

## Emotional Intelligence in Relation to Gender among Secondary School Students in Athi-River Sub-County, Kenya

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### Abstract

*An individual with high level of emotional intelligence is more likely to handle life challenges more effectively than an individual with low level of emotional intelligence. Children in the age bracket of 13-19 are in a critical phase of life that usher them to early adulthood. This phase is characterized by heightened emotionality hence considered as stressful by many. As such, it is imperative that they acquire necessary skills that will enable them identify, understand and manage their emotions as they progress to adulthood. The aim of this study was to examine gender differences in emotional intelligence of secondary school students. The study used quasi-experimental design and results are at baseline analysis. The sample comprised of 120 students ranging between 13-18 years studying in secondary schools in Athi-river Sub County. Purposive, simple and systematic sampling techniques were used to select four private secondary schools and the participants. Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i: YV) tool was used to assess emotional intelligence. Spearman's correlation and independent t-test were used in data analysis. There was a statistically significant correlation between gender and emotional intelligence with females having higher emotional intelligence mean scores than males. Moreover both genders differed significantly in two dimensions of emotional intelligence; female students showed higher stress management skills while male students showed higher scores on general mood. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the ministry of education should provide for gender-based life skills training to improve emotional intelligence with respect to these gender differences.*

**Key Words:** Emotional intelligence, gender, adolescents

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has gained great importance among researchers, the public, and practitioners. This is against the backdrop of the arising question on what helps an individual to succeed in life other than the traditional intelligence. It is evident that success in life not only requires intellectual abilities but also social and emotional abilities. Study findings indicate that EI is a predictor of academic achievement (Roy, Sinha, & Suman, 2013), psychological adjustment (Palomera, Salguero, & Ruiz-Aranda, 2012), and career success (Jose-Manuel & Juan-Luis, 2014). Higher levels of emotional intelligence positively correlates with indicators of emotional well-being (Extremera, Duran, & Rey, 2011a).

Adolescence is a period of psychological and physical maturity characterized by the process of identity formation. It is a phase of heightened emotionality hence the need to acquire necessary skills in emotional regulation. Erickson (1968) observed that the transition to adulthood can be an easy process under the guidance of securing, understanding, and nurturing parents within the context of an emotionally favorable environment. A family characterized by emotional bonding, clear behavioral standards, and healthy communication between adolescents and parents facilitates the development of an emotionally competent, independent, responsible, confident, and socially competent individual (Goleman, 1995).

In defining and explaining the concept of emotional intelligence, three theoretical models have been mentioned in the literature. They are based on trait, mental ability, personality and competence (Nowack, 2012). Trait emotional intelligence comprises of fifteen emotion-related self-perceptions distributed across personality dimensions and grouped under four factors namely, emotionality, self-control, well-being, and sociability (Petrides, 2009). Self-report questionnaires are used to assess trait emotional intelligence. These questionnaires involves individuals report on ability to manage different tasks such as management of emotions (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013).

Bar-On (2006) defines EI as emotional and social skills that influence our emotional understanding and expression of ourselves, our understanding of other people and interaction with them, and the ability to deal with daily demands. Bar-On developed Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi) as a validated measure of emotional intelligence. EQi consists of five components and 15 subscales in total. The five components include: intrapersonal component, stress management, adaptability, interpersonal component and general mood.

Kothari, Skuse, Wakefield, and Micali (2013) elucidated that the home environment is the foundation for the growth of emotional intelligence skills through positive interactions between siblings and parents. Furthermore, parents can help their children to identify, name their own emotions, and manage them in different social situations (Kothari et al., 2013). Even though specific parenting practices mould children's emotion adjustment and regulation, children's behavioral and emotional problems may result to insensitive and harsh parenting (Eisenberg, Taylor, Widaman, & Spinrad, 2015).

Emotional intelligence comprises of 26 abilities hence it is influenced by numerous factors. One factor influencing emotional intelligence is gender and this may be attributed to both biological and social factors (Meshkat & Nejati, 2017). The society expects females to express emotions unlike the male gender that is socialized not to express emotions as an act of being manly (Naghavi & Redzuan, 2011). In fact, certain characteristics are perceived to be more appropriate to a specific gender and not the other; assertiveness is more distinctive among male gender whereas empathy is perceived to be more appropriate for female gender (Siegling, Furnham, & Petrides, 2015). Moreover, parents invest their time in teaching their daughters on matters emotions hence acquire necessary skills in naming their emotions faster than males. Consequently, males shy away from expressing their emotions and are not cognizant on how to identify and name their own emotions and those of others (Meshkat & Nejati, 2017).

Globally, there is an inconsistency in general EI between females and males. In their study among secondary students, Joshi and Dutta (2014) observed that female students had higher emotional intelligence in comparison to male students. A study conducted by Khan and Ishfaq (2016) on emotional intelligence among adolescents revealed a significant difference in emotional intelligence among adolescents in reference to socioeconomic status, gender and type of school. Findings of a study among 200 senior secondary schools in India showed a significant gender difference in emotional intelligence with female students having higher scores than male counterparts (Alam, 2018).

On the other hand, several studies have reported no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence among students. For instance, Lawrence and Deepa (2013) conducted a study to investigate emotional intelligence in relation to gender and residential background among secondary students in India. Results indicated that residential place plays a significant role in increasing emotional development whereas gender did not affect the level of emotional intelligence among the students. Oommen (2015) investigated emotional intelligence among secondary students and found no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and gender. Bakhshi, Gupta, and Singh (2016) studied emotional intelligence in relation to secondary school students. Results revealed non-significant relationship between emotional intelligence and gender.

Furthermore, gender differences in emotional intelligence can also be explored by evaluating different dimensions of EI. For instance, a study by Nasir and Masrur (2010) on emotional intelligence in reference to gender among university students revealed no correlation on overall EI mean score and gender except in stress management scale where male students had a higher score in comparison to female students. Meshkat and Nejati (2017) examined the relationship between EI and gender among 455 undergraduate students in Iran. Results indicated non-significant differences in overall EI but gender differed in emotional self-awareness, empathy, self-regard, and interpersonal relationship with females scoring higher than males.

The aforementioned empirical studies were conducted in western countries. There is a dearth of literature on correlation between emotional intelligence and gender among adolescents in

secondary schools in Kenya. As such, this study aimed at examining emotional intelligence in relation to gender among secondary schools students in Athi-River Sub County, Kenya.

## **2. Methodology**

The study used a quasi-experimental design and targeted secondary school students in Athi-River Sub County. Purposive, simple and stratified sampling methods were used in selecting four single gender – 2 girls only and 2 boys' only - private secondary schools as well as 120 participants within the age group of 13-18. The sample comprised of 60 boys and 60 girls in form one to form three (N=120); 30 students from each school. Mean age was 15.93 (SD=1.168).

Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i: YV) was used to measure emotional intelligence. EQ-i: YV is a validated self-report measure of emotional intelligence developed by Bar-On and Parker (2000). The tool consists of 60 items (long version) and it measures EI among young people aged 7 to 18 years. The responses are in a four Likert-scale that ranges from 1 for “very seldom or not true of me” to 4 for “very often true or true of me”. A separate questionnaire was used to get socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation coefficient and independent t-tests were used in analyzing data.

## **3. Results**

Data on participants emotional intelligence and gender were sought. Spearman's correlation coefficient and independent t-test were used to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and Gender.

### **3.1 Key Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, class and religious affiliation were assessed. Results indicated that 35.0% of the participants were between 13-15-years whereas 16-18 years-olds were 65.0%. Concerning gender, 50% were females and 50% were males. Distribution according to religion indicated that 40.0% of the participants were Catholics, 36.7% Protestants, 11.7% Pentecostals, 4.2% Islam and participants from SDA background were 1.7%.

### **3.2 Mean Scores of Emotional Intelligence in Respect to Gender**

Table 1 shows the mean scores of emotional intelligence with respect to gender. Results show that the mean for male was 89.93 (SD = ±10.533) and female was 92.80 (SD= ±11.232).

*Table 1*  
*Mean Emotional Intelligence with respect to gender.*

Variable	Total (N=120)	Mean	Std. dev	Std. error of mean
Gender Male	60	89.93	10.533	1.360
Female	60	92.80	11.232	1.450

### 3.3 Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Gender

The study examined the correlation between emotional intelligence and gender (Table 2). Results indicated a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and gender ( $p = 0.045$ ).

*Table 2*  
*Nonparametric Spearman's Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and Gender*

		Emotional intelligence	Gender
Spearman's rho	Total EI	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.045
		N	120

### 3.4 Mean Scores on different Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence with Respect to Gender

The study sought to examine mean score differences between male and female students in reference to different dimensions of EI. Table 3 shows that out of five composite scales of EQ-i:YV, only two scales (stress management and general mood) had significant difference in means ( $t = -2.11, p < 0.05$ ;  $t = 2.273, p < 0.05$ ) respectively. Female students had higher scores on stress management than male students. Conversely, male students had higher scores in general mood in comparison with female students.

Table 3  
*Comparison of Mean Scores of Male and Female Secondary Students on five Composite Scales of EQ-i: YV.*

Scales	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	t- values	Sig. (2-tailed)
Intrapersonal	Male	94.43	10.097	1.303	-0.241	0.810
	Female	94.90	11.080	1.430		
Interpersonal	Male	93.73	14.987	1.935	0.306	0.760
	Female	92.85	16.625	2.146		
Stress Management	Male	83.40	12.335	1.592	-2.116	0.036
	Female	87.88	10.832	1.398		
Adaptability	Male	98.33	16.948	2.188	-0.917	0.361
	Female	100.97	14.420	1.862		
General Mood	Male	103.07	9.815	1.267	2.273	0.025
	Female	98.10	13.790	1.780		

\* p < 0.05

#### 4. Discussion

The results of this study affirms the common notion that women are more adept in emotional skills. Study results revealed a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and gender ( $p=0.045$ ). Female gender had a higher EI mean score (92.80) in comparison with males (89.93). This finding is in conformity to findings of Joshi and Dutta (2014) who reported a significant difference in emotional intelligence between female and male secondary school students. Female students had higher emotional intelligence in comparison with their male counterparts. This was also supported in a study by Chandel and Chopra (2017), in which female adolescents had higher emotional intelligence than male adolescents.

The probable reason for the study finding could be attributed to both biological and social factors. The biological explanation suggests that womens' biochemistry is more inclined to consider one's own emotions and those of others as a critical element in survival (Fernandez-Berrocal, Cabello, & Castillo, 2012). Furthermore, some evidence show that specific areas of the brain specialized in processing emotions could be larger in women in comparison with men (Baron-Cohen, 2005) and cerebral processing of emotions is different between women and men (Craig, et al., 2009). Social factors are associated with the inborn as well as learnt behaviors of women and men, whereby women are taught to be more empathetic whereas men are trained to be more constructive (Gur, Gunning-Dixon, Bilker, & Gur, 2002). Gender differences could also be attributed to the subtle influences and nurturing roles between a mother and her child whereby the female children are more likely to receive more emotional expressions from their mothers than the male children (Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003).

The results indicated significant gender differences in two dimensions of emotional intelligence; stress management and general mood. Female students unlike their male counterparts had higher mean score in stress management. This is consistent with findings by Davis (2012) which indicated that girls had higher mean scores in stress management in comparison with boys. It means that female students are more capable of tolerating stress and controlling impulse. In essence, girls have the capacity to endure unpleasant events and difficult conditions by constructively managing their emotions; and to delay or resist a desire through controlling their emotions. Ciarrochi, Hynes, and Crittenden (2005) observed that women have rich emotional knowledge, they express negative and positive emotions more eloquently and frequently, have more interpersonal capabilities, and they are more socially skillful. The aforementioned abilities are critical in identifying, expressing and managing psychosocial stressors in everyday life.

Furthermore, study results revealed a significant gender difference in general mood scores. Male students had higher scores than female students and this implies that they are better in self motivation which includes happiness and optimism. Hence, male students were more satisfied with their lives, enjoyed life, had the ability to think and express positive thoughts and feelings in the face of life challenges and negative feelings. Gartzia and Van Engen (2012) observed that men were better than women in handling negative emotions and having an optimistic viewpoint in life.

## 5. Conclusion

The study sought to examine emotional intelligence in relation to gender among secondary school students in Athi River Sub County. The study found out that there was a significant gender difference between male and female students on stress management and general mood scores. Female students were found to have a significantly higher mean score than male students with regard to stress management. Conversely, male students were found to have a significantly higher mean score with regard to general mood than the female students. This might explain why boys are more inclined to destructive coping habits due to stress than girls and thus tend to result more easily to drug abuse and school strikes compared to girls. On the other hand, the findings of girls scoring lower than boys with regard to the general mood might explain why girls naturally tend to be more vulnerable to depression at that age. The ministry of education should therefore provide for gender-based life skills training to improve emotional intelligence with respect to these gender differences.

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