

Emotional Intelligence Across the Life Span: The Mediating Effects of Personality and Perceived Social Support

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence has been the subject of much attention in the past as well as in the present when it comes to managing, regulating, and understanding one's own and others emotions and how EI can have a significant impact over successful performances on various domains of life such as mental health, academic and work place performances even on the roles that we play as a teacher, student, researcher etc. The purpose of the study was to examine the age group differences i.e., late adolescents, young adult, middle adult, and elderly with respect to emotional intelligence despite of having controlled ones personality and perceived social support. The participants (n= 200) were age ranged from 18 to 71 years from the state of Sikkim. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant age group differences with respect to overall perceived emotional intelligence. Preceding age group participants scored significantly higher than the lower age groups. The correlation analysis demonstrated the results that overall perceived social support and some dimensions of personality had a significant positive and negative correlation with EI. Further results indicated that age group differences with respect to overall EI remained statistically significant even after controlling for perceived social support, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Life Span; Late Adolescents; Young Adult; Middle Adult; Elderly; Perceived Social Support; And Personality.

The concept emotional intelligence refers to the extent to which individuals deal effectively with their own as well as of others emotions. There has been a tremendous amount of popular and academic interest in emotional intelligence, probably because of the idea or of the scientific findings that emotions are considered to be the important determinant for successful performance in various domains of life including health, leadership, workplace, academic performance, life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Emotional Intelligence as a term or construct actually has two different concepts of psychology one as emotion and the other as intelligence. These two different concepts were clubbed together and were referred as Emotional Intelligence by the work of a Yale psychologist Salovey and Mayer, 1990 which they defined as the subset of social intelligence that involves the “ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and

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emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." The age as a variable has generally represented one of the most popular independent variables used in research probably reflecting the idea that it has on an individual variation in behavior, which is not only readily measurable but accounts for a variance in a variety of behavioral measures. The popularity of this variable in psychological research arises when differences in behavior are related to age. Thus, age refers to the process of undergoing changes in mental, emotional, social and physical maturity as a result of passage of time, where each individual goes through a series of developmental stages carrying these changes. A personality trait does account for the variance in individual differences and it does also appear to be influential to an individual well-being (McCrae and Costa, 1991). Thus, we can define personality as the combination of characteristics or qualities that makes an individual's distinctive character. Perceived social support refers to the degree of taking privilege of love, assistance provided by family members, friends and other people. Social support is a social network that can provide an individual with actual psychological resources to deal with the stressful events of life and daily problems such that there has been an increasing number of an interest in the role of social support as a coping mechanism or resources (Zimet et. al., 1998). A number of studies and researchers have showed that the influence of social support is directly related to an individual's psychological well-being (Procidano and Heller, 1978; Di Fabio and Kenny, 2012).

Objectives

The main objective of the present study is to determine how age is related to EI level of a person, as assessed using the self report measures of EI, while also analyzing the variables of personality and perceived social support as controlled variables.

The research is carried out with the following objectives:

- 1) To investigate if there is a significant age group differences in Emotional intelligence among elderly, middle adulthood, young adults and late adolescents
- 2) To examine whether the age group differences in EI is independent of the personality traits and perceived social support.

Hypothesis

H1 Participants with higher age group will score higher on EI than participants with lower age groups.

H2: The age differences in EI will remain statistically significant even after controlling for personality and perceived social support.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of the study comprised of 200 participants, 50 late adolescents age ranged from 18-20 years, 50 young adults age ranged from 21-39 years, 50 middle adult ages ranged from 40-59 years and 50 elderly above (60+). With regard to gender, 25 subjects were male and 25 females in each age group category which would make 50% male and 50% female in overall sample.

Measures

- *The Wong's and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS):* It is a 16 items self-report measure of emotional intelligence based on 7 point Likert type scale i.e., 1 as "Strongly disagree" to 7 as "Strongly agree", developed by Wong's and Law (2004).

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The scale has four dimensions of EI to measure i.e., Self emotion appraisal (SEA), others emotion appraisal (OEA), Use of emotion (UOE) and Regulation of emotion (ROE).

- *The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)*: The MSPSS is a self report questionnaire developed to measure perceived social support. The MSPSS was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, (1988). The scale is a 12- item questionnaire; on a 7 point Likert type scale where 1 as “Very strongly disagree” to 7 as “Very strongly agree”. The instrument measures support from family, friends, and significant others.
- *Big Five Inventory (BFI)*: It is a 44-item inventory that measures an individual on the Big Five Factors (dimensions) of Personality developed by John & Srivastava, (1999). It is answered in a five point scale from 1 as “Disagree strongly” to 5 as “Agree strongly”.

Procedure

The study was conducted with the use of self report questionnaire and the data of the study has been collected using stratified random sampling. The school and college going students, different organizations and club of elderly people from the state of Sikkim were approached for participation in the study seeking permission from the concerned authorities of different institutions and organizations in accordance with the legal and ethical guidelines. The participants were briefed about the objective of study, and informed consent was taken. The required information was taken through demographic sheet which included age, gender, qualification, and English fluency and the scales of the study were provided. Participants were assured about the confidentiality of information provided by them.

RESULTS

Normal distribution of the data was checked and was found to be normally distributed. Table 1 shows means, standard deviation, and reliability of all the variables used in the present study.

Table 1: Mean, SD and Reliability for the measures of Emotional intelligence (WLEIS), Perceived social support and Personality

Variables	Items	Mean	SD	Reliability
WLEIS:TOTAL	16	89.90	8.93	.830
WLEIS:SEA	4	22.93	2.89	.701
WLEIS:OEA	4	22.40	3.10	.719
WLEIS:UOE	4	22.68	2.93	.679
WLEIS:ROE	4	21.88	3.20	.685
MPSS:TOTAL	12	65.63	10.21	.872
MPSS:SIGNIFICANTOTHERS	4	21.27	5.06	.870
MPSS:FAMILY	4	23.26	3.84	.819
MPSS:FRIENDS	4	21.11	3.97	.800
EXTRAVERSION	8	26.28	4.57	.616
NEUROTICISM	8	21.57	4.99	.675
OPENNESS	10	35.87	3.88	.464
AGREEABLENESS	9	34.29	4.47	.612
CONCIENTIOUNESS	9	31.79	5.58	.779

Note: WLEIS: Wong’s and Law emotional intelligence scale; SEA: Self emotional appraisal; OEA: Others emotional appraisal; UOE: Utilization of emotions; ROE: Regulation of emotion; MPSS: Multidimensional perceived social support.

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The above mentioned Table 1 depicts the mean, SD of all the variables used under study and the internal consistency reliability of WLEIS, the overall emotional intelligence (.830) and its sub scales i.e. Self-emotional appraisal (.701), others emotional appraisal (.719), Utilization of emotions (.679) Regulation of emotion (.685) were found to be little lower than reported by Wong & Law, 2002.

In the case of MPSS the internal consistency reliability was found to be .872, its sub scales internal consistency reliability was found to be, Significant others (.870), Family (.819) and Friends (.800) which are comparatively similar to the internal consistency reliability as reported by the author Zimet et.al., (1988). The internal consistency reliability for the personality (BFI) dimensions were found to be as Extraversion (.616), Neuroticism (.675), Openness (.464), Agreeableness (.612), and Conscientiousness (.779) which is bit lower than reported by the author of the scale (John & Srivastava, 1999).

To examine age group differences on emotional intelligence measure, One-Way-MANOVA was performed with age as an independent variable. The findings showed that the groups differed in emotional intelligence, $F(12,415) = 4.372, p < .001$. As it can be observed from the below placed Table 2 that there exist a significant age group differences among late adolescents, young adult, middle adult and elderly on emotional intelligence and even in the sub scales except for OEA: others emotional appraisal.

Table 2: Mean, SD and F values for WLEIS: SEA, OEA, UOE, ROE between different age groups.

Variables	Adolescents		Young adult		Middle adult		Elderly		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1.WLEIS	86.02	9.52	86.71	9.23	92.24	7.17	94.61	6.57	10.702**
2. SEA	21.46	3.34	22.20	2.55	23.85	2.62	24.22	2.07	9.894**
3. OEA	22.24	3.28	21.17	3.02	22.73	3.04	23.46	2.69	4.165**
4. UOE	21.85	3.06	22.07	3.33	22.56	2.26	24.24	2.34	6.086**
5.ROE	20.46	3.52	21.27	3.61	23.10	2.57	22.68	2.23	6.639**

Note: ** $p < .01$; WLEIS: Wong's and Law emotional intelligence scale; SEA: Self emotional appraisal; OEA: Others emotional appraisal; UOE: Utilization of emotions; ROE: Regulation of emotion.

From the above-mentioned Table 2 we can see that there exist a significant age groups differences on emotional intelligence as the mean score of late adolescents as (86.02), young adult (86.71), middle adult (92.24), and elderly (94.61) which gives an idea or indication that EI increases with an increase in one's age. Therefore, the hypothesis H1 that have been formulated which states that Participants with higher age group will score higher on EI than participants with the lower age groups has been found to be accepted.

On the contrary, among the subscales of EI also it can be noticed that the mean scores has been found to be increasing with an increase in age or age groups except for OEA: others emotional appraisal where the mean score of young adult (21.17) is lower than the mean score of late adolescent (22.24). In the rest cases, the mean score is found to be higher and increasing with every stage of age group (See Table 2).

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In order to perform MANCOVA, we first compute the correlational analysis to test whether or not there exist a significant correlation among all the variables under study. Thus, the Table 3 shows the correlation of all the variables.

Table 3: Results of Pearson's product moment correlation between Emotional Intelligence, Perceived Social Support and Personality

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1.WLEIS.TOT														
2.SEA	.766**													
3.OEA	.731**	.381**												
4.UOE	.753**	.542**	.411**											
5.ROE	.695**	.366**	.348**	.292**										
6.MPSS	.196*	.119	.083	.250**	.128									
7.SO	.198*	.210**	.054	.215**	.114	.838**								
8.FAM	.114	.097	.009	.155**	.080	.748**	.426**							
9.FRND	.140	.056	.137	.218**	.108	.776**	.466**	.411**						
10.E	.125	.066	.094	.231**	-.013	.146	.130	.068	.144					
11.A	.237**	.122	.259**	.281**	.042	.058	.042	.056	.042	.202**				
12.C	.490**	.398**	.330**	.506**	.221**	.262**	.245**	.204**	.163*	.182*	.462**			
13.N	-.219**	-.129	-.102	-.293**	-.126	-.248**	-.184*	-.275**	-.135	-.338**	-.461**	-.462**		
14.O	.140	.006	.187*	.172*	.047	.070	.062	-.084	.182*	.233**	.202**	.132	-.034	

Note: WLEIS.TOT: Wongs & Law Emotional Intelligence Total; SEA: Self emotional appraisal; OEA: Others emotional appraisal; UOE: Utilization of emotions; ROE: Regulation of emotion; MPSS: Multidimensional perceived social support; SO: Significant others; FAM: Family; FRND: Friends; E: Extraversion; A: Agreeableness; C: Conscientiousness; N: Neuroticism; O: Openness. * P<0.05, ** p<0.01 (2-tailed)

Table 2 reveals the correlations of all the variables and it can be observed that the different components or the dimensions of emotional intelligence are found to be significantly correlated with each other. Results demonstrated that overall perceived social was found to be significantly correlated with the total of WLEIS, $r = .196$, $P < .05$. The correlations among the WLEIS subscales and MPSS, only the OEA: others emotional appraisal was found to be positively correlated but not with the rest three dimensions.

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The different dimensions of MPSS were also found to be significantly correlated with each other. Significant others as the dimension of MPSS was found to be positively correlated with WLEIS total, $r = .198, P < .05$; SEA, $r = .210, P < .01$; UOE, $r = .215, P < .01$ but was not with OEA and ROE. The other subscale of MPSS i.e., FAM and FRND was only found to be positively correlated with WLEIS subscale UOE, $r = .155, P < .01$ and $r = .218, P < .01$, but not with the WLEIS total and with its rest three dimensions.

Some of the personality dimensions were found to be correlated with WLEIS total and with some of its dimensions. Extraversion was only found to be correlated with the UOE subscale of WLEIS, $r = .231, P < .01$ but was not found with rest subscale and with the total. Agreeableness was found to be positively correlated with WLEIS total, $r = .237, P < .01$; OEA, $r = .259, P < .01$; and with ROE, $r = .281, P < .01$, but not with the two of its dimension i.e. SEA and ROE. Conscientiousness was found to be positively correlated with WLEIS, $r = .490, P < .01$, and with all of its dimensions: SEA, $r = .398, P < .01$; OEA, $r = .330, P < .01$, UOE, $r = .506, P < .01$; and ROE, $r = .221, P < .01$. As neuroticism was found to have negative correlations with WLEIS total, $r = -.219, P < .01$; UOE, $r = -.293, P < .01$ but not with the rest three dimensions, openness was only found to be correlated with the two dimension of WLEIS i.e., OEA, $r = .187, P < .05$, and with UOE, $r = .172, P < .05$.

After the computation of the correlation analysis the results revealed a positive correlation of WLEIS with perceived social support and personality (See Table 3). The correlation was found to be in the expected direction as compared with the pervious study. Thus, we performed a multivariate analysis of covariance with the total scores of WLEIS and with its four dimensions as dependent variables and the four age groups as independent variable while controlling for perceived social support and personality. Table 4 illustrates the Mean difference between WLEIS between different age groups based on MANCOVAs after having controlled for personality and perceived social support (See Table 4).

Table 4: Mean difference between WLEIS between different age groups based on MANCOVAs controlling for personality and perceived social support

	Age groups			
	Adolescents	Young adult	Middle adult	Elderly
WLEIS. Total				
M (SD)	86.418 (9.52)	86.937 (9.23)	92.763 (7.17)	93.467 (6.57)
M difference ^a		-.520	-6.346*	-7.050*
M difference ^b			-5.826*	-6.530*
M difference ^c				-.704
SEA: Self emotional appraisal				
M (SD)	21.617 (3.34)	22.239 (2.55)	24.030 (2.62)	23.846 (2.07)
M difference ^a		-.612	-2.412*	-2.229*
M difference ^b			-1.791*	-1.608*
M difference ^c				.183
OEA: Others emotional appraisal				
M (SD)	22.324 (3.28)	21.216 (3.02)	22.816 (3.04)	23.255 (2.69)
M difference ^a		1.108	-.492	-.931
M difference ^b			-1.600	-2.039*
M difference ^c				.439
UOE: Utilization of emotion				
M (SD)	21.987 (3.06)	22.197 (3.33)	22.723 (2.26)	23.825 (2.34)

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M difference ^a		-0.211	-0.736	-1.839*
M difference ^b			-0.525	-1.628*
M difference ^c				1.103
ROE: Regulation of emotion				
M (SD)	20.490 (3.52)	21.286 (3.61)	23.195 (2.57)	22.541 (2.23)
M difference ^a		-0.796	-2.706*	-2.051*
M difference ^b			-1.909*	-1.255*
M difference ^c				.654

Note: M difference^a = Mean difference between late adolescents and young adults, middle adult and elderly, M difference^b = Mean difference between young adults and middle adults, elderly, and M difference^c = Mean difference between middle adults and elderly. * The mean difference is significant at .05 level.

The findings from the MANCOVAs analysis showed that the age groups significantly differed with respect to Emotional Intelligence score, $F(12, 394) = 3.848 p < .001$. We also performed pairwise comparisons using the Sidak for multiple comparisons. Findings revealed that the scores of each higher age group were significantly higher than those of the lower age groups with respect to the total score of Emotional Intelligence. Thus, the hypothesis H2 stating the age differences in EI will remain statistically significant even after controlling for personality and perceived social support were also found to be accepted. Regarding the subscale of WLEIS the higher age group scores were found to be significantly higher than those of lower age group with respect to the Utilization of emotions (UOE). In terms of the Self emotional appraisal (SEA) late adolescent's scores were found to be lower with the preceding age groups, only middle adult scores were found to be higher than elderly. Regarding the Others emotional appraisal (OEA) elderly scored significantly higher than the lower age groups, the scores of only young adults were lower than late adolescents. With respect to the Regulation of emotion (ROE) late adolescent's scores were found to be lower with the preceding age groups, only middle adult scores were found to be higher than elderly (See Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The current study was focused and aimed at examining the age group differences with respect to emotional intelligence beyond the effects of personality and perceived social support. As all the variables under study were assessed using the self report test. Most of the studies on emotional Intelligence with respect to age group differences have not included the stratified life span development as the respective age groups or controlled the variables of personality and perceived social support. Therefore, the study provides a new insight into age group differences on emotional intelligence.

The first hypothesis H1 stating that participants with higher age group will score higher on EI than participants with lower age groups was found to be accepted. This supports the fact that with an increase in ones age increases the level of emotional intelligence or an individual EI significantly varies across different age groups. The finding suggests emotional intelligence is a developing ability; it is likely that accumulated life experiences contribute to one's EQ. These results are also found to be consistent with the findings reported by (Goleman 1998; Mayer et. al, 200; Wong & Law, 2002). With respect to the dimensions of the scale also it was found to have significant age group differences. Since, SEA: self emotional appraisal refers to the ability to understand and execute their emotions clearly and naturally, OEA: others emotional appraisal refers to the ability to perceive and understand

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the emotions of others people around, UOE: use of emotions pertains to the ability to use ones emotions effectively, ROE; regulation of emotions refers to the ability to regulate emotions. This result supports the fact that the older adults tend to learn and remember the emotional content and execute it from their past experiences as a result of which EI tend to go hand in hand with that of ones level of maturation. Meanwhile, the personal and the social activities that people tend to carry out with the passage of one's age such as education, parent guiding their upcoming their generation emotionally and socially being an example, devoting time to health and religious practices or the social responsibility that one is surrounded might also impacts the emotional maturity among older adults. Since, self report measures are also viewed as, that it tends to evaluate one's own performance which are going to be highly cognitive in nature and it also involves comparisons with past and present as of which that older adults adopt higher standards for judging the success of their attempts to control emotions as older adults generally have higher expectations with respect to emotional control (Carstensen et. al., 2000). The complexity of emotional understanding in adulthood, patterns of coping and defense would seem to be strongly influenced by sociocultural conditions, and it is possible that the older adults received more rigid training about how to self-regulate emotions (Labouvie-Vief et. al., 1989).

The correlation analysis between overall emotional intelligence and over all perceived social support was also found to have a significant correlation. These findings are also in consistent with the findings reported by (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). This may be due to the fact that Perceived social support is the degree of taking privilege of love, assistance provided by family members, friends and other people. Social support is a social network that can provide man with a good amount of psychological resources to deal with the stressful events of life and daily problems. Thus, we can be observed and assume that whatever people can receive more social support, greater EI they can achieve. Since social support involves an exchange of psychological resources between persons.

On the other hand agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism were also found to have significant correlation with the overall emotional intelligence which is found to be the similar results as reported by (Petrides, 2010; Bracket and Mayer, 2003). Since agreeableness as personality traits are generally characterised by a forgiving and sympathetic, conscientiousness are remarked by self-discipline, organized and not being impulsive, and neuroticism which are often characterized as emotional instability in nature such characteristics of these personality traits might induce the emotional skills and result in greater degree of emotional intelligence.

The finding of the study also revealed that the age group differences remain statistically significant even after controlling for perceived social support, which states that the group differences with respect to emotional intelligence is not influenced by one's level of perceived social support despite of this some components of perceived social support were also found to have significant correlation with EI and its subscales too.

Perceived social support refers to the degree of taking privilege of love, assistance and taking care by family members, friends and other people. Social support is a social network that can provide man with a good amount of psychological resources to deal with the stressful events in life and daily problems. Accordingly, it can be concluded that whatever people can receive more social support, greater EI they can achieve. The results by (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984), also suggest that how specific aspects of EI may relate to perceived social

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support. For example, with regard to self-report EI, individuals' perceptions that they can accurately appraise the emotions of self and others and express their emotions appropriately contributed to perceived social support. That is, persons who perceive more available social support report that they are better able to recognize emotions in themselves and in others and to express their emotions. They also see themselves as being able to use their emotions in solving problems. Since social support involves an exchange of resources between individuals.

The study also demonstrated that the age group differences remain statistically significant even after controlling personality dimensions i.e. agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism depicts that personality dimensions does not influence or mediate the age group differences with respect to emotional intelligence. Thus, the hypothesis H2 stating that the age differences in EI will remain statistically significant even after controlling for personality and perceived social support. This suggests that the age group differences with respect to emotional intelligence do not mediate by perceived social support and personality. In the past research EI was found to be significantly correlated with personality and perceived social support. Thus, it was found that there was no such mediating effect on the age differences in EI when personality and perceived social support is controlled.

According to the literature on emotional intelligence and personality, researchers have used different models to find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and five factor model of personality. Based on the models, different results have been revealed. According to Petrides (2010) a stronger relationship was reported between emotional intelligence and big five personality. Brackett and Mayer (2003) found that a high significant correlation between emotional intelligence and Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, but it has been moderately related with Openness to experience.

The study aimed at examining the age group differences among late adolescents, young adults, middle adult, and elderly with respect to emotional intelligence. The findings of the study showed that a significant age group differences in overall emotional intelligence such results are consistent with the research findings as reported by (Goleman, 1998; Wong and law, 2002). Even there was a significant age group differences in some of the dimensions of EI. We were also interested in exploring age group differences on emotional intelligence after controlling personality and perceived social support at which the correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and some dimensions of personality with overall emotional intelligence. The findings of the study also demonstrated that there was a significant group differences with respect to emotional intelligence even after having controlled personality and perceived social support.

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Conflict of Interest

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