

Research Paper

Understanding the Interplay Between Emotional Intelligence, Social Ostracism, and Coping Mechanisms in Young Adults in India

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the nuanced relationship among emotional intelligence, social ostracism, and coping mechanisms among Indian young adults aged 18 to 25. This research seeks to investigate how individuals navigate emotional and psychological obstacles, particularly those arising from experiences of social ostracism, within the context of fast social change and escalating emotional stresses in urban India. The study utilises a quantitative, non-experimental correlational approach that draws on theories including Salovey and Mayer's emotional intelligence framework, Williams' ostracism model, and Folkman's stress and coping theory. Applying Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analyses, data from approximately 240 participants were analysed to investigate the relationships and predictive nature of emotional intelligence and social ostracism on diverse coping mechanisms, encompassing problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping. Findings demonstrate that increased emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with the use of adaptive coping mechanisms and negatively correlated with maladaptive coping, indicating its function as a protective psychological trait. In contrast, social ostracism is a significant predictor of maladaptive coping, highlighting the emotional consequences linked to exclusion in collectivistic cultures. The findings highlight the necessity for culturally customised mental health therapies that enhance emotional intelligence and alleviate the psychological effects of social ostracism. Practical implications involve integrating emotional skills training into educational and therapeutic contexts and promoting inclusive peer environments. This research enhances Indian psychological literature by elucidating the impact of emotional and social elements on coping mechanisms, hence fostering mental health resilience in young adulthood.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Coping Mechanisms, Multiple Regression Analyses, Pearson's Correlation, Social Ostracism, Young Adults*

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Understanding how people process emotions, handle rejection and bounce back from stress is extremely important to modern psychology. Emotional Intelligence, Social Ostracism, and Coping Mechanisms are three concepts that when studied together can shed light on how individuals maintain their psychological well-being in challenging social situations. Rather than viewing them separately it may be more useful to explore how they interact, how emotional intelligence shapes a person's reaction to being excluded and how that, in turn, influences the coping mechanisms they choose. This research looks at these overlapping areas through established psychological theories such as Mayer and Salovey's emotional intelligence framework, Williams' model of ostracism and Folkman's ideas on coping to better understand the emotional processes that help people deal with social rejection and emotional stress.

Concept of Emotional Intelligence

The term Emotional Intelligence describes an individual's skill in recognizing and interpreting, both their own feelings and those of other people, using this insight to guide their behaviour and manage relationships effectively. The term gained attention in the early 1990's through the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), who defined it as "The ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions".

Concept of Social Ostracism

Social ostracism refers to being deliberately left out, ignored, or rejected by others. It can happen in different forms. Sometimes it is obvious like being excluded from a group and other times more subtle like receiving the silent treatment (Williams & Zardo, 2001). Irrespective of the manner in which it occurs, the emotional impact of ostracism is often profound. Social exclusion adversely affects an individual's sense of belonging, self-worth, and perceived control over their social environment. Across its various forms, ostracism remains a psychologically distressing experience for many individuals.

Concepts of Coping Mechanisms

Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviours that individuals use to manage stressful internal or external demands (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Whereas Coping Mechanisms are the mental and behavioural methods that people utilise to deal with these stressors. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), these mechanisms generally fall into three categories: problem-focused (aimed at solving the issue), emotion-focused (aimed at managing the emotional impact), and avoidance-based (aimed at distancing themselves from the problem).

Objective of the Study

The primary objective is to investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, coping mechanisms, and social ostracism experiences among young adults in India using a quantitative, non-experimental research design. The study used the Brief Emotional Scale (BEIS-10), Brief COPE Inventory, and Ostracism Experience scale (OES-8) for measuring the relationships between the variables. The study's specific goal is to determine the strength of the relationships between emotional intelligence, various coping mechanisms (problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping), and social ostracism. Furthermore, the study aims to determine the predictive nature of emotional intelligence and social ostracism on young adults' coping mechanisms. Using Pearson's Correlation

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Coefficient and Multiple Regression Analysis, providing insights for potential psychological interventions and mental health support systems tailored to this population.

Sample Population

The studies population consists of young adults living in India, specifically aged from 18 to 25 years. The participants in the study encompass a variety of ages in order to ensure a diverse sample of the wider young adult demographic. This encompasses individuals currently pursuing undergraduate, diploma, or postgraduate degree programs, along with those who have just graduated from high school or, received an undergraduate degree, or earned a post-graduate degree. This study also includes individuals who are currently not enrolled in any educational institutions but can read and understand English language. The study seeks to incorporate diverse academic backgrounds to collect nuanced perspective related to the research objectives.

Approximately 240 individuals were recruited to be a part of the study. Participants were chosen from the broad young adult population in India, regardless of their institutional affiliations. The primary method of data collection was online questionnaire sent using Google Forms, distributed across social media platforms and personal networks to ensure accessibility and reach. All participants had to disclose basic demographic information and complete the questionnaire items, which were specifically intended to meet the primary factors and objectives of the study.

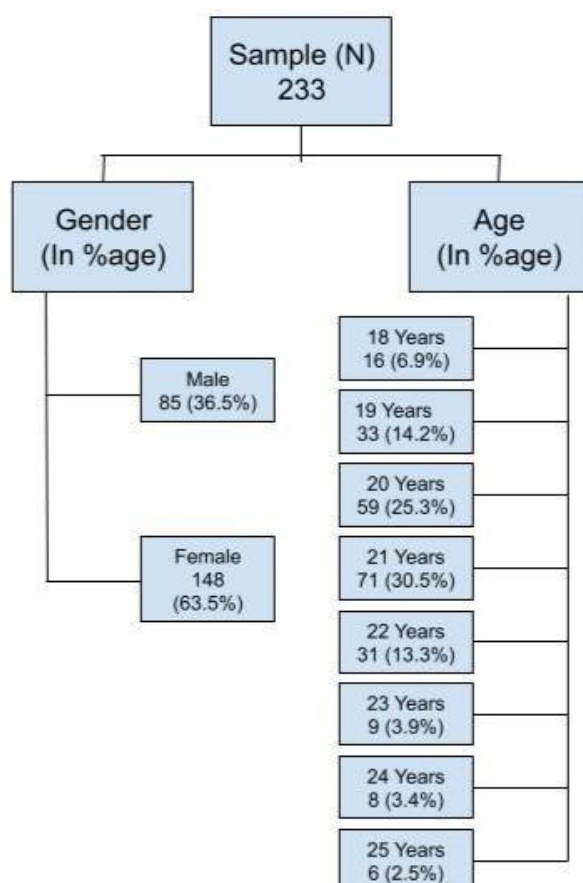


Figure 1: Chart about Sample Segregation

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Table 1: Statistics of Sample Population

Statistics		GENDER	AGE
N	Valid	233	233
	Missing	0	0
Mean			20.67
Std. Error of Mean			.100
Median			21.00
Mode			21
Std. Deviation			1.533
Variance			2.350
Skewness			.591
Std. Error of Skewness			.159
Kurtosis			.589
Std. Error of Kurtosis			.318
Range			7
Sum			4817
Percentiles	25		20.00
	50		21.00
	75		21.00

Data Analysis

This research employs a quantitative, non- experimental research approach to evaluate the relationships between emotional intelligence, coping mechanisms, and social ostracism among young adults in India.

Pearson's correlation coefficient will be utilised to evaluate the extent of relationships between emotional intelligence, coping mechanisms, which includes problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping, and social ostracism. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis will be employed to investigate the predictive nature of the variables. Social ostracism and emotional intelligence would be defined as the independent variables, while coping mechanisms will be defined as a dependent variable, in which problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping will be the levels of dependent variables. This will assess the extent to which social ostracism and emotional intelligence predict coping mechanisms in young adults.

This research design aims to investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, coping mechanisms, and social ostracism, while assessing the degree to which coping mechanisms can be significantly predicted by levels of social ostracism and emotional intelligence in Indian young adults.

Ethical Considerations

1. Informed consent: Prior to participation, informed consent will be obtained from all participants. The participants will be provided with detailed information about the research's objectives, their rights as participants, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and the voluntary aspect of their participation (American Psychological Association, 2017).

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2. Confidentiality: All data collected will be treated with strict confidentiality. Participants will only use their initials in place of their full name to protect their identities, and data will be securely stored and accessible only to the researchers (American Psychological Association, 2017).
3. Protection from harm: The tests are evaluated thoroughly to ensure that no harm or distress is caused to the participants in any way (American Psychological Association, 2017).
4. Voluntary nature of participation: All participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any given point without any penalty or consequences. They will not be coerced or forced to participate against their will (American Psychological Association, 2017).
5. No incentives: The study will not provide incentives to participants in exchange for their participation in order to ensure that the participants are not primarily motivated to participate by the reward and that they do not feel obligated to continue participating against their will (American Psychological Association, 2017).

RESULTS

The study gathered responses from young Indian adults, revealing significant relationships between emotional intelligence, experiences of social ostracism, and the coping mechanisms they use. This work supplements existing research focused on emotional functioning and psychological resilience by examining how individual traits and social experiences interact within the cultural and developmental framework of young adulthood in India, this study looks at both helpful and unhelpful ways people respond to stress, showing how different emotional skills and feelings of being included or excluded in society affect how individuals handle challenges.

To explore these dynamics, we used Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess the interplay between emotional intelligence, social ostracism, and four types of coping mechanisms: problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping. Additionally, we performed a multiple regression analysis to assess how well emotional intelligence, and social ostracism can predict different coping styles. This section presents the statistical findings, providing a clear view of the nature and strength of the association.

Correlation

A sample of $N = 233$ participants was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the relationships between Emotional Intelligence, Social Ostracism, and coping mechanisms. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed and met for all analyses, and all variables were measured on continuous scales.

i. Emotional Intelligence and Coping Mechanisms

Emotional Intelligence demonstrated a moderately positive and statistically significant correlation with problem-focused coping ($r = .305, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to employ problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Similarly, Emotional Intelligence showed a significant positive correlation with emotion-focused coping ($r = .285, p < .001$). Although the strength of the relationship falls between small and moderate, the findings suggest that higher emotional intelligence is associated with increased use of emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

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In contrast, Emotional Intelligence exhibited a very weak positive but non-significant relationship with adaptive coping ($r = .080$, $p = .225$), indicating no meaningful association in the present sample.

Additionally, Emotional Intelligence showed a negligible negative and non-significant correlation with maladaptive coping ($r = -.014$, $p = .833$), suggesting no empirical support for a relationship between emotional intelligence and maladaptive coping mechanisms.

ii. Social Ostracism and Coping Mechanisms

Social Ostracism demonstrated a weak negative but non-significant correlation with problem-focused coping ($r = -.120$, $p = .068$). Although the direction suggests that higher ostracism may be associated with reduced use of problem-focused coping, the relationship did not reach statistical significance.

A weak but statistically significant negative correlation was found between Social Ostracism and emotion-focused coping ($r = -.160$, $p = .014$), indicating that higher perceived social exclusion is associated with lower use of emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

No meaningful relationship was observed between Social Ostracism and adaptive coping ($r = .005$, $p = .945$), as the correlation was negligible and non-significant.

Finally, Social Ostracism showed a small-to-moderate positive and statistically significant correlation with maladaptive coping ($r = .239$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of perceived social exclusion are associated with increased use of maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Multiple Regression

Standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether Emotional Intelligence and Social Ostracism predicted problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, adaptive coping, and maladaptive coping among young adults in India. Across all models, assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were tested and met. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were 1.013 and tolerance values were .987 in all models, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Residuals were approximately normally distributed, with P-P plots and histograms supporting normality and no evidence of severe outliers.

i. Problem-Focused Coping

Descriptive statistics indicated a mean score of 2.64 ($SD = 0.59$) for problem-focused coping, 38.07 ($SD = 5.62$) for emotional intelligence, and 20.37 ($SD = 11.71$) for social ostracism.

The regression model was statistically significant, $R = .317$, $R^2 = .100$, Adjusted $R^2 = .093$, $F(2, 230) = 12.82$, $p < .001$, explaining 10% of the variance in problem-focused coping.

Emotional Intelligence significantly predicted problem-focused coping ($\beta = .295$, $t = 4.688$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher emotional intelligence is associated with greater use of problem-focused coping mechanisms. Social Ostracism was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -.086$, $t = 1.364$, $p = .174$).

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ii. Emotion-Focused Coping

The mean score for emotion-focused coping was 2.47 (SD = 0.62).

The regression model was statistically significant, $R = .313$, $R^2 = .098$, Adjusted $R^2 = .090$, $F(2, 230) = 12.456$, $p < .001$, accounting for 9.8% of the variance.

Emotional Intelligence significantly and positively predicted emotion-focused coping ($\beta = .270$, $t = 4.287$, $p < .001$). Social Ostracism significantly and negatively predicted emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.129$, $t = -2.047$, $p = .042$), suggesting that higher ostracism is associated with reduced use of emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

iii. Adaptive Coping

Adaptive coping had a mean of 2.62 (SD = 0.67).

The regression model was not statistically significant, $R = .081$, $R^2 = .007$, Adjusted $R^2 = -.002$, $F(2, 230) = 0.76$, $p = .469$.

Neither Emotional Intelligence ($\beta = .081$, $t = 1.231$, $p = .220$) nor Social Ostracism ($\beta = .014$, $t = 0.211$, $p = .833$) significantly predicted adaptive coping, indicating that the predictors did not explain meaningful variance in adaptive coping within this sample.

iv. Maladaptive Coping

The mean score for maladaptive coping was 2.16 (SD = 0.55).

The regression model was statistically significant, $R = .240$, $R^2 = .057$, $F(2, 230) = 7.01$, $p = .001$, explaining 5.7% of the variance in maladaptive coping.

Social Ostracism significantly predicted maladaptive coping ($\beta = .241$, $t = 3.739$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived ostracism is associated with greater use of maladaptive coping mechanisms. Emotional Intelligence did not significantly predict maladaptive coping ($\beta = .014$, $t = 0.214$, $p = .830$).

DISCUSSION

The investigation sought to examine the relationship between social ostracism and coping mechanisms among young adults, as well as the association between emotional intelligence and various coping styles, including problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive and maladaptive coping. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to test eight hypotheses, and the findings were interpreted considering established theoretical frameworks such as Temporal Need-Threat Model (Williams, K.D., 2009), the Ability Model (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, 2004) the Need-to-Belong Theory (Baumeister, R.F., & Leary, M.R., 1995), and the Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, 2004). Furthermore to correlational analysis, multiple regression was conducted to assess the predictive role of emotional intelligence and social ostracism on different coping mechanisms. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of how psychological and social factors jointly influence coping behaviours in young adults, while also identifying the relative strength and unique contribution of each predictor across coping outcomes.

The correlational analysis revealed several significant relationships between emotional intelligence, social ostracism, and coping mechanisms among young adults. Emotional intelligence demonstrated a significant positive association with both problem-focused coping (H1) and emotion-focused coping (H2), supporting the hypotheses. These findings suggest that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to

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engage in both active problem-focused and effective emotional regulation mechanisms. This aligns with the Ability Model of emotional intelligence proposed by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1997), which emphasizes emotional awareness and regulation as key components of adaptive functioning. Similarly, the Mixed Model by Daniel Goleman (1995) highlights competencies such as self-regulation and motivation that facilitate both cognitive and emotional coping processes.

However, emotional intelligence did not show a significant relationship with adaptive coping (H3) or maladaptive coping (H4). While the direction of associations was consistent with theoretical expectations, the lack of significance suggests that emotional intelligence may not uniformly influence all categories of coping. This may be due to variations in how adaptive coping is operationalized or the influence of contextual and cultural factors. Additionally, maladaptive coping may be more strongly shaped by external variables such as personality traits, environmental stressors, or mental health conditions, thereby weakening its direct association with emotional intelligence.

With respect to social ostracism, no significant relationship was found with problem-focused coping (H5), indicating that experiences of exclusion may not directly impair an individual's ability to engage in task-oriented coping mechanisms. This finding suggests that problem-focused coping may be relatively stable and influenced more by individual cognitive styles than by social experiences.

In contrast, social ostracism showed a significant negative relationship with emotion-focused coping (H6), suggesting that individuals experiencing higher levels of exclusion are less likely to engage in adaptive emotional regulation mechanisms such as seeking support or cognitive reappraisal. This finding is consistent with the Need-to-Belong Theory proposed by Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary (1995), which posits that social exclusion disrupts emotional security and reduces motivation to seek interpersonal connection.

Furthermore, no significant association was found between social ostracism and adaptive coping (H7), indicating that adaptive coping mechanisms may be influenced more by internal resilience factors than by immediate social experiences. This highlights the complexity of coping processes and suggests that not all coping responses are directly shaped by external social stressors.

Finally, social ostracism was found to be significantly and positively associated with maladaptive coping (H8), supporting the hypothesis. This indicates that individuals who experience higher levels of exclusion are more likely to engage in avoidant or harmful coping behaviours. This finding is in line with the Temporal Need-Threat Model proposed by Kipling D. Williams (2007), which suggests that prolonged social exclusion threatens fundamental psychological needs and may lead to maladaptive behavioural responses.

Multiple regression analysis examined the predictive effects of emotional intelligence and social ostracism on coping mechanisms, revealing distinct patterns across coping styles.

Emotional intelligence emerged as a significant positive predictor of both problem-focused coping (H1) and emotion-focused coping (H2), supporting the proposed hypotheses. This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to engage in

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both proactive problem-focused and adaptive emotional regulation mechanisms. These findings are consistent with the Ability Model proposed by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1997), which emphasizes emotional awareness and regulation as central to effective functioning. Similarly, the Mixed Model by Daniel Goleman (1995) highlights the role of self-regulation, motivation, and emotional awareness in managing stress and guiding adaptive responses.

In contrast, emotional intelligence did not significantly predict adaptive coping (H3) or maladaptive coping (H4), although the direction of relationships was consistent with theoretical expectations. This suggests that while emotional intelligence facilitates certain coping mechanisms, it may not uniformly influence all forms of coping. The lack of significance may reflect the role of additional factors such as personality traits, situational demands, or cultural influences that shape coping preferences beyond emotional competencies alone.

Regarding social ostracism, no significant predictive relationship was found with problem-focused coping (H5) or adaptive coping (H7). This indicates that these coping mechanisms may be relatively stable and influenced more by internal cognitive and dispositional factors rather than external social experiences. Such findings suggest that young adults may continue to engage in task-oriented or adaptive coping despite experiencing social exclusion.

However, social ostracism significantly negatively predicted emotion-focused coping (H6) and positively predicted maladaptive coping (H8). These findings indicate that individuals experiencing higher levels of exclusion are less likely to engage in adaptive emotional coping mechanisms and more likely to adopt avoidant or harmful coping behaviours. This pattern is consistent with the Need-to-Belong Theory proposed by Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary (1995), which suggests that social exclusion disrupts emotional connection and reduces motivation to seek support. Additionally, the Temporal Need-Threat Model by Kipling D. Williams (2007/2009) posits that prolonged ostracism threatens fundamental psychological needs, thereby increasing vulnerability to maladaptive coping responses.

Limitations of the Study

While the current study's results provide significant insights, several limitations must be acknowledged in order to provide a balanced interpretation of the findings:

- **Gender Imbalance in Sample:** The sample contained an insufficient number of male participants, potentially affecting the generalisability of the results across genders.
- **Restricted Age Range:** The research concentrated solely on individuals aged 18 to 25 years. Consequently, the results may not be applicable to teenagers, older adults, or persons at different developmental stages.
- **Cultural and Geographical Limitations:** The research was only performed within the Indian demographic, with data predominantly from people of urban settings. This restricts the cultural and contextual generalisability of the findings to other regions or rural and semi-urban demographics within India.
- **Lack of Experimental Control:** The study is a non-experimental, correlational and regression study which examines the strength and direction of relationships between variables without establishing causal conclusions. The study's lack of variable manipulation and control over confounding variables prevents any definitive findings about the direct effects of emotional intelligence and social ostracism on coping mechanisms.

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- Limited Contextual Diversity: The study's emphasis on online data collection methods may have biased the sample towards technologically proficient, educated, and urban young adults, thereby under-representing perspectives from rural, semi-urban, uneducated or socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.

CONCLUSION

This research assessed the intricate relationship between emotional intelligence, social ostracism, and coping mechanisms among young adults in India. This study utilised a quantitative, non-experimental methodology to investigate the correlational links and predictive nature of emotional intelligence and social ostracism related to various coping styles, including problem-focused, emotion-focused, adaptive, and maladaptive coping.

The findings indicated that higher emotional intelligence correlates positively with the use of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms while negatively correlating with maladaptive coping, emphasising the essential function of emotional abilities in managing emotional stress and social difficulties. Moreover, social ostracism had a significant positive connection with maladaptive coping, indicating that experiences of exclusion may result in psychologically negative coping mechanisms unless countered by protective traits such as emotional intelligence.

However, the findings suggest that adaptive coping may not constitute a unified, cohesive construct and might require a deeper understanding in subsequent research. The absence of significant predictive value in certain areas necessitates greater investigation into mediating and moderating variables, including emotional regulation, mindfulness, and environmental support systems.

Overall, this research highlights the significance of emotional intelligence as a psychological tool in promoting healthy coping mechanisms and alleviating the negative impacts of social ostracism. It highlights the necessity for culturally contextualised mental health interventions, particularly for Indian youth, who encounter distinct psychosocial difficulties.

This research adds to the expanding literature supporting the use of emotional intelligence training in educational, therapeutic, and community environments to improve resilience and well-being amid social challenges.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research paper. The study was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, professional, or institutional affiliations influenced the research process, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of findings. All authors have contributed ethically and responsibly to the completion of this work.

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