

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AND ADOLESCENT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Sherine Rachel John, Olive Nagarajan

Abstract

Adolescence and parenting adolescents are challenging stages in family life cycle. A smooth transitioning through this stage requires several factors to coalesce, of which parental adolescent attachment (AA) and emotional intelligence (EI) are critical. This study investigates the relationship between AA and EI in adolescents and delves into the impact of dynamic variables on AA and EI. 402 school-going adolescents in the city of Hyderabad participated in this study. The study concluded that there is a significant relationship between AA and EI in adolescents, proving that higher EI exists in adolescents who have secure attachment and lower EI for insecure attachment. Insecure AA and low EI are exhibited by the adolescents at an alarming ratio. The study also sheds light on how dynamic variables can affect the AA, EI and the well-being of adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescence, Parental attachment, Emotional intelligence, secure attachment, insecure attachment, well-being.

Introduction

The American Psychological Association refers to three common goals of parenting as “ensuring children’s health and safety, preparing children for life as productive adults and transmitting cultural values” (*Parenting*, n.d.). The healthy accomplishment of these goals depends largely on the parent-child relationship. But a challenging stage between childhood and adulthood is adolescence. Adolescence, broadly classified as the ages between 10 and 19

and more specifically as between 12 and 18 (Kakkad et al., 2014), is considered crucial for the holistic development of an individual. According to family life cycle theory, conflicts rise with several family based risk factors (Carter, 1999; Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011) during this time. There is rapid change in physiological development aided by a flood of hormonal activity (Susman et al., 2003), heightened emotionality, exploration of identity separate from their parents (Kroger, 2006) as they transition to adulthood. As much as adolescents are active agents in their own developmental process, interactions with significant people like parents and peers and environment around them can bolster or hamper holistic growth and development (Backes & Richard, 2019).

Two factors are extremely significant for adolescent development, parental attachment (AA) and emotional intelligence (EI). Attachment refers to the bonding between a parent and a child. There are four fundamental attachment styles, viz, secure, avoidant/dismissive, anxious/ambivalent, disorganized/fearful-avoidant attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Magaña et al., 2011). Secure attachment style is healthy whereas the other styles are insecure/unhealthy for the individual with long lasting effects (Rees, 2007). Emotional Intelligence (EI), a predictor of academic and professional success (Romanelli et al., 2006), is defined as the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of others around you. The components of EI are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 2006).

Review of Literature

The holistic development of a child into an adolescent and into a well-functioning adult depends much on the parental function (Philip, 2022). In any stage of life, the well-being of an individual to a great extent can be traced back to the impact that parents/primary care-givers had on him and the attachments they develop (Breiner et al.,

2016). Higher EI and emotional development are intertwined with parental attachment and adolescent well-being (Bahat & Ovsenik, 2020; Romanelli et al., 2006).

In several countries, positive correlation between attachment/higher family functioning and EI are observed with benefits including better interpersonal relationships, mood regulation and decreased loneliness (Barragán Martín et al., 2021; Borawski et al., 2022; Najm, 2022). Studies done in different Indian states show significant relationship between adolescent EI and parental attachment/acceptance, confirming that healthy family relationships greatly influence EI of adolescents (Bhatia, 2012; John & Manimekhalai, 2019; Robert S & Kadhiravan, 2022). Thus secure attachment is a significant positive predictor while insecure attachments are significant negative predictors of EI (Samadi et al., 2013; Scarlet, 2021).

Considering the vitality of EI and AA and the post-pandemic crisis in families with heightened parental conflict, emotional, social and mental challenges (Alamolhoda et al., 2022; Chavira et al., 2022), the present study is extremely relevant as it investigates the relationship between AA and EI and endeavors to understand how dynamic variables contribute to it.

Methodology

The objectives of this study are to assess the relationship between AA and EI among school going adolescents and to investigate the impact of dynamic variables on AA and EI. Three hypotheses are tested, viz,

- There is no significant relationship between AA and EI in adolescents.
- Higher EI exists in adolescents who have secure attachment styles and lower EI for insecure attachment styles.
- There is no significant relationship between AA or EI factors and family or external variables.

Participants and Procedure

The study is conducted among adolescents between 12 and 18 years (Grades 8-12) in a school in Hyderabad. 402 samples were collected, collated into MS excel and exported to SPSS for the analysis.

Tools

Three tools were used for this study.

1. Socio-demographic data sheet
2. Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) - The AAQ, developed by Malcolm West (West et al., 1998), is validated, reviewed and extensively used (Bodfield et al., 2020; Wilson & Wilkinson, 2012). It includes nine items on a five-point Likert type scale, measuring three specific factors of AA, namely, Angry Distress (AD), Availability (A) and Goal-Corrected Partnership (GCP), along with the total AA score.
3. Trait EI Questionnaire for Adolescents (TEIQue-ASF) – The TEIQue-ASF, developed by K. Petrides (K. Petrides et al., 2006; K. V. Petrides, 2009), is extensively validated and used across the globe (Denz et al., 2013; Siegling et al., 2015). It is a 30-item questionnaire with a seven-point rating scale, measuring four factors of EI, namely, well-being, self-control, emotionality and sociability and Global trait EI.

Results

The basic socio-demographic variables are analyzed and presented.

Age and Grade

The respondents belong to ages 12 to 18 (Mean =14.04, Standard Deviation =1.20) and are in Grades 8 to 12, depicted in Figure 1 and 2 respectively.

Figure 1 Age distribution of respondents

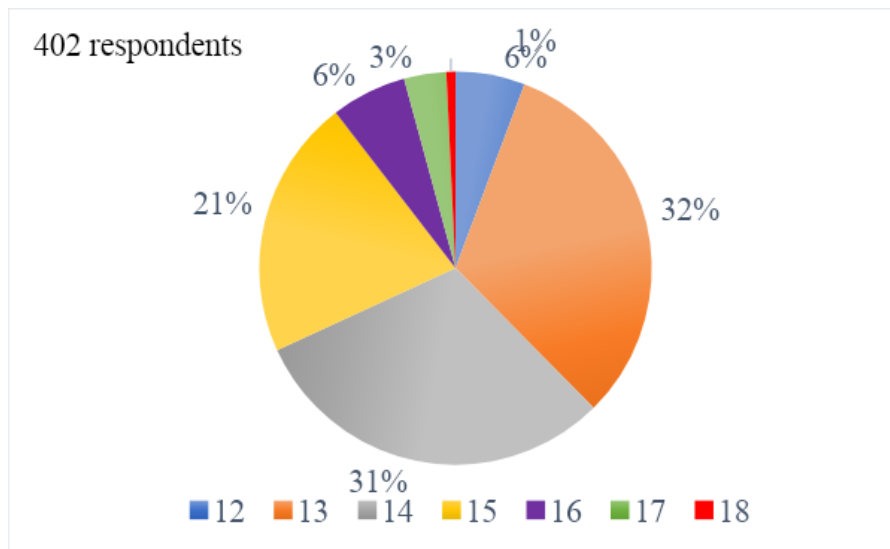
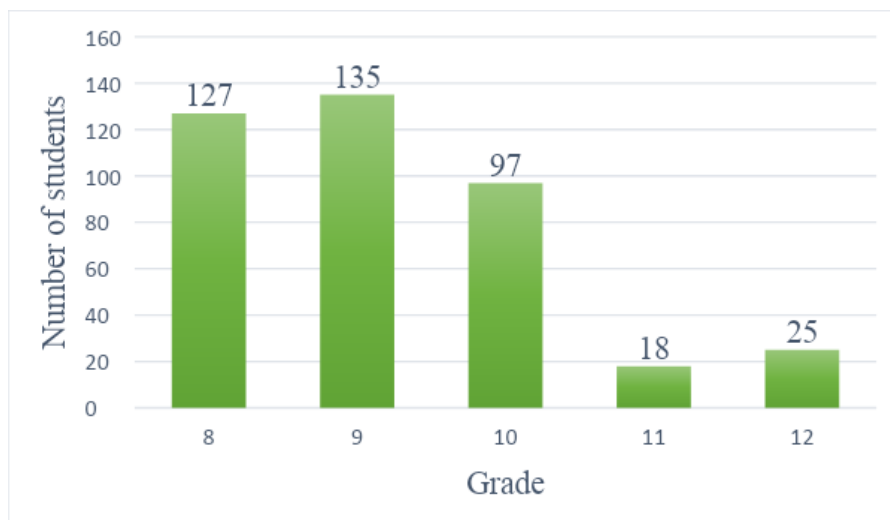


Figure 2 Grade-wise distribution of respondents

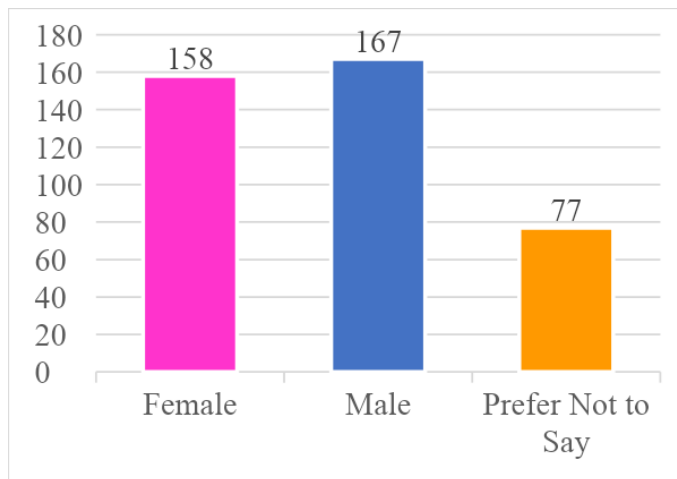


Gender

In gender, the students are given the options of male, female and preferred not to say.

The gender distribution is depicted in the histogram in Figure 3.

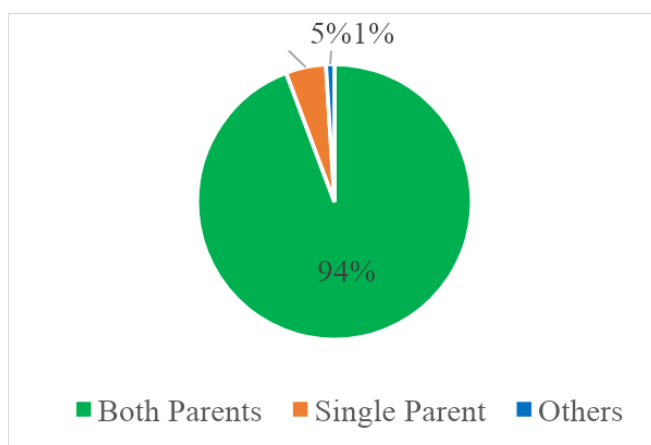
Figure 3 Gender distribution of participants



Living Arrangement

The students are classified on the basis of whom they are living with, single parent, both parents or others (extended family or in a hostel), as shown in the pie-chart in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Living arrangement of participants



Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between AA and EI in adolescents.

In order to assess the relationship between AA and EI, the Total AA is calculated as the average of its three sub-scores and Global trait EI as the average of its four factors.

Percentile distributions are done for AA and EI scores, shown in Tables 1 and 2 and graphically represented in Figures 5 and 6. Higher scores of AA corroborate with insecure attachment and lower values with secure attachment (Levine, 2015).

Table 1 AA distribution

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Below Average (<25th Percentile) | 86 | 21.4 | 21.4 | 21.4 |
| Average (25th-75th Percentile) | 206 | 51.2 | 51.2 | 72.6 |
| Above Average (>75th Percentile) | 110 | 27.4 | 27.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 402 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 2 Trait EI distribution

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Below Average | 251 | 62.4 | 62.4 | 62.4 |
| Average | 129 | 32.1 | 32.1 | 94.5 |
| Above Average | 22 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 402 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Figure 5 AA interpretation

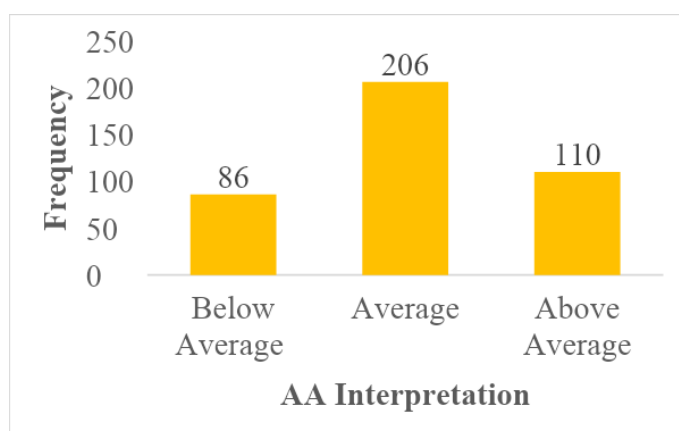
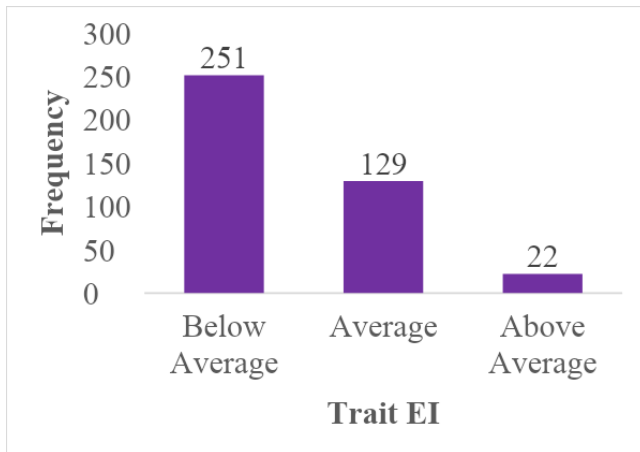


Figure 6 Trait EI interpretation

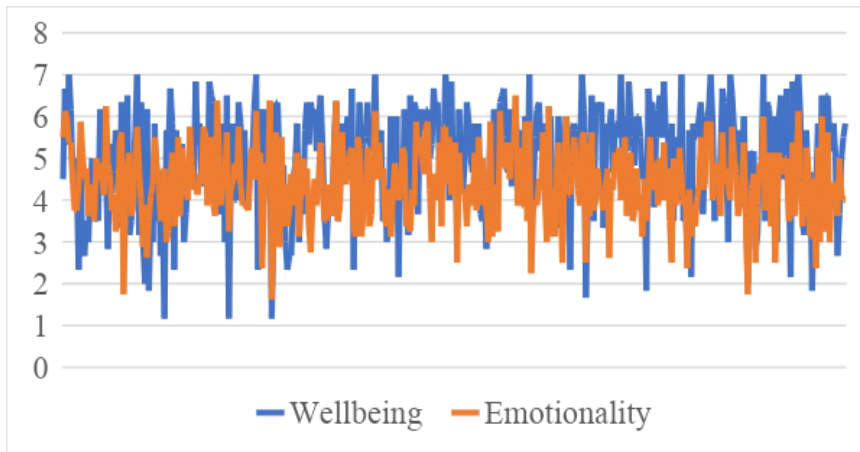


Further, a Pearson Correlation test is done between Total AA and Trait EI and its factors. For AA and EI, the correlation coefficient is -0.521, with sigma .000, which is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates that these variables have a strong inverse relationship. Not just the total scores, but also the sub-scores/factors show strong correlation with each other. It is seen that when adolescents experience angry distress or lack of availability of parents, their well-being, emotionality and self-control are significantly impacted negatively. Well-being and emotionality also show positive correlation with each other, depicted in Figure 7.

Table 3 Correlation between Total AA score and Global Trait EI

| | Correlation | Total AA score | Global trait EI |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Total AA score | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.521** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| Global trait EI | Pearson Correlation | -.521** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |

Figure 7 Correlation between Well-being and Emotionality



This highlights the impact of each factor on the other. Therefore, significant relationship between AA and EI is established and hence the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Higher EI exists in adolescents who have secure attachment styles and lower EI for insecure attachment styles.

In order to understand the extent of association between EI and AA, a chi-square test is performed as seen in Table 4 and cross-tabulated in Table 5.

Table 4 Chi-Square Test Statistics

| | Value | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 75.506 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 71.447 | 4 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 64.728 | 1 | .000 |

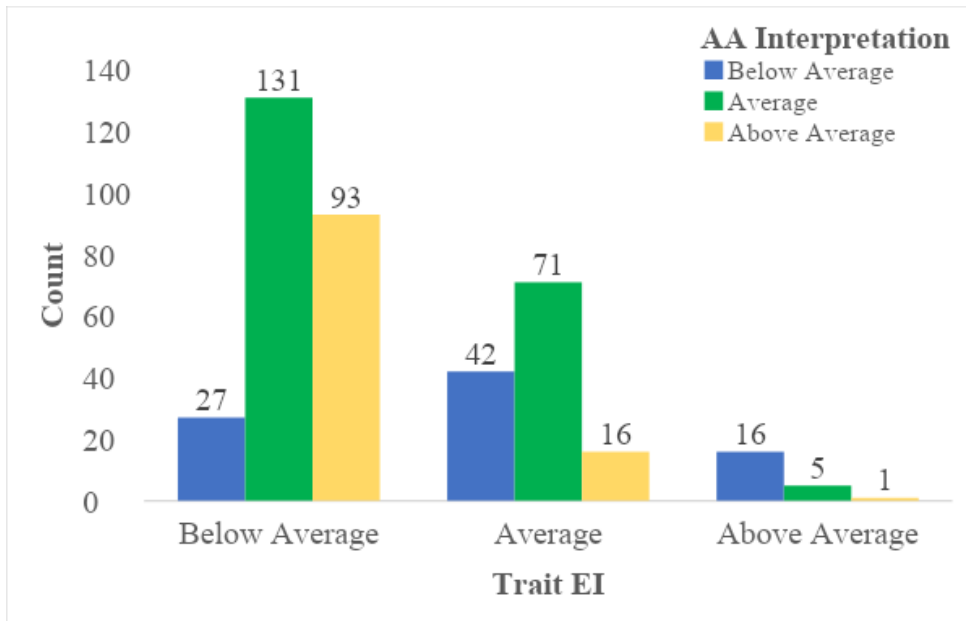
The Pearson Chi-square score value is 75.506 with a p-value of .000 which is statistically significant. From Table 5 and Figure 8, it is clear that out of the 251 respondents who have low EI, 224 have insecure attachment, indicating that low EI corresponds to

insecure attachment style. 129 students have average EI but only 42 of them have secure attachment, confirming the inverse relationship between EI and AA. Looking at the 22 adolescents who have above average EI, it is significant that 16 of them have secure attachment while just 6 of them have insecure attachment. These inferences thus confirm that higher EI exists in adolescents who have secure attachment and lower EI in adolescents with insecure attachment styles. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5 Cross-tabulation of Trait EI and AA interpretations

| | | AA | | | Total | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|---------------|--------|-------|
| | | Below Average | Average | Above Average | | |
| Trait EI | Below | Count | 27 | 131 | 93 | 251 |
| | Average | % of Total | 6.7% | 32.5% | 23.2% | 62.4% |
| | Average | Count | 42 | 71 | 16 | 129 |
| | | % of Total | 10.5% | 17.6% | 4.0% | 32.1% |
| | Above | Count | 16 | 5 | 1 | 22 |
| | | Average | % of Total | 4.0% | 1.3% | 0.2% |
| Total | Count | 85 | 207 | 110 | 402 | |
| | % of Total | 21.2% | 51.4% | 27.4% | 100.0% | |

Figure 8 Bar chart representing AA and trait EI score



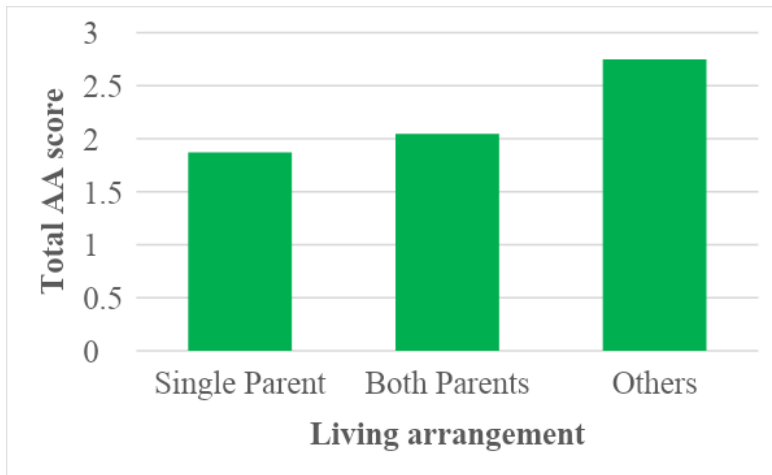
Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between AA or EI factors and family or external variables.

Two variables are considered here – grade and living arrangement of the adolescent, to understand their impact on AA and EI and its factors.

Impact of Living Arrangements on AA

Three options are considered for the living arrangement of the adolescent, living with single parent, both parents or others (grandparents, hostel, extended family), and the impact on AA is tested using one-way Anova. A statistically significant relationship is found ($p=.037$) with the total mean AA score for those living with single parent as 1.871, with both parents as 2.047 and with others as 2.75, shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Total mean AA score based on living arrangements



Adolescents who live with single parents exhibit healthier attachment compared to those living with both parents. Those who do not live with parents show highly insecure attachment. When both parents live together, marital quality is a predictor of adolescent well-being as marital and interparental conflict, parents' romantic attachment and attachment styles can have critical impact on AA (Doyle & Markiewicz, 2005; Laurent et al., 2008). On the contrary, it is also to be noted that all the 16 students who have secure attachment styles and high EI live with both parents. Thus, it can be concluded that AA and EI are significantly impacted not only based on whom the adolescents are living with but also the living environment that exists in the home.

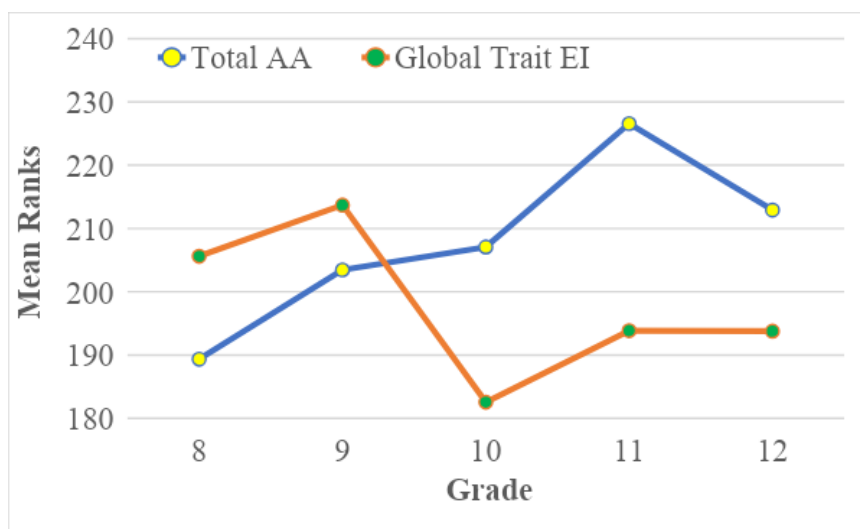
Impact of Grade on AA and EI

In order to assess if there is any relationship between the grade in which the adolescent is studying and the AA or EI, Kruskal-Wallis test is done and the mean ranks are obtained as shown in Table 6, represented in Figure 10. It is observed that grades 8 and 9 have higher EI and secure attachment styles when compared to grades 10 to 12. Grade 10 shows significant dip in EI and grade 11th and 12th have significantly low EI and insecure attachment.

Table 6 Ranks of Kruskal-Wallis test for Total AA and Trait EI based on grade

| Grade | N | Mean Rank | |
|-------|-----|-----------|----------|
| | | Total AA | Trait EI |
| 8 | 127 | 189.35 | 205.61 |
| 9 | 135 | 203.47 | 213.7 |
| 10 | 97 | 207.07 | 182.55 |
| 11 | 18 | 226.58 | 193.86 |
| 12 | 25 | 212.92 | 193.78 |

Figure 10 Total AA and trait EI mean ranks based on Grade



Impact of Grade on the Well-being of the Adolescent

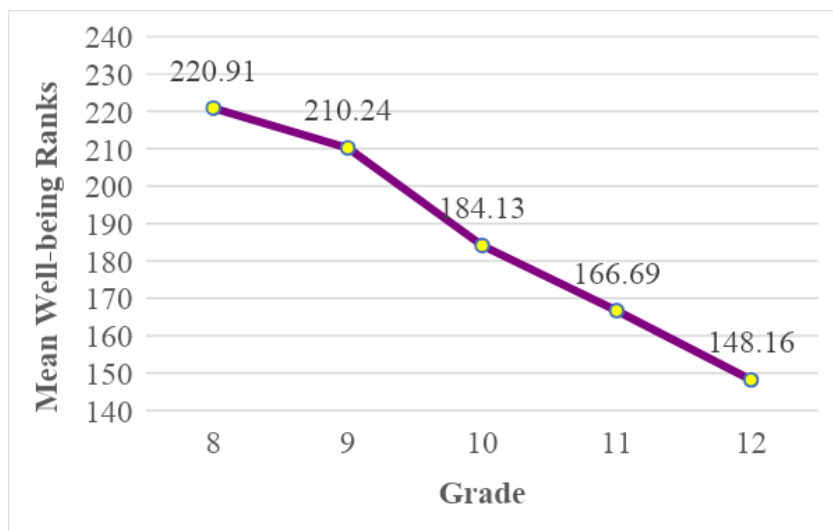
Well-being, a factor of EI, is considered to understand how adolescent wellness is affected as they move higher up in grade. Kruskal-Wallis test shows statistical significance ($p=.010$) and mean ranks for Well-being are given in Table 7 and plotted in Figure 11.

Table 7 Ranks of Kruskal-Wallis test for Well-being based on grade

| Grade | N | Mean Rank |
|-------|---|-----------|
|-------|---|-----------|

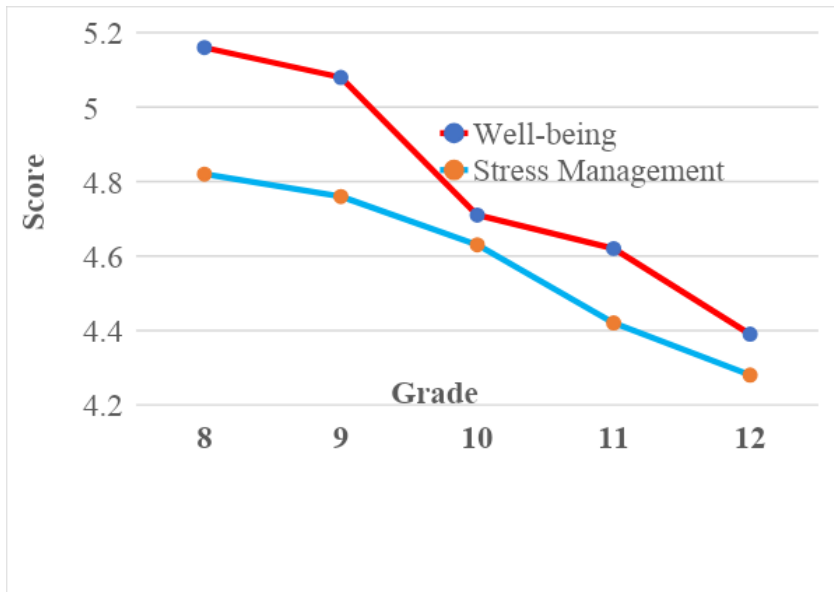
| | | |
|----|-----|--------|
| 8 | 127 | 220.91 |
| 9 | 135 | 210.24 |
| 10 | 97 | 184.13 |
| 11 | 18 | 166.69 |
| 12 | 25 | 148.16 |

Figure 11 Mean Well-being ranks based on Grade



It is seen that well-being constantly decreases as the adolescent moves up from grade 8 to 12. The reason behind this is explored by calculating the mean stress management of the adolescent in each grade and is plotted with mean well-being in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Grade-wise Well-being vs Stress management



It is evident that as adolescents move to grades 10 and above, they are not able to manage stress well. This is primarily academic (Jassal, 2021; Meza et al., 2022). The striking similarity in the patterns of well-being and stress management informs that there is considerable stress in the life of adolescents that impacts their well-being adversely. Thus, adolescents struggle with well-being which in turn affects AA and EI as they transition through early to late adolescent years. So, the hypothesis is rejected as significant relationship is found between AA and EI factors and external and family variables.

Recommendations

For Family Educators and Counselors

1. To create awareness about the significance of AA and EI in adolescents and the impact of AA on EI.
2. To educate parents about developing and maintaining secure attachment with their children.
3. To equip families to keep the home environment healthy, understanding the impact of marital conflicts and parental issues on the adolescent.
4. To ensure that adolescents are not pressurized to perform but are trained to manage stress well and maintain well-being.

5. To encourage growth in well-being, emotionality, sociability and self-control in adolescents.
6. To enable parents to invest on adolescent EI by building secure attachment that ensures that they become well-performing adults as they transition into the subsequent life stages.

For Educational Institutions

1. To focus on the holistic development of adolescents rather than mere academic performance.
2. To alleviate academic pressure off adolescents so that they are not under stress and their well-being is not compromised.

Future Scope

The study has opened up doors for a plethora of research and further investigations as mentioned below.

- A similar research can be planned for rural adolescents to understand the impact of urbanization on parental attachment and EI.
- Studies dividing early, middle and late adolescent stages to understand transitional changes and their role in moderating AA and EI.
- Studies on the impact of marital conflicts and academic stress on adolescents.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there is significant relationship between parental attachment and EI in adolescents, proving that higher EI exists in adolescents who have secure attachment styles and lower EI for those with insecure attachment. Majority of the adolescents have insecure attachment and low or average EI. Variables like living arrangements and grade significantly impact AA and EI of adolescents. Adolescents who don't stay with parents have highly insecure attachments. Marital health can also contribute

to unhealthy attachment. The adolescent well-being drastically drops as they move higher in grades as stress impacts their well-being. The study has somber recommendations and scope for further investigation to enhance holistic well-being of adolescents in families.

Bibliography

- Alamolhoda, S. H., Zare, E., & Nasiri, M. (2022). The status of adolescent health during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Medicine and Life, 15*(5), 675–678.
- Backes, E. P., & Richard, B. (2019). *The promise of adolescence: realizing opportunity for all youth*. National Academies Press.
- Bahat, B., & Ovsenik, M. (2020). Emotional intelligence in secondary school students. *revija za univerzalno odličnost, 9*, 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.37886/ruo.2020.018>
- Barragán Martín, A. B., Molero Jurado, M. D. M., Pérez-Fuentes, M., Oropesa Ruiz, N. F., Martos Martínez, Á., Márquez, M., & Gázquez Linares, J. (2021). Interpersonal support, emotional intelligence and family function in adolescence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*, 5145. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18105145>.
- Bhatia, G. (2012). A study of family relationship in relation to emotional intelligence of the students of secondary level. *IJSRP, 2*(12), 5.
- Bodfield, K. S., Putwain, D. W., Carey, P., & Rowley, A. (2020). A construct validation and extension of the adolescent attachment questionnaire (AAQ). *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 37*(12), 3070–3082. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520951267>.
- Borawski, D., Sojda, M., Rychlewska, K., & Wajs, T. (2022). Attached but lonely: Emotional intelligence as a mediator and moderator between attachment styles and loneliness. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*, 14831. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192214831>.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*. Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Breiner, H., Ford, M., & Gadsden, V. L. (2016). *Parenting matters: Supporting parents of children ages 0-8*. National Academies Press.

- Carter, E. A. (1999). *The expanded family life cycle: Individual, family, and social perspectives*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Chavira, D. A., Ponting, C., & Ramos, G. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 on child and adolescent mental health and treatment considerations. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, *157*, 104169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2022.104169>.
- Crosnoe, R., & Johnson, M. K. (2011). Research on adolescence in the twenty-first century. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *37*, 439–460. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150008>.
- Denz, M. E., Özer, E., & Işık, E. (2013). Trait emotional intelligence questionnaire-short form: Validity and reliability studies. *Egitim ve Bilim*, *38*, 407–419.
- Doyle, A. B., & Markiewicz, D. (2005). Parenting, marital conflict and adjustment from early- to mid-adolescence: Mediated by adolescent attachment style? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *34*(2), 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-005-3209-7>.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Random House Publishing Group.
- Jassal, N. (2021). *Relationship between academic stress and emotional intelligence in high school students*. *7*, 30–35. <https://doi.org/10.17140/PCSOJ-7-162>.
- John, E., & Manimekhalai, K. (2019). Emotional intelligence and family relations of adolescents in the district Of Kottayam, Kerala. *IOSR-JHSS*, *24*(12), 90–93. [https://doi.org/DOI: 10.9790/0837-2412059093](https://doi.org/DOI:10.9790/0837-2412059093).
- Kakkad, A., Trivedi, M., Trivedi, G., & Raichandani, A. (2014). Study For adolescent problem and psychology. *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences*, *3*, 9564–9574. <https://doi.org/10.14260/jemds/2014/3237>.
- Kroger, J. (2006). *Identity development: Adolescence through adulthood*. SAGE Publications.

- Laurent, H. K., Kim, H. K., & Capaldi, D. M. (2008). Prospective effects of interparental conflict on child attachment security and the moderating role of parents' romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Psychology: JFP : Journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43)*, 22(3), 377–388.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.3.377>
- Levine, D. (2015). *Adolescent girls, social cognition and technology*. University of Warwick.
- Magaña, L. C., MYers-Walls, J. A., & Love, D. (2011). Different type of parent child attachment. *Provider-Parent Partnerships*,
<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/index.htm> Purdue University, School of Consumer and Family Sciences.
- Meza, W., Auccahuasi, W., Obispo, J., Meza, S., Caipo, M., Rojas, K., Linares, O., Pando-Ezcurra, T., & Cosme, M. (2022). Emotional Intelligence and its relationship with academic stress, in high school students, an approach to the computational model. *CEUR Workshop Proceedings*, 3338, 62–69.
<https://cris.cientifica.edu.pe/en/publications/emotional-intelligence-and-its-relationship-with-academic-stress->
- Najm, Q. (2022). *Attachment styles and emotional intelligence in marital satisfaction among Pakistani men and women*.
- Parenting. (n.d.). <https://www.apa.org>. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from
<https://www.apa.org/topics/parenting>
- Petrides, K., Sangareau, Y., Furnham, A., & Frederickson, N. (2006). Trait emotional intelligence and children's peer relations at school. *Social Development*, 15, 537–547.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2006.00355.x>
- Petrides, K. V. (2009). Psychometric properties of the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire (TEIQue). In J. D. A. Parker, D. H. Saklofske, & C. Stough (Eds.),

- Assessing emotional intelligence: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 85–101). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-88370-0_5
- Philip, D. S. (2022). Factors influencing the holistic development of a child: A systematic review. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8), Article 8.
- Rees, C. (2007). Childhood attachment. *The British Journal of General Practice*, 57(544), 920–922.
- Robert S, J., & Kadiravan, S. (2022). Influence of family environment on emotional intelligence among youth. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 8.
- Romanelli, F., Cain, J., & Smith, K. M. (2006). Emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic and/or professional success. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(3), 69.
- Samadi, R., Kasaei, F., & Pour, E. (2013). Attachment styles as a predictor of emotional intelligence. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.07.018>
- Scarlat, E. (2021). The role of cognitive schemas in the relationship between attachment style and emotional intelligence. *Studia Doctoralia*, 12, 54–69. <https://doi.org/10.47040/sd/sdpsych.v12i1.123>
- Siegling, A., Vesely, A., Petrides, K., & Saklofske, D. (2015). Incremental validity of the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire–short form (TEIQue–SF). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2015.1013219>
- Susman, E. J., Dorn, L. D., & Schiefelbein, V. L. (2003). Puberty, sexuality, and health. In *Handbook of psychology: Developmental psychology, Vol. 6.* (pp. 295–324). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/0471264385.wei0612>

- West, M., Rose, M., Spreng, S., Keller, A., & Adam, K. (1998). Adolescent attachment questionnaire: A brief assessment of attachment in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 27, 661–673. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022891225542>
- Wilson, J. M., & Wilkinson, R. B. (2012). The self-report assessment of adolescent attachment: A systematic review and critique. *Journal of Relationships Research*, 3, 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jrr.2012.7>