

# Fathers' Emotional Intelligence and Their Response towards Their Children's Behaviors

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## Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) measures one's "common sense" and ability to get along with others. The EI construct is a rather novel concept with little empirical support, particularly, in relation to the link between father's EI and that of his child's behavior. The specific objective of this research is to determine the relationship between fathers' EI and their pleasure-anger responses to children's behavior. The present study was carried out among 107 fathers of Iranian students in the Iranian primary school located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The students were clustered in three different age groups, 8, 9, and 10 years old. Data were collected using the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) adult version (Bar-on EQ-I, 1997) and Parent Affect Test (PAT, Linehan and Egen, 1983). Pearson's correlation indicated that fathers with high EI displayed more positive responses to children's behavior in comparison to the fathers with low EI. In addition, fathers with low EI displayed more anger responses to children's behavior in comparison to the fathers with high EI.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Quotient Inventory, Pleasure, Anger, Parent Affect Test

## 1. Introduction

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has brought a new depth to the understanding of human intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). In particular, EI is concerned with understanding oneself and others. Moreover, EI helps to predict success because it reflects how a person applies knowledge to an immediate situation (Ozabaci, 2006). Evidence suggests that fundamental skills of EI are highly correlated with healthy physical, social, and emotional functioning in both adults and children (Goleman, 1995; Gottman, 1997). According to Mayer and Salovey (2000), an important aspect of EI is the ability to regulate emotion.

Stover (2003) pointed out that several factors related to fathers have a crucial influence on children cognitive, emotional and behavioral development. Nowadays, fathers are becoming more aware of how their fatherhood role affects their children's outcome and how they can raise their children's skills (Lamb, 2004). In addition, fathers are taking a more active role in supporting their children's development, especially their social and emotional skills (Ozabaci, 2006). However, according to Stover (2003) 54 percent of fathers were not fulfilling their paternal responsibilities. He also ascertained that father's contributions have been under researched in the parenting process (Stover, 2003) but their contribution to development of their child's emotion and social behavioral skills is, nonetheless, important. Father's emotion affects children's emotion and social behavior by undermining their emotional regulation (Fabes 2001; Stover, 2003). However, EI and the many factors related to one's EI are important aspects for researchers to consider. Thus, the present study attempts to examine the relationship between father's emotional intelligence and both their pleasure and anger responses to their children's behavior. The findings of this study expect to provide psychologists, psychiatrists, instructors, school managers, school counselors and relevant organizations (e.g. UNESCO) with further evidence and more information for future programs.

## 2. Research Methodology

The present study was carried out among 107 fathers of Iranian students in Iranian Primary School located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The respondents (subjects) for this study were the fathers of 36 boys and 71 girls. In other words, this study comprised of 107 father-student dyads, clustered in three groups, based on the children's ages (8, 9, 10 years old). The sample was made up of 35.5% of students aged 8 (year two) of schooling, 31.8% of students aged 9 (year three), and 32.7% of students aged 10 (year four). The fathers were graduate students, doing their Master (10.3%) and Doctoral degree (89.7 %) in various universities in Malaysia. Their major areas

of studies include environment (38.3%), medicine (24.4%), education (20.5%), and engineering (16.8%). The ages of these fathers ranged from 25 to over 40 year old.

The data were collected using Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) adult version (Bar-on EQ-I, 1997) for assessing EI, and Parent Affect Test (PAT, Linehan and Egen, 1983) to assess the fathers' pleasure-anger responses to their children's behavior. In addition, a brief self-designed demographic questionnaire was also used to gather relevant background information of the subjects in this study.

The study employed the Bar-On EQ-I which comprised of 133 brief items and a five-point Likert scale format response set (ranging from "Not True of Me" to "True of Me"). The Bar-On EQ-I instrument consists of the following five scales: interpersonal, intrapersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. The first step in ascertaining a respondent's EQ-I results were to calculate raw five composite factors and each father's total emotional intelligence. Each item is assigned with "points" ranging from one to five based on the respondent's responses. In this study, the internal consistency (reliability) of the EQ-I was examined using the Cronbach's alpha and the result was  $\alpha = 0.988$ . Reliability indicates the extent to which individual differences in test scores are attributable to "True" differences in the characteristics under consideration (Anastasi, 1988).

The PAT instrument was designed to access areas in which parents are likely to feel positively or negatively towards one of their children. The 40-item instrument was equally divided between positive (pleasure - 20 items) and negative (anger - 20 items) circumstances, with fathers were required to respond to each in terms of six bipolar scales. Anger was assessed in terms of one's responses to negative child's behavior, while pleasure measures affective responses to positive child's behavior. The scales include (1) feel angry... feel pleased; (2) feel bad... feel good; (3) feel tense...feel relaxed; (4) want to hit/spank...want to hug/kiss; (5) want to yell...want to praise, and (6) want to send a child to room ...want to be with a child. The sub-scales (pleasure and anger) were designed to be treated separately, and not to be combined to form a total score. Higher scores reflected more effects. Each item scored on a range from zero to seven, and the points within each item were rearranged so that "7" is consistently the highest score on either anger or pleasure. The internal consistency for the PAT instrument was found to be 0.84 for the fathers. Garner (1994) pointed that the validity of PAT was indicated by its correlation with pre-schoolers' emotional knowledge.

In this research, Pearson product-moment correlation was used for statistical analysis. According to Bahaman (1999), this statistical method was used to determine the strength and direction (nature) of the relationship between variables. In this analysis father's EI was considered as independent variables, whereas father's pleasure and anger towards their children's behavior were dependent variables.

### 3. Results and Discussions

The means, standard deviations of the fathers' EI are presented in Table 1. The mean and standard deviation of Father's EI were  $M=104$ ,  $SD=15.6$ . The mean EI score of the fathers in this study was within the normal or satisfactory range of the Bar-On model. Figure 1 illustrates the mean value of the EI variables for the fathers, and the range of the score's scale and the quality classes of skills for the total EI and its sub-scales in this study. Based on the data presented in Figure 1, the total EI and its four clusters (interpersonal, intrapersonal, adaptability, and general mood) of the fathers were within the "average and effective function range", while the stress management was in the "need to be an enhanced and low" cluster.

Meanwhile, the fathers' affective responses to the children's behavior were evaluated using the PAT (Linehan, Paul & Egan, 1983). Table 2 shows both means and standard deviations of the fathers' affective responses to their child's behavior in this study. The mean scores for anger ( $M=82.4$ ,  $SD=18.6$ ) and pleasure ( $M=90$ ,  $SD=13.0$ ) were in the average range.

The results of statistical test of Pearson's product indicated that the father's emotional intelligence is related to their pleasure responses to children's positive behavior ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Figure 2 reveals that the fathers with high emotional intelligence were more attuned towards their children's behavior, and tended to show more pleasure responses to their children's positive behavior, and vice versa. Furthermore, the child's gender did not influence father's emotional expression (Garner, 1997). Meanwhile, the fathers with higher emotional intelligence were found to be more attuned to the emotional environment around them, as in comparison to those with lower emotional intelligence.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between fathers' EI and their anger response to children's behavior. The findings of this study also revealed a significant negative relationship between the fathers' emotional intelligence and their anger responses to children's negative behavior ( $r = -0.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Several past research (e.g. Bonebright, Thompson, and Leger, 1986) generalized that males are better at recognizing and posing anger than females, and

fathers were found to report less anger on the PAT in comparison to mothers (Gardner, 1993). The findings of this study also suggest that caution must be made in over-generalizing the affective reactions of fathers towards their children's negative behavior. The study reveals that the fathers with a low level of emotional intelligence displayed more anger responses to their children's negative behavior, in comparison to the fathers with a high level (effective functioning level and enhanced skills) of EI.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that fathers with high levels of emotional intelligence display more pleasure responses to their children's positive behaviour and less anger responses to their children's negative behaviour. Thus, the findings of the present study offer us new insights on the ways in which parents with high emotional intelligence tend to "breed" children with equally high emotional intelligence, and vice versa. The concept of reinforcement in Skinner's learning theory provides us with the tools to reinforce or instil good behaviour while eliminating bad ones. More importantly, fathers with high emotional intelligence can build self-esteem, inspire confidence and foster positive behaviour in their children by focusing on positive reinforcements to positive behaviours than using negative reinforcements and punishment to negative behaviours. Once the habits of consistent positive reinforcements to positive behaviours are cultivated at home, parent-child communication becomes easier. Thus, the need to resort to negative behaviour to obtain parents' attention no longer exists. On the contrary, fathers with low emotional intelligence will harm their children's confidence and self-esteem by giving negative reinforcements to negative behavior and ignoring positive ones. Therefore, children of the fathers with low emotional intelligence have lesser opportunities to experience positive feedbacks to positive behaviour, making it more difficult for them to acquire positive behaviour.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, as well as the relative novelty of the theory of Emotional Intelligence, significant findings should be considered preliminary and serve as an impetus for future research. It merely demonstrates the value of expanding future research on the relationship between father's emotional intelligence and the reactions to their children's behaviours.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations of the fathers' emotional intelligence scores

Variables	Mean	SD
Intrapersonal	112.00	13.70
Interpersonal	107.30	15.34
Stress Management	94.47	17.36
Adaptability	100.32	17.64
General Mood	106.23	16.31
Total EI	104.00	15.60

Table 2. Mean and standard deviations of the variables of father's affective responses to children's behaviour

Variables	Mean	SD
Anger	82.4	19.6
Pleasure	90.0	13.0

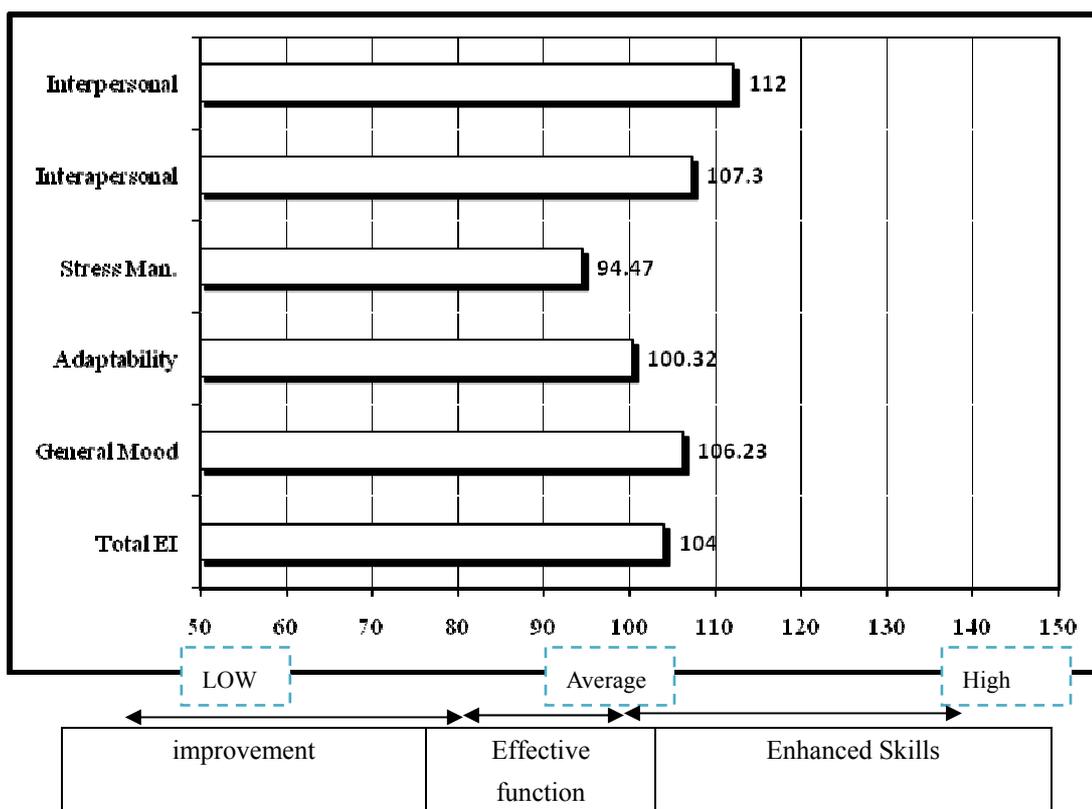


Figure 1. Mean value of the EI variables and the range of scores scale and quality classes of skills for fathers

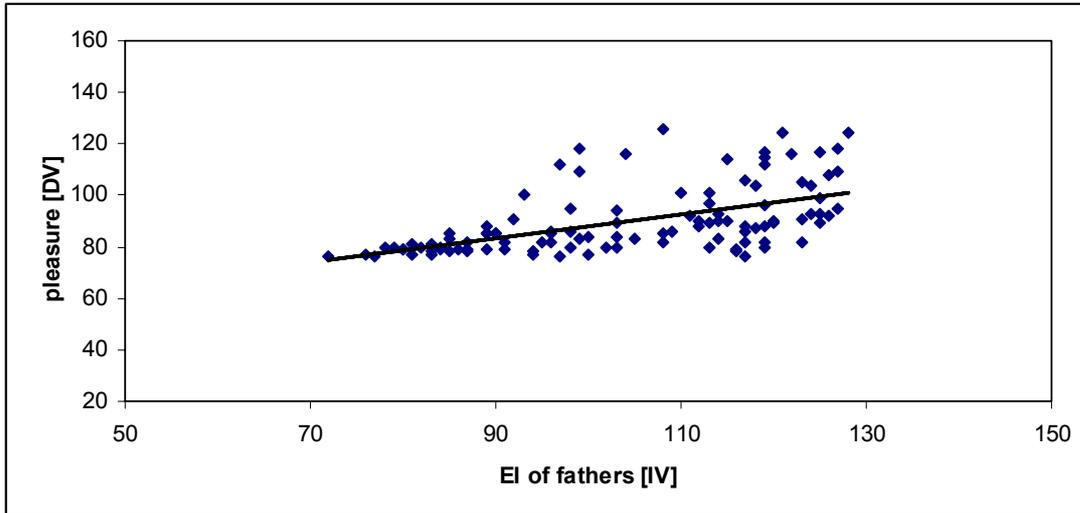


Figure 2. The relationship between the fathers' EI and their pleasure responses towards their children's behaviour

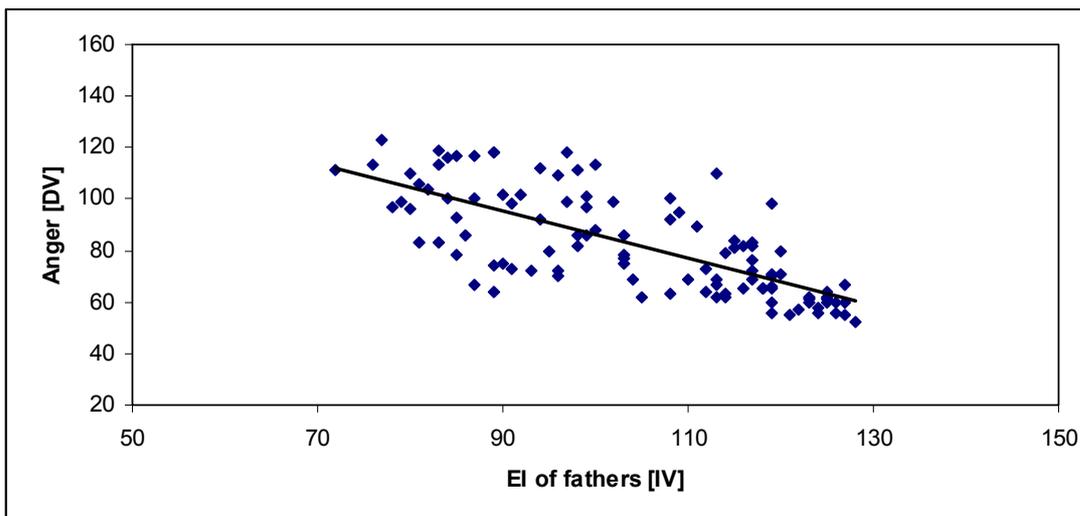


Figure 3. The relationship between EI of fathers and anger response of fathers to behaviours of children