

IMPACT OF STRESS ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The capacity to be aware of, control, and express emotions plays a vital role in all our interpersonal and social behaviors. Our emotions have the capacity to empower us, but if not managed efficiently they can create obstacles leading to anxiety and stress. However, conditions of anxiety and stress do also influence our capacity to manage our emotions. This study explores the relationship between stress and emotional intelligence among adolescents. To achieve this objective, Emotional Intelligence Scale by Anukool Hyde, Sanjyot Pethe and Upinder Dhar and Singh's Personal Sources of Stress Inventory by Arun Kumar Singh, Ashish Kumar Singh and Arpana Singh were administered to 100 adolescents belonging to the age range of 17 to 20 years. This study included quantitative data. Further, data was analyzed using statistics like mean, standard deviation and correlation. The results revealed that stress influences the emotional intelligence of adolescents. It is found that adolescents with higher levels of stress have a lower emotional intelligence. The main implication of this study is in understanding the underlying relationship between stress and emotional intelligence. Hence, these results play an important role in designing interventions to reduce stress and in developing the emotional intelligence of adolescents.

Keywords: Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

Emotions are essential in understanding ourselves and the world around. Through our emotions we give others cues about our internal state, also we pick the emotional cues of others through their overt expressions. This delicate exchange of emotional cues is the basis of our social interactions.

Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

-- Salovey, P. & Mayer. J.D. (1990)

People with a high emotional intelligence are happier, healthier and more successful in their encounters (Singh, 2001). They are aware of their own feelings, they show empathy and compassion to others and are able to strike a balance between emotions and reason besides having a high self-esteem. Emotional intelligence encompasses five major characteristics (Goleman, 1996):

- **Self-awareness:** It is the capacity to identify and label specific feelings and being able to discuss and communicate emotions directly and clearly. It involves a healthy balance of emotions and reason in making intelligent decisions.
- **Empathy:** The capacity to understand, be aware, be sensitive and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another at the present time or in the past.
- **Managing relations:** Is the capacity to handle interpersonal interactions and resolve conflict.
- **Self-development:** the capacity to develop one's talents and potential, enhance the quality of life and contribute to the realization of one's dreams and aspirations.
- **Self-motivation:** The capacity of an individual to rise above their present situations and direct their feelings and emotions towards a specific goal despite self-doubt, inertia and impulsiveness.

Research has indicated that, having a high emotional quotient is associated with the ability to reduce stress, resolve emotional issues and improve overall wellbeing (Singh, 2001; Gohm, C. L., Corser, G. C. & Dalsky, D. J., 2005).

Stress is the body's fight or flight response when; too many situations, events or people overpower its adaptive capacity. According to Lazarus & Launier (1978), stress occurs when a person assesses his/her environment as potentially harmful or threatening; such that its demands are perceived to outdo the person's adaptive resources. Therefore, our ability to recognise and regulate our feelings and emotions to an optimum levels is essential in managing our response to stressors.

About the study:

Adolescence is a phase characterized by emotional ups and downs, turmoil, uncertainty and anxiety. For the adolescent; their physical body is changing, their social networks are expanding, their emotional experiences are fluctuating, and their academic pressures are mounting. All these uncertainties can be very demanding for an adolescent's limited capacity;

thus causing a state of mental and emotional strain or tension. This study attempts to understand the relationship between levels of stress and emotional intelligence among adolescents. The study also investigates various variables that are strongly correlated with emotional intelligence; eg. Self-awareness, empathy, managing relations, self-motivation and self-development. The results of this study will help identify the role of emotional intelligence in the experience of stress. Also, they will highlight the specific characteristics of emotional intelligence that can influence an adolescent's levels of stress.

OBJECTIVE

- To understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and the levels of stress among adolescents.
- To investigate the strength of the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-awareness, empathy, managing relations, self-motivation and self-development respectively.

HYPOTHESES

- H₁** There is a significant inverse association between emotional intelligence and the levels of stress among adolescents.
- H₂** Levels of stress has the strongest inverse association with managing relations.

METHODOLOGY

Participants:

The present study was conducted in order to understand the relationship between the stress levels of adolescents and their emotional intelligence. The convenience sampling procedure was used for the study. The sample included 100 adolescents in the age group of 17 to 20 years.

Data collection tools:

The participants were administered two standardized scales for the purpose of collecting the data:

- ***Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS):*** Hyde, A., Pethe, S., & Dhar, U. (2007).

This scale was developed by Anukool Hyde, Sanjyot Pethe and Upinder Dhar. It contains 34 statements that have to be answered as; Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The split- half reliability coefficient has been found to be 0.88. The scale has a high content validity of .93 .

- ***Singh's Personal Sources of Stress Inventory (SPSSI):*** Singh, A.K., Singh, A. K., & Singh, A. (2004)

This inventory contains 35 items that have to be responded to with one of the alternatives; seldom, sometimes and frequently. The test-retest reliability was found to be .79 and the internal consistency reliability by odd-even method was found to be .78. The concurrent validity of the scale was .687 when correlated against the Hindi version of social Readjustment Rating Scale originally developed by Holmes & Rahe (1967). The coefficient of concordance (correlation) among the ranking of 10 judges was .624 .

RESULTS

The present research attempted to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and levels of stress among adolescents.

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of variables (Total)

Characteristic	M	SD
Stress Levels	36.88	18.27
Emotional Intelligence	120.47	15.34
Self-awareness	15.13	2.74
Empathy	16.03	3.59
Managing relations	14.84	2.85
Self- motivation	22.09	4.50
Self- development	7.80	1.40

Table 2: Correlation between Stress and Emotional Intelligence (Total)

	Stress Levels	Emotional Intelligence	Self-Awareness	Empathy	Managing Relations	Self-Motivation	Self-Development
Stress Levels	1		--	--	--	--	--
Emotional Intelligence	-.428** .000	1	--	--	--	--	--
Self-Awareness	-.362** .000	.761** .000	1	--	--	--	--
Empathy	-.307** .002	.688** .000	.402** .000	1	--	--	--
Managing Relations	-.371** .000	.738** .000	.557** .000	.430** .000	1	--	--
Self-Motivation	-.369** .000	.709** .000	.543** .000	.296** .003	.423** .000	1	--
Self-Development	-.250* .012	.575** .000	.253* .011	.429** .000	.290** .003	.284** .004	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results of the study indicate that there is an inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and level of stress among adolescents. Referring to table 2 there is a significant inverse correlation between emotional intelligence ($M= 120.47$ $SD= 15.34$) and levels of stress ($M=36.88$ $SD=18.27$), $r= -.428$, $p<0.01$. This means that as the emotional intelligence of adolescents' increases, their levels of stress decrease. Thus the hypothesis stating that there is a significant inverse correlation between emotional intelligence and levels of stress is proved.

The study also investigated other variables that are strongly associated with emotional intelligence. Referring to table 2, the variables that are strongly associated with emotional intelligence are self- awareness ($r= .761$, $p<0.01$), empathy ($r= .688$, $p<0.01$), managing relations ($r= .738$, $p<0.01$), self-motivation ($r= .709$, $p<0.01$) and self-development ($r= .575$, $p<0.01$). Self-awareness is found to have the strongest positive association with emotional intelligence, followed by Managing relations, self-motivation, empathy and self-development respectively.

Referring to table 2, there is a significant inverse association between the levels of stress among adolescents and the variables that are strongly associated with emotional intelligence. Levels of stress ($M= 36.88$, $SD= 18.27$) of adolescents is negatively associated with; self-awareness ($M=15.13$, $SD=2.74$); $r= -.362$, $p<0.01$, empathy ($M=16.03$, $SD=3.59$); $r= -.307$, $p<0.01$, managing relations ($M=14.84$, $SD=2.85$); $r= -.371$, $p<0.01$, self-motivation ($M=22.09$, $SD=4.50$); $r= -.369$, $p<0.01$ and self-development ($M=7.80$, $SD=1.40$); $r = -.250$, $p<0.05$ respectively. The strongest inverse association is with managing relations, followed by self-motivation, self-awareness, empathy and self-development.

Thus the hypothesis stating that level of stress has the strongest inverse association with managing relations is proved.

DISCUSSION

Emotionally literate individuals have mastered the emotional abilities that inoculate them against the turmoil and pressures they are about to face during life transitions.

-- Goleman, 1995

Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to recognize and express emotions so as to reflectively regulate them and assist thought, in order to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Emotions play a critical role in our day to day encounters, especially in the way we respond to stressful situations.

The results of this study indicate that emotional intelligence is inversely associated (significant) with levels of stress. Therefore, if an individual's emotional intelligence is

developed, their coping with stressful situations would also improve. Other research studies conducted on the experience of stress, resolution of emotional issues and improving overall wellbeing indicate that high levels of emotional intelligence play an important role (Singh, 2001; Gohm et al, 2005).

The two characteristics of emotional intelligence have been found to reduce levels of stress among adolescents are: self-awareness and managing relations.

One of the important characteristics of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. It is the capacity to make mindful decisions; being cognizant of ones emotions, feelings, capacities and weaknesses. As indicated in the results of this study, self-awareness has the strongest association with emotional intelligence, along with a significant inverse association with levels of stress. Various research studies have indicated that self-awareness is a critical protective factor for anxiety and depression (Morrison and Cosden, 1997). Therefore, interventions in reducing levels of stress should lay emphasis on enhancing an individual's awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. This self-awareness can be one of the precursor to building resilience among adolescents (Hippe, 2004).

Another characteristic of emotional intelligence that can help reduce levels of stress is an individual's capacity at managing relations. The results in this study indicate that the ability to manage relations has the strongest inverse (significant) association with levels of stress. Many of the stressors that adolescents experience evolve from the social contact they have with their parents, teachers and peers. Being able to understand the needs and expectations of these relations, can help individuals cope better with their stressors. Research on interpersonal relation has suggested that individuals with supportive social ties, are often better able to avoid the harmful emotional effects of stress (Pearlin, 1999). These results point toward improving interpersonal relations as a means of reducing levels of stress among adolescents.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study was undertaken to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and the levels of stress among adolescents. Through the results it is evident that emotional intelligence is significantly associated with reducing levels of stress among adolescents. And the capacity of managing relations is found to be the most important characteristics of emotional intelligence that helps alleviate levels of stress.

Therefore intervention in helping adolescents cope with their stressors should focus on developing their emotional quotient. Some of the interventions could include:

- Parents, teachers and educators should pay special attention in helping adolescents develop healthy ties with their siblings and classmates.
- Adolescents should be nurtured to inculcate a sense of awareness of their own emotions and those of others; and also should be trained to regularly engage in self-monitoring and introspection.
- Interventions should also focus on helping adolescents develop intrinsic motivation and work towards self-development.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

- The present study has a small sample size. Future research in the field could consider a larger sample.
- The present study addressed the relationship between emotional intelligence and levels of stress. Further research can be undertaken to analyze other mediating variables; like coping styles and academics performance.

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