

Research Paper

## Influence of Parenting Conditions on Emotional Intelligence: A Comparative Study between Male and Female Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is understood as a powerful skill set that enables one to comprehend and regulate emotions such that it ensures successful social engagements and productive life outcomes. Amongst the conditions that dictate the progression of EI, parenting is seen as an important factor that facilitates its development from the early years. This is because family provides the original context in which an individual learns to unscramble emotions and behaviors of an ever-growing complex social world. With this in perspective, the present study measured and compared EI in adults growing up in single-parent and both-parent homes. The study also examined the differing effects of parenting conditions on gender and its subsequent influence on EI. 200 adult participants (male=104; female=96) with a mean age of 29.45 years were included in the study. Purposive random sampling technique was used for sample selection with the criteria of those having single parents (n=100) and those with both parents (n=100). The Emotional Quotient Test was used to measure EI and the obtained data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, and two-way ANOVA. The findings of the study revealed that participants with single parents had higher EI when compared to those with both parents. This was specifically so on the dimensions of emotional maturity and emotional competence than in the domain of emotional sensitivity. Also, a non-significant difference was found in EI between male and female participants, demonstrating that parental conditions did not have a deferential effect on gender in mediating EI, at least during the later years of life.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence, Parenting Conditions, Single Parent, Both Parents*

Emotions are internal guiding systems that determine thoughts, motivate behaviors, and help people to communicate with each other. Because emotions are fundamental to human existence, one must learn to express and control his/her emotions as well as acquire the ability to construe and respond to the emotions of others. Emotional Intelligence (EI), also known as Emotional Quotient (EQ), is often considered a key skill that enables people to recognize and make use of emotions in a constructive manner (Sangeetha, 2017). Investigators who underline its unequivocal role in determining life outcomes argue that EI is as crucial as Intelligence Quotient (IQ), and sometimes more, in shaping happiness and

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success (Bustamante et al., 2015). Intelligence, being a cognitive faculty, makes people extraordinarily talented and conceptually brilliant; but it does not guarantee healthy relational associations necessary for vibrant and exultant living. Constructs like social aptitude, emotional adjustment, warmth, and empathy are considered vital as they contribute much to a flourishing life than mere intelligence alone (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018). Pragmatic research, therefore, emphasizes that adding intelligence to emotions can make people smart enough to niche a distinctive mark in life. Emotionally intelligent people are said to effortlessly connect with their feelings, turn intent into accomplishments, and make informed choices about what matters the most. They are predisposed to build stronger social bonds, perform better in academics, thrive in vocational pursuits, and undoubtedly attain personal and interpersonal goals (MacCann et al., 2020). They are thus seen to be remarkably buoyant and sanguine (Serrat, 2017).

The concept of EI was initially introduced by John Mayer and Peter Salovey in the early 1990's following which it evoked massive interest in both researchers and the general public because of its obvious implications. Borrowed from the ideas on Social Intelligence (Furnham, 2011), EI was conceptualized as a proficiency that promotes emotional perception, stimulates emotional management, and regulates emotional assimilation to endorse emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer et al., 2004; Tripathy, 2018). It was Daniel Goleman (1995) who later popularised the expression of EI and characterized it as comprising of personal effectiveness, social skills, and emotional competency required for self-actualization, optimism, conflict resolution, and effective leadership. With time, several theories and models cropped up in an attempt to describe EI. Of these, there are three influential, comprehensive models which provide distinct illustrations on it. They include - the *Ability Model* that defines EI as a network of interconnected cognitive abilities, permitting people to perceive and process emotional information (Mayer & Salovey 1997); the *Trait Model* which considers EI as an inherent personality component made up of a constellation of emotional self-perceptions, located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies, and enabling people to distinguish their personal ability to work with emotions (Petrides & Furnham, 2003); and the *Mixed Models* that bring together mental abilities with personality traits to grasp the concept of EI and term it as an assortment of competencies and skills that drive performance and behavior (Bar-On, 2006; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004).

EI, as a capacity to feel the feeling is a potent tool essential for adjustment, health, and wellbeing. Once acquired, it becomes a predictor of wellbeing and life satisfaction (Fernández-Abascal & Martín-Díaz 2015; Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019), stronger psychosocial adaptation (Almajali et al., 2018), constructive exchanges with peers (Cañas et al., 2020), healthy family interactions (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020), higher levels of intimacy and parental warmth (Bhalla & Ali, 2019). Individuals high on EI are, by disposition, very empathetic, responsive, know to handle their feelings, and have high intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, research shows that those with low EI experience frequent unhappiness, frustration, emptiness, dejection, instability, loneliness, and stress (Singh, 2006). Since EI aids in accurate emotional interpretations, it permits people to lucratively guide their thoughts and responses according to the perceived emotional information. It motivates people to spot and tactfully handle the dynamics of human behavior, preparing them to creditably handle the day-to-day challenges of life (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018).

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Empirical studies on EI suggest that among the causal factors that channel EI, parental influence and family structure persuade its development from initial years of life (Alavi et al., 2017; Argyriou et al., 2016; Bhavani & Amuthavally, 2017; Cameron et al., 2020). Children, though are born with a unique combination of mechanisms connected to EI, their early life experiences can either enhance or dampen their emotional abilities (Malekar & Mohanty, 2009; Vajpeyi & Safri, 2016). John Gottman (1998), a pioneer in family dynamic studies, says that parental responses towards the child's emotionality have a profound impact on the growth and expansion of EI. And literature asserts that the presence of both father and mother is imperative for EI as each dyad distinctively contributes to the child's emotional development (Aniemeka et al., 2020; Patock-Peckham et al., 2011; Shalini & Acharya, 2013). Furthermore, since gender differences arbitrate emotional abilities (Chaplin, 2015; Deng et al., 2016), the way a father responds to his child's emotions is notably different from that of a mother. These differing maternal-paternal emotional experiences are unavoidable and decisive for a child to develop a deeper awareness of emotional complexities and emotional socialization. They provide multiple schemas allowing children to attain more synergetic processing of emotional information (Sloan, 2020).

Research in the past has time and again validated the superiority of EI in children from both-parent families than those from one-parent homes. They profess that because children from one-parent homes are deprived of holistic emotional integration, they experience barriers in their socio-emotional growth (Bhat & Patil, 2019; Musick & Meier, 2010; Sahu, 2012; Sloan, 2020). Nevertheless, much of these studies focus on emotionality in younger age groups or consider multiple factors playing an intermediate role in determining EI. They grossly generalize results on emotional development across family structures based on socio-demographic correlates and other environmental variables (Sloan, 2020). Very few studies have tracked the trajectories of emotional development in individuals growing up in single-parent homes during later years of life. The present study intends to fill the existing gaps in research and focuses on validating EI among adults who have grown up in single-parent and both-parent homes. The study also assesses the influence of parenting conditions on gender to understand how it affects the EI of male and female adults.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Sample***

The study sample consisted of 200 adult participants with a mean age of 29.45 years. Purposive random sampling technique was used for sample identification and selection, with the criteria of those having single parents i.e., either father or mother (n=100) and those with both parents (n=100). In the single-parent group, individuals who lost their parent (either father or mother) before the age of 16 years were considered.

#### ***Instrument***

##### **The Emotional Quotient Test**

The Emotional Quotient Test (2003) developed by Dalip Singh and N. K. Chadha was used as a measure of EI in the study. The test consists of 22 situational items that assess the emotional responses of participants under different circumstances. The test items yield scores on three dimensions of EI namely, Emotional Maturity, Emotional Sensitivity, and Emotional Competency, plus an overall EQ score for the entire test. A maximum score of 440 can be obtained on the test, which is converted into percentile values for further analysis and interpretation. The test registers reliability coefficients of 0.94 on test-retest and 0.89 on

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split-half methods respectively. The validity of the test is reported to be 0.89 (Singh & Chadha, 2015).

### **Procedure**

Data was collected from the sample using the Emotional Quotient Test (2003). Participant consent was sought, confidentiality assured and only those who matched the study criteria were included in the study. Individuals with impaired abilities and those already exposed to similar studies were excluded from the present research.

## RESULTS

*Table 1 shows the mean scores of participants with single-parent and both parents on Dimensions of EQ and the results of Independent Sample t-test.*

EQ Dimensions	Parenting	N	Mean	SD	Test statistics
Emotional Sensitivity	Single Parent	100	86.25	8.299	t= -2.132
	Both Parents	100	89.20	11.072	p= .034
Emotional Maturity	Single Parent	100	121.55	12.687	t= 7.262
	Both Parents	100	108.75	12.235	p= .001
Emotional Competency	Single Parent	100	170.95	22.402	t= 2.897
	Both Parents	100	162.15	20.514	p= .004
EQ Total	Single Parent	100	378.85	32.285	t= 4.010
	Both Parents	100	360.30	33.127	p= .001

**Emotional Sensitivity Score:** Single-parent sample had a mean score of 86.25 while those with both parents had a higher mean score of 89.20. The difference in the mean scores of the participants was found to be statistically significant ( $t=-2.132$ ;  $p=.034$ ) indicating that individuals with both parents had superior emotional sensitivity than those with single parents.

**Emotional Maturity Score:** Single-parent sample had a higher mean score of 121.55 than the both-parent sample who had a mean score of 108.75. The results of independent sample t-test showed a highly significant difference ( $t=7.262$ ;  $p=.001$ ) in the emotional maturity scores of the participants, revealing that individuals with single parents had far better emotional maturity than those with both parents.

**Emotional Competency Score:** It is found that the single-parent sample had a mean score of 170.95 and the both-parent sample had a mean score of 162.15. Independent sample t-test showed a significant difference ( $t=-2.897$ ;  $p=.004$ ) in the mean scores, indicating that single-parent participants were more emotionally competent than participants with both parents.

**EQ Total score:** On the overall EQ scores, it was seen that the single-parent sample had a higher mean score of 378.85 than both parent sample who had a mean score of 360.3. Results of independent sample t-test showed a highly significant difference ( $t=4.010$ ;  $p=.001$ ) in the scores revealing that single-parent sample had higher EQ than those with both parents.

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*Table 2 shows the mean scores of male and female samples from single-parent and both-parent groups on Total EQ score and the results of 2-way ANOVA.*

Groups	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Single Parent	Male	379.50	28.397	50
	Female	378.20	36.038	50
	Total	378.85	32.285	100
Both Parent	Male	363.43	32.474	54
	Female	356.63	33.863	46
	Total	360.30	33.127	100
Total	Male	371.15	31.486	104
	Female	367.86	36.475	96
	Total	369.58	33.926	200
Test Statistics	F <sub>(groups)</sub>	F= 16.429; p = .001		
	F <sub>(gender)</sub>	F= 0.760; p = .384		
	F <sub>(groups*gender)</sub>	F= 0.350; p = .555		

From the above table, it is evident that participants with single parents had a higher mean EQ score of 378.85 than both-parent participants, who had a mean EQ score of 360.3. The two-way ANOVA test results for single and both parent samples showed a highly significant difference in the mean EQ scores between groups ( $F=16.429$ ;  $p=.001$ ).

Gender-wise comparison of scores showed that male samples had a mean EQ score of 371.15 and female samples had a mean EQ score of 367.86. The two-way ANOVA test revealed a non-significant result ( $F=0.760$ ;  $p=.384$ ) i.e., no statistically significant difference was found in the mean EQ score of male and female participants. While the interaction effect between groups was found to be highly significant ( $F=16.429$ ;  $p=.001$ ), the interaction between groups and gender was found to be non-significant ( $F=0.350$ ;  $p=.555$ ). That is, the pattern of EQ scores of male and female samples remained the same in single-parent and both-parent groups. The obtained results clarify that there is no significant effect of parenting conditions on the EI of the sample group based on gender.

## **DISCUSSION**

The present study focused on assessing EI in adults growing up in single and both parent homes. Based on the literature review regarding the differential effects of parenting on the emotional development of children with one parent and both parents, the study hypothesized a non-significant difference in EI of the sample participants. The results obtained in the study indicated that individuals growing up with single parents had higher EI than those with both parents. The findings of this study are contrary to most past findings that suggest better emotional intelligence in individuals from both-parent homes (Bhat & Patil, 2019; Musick & Meier, 2010; Richter & Lemola, 2017; Sahu, 2012; Sloan, 2020). In addition to this, the analysis revealed that participants belonging to single-parent homes expressed higher emotional maturity and competency when compared to their counterparts, while those with both parents showcased better scores on emotional sensitivity only. The study also found that growing up in single or both parent homes did not direct the emotional intelligence of male and female adults, at least during later years of life.

There is still a deficiency of knowledge in research on the enduring effects of single parenthood on a person's well-being at different stages of development (Richter & Lemola,

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2017). Hence, it would be inappropriate to conclude that early parental deprivation continues to penalize individuals coming from one-parent homes throughout life. Several studies have confirmed that unfavorable circumstances do exist in both parent homes as well, which invariably have a negative impact on the socio-emotional development of children. The dysfunctional relationship between parents (father and mother) in the form of hostility, conflict, strife, incompatibility eventually make way for emotional distress, behavioral disturbances, poor academic achievement, poorer adult relationships, and lower psychological well-being in children growing up with both parents too (Musick & Meier, 2010).

Lekaviciene and Antiniene (2016) affirm that EI level is significantly linked to a number of family psychosocial factors such as emotional atmosphere at home, the strength of the relationship between mother/father and child, subjective perception of family financial status, and so on. One-parent families may hold an advantage here in that, a single adult individual remains in charge of and accountable for the child's life (Ali & Soomar, 2019). And since many single parents obtain support and assistance from their extended family and friends, it can act as a buffer for the absence of another parent (Lestariaa & Rahmab, 2017). Role reversal, ambiguity, role diffusion, contradicting environment are all avoided in one-parent homes, making children agile as they grow older. The loss of a parent during early years of life compels single-parented individuals to become assertive, self-reliant, and responsible. As they are frequently encouraged to be autonomous and take independent decisions, they tend to have a greater sense of emotional processing and control (Bhat & Patil, 2019). By amalgamating life experiences, these kids can go on to attain better emotional maturity when compared to others. With time, they grow up to be emotionally well-equipped and competent, building up assets of personal and social skills to constructively respond to the emotions of self and others.

Considering the overall factors, the present study stresses the need for additional research on children growing up in one-parent homes, particularly looking out for pathways in their later development. A major limitation of this study is that it does not differentiate between individuals growing up in father-only and mother-only homes. Also, the study does not account for the reasons of parental loss (death, divorce, unintended pregnancy, adoption, abandonment, etc.), each of which may have its bearing on the child's emotional function. Further investigations in this regard are necessary as they will yield valuable information leading to a new direction in research on people growing up in single-parent homes.

### **CONCLUSION**

Developmental literature has consistently demonstrated that emotional abilities can be taught and learned at any stage of life (Denham et al., 2014). And an understanding of the factors that truly determine its growth would be beneficial to increasing EI in any given population. Raising an emotionally intelligent child remains a challenge for parents, whether it is a one-parent or two-parent home. It is important to remember that causality of poor EI is not the consequence of growing up in a single-parent household alone as other variables mediate EI during later years of life. Instead of stigmatizing single parents and their children as a liability, struggling with broken emotions to make it through life, it would be more appreciable if the community as a whole provides unbiased opportunities for such children to realize their fullest potentials. They, when encouraged to believe in themselves, given a platform to explore their identity without being judged for their parental disadvantage or

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attributing all their limitations to this factor only, can go on to make it big in life like any other individual.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interests in this research.

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