 to 0.658, while the reliability alpha was 0.808.

Data on self-control were collected using an instrument developed by the researcher, adapted from the Brief Self-Control Scale by Tangney et al. (2018), encompassing five aspects, such as self-discipline (5 items), deliberative/non-impulsive action (6 items), healthy habits (6 items), work ethics (5 items), and reliability (6 items). The instrument consists of 28 items rated on a 4-point scale (4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The validity test results ranged from 0.284 to 0.735, while the reliability alpha was 0.853.

The aggressive behavior instrument was developed by the researcher based on the aspects of the Buss & Perry (1992) Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) by Buss & Perry (1992), which includes physical aggression (4 items), verbal aggression (4 items), anger (5 items), and hostility (5 items). This measurement tool consists of 18 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The validity test results ranged from 0.199 to 0.608, while the reliability alpha was 0.485.

The moral disengagement instrument was developed by the researcher based on the eight dimensions of moral disengagement proposed by Bandura et al. (1996), consisting of moral justification (3 items), euphemistic labeling (3 items), advantageous comparison (3 items), displacement of responsibility (4 items), diffusion of responsibility (3 items), distortion of consequences (4 items), attribution of blame (3 items), and dehumanization (4 items). This measurement tool consists of 27 items, rated on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The validity test results ranged from 0.217 to 0.699, while the reliability alpha was 0.845.

Result and Discussion

Based on descriptive analysis data, it is shown that the students' religiosity is categorized as medium ($M=85.02$; $SD=7.31$), self-control in medium category ($M=80.93$; $SD=9.82$), aggressive

behavior in medium category ($M=39.56$; $SD=4.65$), and moral disengagement in the medium category ($M=55.09$; $SD=9.04$).

Table 1. Mean, SD, and category of each variable

Variable	M	SD	Category
Religiosity	85.02	7.31	Moderate
Self-control	80.93	9.82	Moderate
Aggressive behavior	39.56	4.65	Moderate
Moral disengagement	55.09	9.04	Moderate

Table 2. The result of path analysis and sobel test

Predictor	β	t	R	R ²	F	P
Crit: Moral disengagement			0.61	0.37	77.98	
Religiosity (X1)	-0.34	-6.28				< 0.05
Self-control (X2)	-0.37	-6.86				< 0.05
Crit: Aggressive behavior			0.57	0.32	41.42	
Religiosity (X1)	-0.03	-0.58				> 0.05
Self-control (X2)	-0.29	-4.68				< 0.05
Moral disengagement (Z)	0.33	5.20				< 0.05
Mediator	β	Z _{sobel}	S.E	P		
X1 – Z – Y	-0.07	-4.03	0.018	< 0.05		
X2 – Z – Y	-0.06	-4.19	0.014	< 0.05		

Notes: Y = aggressive behavior

It is discovered from the path analysis and Sobel test results conducted in Table 2 ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$) that religiosity has no significant effect on aggressive behavior; self-control has a negative correlation with aggressive behavior ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$); religiosity has a negative correlation with moral disengagement ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.05$); self-control has a negative correlation with moral disengagement ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.05$), and moral disengagement has a positive correlation with aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, Table 2 also demonstrates an indirect relationship between religiosity and aggressive behavior through moral disengagement ($\beta = -0.07$, $p < 0.05$). The results also indicate an indirect effect of self-control on aggressive behavior through moral disengagement ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that religiosity and self-control affect aggressive behavior through moral disengagement as a mediating variable. The data in Table 2 indicate that religiosity does not have a significant effect on aggressive behavior. This finding contradicts previous research by Gumelar & Yuska (2023), which suggested that religiosity significantly affects aggressive behavior by providing inner peace through various forms of worship, thereby reducing aggressive behavior and preventing aggressive behavioral disturbances.

Nonetheless, the results of this research could be explained by the possibility that levels of aggressive behavior are correlated with a decrease in religious beliefs. Pegah (2022) discovered that individuals with strong religiosity may still exhibit aggressive behavior due to cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual's religious beliefs are not aligned with their actions, leading to aggressive behavior even though they recognize it as morally wrong. Additionally, individuals may experience discomfort that drives changes in behavior or beliefs, resulting in negative emotions and poor behavior. This could explain why students in highly religious environments (such as those in SMP Plus schools who receive extensive religious education) might still exhibit aggressive behavior.

Aggressive behavior is significantly affected by self-control, suggesting that those who possess greater degrees of self-control are less prone to display aggressive behavior. Self-control enables students to properly manage both positive and negative behaviors, preventing aggressive actions that could injure them or others. It also helps people develop awareness and thoughtful

decision-making processes (Putri et al., 2021). Similarly, research by Asnidar et al. (2022) found that self-control is a crucial aspect of behavior. Strong self-control increases students' likelihood of responding to circumstances and events in a fair and appropriate manner. In social environments, students with good self-control serve as role models for others by demonstrating wise and positive behavior during responding to situations and managing emotions. Thus, self-control is essential for students to navigate challenging situations that could have negative consequences.

Moral disengagement is highly affected by religiosity; meant as an individual's level of moral disengagement reduces as their religiosity increases. Faith and a person's relationship with God are closely linked to religiosity. Strong religious convictions reduce the likelihood of damaging defense mechanisms being used by individuals who want to morally reject social standards. Religious people typically use defensive strategies that help them act responsibly and steer clear of bad decisions that could compromise their moral integrity and hurt others, such aggressive behavior (D'Urso et al., 2019). This finding aligns with research conducted by Bulut et al. (2022), which demonstrated the significant effect of religiosity on moral disengagement. It is every human obligation to act morally demonstrated by specific actions that support moral behavior toward others, are consistent with religious beliefs, and create healthy emotional bonds. Additionally, this research is supported by Saroglou et al. (2020), who identified four dimensions of religiosity: believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging. In this context, the dimension of behaving which relates to morality, is considered a key aspect of religiosity.

Other than that, self-control plays a crucial role in moral reasoning, where individuals respond to situations by behaving in accordance with their moral values and adhering to social norms. Consistent with research by Li et al. (2023), the findings of this research indicate that self-control has a significant negative impact on moral disengagement. The research explains that higher levels of self-control are associated with lower levels of moral disengagement.

Each individual possesses an inherent moral mechanism shaped by the moral values and norms they believe in and express through their behavior. A cognitive process known as moral disengagement serves as a defense for unethical behavior, like acts of aggression. It is among the internal elements that may provoke the aggressive behavior. According to research by Siregar & Ayriza (2020), moral disengagement has a substantial impact on aggressive behavior, suggesting that higher moral disengagement levels are linked to an increase in aggressive behavior. As identified, students in current era frequently prioritize independence over moral principles in their social relationships, which might result in emotional instability and aggressive inclinations. Additionally, Wang et al. (2018) propose that moral disengagement functions as a socio-cognitive predictor of aggressive behavior, with higher aggressiveness levels being associated with lower psychological well-being and higher moral disengagement.

Moreover, the results of the Path analysis and Sobel test in this research indicate that moral disengagement effectively mediates the relationship between religiosity and self-control on aggressive behavior. These findings are consistent with research conducted by Cardwell (2017), which asserts that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between spiritual-religious attitudes and deviant behavior. Cardwell also found that religiosity and moral values are negatively associated with deviant behavior. However, individuals may still suffer the consequences of their deviant actions, even if they do not perceive their behavior as wrong and believe that religion can protect them without a strong moral conviction.

This study further reveals that moral disengagement successfully mediates the relationship between self-control and aggressive behavior. These findings align with previous research by Kokkinos et al. (2016), which demonstrated that moral disengagement can mediate the impact of a lack of empathy on aggressive behavior. Additionally, it is identified that moral disengagement mediated the association between aggressive behavior and low empathy. It indicates that a lack of

empathy becomes the characteristic of early adolescence, in which they struggle to recognize the moral consequences of their negative actions.

Moreover, research by Alexandra (2019) highlights that self-control is a core component of the self-regulation system (Tangney et al., 2018). This component, according to social cognitive theory by Bandura et al. (1996), enables students to exert control over their cognitions by superseding ideas and routines in order to conform to their moral standards. In addition, moral disengagement involves undesirable strategies that allow individuals to deviate from social norms; while self-control is essential for assisting students in upholding moral principles, which lowers moral disengagement and deters aggressive behavior.

The findings of this research have significant implications for school counseling, since they highlight the necessity for counselors to concentrate on helping students develop their self-control and religion. Students can conduct in accordance with their religious teachings and refrain from forbidden behaviors, such as aggressive behavior, by using their religiosity as a guiding principle. Contrarily, self-control serves as an internal regulator, empowering students to abstain from bad actions and promoting independence through competent self-management. The degree of moral disengagement, as a predictor of aggressive behavior, can be decreased by enhancing both religion and self-control, which will lessen the likelihood that students will act aggressively.

Furthermore, school counselors can play a crucial role by offering group counseling services that provide students with a better understanding of aggressive behavior. Group counseling has been shown to reduce aggressive behavior; as discovered by Siburian (2023), students who participated in group counseling sessions exhibited improvements in emotional regulation and anger management, leading to a noticeable decrease in their aggressive behaviors.

Conclusion

This research findings concludes that the variable of moral disengagement successfully mediates the relationship between religiosity and self-control on aggressive behavior. Furthermore, it was discovered that self-control and moral disengagement were strong predictors of aggressive behavior, while religiosity did not. Future research is encouraged to explore innovative approaches by using moral disengagement as a mediator between different independent and dependent variables. This is particularly relevant given the limited number of studies in Indonesia that examine moral disengagement as a mediating variable between positive and negative behaviors.

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