# Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem among Young Indian Adults

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The transitioning period between adolescence to young adulthood with adaptation to the social environment is determined by an individual's capacity to segregate emotions from one's perspective and yet be high on self-esteem through maintaining a positive self-regard for oneself and towards others. The present study focused on understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem among young adults. This study recruited 134 young adults under 18-25 years to investigate the relationship between the two constructs and identify a gender difference between them. Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale (1998) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1979) were used to assess the constructs. The results showed a significant positive relationship between the perception of emotion and the management of others' emotions with self-esteem ($r$ = 0.182, 0.195, p < 0.05). No significant difference was found in emotional intelligence and self-esteem based on gender. This finding is in contrast to gender opinion on gender difference in self esteem. Larger studies can be conducted to explore further as these various have impact on further psychosocial development of young adults.

**Keywords**: Emotional Intelligence, perception of emotions, self-esteem, young adults

The need for young adults to deal with everyday life challenges effectively is manifested along the lines of psychosocial competence. It is one's ability to interact and relate to the positive mental well-being of oneself and others (Faiza, 2022). The present study aims to understand how greater levels of expression, appraisal, and regulation of one's and others' emotions increase the scope of having higher levels of self-esteem. Another area that the study would like to assess is understanding whether there would be no variance in emotional expression and self-esteem regarding gender.

Emotional Intelligence can be seen as a schedule that encircles the concept of emotional autonomy, coping, and socially responsible behaviour that predicts one's capacity and success to solve problems. It is a means through which we recognise, regulate, express and understand our emotions. It begins with the self and gradually progresses towards the wider social environment. An individual's ability to acknowledge the intensity of emotions depends on self-awareness, which enables one to monitor one's emotions and identify the same in other people, instilling self-confidence. (Goleman, 1995).

Self-esteem refers to one's general emotional response towards oneself, which can be negative or positive. In self-esteem, an individual measures their approval or disapproval by enhancing meaning in terms of the credence they provide to their talents, confidence and success. The degree of acceptance, respect and behaviour from others determines how an individual responds to evaluation, through which their experiences are modified and interpreted in terms of their values and aspirations. It acts

as a buffer system to regulate, sieve and protect the self from emotions that are deemed to be harmful. (Coopersmith, 1996).

Recent research has postulated that upholding positive emotional intelligence is closely associated with maintaining different social abilities to universalise perceptions and comprehend and manage skills to others' emotions, thereby improving interpersonal relationships. The perception of clarity in feelings and mood repair allowed young adults to have good self-perception in domains of self-concept (Jimenez & Lopez-Zafra, 2011; Salguero et al., 2011).

There is also a need to understand the variables with the help of theoretical background. Salovey and Mayer explained emotional intelligence through the *ability model*, which is the higher-level capacity to appraise, express, and perceive emotions and understand the reflective regulation of emotions. In addition to this, the ability model also focuses on labelling and identifying similarities and differences within emotions, which results in the development of the last dimension in the model, which is about contemplating the regulation of emotions that allows an individual to reduce, avert, and enhance one's own and others' emotions.

The *Cognitive Model of Self Esteem*, postulated by Melanie Fennell, explains the formation of self-esteem through an information-integrative approach wherein its development is owed largely to the rational process. The model suggests that people explore numerous characteristics based on a judgemental process, examining their capacities, attributes and performances through which they arrive at a conclusive decision about their worthiness. The relationship between emotional distress and self-esteem is also explained by the same model, which assumes that people who hold negative doubt about their ability lead to the expectation of failure, wherein the attributing factor about failure is associated with low ability. Such an understanding of failure surpasses different areas of self-concept, leading to emotional distress.

Previous research has shown that emotional intelligence is associated with positive mood states and high self-esteem (Schutte et al., 2002; J Cejudo et al., 2018; Singhal S, 2021). Faiza A (2022) indicated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem that is also associated with healthy personality traits and psychological well-being. These results are consistent with those who found that there were no gender differences in self-esteem (Saleha Bibi et al., 2016), as well as Sabah Abo El Fetouh Mohamed (2019), who found that there were no gender differences in emotional intelligence.

People can alter their emotions in various ways, and these emotion regulation strategies may affect a person's self-esteem. A study by Moutsatsou C and Koutra K (2021) found that effective emotion control can increase self-esteem, enabling people to react to stress adaptively. Additionally, this study also aligns with a previous study by Donnellan et al. (2005) that, in addition, reported that more violent behaviour has been linked to low self-esteem. Attention clarity of emotions and mood repair are traits of perceived emotional intelligence, according to earlier research by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Clarity of feelings and self-esteem were positively correlated, as well as mood repair and self-esteem (Daniela Calero et al., 2018). These results support Salovey et al. (2002) and Matalinares Calvet et al. (2005), which also reported a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and self-concept.

The scientific literature emphasises that emotional intelligence significantly impacts subjective well-being (Fabio A & M.E Kenny, 2016). According to Guerra-Bustamante J et

al. (2019), there is a direct correlation between a person's happiness and their perceived interpersonal emotional intelligence, as well as between emotional clarity and repair and psychological well-being. These results were consistent with J Cejudo et al. (2018) findings, which connected emotional intelligence to psychological processes inclusive of subjective well-being.

Previous research investigated the relationships between optimism, self-esteem, and personal happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003; Carver et al., 2010; Gorsy & Panwar, 2016). According to research by Mohammad Amin Wani (2017), optimism, self-esteem, and happiness are all positively correlated. These results are consistent with earlier research, which also found no significant gender differences in optimism (Bastianello et al., 2014).

Research studies in this area have tried to explore the correlation between emotional intelligence and an individual's gender. Males and females do not differ in terms of emotional intelligence, according to Meshkat M & Nejati R (2017). The findings of this study are in contrast with those of previous research, which indicated that emotional intelligence was higher in women than in men (Craig et al., 2009; Domakani et al., 2014).

Gender also seems to play a role in the recognition of emotions. According to a recent study, there were no significant differences between males and females; however, young female adults seem to recognise anger more quickly than males, and the genders could differentiate between pairs of emotions (Abbruzzese L et al., 2019). These results align with past research by Kothari R & Skuse D (2013) that focused on emotion recognition in young males and females separately.

Based on the above research, it is evident that a positive relationship exists between emotional intelligence and self-esteem along with different dimensions. Although researchers have tried to link gender with both constructs distinctly, certain irregularities in results were seen.

**Rationale of the study**

Emotional intelligence is considered an interpersonal skill which facilitates individuals to address basic differences in terms of emotional challenges while holding a positive attitude towards the self. Although previous studies have confirmed that a positive relationship exists between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults, the present studies vary in understanding the level of emotional intelligence across distinct dimensions in terms of the testing tool while understanding its relationship with self-esteem. The present study also tries to understand if there exist gender differences between the two constructs that will make use to introspect and design gender-based psychological wellbeing programs.

The study findings would help comprehend the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults. The variation in scores between the two constructs will help us identify if a positive relationship exists with no significant gender difference. Hence, the results would further add to the existing knowledge about the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem and try to fill the gap concerning gender differences.

By referencing the above aim of the study, the following hypotheses were framed based on the literature:

Hypothesis 1: There exists no gender difference between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults

Hypothesis 2: There exists a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults.

## Method

**Procedure:**

The participants in the study, after fulfilling the inclusion and exclusion criteria, were debriefed about the study procedure in the description section of the survey form, in which a section exclusive to taking consent from the participants was included. The survey was conducted remotely, requiring the participants to rate the specific items pertaining to both scales. The total duration required for the participants to rate the items will be approximately 5 minutes. Statistical analysis will be conducted to interpret the results of the data.

**Measures**

*Socio-Demographic Profile:* In the survey distributed to the participants, one section will be devoted to collecting information about the participants, such as their initials, age, gender, occupation and educational qualification.

*Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale:* It is a 33-item self-report measure developed by Schutte et al., (1998) to measure emotional intelligence. Every item in the test is designed to assess facets of Peter Salovey and John Mayers's (1990), original model of emotional intelligence. The reliability of the test stands at 0.90, being highly reliable for adults, with 0.85 as the validity of the scale.

*Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale:* It is a 10-item scale that measures positive and negative feelings about the self, developed by Rosenberg M (1969). It is a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with 0.81 as the scale's reliability and high predictive validity.

## Results

Table 1 shows that the sample of young adults consisted of 49 (36.6%) male and 85 (63.4%) female respondents ($N$ = 134). It also shows the descriptive statistics for Emotional Intelligence, which reveals that a low level of Emotional Intelligence has a frequency of 24.6%, and a high level of Emotional Intelligence has a frequency of 75.4%. In addition, Problematic Low Self-Esteem has a frequency of 15.7% and high Self-esteem has an 84.3% frequency level.

Table 1  Describing the characteristics of the sample

| Variable | Gender | | Level of Emotional Intelligence | | Level of Self-esteem | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Low | High | Problematic Low Self Esteem | High Self Esteem |
| Frequency | 49 (36.6) | 85 (63.4) | 33 (24.6) | 101 (75.4) | 21 (15.7) | 113 (84.3) |

From table 2 we have shown how the study tried to prove its directional hypothesis ($H_1$) using Pearson Moment Correlation. It was found that there exists a negligible positive correlation between the Perception of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem ($r$ = .182, p < 0.05 ). In addition, a negligible positive correlation exists between the Management of others' Emotions and Self-Esteem ( $r$ = .195, p < 0.05). However, it was found that no relationship between the other dimensions of emotional intelligence and self-esteem existed.

Table 2. Depicting the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem among Young Adults

| Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence | Perception of Emotion | Management of Emotion | Management of other emotion | Emotional Intelligence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-esteem | 0.182* | 0.042* | 0.195* | 0.157* |

*significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 depicts our testing of the null hypothesis ($H_0$), for which an Independent Sample *t-test* was conducted and it was found that Emotional Intelligence across all its dimensions did not differ significantly in males and females, and the same was reported for Self-Esteem in both males and females.

Table 3. depicting the difference between males and females across all dimensions of Emotional Intelligence with Self-Esteem

| Study Variables | Male (N=49) | | Female (N=85) | | "t" value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M1 | SD1 | M2 | SD2 | |
| Perception of Emotions | 32.76 | 4.55 | 32.25 | 4.71 | 0.60[NS] |
| Management of Emotions | 21.10 | 3.82 | 21.15 | 3.53 | 0.07[NS] |
| Management of other Emotions | 19.04 | 2.58 | 18.79 | 2.70 | 0.50[NS] |
| Emotional Intelligence | 120.88 | 14.22 | 119.94 | 13.25 | 0.38[NS] |
| Self-Esteem | 15.92 | 1.80 | 16.22 | 1.55 | 1.03[NS] |

NS-Not Significant at 0.05 level

### Discussion

The period of adjustment from adolescence to young adulthood is marked by individuals experiencing inhibition to regulate their attention and action towards negative and positive social cues. Emotional Intelligence is considered to be a self-visualised ability to perceive and respond to one's external stimuli, being highly dependent on the self-motive generalisation of what an individual has about one's worth and competence. As such, this study sought to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults and to observe if there exists no significant difference between male and female participants across these two constructs (Petrides & Furnham, 2006).

This study hypothesised that there would be no significant difference between males and females while understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem. Similar to the hypothesis, it was observed that males and females had similar levels of perception in regulating and expressing emotions across different dimensions while maintaining an optimistic attitude towards others and the self. This is adequately supported in one of the studies wherein they observed no gender difference in emotional intelligence and self-esteem scores, in which they utilised a multi-group analysis of data using a cross-sectional method (Kong F, et al., 2012). Although this study has supported the findings of this study, a contradiction can be that the study used a cross-sectional design, which focuses on the interpretation of data at a single point in time with no recommendations for the future prevalence and as it is based on an observational basis of the study, there could have been biases involved while answering the questions or even the perception of participants at that specific time might have been very different from the participants of this study.

The present study can be contradicted by one of the findings in which they suggested that females scored higher on emotional intelligence scores and males in the self-regulatory aspect in one instance, while the same male participants scored higher in emotional intelligence than females in another instance of the same study. Such a finding was observed because two different tools were used to study the same construct, one being the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire for females and the Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale for males. Although the study does contradict the findings of this study, it can also be criticised with regards that it didn't allow the researchers to establish a causal relationship between the constructs as to what were the

contributing factors in differential scoring patterns between males and females at each instance (Saklofske et al., 2011)

However, in the most recent advancement of study between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, a study highlighted that these two variables have no association with demographic aspects like gender. It comprised a similar research design framework of a correlational analysis (Tajpreet et al., 2022). Although the study does confirm the findings of this study, a significant point of contradiction can be the sample size they used, which was larger and more diverse in terms of sampling compared to this study, which had a relatively smaller sample size.

Contrary to the hypothesis, where it was stated that there exists a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, the statistical outcomes of the study suggested that although there is a positive relationship between the two variables, the strength of the relationship is very minimal, with no accountable significance (See Figure 1). The potential outcome for this finding can be due to the factors of affect variability and affect reactivity, which are two of the dynamic components of emotional well-being about age differences (Charles et al., 2010). This was emphasised in one of the interventional studies where they suggested that the differences within these two dimensions are due to differences in the exposure levels of young adults to situations which are emotionally charged, which may in turn, influence their expert understanding of handling the situation along with their perception of self-worth (Charles et al., 2010). Although this study supports the findings in the present study, there can be a certain contradiction in terms of the reporting measure. A self-report measure was used for both studies; however, the above-cited study focused more on the continuum of one's emotional habituation about stressors and a generalised positive outlook towards self and life extremes; the current study also did focus on similar facets, but was more centralised in terms of inductive understanding from the self to the external world in terms of emotions and self-esteem.

In addition, most recent research conducted to understand the same set of variables supports these findings, suggesting that there is a weak positive correlation between emotional intelligence and self-esteem in young adults which they had used a similar research design of a correlational study as well as in terms of the testing tools (Niyogi J et al., 2020).

The current study was not without limitations. There can be various drawbacks that this study can pose about internal validity. This study focused only on understanding the correlation between emotional intelligence and self-esteem. This correlation, however, does not imply the causal relationship between the two variables, wherein their causation can only be understood through a different framework and statistical analysis. This is a limitation since the study did not explain an individual cause-and-effect contributing factor.

In terms of utilising the testing tools, we used Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1969); although the Rosenbergs scale is one

of the most popular scales to evaluate self-esteem, in this study, it can pose a threat to the construct and sampling validity since Rosenbergs scale is unidimensional in nature which comes as a contrast to Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale which has been modelled on the multiple facets of Salovey and Mayer's emotional intelligence model, thereby not allowing the measurement of different dimensions and perceptions that the participants are likely to hold.

In addition to this, for this study to be high on external validity, we require a sample size that is large enough to be generalisable to the population; however, this study had a limited sample size of 134 samples between the age group of 18-25 years wherein we posed a limitation in enhancing the systematic variance of the study by not catering to remove the variance factor with regards to age groups by matching an equal number of participants in each group which can be accounted for as one of the contributing factors to an extraneous variable.

Despite these limitations, this study will serve as a basis for parents and school administrators to gain a root-level understanding that there can be a relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, wherein different interventions can be made in the community to enhance the levels of positive assertiveness, stress management, emotional regulation, positive self-talk, team building and communication strategies.

## Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to express, regulate and appraise emotions through the maintenance of a positive attitude about oneself and the external world (Salovey & Mayer, 1997). Many studies have supported this statement wherein they have attributed that effective emotional control increases one's self-esteem which in turn enables people to be more adaptive to external stressors with greater psychological well-being (Moutsatsou C & Koutra K, 2021). The present study tried to examine a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, with no significant difference in males and females between these constructs.

Findings indicated no significant difference between males and females in emotional intelligence and self-esteem. In addition, although we did observe a positive relationship between these two variables, the strength of the relationship could have been stronger, with less significance. Taken together, these findings will allow the readers to plan on strategies that will focus on improving the relationship between these constructs at an individual and community level and also by adding to existing literature to fill the scientific gap.

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