

Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents and its Implications on their Lifelong Development

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the paper is to study the implications of emotional intelligence in adolescents. This is a theoretical paper, wherein patterns are drawn from the existing review of literature as well as Mayer and Salovey's Model of Emotional Intelligence, the Bar-On Model of Emotional Intelligence, along with Goleman's Model of Emotional Intelligence. The discussion around these theories and literature shows that higher emotional intelligence among adolescents has a positive impact on their overall development, including academics, psychological well-being, lifestyle choices, and adjustment among peers. The paper also attempts to understand emotional intelligence in adolescents in the Indian setting, and makes some suggestions to improve upon it.

Keywords: *Emotional Quotient; Adolescents; Mayer & Salovey; Bar-On; Goleman.*

Emotional Intelligence has been directly linked to scholastic success among adolescents (Downey, Mountstephen, Lloyd & Stough, 2008). Even though some studies point out the EI does not significantly contribute to social and academic success among teenagers (Woitaszewsky & Aalsma, 2003); it has been popularly portrayed as important to success and even more critical than Intelligence Quotient (Goleman, 1995). This paper tries to understand the influence of emotional intelligence on different aspects of an adolescent's life and development. It also attempts to draw out some patterns about how emotional intelligence makes a significant impact.

Adolescence has often been described as a time of physical and emotional changes that every young person between the ages of 13-19 goes through. It is a transition from childhood to adulthood, and is a crucial time for young individuals to develop their thinking patterns, emotional patterns, and form close relationships. It is also a time for exploration of their own self, societal norms, sexuality, career choices, and peer groups.

With the world changing so fast, and the focus now shifting to qualities such as empathy, pro-activeness, social intelligence, adolescents also need to keep pace with not only what is happening with them, but to others as well. They need to learn to respond to other people's

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behaviour, and regulate their own emotions and responses too. There are a number of roles emotional intelligence plays in the transition from childhood to adulthood, which we will try and understand further. But first, let us understand what exactly emotional intelligence is.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use that information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It consists of three adaptive abilities – appraisal and expression of emotion; regulation of emotion; and utilization of emotion in solving problems. The first component is the ability to understand emotions in one self as well as others and also understand how it is expressed. The second component deals with the ability to control emotions and ensure their appropriation. The third component is the ability to use emotions in creative as well as rational thinking to ensure overall emotional and intellectual development in one's life (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Emotional intelligence is not only associated with assessing and assimilating emotions, but also motivation and global personal and social functioning of a person (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995). "Emotional-Social Intelligence is a cross-section of inter-related emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands" (Bar-On, 1997).

Martinez (1997) refers to emotional intelligence as being "an array of non cognitive skills, capabilities and competencies that influence a person's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures" (Len Tischler et al., 2002).

Goleman (1997) also provides a very useful definition of emotional intelligence, which is about: ☐

- ❖ Knowing what you feel and being able to handle those feelings without having them overpower you; ☐
- ❖ Being able to motivate yourself to get jobs done, and being creative and performing at your peak; and
- ❖ Sensing what others may be feeling and handling interpersonal relationships effectively. In other words, Emotional Intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in us and in our relationships. His model of EI has five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

All three models of EI are assumed to be playing a role (positive or negative) in adolescent development throughout this paper.

Indians have a different approach to behaviour and emotional development because of the collectivist culture we reside in. It has also been shown that other collectivist cultures such as the East Asians tend to have a more holistic thought process, which can also be viewed as "dialectical" reasoning (Nisbett et. al., 2001). For example, the emotion of "*Lajya*" is seen as a positive emotion in India, which may be viewed negatively in the western countries (Hejmadi, Davidson & Rozin, 2000). The Indian perspective on human development also recognizes the role of contextual factors and children embeddedness in a more notable manner (Misra, Srivastava & Gupta, 1999). As such, the Indian Model of emotional intelligence encompasses dimensions such as: Social Sensitivity, Pro-Social Values, Action Tendencies and Affective States (Sibia, Srivastava & Misra, 2003, 2004a). This model

conceives emotional intelligence as rooted in the traditional, religious and philosophical context, and focuses on the role of family and society in the development of one's emotions. However, the research on the impact of low EI on many aspects is limited, which serves as the motivation to assimilate this paper. The implications of emotional intelligence among the adolescent population are understood through already established trials and the existing theories in this area. It is supplemented by some patterns observed in the existing literature and theories.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

EI has been implicated in gender differences and coping strategies among males and females. A study conducted on Bahraini adolescents showed that gender was significantly associated with EI, as well as coping styles. Females showed a higher level of emotional intelligence and non-productive coping style than males (Alumran, Punamaki, 2008). Supporting this claim, another study conducted by Shaheeh & Shaheen (2016) on Indian adolescents indicated that there is a positive relationship between EI and Psychological Well-Being. Moreover, the results also showed that female adolescents had higher EI levels than male adolescents, but not overall psychological well-being.

A recent study conducted in India in the area of EI has found that there are no significant differences in the levels of emotional intelligence between males and females and that the overall level of emotional intelligence remains low (Katyal & Awasthi, 2005). However, some other studies are suggestive of EI being higher in females, and being positively related to skills of identifying emotional expressions, providing social support and mood management behaviour (Ciarrochi, Chan & Bajgar, 2001).

A higher EI has been shown to lead to better school performance, and has been shown to be impacted by demographics. It has been concluded in a study that EI levels are negatively related to internal and external behavioural problems in adolescents, and positively related to school achievements and social activity (*Kušlevič – Veršekienė, Pukinskaitė, 2009*). *The study went on to observe a positive relationship between EI and Gender, since EI was higher among females; Parents' education, household income, and location of residence were also found to be positively related to EI. However, Harrod & Scheer (2005) after examining EI among 200 adolescents found no significant differences between EI scores and age, location of residence and household income. They did imply that EI was significantly higher in females than males, and that father's education may also play a role in shaping emotional intelligence. Another study in this regard suggests a strong positive relationship between academic success and several dimensions of EI (Parker et. al., 2004).*

Emotional Intelligence has also been found to impact drug & substance use, and health among adolescents. A study in this regard concluded that emotional intelligence is negatively related to an overall use of tobacco and alcohol. It is plausible that adolescents with a high EI may possess greater mental ability to resist peer pressure, thereby resisting a high TAU (Trinidad, Johnson, 2002). Researchers also suggest that a higher emotional intelligence is associated with better health (Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar & Rooke, 2007). To further this claim, Martins, Ramalho & Morin (2010) also tried to understand the relationship between EI and health, and concluded that EI was a plausible predictor of health. Another notable study in this aspect concluded that self-reported emotional intelligence is negatively related to levels of depression and anxiety. Emotional abilities were found to be an important contributor to psychological adjustment among adolescents (Fernandez-Berrocal, Alcaide, Extremera, & Pizarro (2006). These studies point towards the hypothesis that EI may help

adolescents understand themselves and their environments in a better way, which may lead them to take judicious decisions about their mental and physical health.

Research in the Indian context establishes EI as a major area of development, especially in the tribal and rural areas. A study in the Indian state of Assam in the tribal, rural, and urban areas revealed that adolescents of urban culture had more skills in all dimensions of emotional intelligence as compared to adolescents of rural culture except interpersonal management; adolescents of tribal culture had significantly low levels of emotional intelligence (Saikia, Mathur, 2015). A study among the tribal adolescents in Udaipur reveals that EI was an important factor in deciding whether adolescents are able to handle the pressure of this age group, and the social, cultural, economic and educational limitations among tribal adolescents limit the growth of their EI (Nandwana, Joshi, 2010). A similar study conducted in the district of Hissar, Haryana proved that urban adolescents had slightly better adjustment and emotional intelligence than rural adolescents. In fact, it was also inferred that caste, income, and father's occupation were positively related to higher levels of EI and adjustment among all adolescents (Punia, Sangwan, 2011). In a research done among adolescents studying at Banaras Hindu University, it was found that adolescents with a low emotional intelligence scored high on internalizing symptoms and were more alienated than others who had a higher EI score (Shrivastava, Mukhopadhyay, 2009). A lot more research needs to be done in the Indian context to understand more about the implications of EI for adolescents, its role in their development, and factors that aid in its development.

The literature review, theories on EI, and personal observation are used to draw out some patterns that are implicit and explicit throughout the paper. These patterns are discussed in detail to throw more light on the impact EI has on different aspects of an adolescent's development.

DISCUSSION

Most of the research above and the theories of Emotional Intelligence all signify that EI plays a very important role in the development of adolescents, and may even impact them throughout life. It can be due to the fact that EI helps an individual understand themselves and others' emotional and social capabilities in a better manner. Adolescents with higher EI levels may be able to cope well with the pressures of puberty, academic pressure, and changes in other's people's perception of them moving towards adulthood and resuming more responsibility. More discussion in lieu of this lies ahead.

Positive impact on academic achievement

One thing that most researchers agree on is that a higher EI level has a positive impact on an adolescent's academic achievement. Adolescents who have higher trait EI are less likely to have unauthorized absences from school (Petrides, Frederickson and Furnham, 2004). School children who scored higher on EI (using the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale) are rated more pro-social and less aggressive by their peers (Rubin, 1999).

High pro-social behaviour and consistency in attending school may automatically add to a student's scholastic abilities. Students with higher emotional intelligence may also have parents with higher emotional intelligence, which may in turn reinforce these adolescents to pay more attention to excelling at school, as well as provide them with a conducive environment for study. It may even make the transition to higher education easier, giving them more scope of growth in their college years, and ultimately a higher success rate in later years.

Difference in impact on male and female adolescents

Even though emotional intelligence has been shown to be higher among females, there are studies that do show that this might not be the case. Brody and Hall (2008) say in their study titled 'Gender and Emotion', "Girls and Boys learn different lessons in controlling their emotions. Parents talk more to their daughters than their sons about feelings and emotions (except anger). Since girls master language faster than boys, this causes them to be more experienced in expressing their feelings. Boys, for who emotional expression has not been emphasized are probably unaware of their own and other people's emotional states to a large extent" (Scharfe, 2000). This could very well be the reason for many males, especially adolescent males, choosing not to overtly express their emotional concerns. Parents, television and popular culture, may add to this aspect as well.

Apart from this, lower levels of emotional intelligence among males have also been found to be related to higher alcohol and substance use, poor relationship with friends, and deviant behaviour, whereas no such relation has been found among females (Brackett, Mayer & Warner, 2004). We could safely assume that females may be higher in EI on an average, but higher levels of EI among males could serve as a predictor of better behaviour and relationships for them. However, there still needs to be more research on the factors that bring about this difference, and seeing whether it has any further implications to improve EI levels in both the genders.

Higher EI has a positive impact on lifestyle choices

EI also seems to have an impact on the lifestyle choices that adolescents make. Lower trait EI levels have been linked to poor impulse control (Schutte et. al., 1999) and greater alcohol and drug-related problems (Riley and Schutte, 2003). Adolescents take to drug and substance abuse due to a number of reasons: peer pressure, family conflict or poor demographics, mental stress or depression, and for momentary pleasure. Studies have pointed out the positive relationship between higher EI and well-being and problem-focused coping (Por, Barriball, Fitzpatrick, Roberts, 2011). This could very well mean that adolescents with a higher EI level cope with stress in a more effective manner, and may not respond negatively to peer-pressure. They may also have a higher sense of responsibility which leads them to lesser drug and substance abuse, or making healthy lifestyle choices in general. Emotional Intelligence can serve as a valid predictor for lifestyle choices among adolescents.

Positive Implications for mental health, physical health and well-being

Most of the research points towards emotional intelligence having a significant impact on the mental health in adolescents. Poor use of emotions in adolescents may lead to higher levels of problem behaviour, such as depression, aggression, and delinquency (Siu, 2009). It is also to be noted that the ability to manage and control emotions in adolescents is predictive of their ability to manage life's challenges, therefore contributing to higher psychological and physical health (Downey, Johnston, Hansen, Birney & Stough, 2010). Even new-age addictions such as internet, video games and gambling have been found to be predicted by levels of emotional intelligence in young adults (Parker et. al., 2008).

Dimensions of perceived emotional intelligence, particularly mood clarity and repair, have also been linked to life satisfaction (Rey, Extremera & Pena, 2011). It is safe to say that emotional intelligence is in fact a stable predictor of adolescent adjustment and psychological well-being (Salguero, Palomera and Fernandez-Berrocal, 2012). Hence, EI has long-term consequences for an adolescent's health and well-being, which should prompt us to induce more interventions aiming to improve EI from a young age.

Creating solutions for the times ahead: From an Indian Perspective

Emotional Intelligence does impact the development of young adolescents in a crucial way. Not only does it have an impact on their vocational development, it also affects the way they respond to stressors in their everyday life, their interpersonal relationships, and the way they differ in expressing themselves. In the Indian context, emotional intelligence in school going adolescents is often neglected, and is associated with adulthood, without considering the fact that the roots of developing EI lie at a young age.

Indian Parents may tend to focus more on imparting familial values such as extending the family tree, respecting elders, and material contribution received from them in rearing children. Considering that emotional intelligence can be increased through training in adults (Nelis et. al., 2009), we can assume that it would work with adolescents as well.

Keeping all of this in mind, finding some solutions to work on the emotional aspect, especially with Indian adolescents, becomes utmost important. The paper attempts to provide a few ways to work on EI with adolescents:

- ❖ It is known that parenting styles can affect and predict children's emotional intelligence, and negative parental demandingness can lead to lower EI in them. Even adolescents' perceptions of their parents' influence on their EI seems to be an important predictor of their actual emotional and social functioning (Martinez-Pons, 1998). Research also shows us that children with lower emotional and social intelligence are more frequently found in families where parents express more hostile parenting, engage in more conflict, and give more attention to a child's negative behaviours than positive ones (Cummings, 1994). This does show us that Parent Education of Emotional Intelligence is the first step towards making emotionally stable adolescents.

Gottman, Katz and Hooven (1996) in a research paper gave the concept of *Scaffolding-Praising*, while talking about parenting styles. Parents high on this dimension provided their children with structure for a task, stating the rules and regulations in a relaxed manner, and waited for the child to act, giving praise and cheering at every right act the child did. This could be one of the dimensions to be talked about with parents as it might work even better than an authoritative parenting style.

- ❖ Developing a system of education that includes life skills training and emotional coaching for adolescents and aims to inculcate emotional literacy in younger children also seems like a plausible idea. Socio-emotional intervention programs at school do succeed in improving emotional skills in children (Alegre, 2011). A good example is a curriculum known as the "Dinosaur School" designed for elementary school in the US which focuses on increasing social, emotional and academic competence and reducing problem behaviour in the classroom. It has been successful and is being adopted by more and more schools (Webster-Stratton, Reid, 2004). This curriculum involves role playing, puppets being used as role models, group activities with students, and games that focus on building strong peer relationships.

NIMHANS, Bangalore also created a life skills program for rural adolescents (Vranda, Rao, 2011). The program focused on educating students about mental health, study methods, interpersonal relations and student-teacher relationship, among other things. Another program by NIMHANS in collaboration with WHO-SEARO focused on students of grades 8th, 9th, and 10th, using teachers as facilitators. The modules covered were Nutrition, Hygiene, Interpersonal Relationships, Academics, Gender Issues, Sexuality, Career, and Social

Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents and its Implications on their Lifelong Development

Responsibility. More of such programs being introduced in school where students learn about emotional intelligence through simple discussions and engaging activities is required, especially in India.

- ❖ Consistent psychological counselling in schools and teacher training need to be more in focus since school is the one place young adolescents spend the most time at.

Teachers report that 16-30% of students they teach pose ongoing problems in terms of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (Raver & Knitzer, 2001), which means that teachers need to be able to handle such cases. Even though the research is still in the nascent stages as far as India is concerned, we do know that many schools do recognize the importance of having full-time counsellors on campus, and holding regular trainings for their teachers. But the majority of schools, especially in smaller cities, still have a long way to go.

CONCLUSION

Emotional Intelligence certainly does affect the lifelong development in adolescents. Even in adults, emotional intelligence remains a predictor for greater satisfaction in relationships, social skills and marital satisfaction (Schutte et. al., 2001). Even at as young an age as 10, higher emotional intelligence has been shown to be positively related to behavioural traits like “co-operation” and “dependence” (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham and Fredrickson, 2006). Whereas low emotional intelligence may have an impact on negative behaviours and decisions during adolescence such as substance abuse, deviant behaviour, lesser focus on academics and an overall low mental health status. Since components of EI such as emotion identification and management can be improved through training (Nelis et. al., 2009), the focus should be on creating an environment where adolescents feel emotionally secure and can learn to be aware of social and emotional competencies. Indian adolescents, parents, and teachers are very much in need of holistic programs centred on developing life skills, parenting and teaching skills, and increasing social and emotional intelligence.

LIMITATIONS

The paper is not exhaustive and has certain limitations. It does not delve very deep into the factors contributing to low emotional intelligence among adolescents, rather focuses more on the impact it creates for them. Second, even when it talks about the need for targeted training programs, it does not come up with any specific program aimed to develop EI skills in the Indian set-up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The topic has tremendous scope of research, especially with respect to the Indian context. More research on what affects low EI scores in young people, and how they can be improved remains to be studied. Even the effects of techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Transactional Analysis could be helpful in understanding this in a better light, even more so with an empirical approach.

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Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents and its Implications on their Lifelong Development

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