

A study on emotional intelligence of adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The present study was taken up to find out the emotional intelligence levels of adolescents and to find out the differences among them due to different sociocultural background. The sample size comprised of 325 adolescents (16-18 years) drawn from urban, rural and tribal areas of Jorhat district of Assam. It can be highlighted from the results that the level of emotional intelligence of most of the adolescents was far better in the dimension of interpersonal management. Majority of adolescents were least competent in the abilities pertaining to the dimension of intrapersonal management. Majority of adolescents of urban culture were found to have more skills in all the dimensions of emotional intelligence than the adolescents of rural culture barring interpersonal management. The adolescents of tribal culture possessed considerably low level in all the dimensions of emotional intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

The popularization of emotional intelligence has been a major event in the history of the psychological construct. The merging of emotion and intelligence as a cognitive ability under the caption of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was proposed by Yale psychologists, Salovey and Mayer (1990). It offers solutions to a myriad of problems we are facing in work, education, and health domains. It now seems evident that emotional intelligence has implications for the ways in which individuals tackle daily problems such as preventive activity in physical and mental health, effective developmental intervention in schools and communities, business and organizations (Goleman, 2001). More specifically at the individual level it is suggested

that it modulates parenting behaviour, ego strength, choice of role models, communication of feelings, appreciation of aesthetics, moral and ethical feelings, social problems solving, leadership and spiritual feeling (Mayer and Salovey, 1995). Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive emotions, integrate emotions to facilitate thoughts, understand emotions and regulate emotions to promote personal growth. According to Singh (2006) emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to appropriately and successfully respond to a vast variety of emotional stimuli being elicited from the inner self and immediate environment. Some emotional reactions and emotional memories can be formed without any conscious, cognitive participation at all (Goleman, 1995). Bar-on (2006)

developed one of the first measures of emotional intelligence that used the term Emotional Quotient (EQ) and constructed commercially available operational index for the assessment of emotional intelligence. There is a Trait emotional intelligence model of emotional intelligence which encompasses behavioural dispositions and self-perceived abilities and is measured by self-report (Petrides, 2007). Keeping in view the distinctive characteristics of the Indian cultural context, Sibia *et al.* (2003 and 2004) proposed a model of emotional intelligence. The model does not conceive emotional intelligence as a homogenous trait or a mental ability devoid of social concerns. Rather, it is rooted in the rich traditional, religious and philosophical context focusing on the role of family and society in shaping one's emotions. Emotions, unlike intelligence, are primarily learned. Culture, by way of socialization and enculturation practices, have a great role to play. Since both emotion and intelligence are psychological processes, and all psychological processes are necessarily culturally constituted, emotional intelligence also should be shaped by environment (culture). Studies have identified 7 to 10 basic emotions that may be universally experienced and expressed in similar ways in almost all the cultures. Display rule for emotional expressions differ across cultures (Huffman, 2002). According to Goleman (1995) the amount of control of emotion has a genetic component, yet one can learn to control emotions to a certain degree. Most people do learn this at some point. Further it is possible to hone the skill, achieving greater abilities to manage emotions. Therefore, Goleman believes that emotional intelligence is learnable. According to Mayer and Salovey (1997) emotional intelligence is a psychological capacity, part of which is innate and part of which can be learned from the experience of life. This later part may be improved through practice and experience. According to Cooper (1996) emotional intelligence is the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power of and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information, trust, creativity and influence. Freedman (1998) defines that emotional intelligence is a way of recognizing, understanding, and choosing how we think, feel and act. Sanwal (2004) defines that emotional intelligence is the awareness of use of emotions and their utilization within the parameters of individual cognitive styles to cope with situations and problems. Research supports the notion that emotional

abilities help people to achieve their goal (Salovey *et al.*, 2002) namely establishment of good interpersonal relationship, managing ones emotional balance and being successful in every sphere of life.

From the viewpoint of individual, his sociocultural environment is made up of situation, roles, and institutions that represent normative pressures on him for correct performance and also offer opportunities for personal expression and satisfaction. Lutz and White (1980) in their study had shown that emotion is dependent on cognitive appraisals of experience as well as a culturally grounded process. Kitayama (1994) further noted that emotions are not discrete 'hardwired' biological events, but are influenced and shaped through social, cultural, and linguistic processes. The individual in a human population adapt to the cultural (or sociocultural) environment that includes means for their individual survival and guides their adaptation along established channels. Child rearing practices are primarily significant as indicators or clues to the cultural values and emotional attitudes of a particular cultural group. Parent-child interaction reflects culturally dominant preferences concerning role relationship and handling of impulses. The relation between affective and emotional aspects of parental behaviour and the child's emotional adjustment is culture specific. The responses and cognitive capacities of the individual were programmed in accordance with the overall design or configuration of his emotional, social, cognitive and personality development. The crimes and antisocial activities prevalent in the society make the peoples' life stressful and critical. Problems for adolescents are increasing all the more in the present fast-paced, time-driven, competitive profit-obsessed modern society with technological advancement and liberalization. Emotional health needs attention through this kind of research to get an insight in to the psychology of adolescents and evolve strategies to make the future generation more effective, productive, and mentally healthy. Nathawal (1998) found and claimed that the regulatory centers in the brain for EQ unlike most others, continue to take shape and mature into adolescence.

Thus, the period of adolescence is very important and hence in-depth researches of this period are of great significance in today's context for the growth of any individual, family, society, as well as the nation. Therefore the present study was taken up to study the emotional intelligence levels of adolescents and to find out the

differences among them due to different sociocultural background.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study was conducted in Jorhat district of the state of Assam. The total sample of 325 were selected from five different institutions of urban, rural and tribal areas of Jorhat district of Assam. Sample consisted of late adolescents between the age group of 16-18 (class – XI) years. A standardized structured questionnaire named Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory (MEII) was administered to collect the necessary information. The inventory assessed the total emotional intelligence of an individual and also its dimensions in terms of Intrapersonal Awareness, Interpersonal Awareness, Intrapersonal Management and Interpersonal Management. The inventory had provided a five fold categorization ('very good', 'good', 'average', 'poor' and 'very poor') for an estimation and quick interpretation of emotional intelligence scores earned by an individual student. The frequencies of the data at different levels of emotional intelligence of respondents of different sociocultural backgrounds were converted into percentages. The differences among urban, rural and tribal respondents on the scores of emotional intelligence were tested for significance with the help of z- test.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present investigation are presented below:

It is evident from the results (Table 1) that almost one seventh of the urban sample (13.95%) fell in the category of 'good' intrapersonal awareness of emotional intelligence, which was followed by rural (5.46%) and tribal (2.33%) adolescents. A great percentages of urban

(61.24%) and rural (67.27%) adolescents were found in 'average' category of intrapersonal awareness. The 'poor' level of intrapersonal awareness was also found among urban (21.71%) and rural adolescents (21.81%) but the number of adolescents in the same category was larger (44.18%) in case of tribal area's adolescents. Similarly, the number of respondents in the category of 'very poor' was also higher in tribal area (11.63%) than their urban (3.10%) and rural (5.46%) counterparts. It can be noted from the results that the cultural effect on the domain of intrapersonal awareness was obvious as the adolescents of urban and rural areas were exposed to a wide and expressive social environment in which they got the opportunities to learn and recognize their feelings and thus they tried to be practical for self-actualization, which contributed towards emotional intelligence. A sense of adolescents' worth and capabilities were also recognized by the technically sound urban parents as well as by some of the rural parents too. These became the motivational factors to achieve competencies in intrapersonal awareness for most of the adolescents of urban and rural areas. On the other hand the sociocultural environment of tribal area was not conducive for the development of intrapersonal awareness. Though the tribal people lived in a collectivist society and led a simplest life even then their cultural atmosphere could not provide a wide concept for deep thinking and to visualize the future with reference to today's context.

The results (Table 2) show that in the dimension of interpersonal awareness of emotional intelligence 9.09 per cent of adolescents of rural area fell in 'good' category, followed by 4.65 per cent adolescents of urban area. It was surprising to note that none of the tribal adolescents were found in the 'good' category of interpersonal awareness. With regard to the 'average' category, a considerable variation was found between

Table 1: Distribution of respondents falling under various categories of intrapersonal awareness across three sociocultural settings

Categories	Intrapersonal awareness							
	Urban (n=129)		Rural (n=110)		Tribal (n=86)		Total (n=325)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Very good	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Good	18	13.95	6	5.46	2	2.33	26	8.00
Average	79	61.24	74	67.27	36	41.86	189	58.15
Poor	28	21.71	24	21.81	38	44.18	90	27.69
Very poor	4	3.10	6	5.46	10	11.63	20	6.16
Total	129	100.00	110	100.00	86	100.00	325	100.00

F= Frequency

P=Percentage

the adolescents of urban (68.99%) and tribal (32.56%) area. The results also picture that more than half of the tribal adolescents (55.81%) were ‘poor’ in interpersonal awareness, followed by 32.73 per cent and 20.16 per cent adolescents of rural and urban areas, respectively. Again some of the tribal adolescents were found (11.63%) in ‘very poor’ category of interpersonal awareness while the number was almost half in case of rural (5.45%) and urban (6.20%) adolescents. The above findings posited that culture had specific bearing on interpersonal awareness. Though the tribal adolescents belonged to a collectivist society their life was confined to the village with daily household and farm activities. They were very conservative in the sense that the community had their own festivals and religious rituals which they never share with the people of other communities or outsiders. The ways of practicing common Assamese culture and festivals were completely different among the tribal group. As the tribal adolescents did not get the chance to know the world outside their villages they could not function effectively in a relationship in recognizing others’ emotions and their effects. In their life skills development process they possessed minimum abilities to develop the skills of interpersonal awareness. Being the collectivist culture,

the rural people were always concerned for others than for self. The rural culture promoted values like respecting elders, being empathetic, co-operative and other human values which motivated the adolescents to conform to those standard of behaviours and they gradually strengthen the abilities to mingle with others and take an active interest in other’s concern in a relationship irrespective of place or person. The unique characteristic of urban culture for inculcating personality development skills in children made most of the urban adolescents capable of developing the skills of interpersonal awareness.

It is evident from Table 3 that irrespective of sociocultural settings most of the respondents had a low level of intrapersonal management. However, a relatively higher percentage of urban adolescents (13.18%) had ‘good’ level of intrapersonal management skills than the adolescents of other two areas (rural: 1.82%, tribal: 4.65%). Almost equal numbers of adolescents were found in urban (40.31%) and rural (40%) areas who had ‘poor’ level of emotional intelligence in the dimension of intrapersonal management. Among the tribal adolescents the largest section of respondents were found in ‘very poor’ (37.21%) category than that of other categories of

Table 2: Distribution of respondents falling under various categories of interpersonal awareness across three socio-cultural settings

Categories	Interpersonal awareness							
	Urban (n=129)		Rural (n=110)		Tribal (n=86)		Total (n=325)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Very good	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Good	6	4.65	10	9.09	–	–	16	4.92
Average	89	68.99	58	52.73	28	32.56	175	53.85
Poor	26	20.16	36	32.73	48	55.81	110	33.85
Very poor	8	6.20	6	5.45	10	11.63	24	7.38
Total	129	100.00	110	100.00	86	100.00	325	100.00

F= Frequency

P=Percentage

Table 3 : Distribution of respondents falling under various categories of intrapersonal management across three socio-cultural settings

Categories	Intrapersonal management							
	Urban (n=129)		Rural (n=110)		Tribal (n=86)		Total (n=325)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Very good	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Good	17	13.18	2	1.82	4	4.65	23	7.08
Average	40	31.01	42	38.18	26	30.23	108	33.23
Poor	52	40.31	44	40.00	24	27.91	120	36.92
Very poor	20	15.50	22	20.00	32	37.21	74	22.77
Total	129	100.00	110	100.00	86	100.00	325	100.00

F= Frequency

P=Percentage

intrapersonal management. It can be inferred that, though the personality of tribal people were very simple but some characteristics like being short tempered, being stubborn, having indifferent attitude, being less sensible, being straight forward and low stress tolerance were found predominantly among them. The unique personality pattern of tribal adolescents was the indicative of having difficulty in the development of skills of intrapersonal management. Though the number was less, some of the urban and rural adolescents were better in this dimension. It indicated that in spite of having tremendous problems during this transitional stage both the cultures escorted their adolescent children through a positive portal to adulthood by providing appropriate role model and guidance.

In the dimension of interpersonal management (Table 4), the overview of percentages of adolescents in various socio cultural settings under different categories shows a better picture. The sample studied exhibited that in rural area, 63.64 per cent fell in ‘average’ level, 23.64 per cent fell in ‘good’ level, and only 12.72 per cent fell in ‘poor’ level of interpersonal management. Surprisingly, none of the rural adolescents had the ‘very poor’ level of

interpersonal management skills. The rural culture of Assamese people is rooted in the rich traditional, religious, and ethical context focusing on social concerns such as well being of others. Likewise, the concept of shared locus of control was more salient and accorded greater value in the rural set up. Therefore, most of the rural adolescent could promote the skills of interpersonal management. The results also revealed that in all the categories endorsement towards interpersonal management of urban (good: 20.93%, average: 62.02%, poor: 13.95% very poor: 3.10%) adolescents were far better than their tribal (good: 11.63%, average: 48.84%, poor: 25.58%, very poor: 13.95%) counterparts. Though the urban adolescents lived in an individualistic society they adapt to such an environment that their emotional health was nurtured through some other kind of practices. In the urban setting, adolescents’ life was exposed to a challenging and competitive environment resulting in analytical and practical behaviour to cope with the changing environment and adept in solving life related problems. The tribal culture possessed the characteristics such as cohesiveness, integration, having an idea of

Table 4 : Distribution of respondents falling under various categories of interpersonal management across three socio-cultural settings

Categories	Interpersonal management							
	Urban (n=129)		Rural (n=110)		Tribal (n=86)		Total (n=325)	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Very good	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Good	27	20.93	26	23.64	10	11.63	63	19.38
Average	80	62.02	70	63.64	42	48.84	192	59.08
Poor	18	13.95	14	12.72	22	25.58	54	16.62
Very poor	4	3.10	–	–	12	13.95	16	4.92
Total	129	100.00	110	100.00	86	100.00	325	100.00

F= Frequency

P= Percentage

Table 5 : Values of z of EI and its four dimensions of urban and rural respondents

Emotional intelligence	Groups	Mean	SD	z value
Total emotional intelligence	Urban	63.74	9.48	1.71*
	Rural	61.76	8.37	
Intrapersonal awareness	Urban	16.17	4.33	2.01**
	Rural	15.22	2.97	
Interpersonal awareness	Urban	15.29	3.17	1.50 ^{NS}
	Rural	14.64	3.54	
Intrapersonal management	Urban	15.04	4.03	2.72**
	Rural	13.67	3.73	
Interpersonal management	Urban	17.57	3.09	1.95*
	Rural	18.25	2.28	

NS=Non significant

* and ** indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

relationship, believing in basic element of trust and reliance only among them, which acted as contributing factors to show comparatively a better result in this dimension by the tribal adolescents also. However, the results should be taken as an indicative fact that the adolescents of this age group found the skills pertaining to interpersonal management easier to conform which overshadowed the other three dimension of emotional intelligence.

Barring interpersonal awareness, in all the other components the differences between urban and rural adolescents were significant (Table 5). The calculated z values of total emotional intelligence ($z=1.71$, $P<0.05$) and interpersonal management ($z=1.95$, $P<0.05$) was significant at 5 per cent probability level, while z values were highly significant in intrapersonal awareness ($z=2.01$, $P<0.01$) and in intrapersonal management ($z=2.72$, $P<0.01$). Almost equal values of mean score of urban (15.29) and rural (14.64) adolescents in the dimension of interpersonal awareness revealed that both the ecological

settings created similar pattern of atmosphere to bolster the emotional potentialities of adolescents related to interpersonal awareness. The urban adolescents yielded higher values of mean scores in the area of intrapersonal awareness and intrapersonal management than the rural counterparts. The urban adolescents were always updated particularly with academic matters and channelized by their parents with all available recent resources which made their life faster, more active and alert and thereby had a positive effect on their emotional health. In case of rural adolescents, it can be inferred that, in general most of the adolescents could not develop the practical strategies to meet the challenges in the outside world like urban adolescents due to less stimulation on the part of the parents and immediate environment.

The differences of urban and tribal respondents in emotional intelligence and its dimensions (Table 6) were highly significant ($z=8.35$, $P<0.01$; $z=5.78$, $P<0.01$; $z=7.79$, $P<0.01$; $z=3.73<0.01$ and $z=4.09$, $P<0.01$), as evidenced

Emotional intelligence	Groups	Mean	SD	z value
Total emotional intelligence	Urban	63.74	9.48	8.35**
	Tribal	53.91	7.71	
Intrapersonal awareness	Urban	16.17	4.33	5.78**
	Tribal	13.09	3.45	
Interpersonal awareness	Urban	15.29	3.17	7.79**
	Tribal	12.23	2.57	
Intrapersonal management	Urban	15.04	4.03	3.73**
	Tribal	12.88	4.22	
Interpersonal management	Urban	17.57	3.09	4.09**
	Tribal	15.72	3.36	

** indicate significance of value at $P=0.01$

Emotional intelligence	Groups	Mean	SD	z value
Total emotional intelligence	Rural	61.76	8.37	6.82**
	Tribal	53.91	7.71	
Intrapersonal awareness	Rural	15.22	2.97	4.55**
	Tribal	13.09	3.45	
Interpersonal awareness	Rural	14.64	3.54	5.51**
	Tribal	12.23	2.57	
Intrapersonal management	Rural	13.67	3.73	1.36 ^{NS}
	Tribal	12.88	4.22	
Interpersonal management	Rural	18.25	2.28	6.00**
	Tribal	15.72	3.36	

** indicate significance of value at $=0.01$

NS = Non-significant

by calculated z values. In all the aspects the mean scores of urban adolescents were considerably greater than the mean scores of tribal adolescents. After considering the role of ecology it can be construed that the urban adolescents experience a superior socialization process in which they were encouraged for the free expression of emotion by maintaining good conduct and simultaneously explained the values behind that. Instead, the tribal culture seemed to provide an unpredictable and less expressive emotional environment to their future generation in which tribal culture never recognize the developmental needs of the adolescents and hence the adolescents lacked in substantial emotional development.

The results of calculated z values reveal that the differences of rural and tribal adolescents in the context of emotional intelligence and its four dimensions (Table 7) namely intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, interpersonal management were highly significant, with $z = 6.82$, $P < 0.01$; $z = 4.55$, $P < 0.01$; $z = 5.51$, $P < 0.01$; $z = 1.36$, $P < 0.01$; and $z = 6.00$, $P < 0.01$. After comparing the mean values of rural and tribal adolescents, it was found that in total emotional intelligence and its four dimensions the mean scores of rural adolescents were higher than their tribal counterparts. Hence, it was evident that the emotional intelligence of rural adolescents was higher as compared to tribal adolescents.

Conclusion :

Culture seemed to play an important role in the development of emotional attributes of adolescents. It can be highlighted from the results that the level of emotional intelligence of most of the adolescents was far better in the dimension of interpersonal management than intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal awareness. Majority of adolescents were least competent in the abilities pertaining to the dimension of intrapersonal management. Majority of adolescents of urban culture projected more capacities in all the dimensions of emotional intelligence than the adolescents of rural culture barring interpersonal management. The adolescents of tribal culture possessed considerably low level of emotional intelligence in all the dimensions. These accumulated facts proved that the sociocultural environment significantly contributes in shaping and constituting the level of emotional intelligence of adolescents.

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