

ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON STRESS AND COPING OF GIFTED ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Giftedness is traditionally defined as having an intelligent Quotient higher than 130. Gifted adolescents experience stress of both their transitional stage as well as problem of being intellectually different from others. Coping strategies are usually adopted by us while facing various stressors. Emotional intelligence is a newly developed concept which is very essential for an individual to lead a successful life. The present study is a quantitative way of identifying the role of emotional intelligence on stress and coping mechanisms of gifted adolescents. The study was conducted among 145 gifted adolescents (60 males and 85 females); age ranging from 13-17 years. Participants were selected from different schools of Kannur, Calicut and Malappuram districts of Kerala using a purposive sampling technique. Participants were selected after administering Advanced Progressive Matrix to assess their degree of giftedness. Data was collected by administering Stress Scale, Coping Scale and Emotional Intelligence Scale. To verify whether stress and coping of gifted adolescents differ significantly as per their levels of Emotional Intelligence (high, average and low) analysis of variance was done. Results of the study indicated that low Emotional Intelligence resulted in high stress and high Emotional Intelligence resulted in low stress. Study also revealed that gifted adolescents who are high on emotional intelligence adopted more problem focused approach; compared to others and they were significantly differing from other groups. The study identified various issues faced by

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gifted adolescents in Indian context which may be helping academicians and parents to design educational programs by considering gifted adolescents.

Key Words: Gifted Adolescents, Stress, Problem focused coping, Emotion focused coping, Emotional Intelligence

Adolescence is usually interpreted as the most colorful years of life. Everybody has rich memories of their adolescence, and these memories will last till the end of a person's life. But in usual exploration, adolescents report that they experience much stress and strain during the period, may be because of the increased demands to adjust and cope up with. Research studies also show that adolescence is characterized by significant increase in stress (Seiffge, 2000). According to Erikson 1968, adolescence must face many major changes in life, including physical development; self-identity, making friends and falling in love, academic advancement exams, and how to maintain good interaction with peers and family members and all of these require more adjustment and adaptation.

Adolescence becomes problematic and unpredictable when they lack self-awareness to adapt to new demands and will be experiencing heightened hormonal secretions. But this can be considered as quite normal in the developmental course. Cream of any nation "Youth and adolescents" has to be given proper guidance and awareness about their development so as to get adjusted to the changing scenario. When the adolescent is not able to accept one's self, this leads to adolescence issues which can be of different sort.

When an adolescent experience wide varieties of issues due to their transitional stage gifted adolescents experience problems of both their changing stage as well as their so called label as 'gifted'. According to US Department of Education, 1993 "gifted children and youth are people with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment." Gifted students usually have unusual talent in one or occasionally two areas. This includes creative thinking, general intellectual ability, specific academic ability, leadership skills, psychomotor skills and outstanding in sense of spatial relationships. No child will be gifted in all

areas, but some may be in more than one area. Within specific academic ability, students again usually have one or two subjects that they are best in and passionate about.

This indicates that special attention needs to be given to this group. Parents and teachers need to be aware about the special gift of this children and the task which is given to them should be according to their intellectual capacities and talents. Usually when they have a different ability when compared with their age mates they are ignored and isolated from the rest of the crowd. Proper guidance is lacking with regard to children who are intellectually gifted. Despite continued efforts by researchers, a gap still exists in our understanding of the psychological, social, and emotional adjustment of gifted students (Mueller, 2009). The purpose of this study is investigating the role of emotional intelligence on stress and coping mechanisms of gifted adolescents, as they are considered to be a “special category” when compared with their age mates.

There are indications that gifted young people are more sensitive to stressors than other young people of their equivalent age (Ferguson, 1981). Gifted children often display sensitivities to their environment that vary from those of the general population (Gere, Capps, Mitchell & Grubbs, 2009). They experience difficulties resulting from uneven development, social deficiencies, strong internal drive, emotional vulnerability, heightened sensitivity, and their perceptions of the expectations of others (Zimmerman & Bickley, 2001). One of the concept with go in par with stress is coping mechanisms.

Coping can be understood as a process that changes as a function of the stressors encountered, the person's appraisal of these stressors, the person's traits, and the perceived efficacy of the particular coping strategies available (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping responses have been grouped into various categories, as well. At a basic level, coping strategies have been described as problem-focused or emotion focused (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused strategies attempt to change the stressful situation itself, whereas emotion-focused strategies endeavor to alleviate negative emotional responses to the stressor.

Buescher & Higham (1987) suggest that gifted adolescents may cope by using their abilities to help other students, earning other labels besides “gifted,” cultivating relationships with adults, seeking outside-of-school opportunities for talent development, avoiding academic

programs for the gifted, hiding high ability, avoiding average-ability peers, and/or underachieving. Swiatek (1995) and Swiatek & Dorr (1998) measure several social coping strategies, including denying giftedness, hiding giftedness, denying the importance of popularity, denying the impact of giftedness on peer acceptance, and maintaining high levels of interpersonal interaction. Most of the studies have reported that gifted adolescents tend to use problem focused coping strategies more often than emotion focused coping (Preus & Dubow, 2004).

Chan (2003) in an empirical study has identified among gifted students some common problems in adjusting to being gifted. These problems included their concerns for good relationships with peers as well as their talents receiving recognition, feeling the lack of challenge in their schoolwork, feeling emotionally involved intensely in what was happening around them, feeling that they were different from their peers, engaging in perfectionist behaviors, and feeling stressed by the high expectations from their parents.

The presence of these adjustment problems could in turn prompt the use of a number of social coping strategies. Specifically, in adjusting to their being gifted, these students employed coping strategies that included avoidance behaviors, denying their giftedness, discounting the importance of popularity, activity involvement, engaging in conforming behaviors, and emphasizing the value of peer acceptance (Swiatek, 1995, 2001). From the above findings it could be surmised that those who were more emotionally intelligent would perhaps engage in using more adaptive coping strategies, which might in turn lead to their reduced vulnerability to psychological distress (Mayer Perkins, Caruso, & Salovey, 2001).

Emotional intelligence is a newly developed concept which is very essential for an individual to lead a successful life. Goleman (1995) popularized the notion of emotional intelligence first used by Mayer and Salovey (1990) who defined emotional intelligence as individuals' ability to monitor their own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among emotions, and to use this information to guide thinking and action. Specifically, they conceptualized emotional intelligence as comprising three categories of adaptive abilities that include appraisal and expression of emotions in self and others, regulation of emotions in self and others, and utilization of emotions in solving problems through flexible planning, creative

thinking, redirected attention, and motivation. Various authors have proposed theoretical links between Emotional Intelligence and coping (Austin, Saklofske, & Mastoras, 2010, Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007). Thus, it was of great interest to explore the relationships between gifted students emotional intelligence and their coping with various stressors.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Being a member of adolescent group, gifted adolescents also experiences various stressors. Hence identifying the issues gifted adolescents face at school and developing educational curriculum according to their needs becomes the need of the hour. Reis, & Renzulli, (2004) found that issues emerge because of the mismatch with educational environment that are not responsive to pace and level of gifted. Effective coping is found to reduce stress. Review of studies indicates that gifted adolescents have increased emotional intelligence but contradictory evidences are also available. A study by Chan, (2008) indicated that gifted have decreased emotional maturity, compared to their age mates.

There is currently little information available on the association between stress, coping strategies and emotional intelligence of gifted adolescents and particularly in Indian context. The present study attempts to find whether stress and coping style of gifted differ significantly as per their levels of emotional intelligence (high, average, low). This study serves an important purpose in identifying various issues faced by gifted adolescents in Indian context so as to help academicians and parents to design educational programs which suits all group of adolescents.

PROBLEM

Role of Emotional Intelligence in stress and coping patterns of gifted adolescents.

OBJECTIVES

- To study and compare the stress of the gifted adolescents, as per their differences in the level of Emotional Intelligence.
- To study and compare coping style of the gifted adolescents, as per their differences in the level of Emotional Intelligence

HYPOTHESES

1. Stress of gifted adolescents differs significantly as per their level of Emotional Intelligence (high, medium and low).
2. Coping style of gifted adolescents differ significantly as per their level of Emotional Intelligence (high, medium and low).

METHODS

SAMPLE

Sample consisted of 145 gifted adolescents which includes 60 males and 85 females, age ranging from 13-17 years. Sample was selected from different schools of Kannur, Calicut and Malappuram districts of Kerala. Participants were selected by administering Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) to assess their giftedness. Adolescents with IQ above 130 were included in the study.

TOOLS

1. Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) [Raven, 1962 R]
2. Stress Among Gifted Adolescents Scale (SAGA) [Rinju George.& Baby Shari, 2011]
3. Adolescent Coping Pattern Scale (ACP) [Rinju George & Baby Shari,2011]
4. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) [Rinju George & Baby Shari,2011]

PROCEDURE

With the consent of various institutions/ schools researcher met the participants in a group of 8-10. Advanced Progressive Matrices was used as screening test to determine participants Intelligence (IQ). Adolescents with IQ above 130 were included in the study. And they were given scales named as Stress among Gifted Adolescents Scale (SAGA), Adolescent Coping Pattern Scale (ACP) and Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS). The test was administered as per the convenience of the participants and with the parental consent. Rapport was established before the administration of the tools. Separate instructions were given for each tool. When the

responses are marked, response sheets were collected thankfully and scored appropriately. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To study the influence of Emotional Intelligence on Stress and Coping Mechanisms one-way analysis of variance was done. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EI scale) for adolescents was based on the five dimensions of Emotional Intelligence given by Goleman (1995). Emotional Intelligence Scale consisted of 44 items which comes under five sub-categories. Sub-factors are named as managing emotions, self-awareness, social skills, self-motivation and empathy.

The total participants of 145 gifted adolescents was categorized into three groups (high EI, average EI and low EI) based on the principle of $\text{mean} \pm 1 \text{ SD}$.

Stress among Gifted Adolescents

In the present study an attempt was made to study the stress experience of gifted adolescents according to their levels of Emotional intelligence. In order to verify hypothesis (1) which stated that stress of gifted adolescents differs significantly as per their level of Emotional Intelligence (high, medium and low) one way analysis of variance was done. Accordingly sample was divided into three groups (high EI group, average EI group and low EI group) and their stress scores were compared using one way ANOVA. Results are given in table 1.

Table 1

Summary of one-way ANOVA of stress by emotional intelligence (N=145)

GROUPS / VARIABLES	BETWEEN GROUPS		WITHIN GROUPS		F-value
	Sum of Squares	Mean square	Sum of Squares	Mean square	
Total SAGA Score	15142.89	7571.45	200592.1	1412.62	5.36**

* Significant at 0.05 level.

** Significant at 0.01 level

One-way analysis of variance revealed that emotional intelligence has a significant influence on total stress scale. F-ratio obtained is 5.36 which is found to be significant at 0.01

level. This indicates that three groups (high Emotional Intelligence, Average Emotional Intelligence and Low Emotional Intelligence) differ significantly in total stress scale. To know which groups of emotional intelligence makes the difference, scheffes F was calculated and results are given below.

Table .2

Mean and standard deviation of total SAGA Score for various groups formed on the basis of Emotional Intelligence

VARIABLES	GROUPS	LOW N=47		AVERAGE N=51		HIGH N=47	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Score	SAGA	144.72	39.79	132.27	38.13	119.34	34.60

Table (2) shows mean scores and standard deviation of total stress score for three groups formed on the basis of emotional intelligence. In the case of overall stress also three groups differ significantly because the F-Value is found to be significant at 0.01level. The groups which vary in their emotional intelligence (EI) differ significantly in their overall stress. To do inter group comparison and find out the significant mean difference among the groups Scheffe test was conducted. Table (2) indicated that mean score and standard deviation of low emotional intelligence group was found to be 144.72 and 39.79 respectively. For Average emotional intelligence group mean is found to be 132.27 and standard deviation is calculated as 38.27. For high emotional intelligence group mean score was calculated as 119.34 and standard deviation was found to be 34.60. The result indicated that group I (low emotional intelligence group) significantly differ from group III (high emotional intelligence group) and there was no significant difference found in terms of group I and II and group II and III. Mean comparison indicated that group I (low emotional intelligence group) scored highest in total stress and group

III (high emotional intelligence group) score the least. This shows that low Emotional Intelligence results in high stress and high Emotional Intelligence results in low stress.

Many studies had reported the fact that Emotional Intelligence decreases stress. Austin, Saklofske, & Mastoras, (2010) reported that high level of stress were associated with lower scores on Emotional Intelligence. Campbell & Ntobedzi, (2007) predicted that higher emotional intelligence would be related to decreased levels of psychological distress. Jaemin, Ronald, Cichy, & Seung, (2009) observed differences between high and low Emotional Intelligence groups for both overall and each dimension of EI scores in social skills and stress management skills among members of the National Automatic Merchandising. Taylor, (2001) argued that the emotionally intelligent can cope better with life's challenges and control their emotions more effectively, both of which contribute to good psychological and physical health. In the present study, stress is studied for the main total of stress scale. Result of the study revealed that stress decreases according to the increase in Emotional Intelligence, and it provides supportive evidences to the early mentioned studies.

Results obtained indicate that low Emotional Intelligence resulted in high stress and high Emotional Intelligence resulted in low stress and hypothesis (1) is accepted.

Coping Pattern among gifted adolescents

In the present study an attempt was made to study the coping mechanisms used by subjects (gifted adolescents) according to their levels of Emotional intelligence; to test the hypothesis 2 which stated that "Coping style of gifted adolescents differ significantly as per their levels of emotional intelligence (high, average and low)" Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was done. Details are given in table (3).

Table.3

F-Value of problem focused and emotion focused coping for various groups (N=145) formed on the basis of Emotional intelligence.

GROUPS VARIABLES	BETWEEN GROUPS		WITHIN GROUPS		F-value
	Sum of Squares	Mean square	Sum of square	Mean Squares	
Problem Focused coping	2910.81	1455.40	6635.23	46.73	31.14**
Emotion focused coping	249.81	124.90	14614.78	102.92	1.21

** Significant at 0.01 level.

One way ANOVA was used to study the spread of coping in gifted sample by considering their EI and dividing them into high, average and low EI groups. When problem focused coping was studied in relation to Emotional Intelligence of the group the F-value is found to be 31.14 which is significant at 0.01 levels. This indicates that there exist a significant difference between low, average and high EI groups on the variable problem focused coping. For emotion focused coping F-value obtained is 1.21 which is not significant. Details about three groups on coping patterns are given in table (4).

Table.4

Mean score and Standard Deviation of Coping Patterns for Various Groups Formed On The Basis of Emotional Intelligence

GROUPS VARIABLES	LOW N=47		AVERAGE N=51		HIGH N=47	
	Mean	standard deviation	Mean	standard deviation	Mean	standard deviation
Problem Focused coping	75.19	6.31	78.20	7.88	85.96	6.08
Emotion focused coping	60.49	9.67	60.12	9.63	57.51	11.10

Table (4) indicates mean scores and Standard Deviation of Coping Patterns for various groups formed on the basis of emotional intelligence. Mean scores of problem focused coping for low, average and high are 75.19, 78.20 and 85.96 respectively.

F-value of 31.14 indicated that there exists a significant difference between three groups formed on the basis of emotional intelligence for the variable problem focused coping. To do inter group comparison and find out the significant mean difference among the groups Scheffe test was conducted. Scheffe test indicated that low EI and high EI group differ significantly where mean difference is found to be 10.77. A significant difference was also observed in terms of average group and high group. High Emotional Intelligence group also differed significantly with low Emotional Intelligence and average Emotional Intelligence group. But there was no difference between average and low EI groups. Mean scores of low, average and high are 75.19, 78.20 and 85.96 respectively. Mean comparison indicated that group with high Emotional Intelligence scored highest in problem focused coping scale and group with low Emotional Intelligence scored the least in this problem focused coping.

For the variable emotion focused coping F- ratio obtained (1.214) is not significant. This indicated that there exists no significant difference between three groups on the variable emotion focused coping. Mean scores of low, average and high are 60.49, 60.12 and 57.51 respectively.

Considering the data, there exist a significant difference between three groups on problem focused coping, where group with high Emotional Intelligence scored high on problem focused coping and group with low Emotional Intelligence scored low on problem focused coping. This indicated that Emotional Intelligence helps individuals to regulate their life using problem focused coping. But in terms of emotion focused coping no significant difference was observed. This indicated that despite of change in levels of Emotional Intelligence gifted group tends to use emotion focused coping where situations demands it.

Various authors have proposed theoretical links between Emotional Intelligence, stress and coping. Austin, Saklofske, & Mastoras, (2010) study reported that high level of stress were associated with lower scores on EI and higher scores on emotion-focused coping. Levels of EI have previously been linked to the use of more or less adaptive coping strategies (Saklofske,

Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, (2007). Study by Chan, (2005) indicated that Emotional intelligence had an effect on psychological distress mediated by social coping.

Data analysis as a whole indicated that group with high Emotional Intelligence scored high on problem focused coping and group with low Emotional Intelligence scored low on problem focused coping and in terms of emotion focused coping no significant difference was observed. In terms of stress it was observed that low Emotional Intelligence group experienced more stress and engaged in fewer problems focused coping and more of emotion focused coping strategies. But high Emotional Intelligence resulted in low stress and increased usage of problem focused coping and decreased use of emotion focused coping strategies.

From the findings it is clear that three groups of emotional intelligence (high, average and low) differ significantly on using of problem focused strategies and the above mentioned hypothesis 2 is partially accepted.

Findings

1. Stress of gifted adolescents differs significantly as per their levels of Emotional intelligence (high, average, low).
2. Coping patterns of gifted adolescents differs significantly as per their levels of Emotional intelligence (high, average, low).

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected from the sample were analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). When the gifted sample were divided into three (high, medium and low) as the basis of their score for emotional intelligence, low Emotional Intelligence group was high in stress and high Emotional Intelligence group had low stress. High emotional intelligence group also were found to adopt more problem focused approach, compared to other groups which differ significantly, one another.

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