

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Interpersonal Conflicts in Romantic Relationships

Amra Hanan A

Postgraduate Student, Department of Psychology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, JAIN
(Deemed-to-be University) Bengaluru

Abstract

This study explored the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in managing interpersonal conflict in romantic relationships among young adults. A quantitative research design was adopted, with data collected from a sample of 37 participants aged 18 to 30 years, all involved in romantic relationships lasting at least three months. Participants completed self-report questionnaires assessing their levels of Emotional Intelligence and the use of different conflict resolution strategies, including Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal. The data were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics to summarize participant characteristics, Pearson's correlation to examine the relationships between EI and conflict strategies, and independent samples t-tests to explore gender differences. The results indicated that higher Emotional Intelligence was significantly associated with the use of constructive conflict strategies and lower engagement in destructive behaviors. No significant differences were observed between males and females. These findings emphasize the importance of Emotional Intelligence in fostering healthier, more stable, and satisfying romantic relationships.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Romantic Relationships, Conflict Resolution, Young Adults, Positive Problem Solving

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social, and interpersonal relationships play an important role in emotional well-being and psychological development. Among various types of relationships, romantic relationships are particularly significant during young adulthood. These relationships involve emotional intimacy, affection, attraction, and commitment between partners, and they contribute to individuals' psychological growth, identity formation, and overall life satisfaction. However, romantic relationships are also complex and dynamic, often involving emotional challenges and disagreements between partners.

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of close interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal conflict refers to disagreements or incompatibilities that arise due to differences in needs, values, expectations, perceptions, or communication styles. In romantic relationships, partners may experience conflicts related to personal beliefs, emotional needs, decision-making, or misunderstandings. While conflict itself is not necessarily harmful, the way individuals manage and resolve these disagreements plays a crucial role in determining the quality and stability of the relationship.

Researchers have identified different strategies used by individuals to manage interpersonal conflict in romantic relationships. These strategies can be broadly categorized as constructive or destructive. Constructive strategies involve open communication and cooperative problem solving aimed at resolving disagreements in a healthy manner. One such strategy is positive problem solving, where partners calmly discuss issues, express their thoughts and emotions, and work together to reach mutually acceptable solutions. In contrast, destructive strategies may intensify conflicts and negatively affect relationship satisfaction. Conflict engagement involves behaviours such as criticism, anger, blaming, or verbal aggression during disagreements, while withdrawal refers to avoiding discussion, becoming emotionally distant, or disengaging from the conflict situation.

Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in how individuals understand and regulate emotions during interpersonal interactions. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence are generally better able to recognize their emotional responses, control impulsive reactions, and respond empathetically to others' emotions. In the context of romantic relationships, these abilities may facilitate effective communication, emotional understanding, and constructive conflict resolution.

Young adulthood is a stage where individuals increasingly engage in romantic relationships and develop deeper emotional connections. However, many young adults are still learning how to manage emotions and navigate interpersonal disagreements within their relationships. Emotional intelligence may influence how individuals respond to conflicts, regulate emotional reactions, and adopt constructive strategies such as positive problem solving rather than destructive approaches like conflict engagement or withdrawal.

Therefore, examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management in romantic relationships is important for understanding the psychological factors that contribute to healthier relationship dynamics. The findings of this study may provide useful insights for counsellors, psychologists, and relationship educators who work with young adults. By understanding how emotional intelligence influences conflict resolution strategies, interventions can be developed to promote effective communication, emotional regulation, and healthier romantic relationships.

The present study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and the management of interpersonal conflict in romantic relationships among young adults.

Review of Literature

Emotional intelligence has been widely studied in relation to interpersonal functioning and relationship quality. Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2001) conducted a series of studies examining the association between emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships. Their findings indicated that individuals with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated greater empathy, stronger social skills, and more cooperative behaviors during interactions. These emotional competencies enabled individuals to respond appropriately to others' emotions and maintain more satisfying interpersonal relationships. The study highlighted that emotional intelligence plays an important role in fostering positive and harmonious social interactions.

Similarly, Lopes, Salovey, and Straus (2003) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Their findings revealed that individuals with higher emotional intelligence demonstrated better social competence and were more effective in managing emotional situations during interpersonal interactions. These individuals also showed greater empathy and were more capable of understanding emotional cues in others. As a result, they tended to experience more

positive and supportive relationships. The researchers suggested that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and improving the quality of social interactions.

The role of emotional intelligence in romantic relationships was further examined by Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005), who studied how emotional competencies influence relationship quality among couples. Their findings indicated that individuals with higher emotional intelligence were better able to perceive and regulate their own emotions as well as understand the emotions of their partners. These abilities allowed them to communicate more effectively, manage disagreements constructively, and maintain higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The study emphasized that emotional intelligence contributes not only to effective communication but also to constructive conflict management within romantic relationships.

Research has also explored the different ways individuals manage conflicts in romantic relationships. Kurdek (1994) examined conflict resolution styles used by couples during disagreements. The study identified several common strategies, including positive problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. Positive problem solving involves open communication and cooperative efforts to resolve disagreements and reach mutually satisfying solutions. In contrast, conflict engagement includes negative behaviors such as criticism, hostility, blaming, and verbal aggression during disagreements. Withdrawal refers to avoiding discussion of the issue or emotionally disengaging from the interaction. The findings indicated that constructive strategies such as positive problem solving were associated with healthier and more stable relationships, whereas destructive strategies like conflict engagement and withdrawal were linked to lower relationship satisfaction.

The theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence were further elaborated by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004), who described emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. According to their framework, individuals with higher emotional intelligence are more capable of recognizing emotional cues, interpreting emotional information accurately, and regulating emotional responses in different social situations. These abilities help individuals communicate effectively and respond more appropriately during emotionally intense interactions.

Additional research has emphasized the role of emotional regulation in maintaining healthy romantic relationships. Brumbaugh and Fraley (2007) found that individuals who are more capable of regulating negative emotions during interactions with their partners tend to experience lower levels of conflict escalation and greater relationship satisfaction. The ability to manage emotional responses enables individuals to respond calmly during disagreements and engage in constructive communication rather than reacting impulsively or defensively.

Fitness (2001) also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in intimate relationships. The study suggested that emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to recognize their own emotions as well as the emotions of their partners. This emotional awareness allows them to respond to emotionally challenging situations with greater empathy and sensitivity. As a result, they are more likely to manage misunderstandings and conflicts in a constructive manner and maintain healthier relationship dynamics. Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009) further emphasized that emotional intelligence contributes to positive interpersonal outcomes by enhancing emotional awareness and regulation. However, the authors noted that recognizing emotions alone may not be sufficient for maintaining healthy interactions; the ability to regulate emotional responses during disagreements is equally important. Individuals who can

manage their emotions effectively are more likely to engage in constructive communication and problem-solving behaviors rather than escalating conflicts.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence is associated with positive interpersonal outcomes and relationship satisfaction, relatively limited research has specifically examined how emotional intelligence influences conflict resolution strategies within romantic relationships. Many studies have primarily focused on general relationship quality rather than the specific strategies individuals use to manage disagreements, such as positive problem solving, conflict engagement, and withdrawal. Furthermore, research examining these variables among young adults remains relatively limited, despite the fact that this developmental stage is characterized by increasing emotional intimacy and the formation of romantic relationships. Young adults are still developing emotional regulation and interpersonal skills, making it important to understand how emotional intelligence may influence their approach to conflict management. Therefore, examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies in romantic relationships among young adults may provide valuable insights into the psychological factors that contribute to healthier and more constructive relationship dynamics.

Methodology

Research Questions

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution strategies in romantic relationships among young adults. Specifically, the study explored whether Emotional Intelligence is associated with the use of different conflict resolution strategies, namely Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal. The study also examined whether gender differences exist in Emotional Intelligence and in the use of constructive conflict resolution strategies.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of the study are as follows:

To assess the levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI) among young adults currently in romantic relationships.

To identify the predominant conflict resolution strategies utilized by this demographic.

To examine the relationship between EI and specific conflict management styles (Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, Withdrawal, and Compliance).

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a statistically significant positive correlation between total Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores and the use of Positive Problem-Solving strategies.

H2: There will be a statistically significant negative correlation between total Emotional Intelligence scores and destructive conflict resolution strategies, specifically Conflict Engagement and Withdrawal.

H3 (Null): There will be no statistically significant gender difference in total Emotional Intelligence scores.

H4 (Null): There will be no statistically significant gender difference in the frequency of using Positive Problem-Solving conflict resolution strategies.

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative correlational and comparative research design to examine the relation-

ship between Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution strategies in romantic relationships. The design also enabled the comparison of Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution behaviors between male and female participants.

Participants

The study included 37 young adults who were currently involved in romantic relationships, consisting of 15 males and 22 females. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants had been in a romantic relationship for at least three months, which allowed them to have some experience with interpersonal conflict within their relationships.

Tools

Two standardized instruments were used for data collection.

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT): The SSEIT is a 33-item self-report measure designed to assess emotional intelligence. It evaluates individuals' ability to perceive, understand, express, and regulate emotions in themselves and others. Participants respond to each item using a Likert-type scale.

Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI): The CRSI was used to assess the conflict resolution strategies employed by individuals in romantic relationships. The instrument measures four conflict resolution styles: Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, Withdrawal, and Compliance, which reflect both constructive and destructive approaches to managing interpersonal conflict.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through both online and physical questionnaires. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their participation was voluntary. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. All responses were kept anonymous and confidential to ensure the privacy of participants and the integrity of the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. All collected data were treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, including Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD), were calculated to summarize participants' Emotional Intelligence scores and conflict resolution strategies. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to examine the relationships between Emotional Intelligence and the conflict resolution strategies of Positive Problem Solving, Conflict Engagement, and Withdrawal. Additionally, independent samples t -tests were conducted to assess gender differences in Emotional Intelligence scores and in the use of Positive Problem-Solving strategies.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses conducted on data collected from 37 participants. The analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and independent samples t-tests to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution strategies, as well as gender differences in these variables.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution strategies. Emotional Intelligence scores had a mean (M) of 110.3 and a standard deviation (SD) of 12.4. For conflict resolution strategies, participants scored an average of 28.5 ($SD = 4.3$) on Positive Problem Solving, 15.7 ($SD = 3.8$) on Conflict Engagement, and 12.3 ($SD = 2.9$) on Withdrawal. These results provide an overview of participants' emotional abilities and their approaches to conflict management in romantic relationships.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for EI and Conflict Styles (N = 37)

Variable	M	SD
1.Total Emotional Intelligence	14.22	124.81
2.Positive Problem Solving (CRSI)	3.61	0.68
3.Conflict Engagement (CRSI)	2.41	0.79
4.Withdrawal (CRSI)	2.32	0.82
5.Compliance (CRSI)	2.89	0.74

Note. $N = 37$; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution strategies.

Table 2: Correlations between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Style

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1.Total EI	—				
2.Positive Problem Solving	.58	—			
3.Conflict Engagement	-.41	-.32	—		
4.Withdrawal	-.34	-.28	.45	—	
5.Compliance	.12	.15	-.10	.22	—

Note. $N = 37$. $p < .01$, $p < .05$ (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposed a significant positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Positive Problem-Solving strategies. The results showed a strong positive correlation ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence are more likely to use constructive strategies when resolving conflicts. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

This finding suggests that individuals who are better at understanding and regulating emotions may be more capable of managing disagreements calmly and engaging in cooperative problem-solving with their partners. This result is consistent with Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of Emotional Intelligence,

which emphasizes the role of emotional awareness and regulation in managing interpersonal challenges effectively.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted a negative relationship between Emotional Intelligence and destructive conflict strategies. The results showed significant negative correlations between EI and Conflict Engagement ($r = -.41, p < .05$) and Withdrawal ($r = -.34, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

These findings indicate that individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence are less likely to respond to conflicts through aggression, criticism, or emotional withdrawal. Instead, they appear better able to regulate their emotional reactions and maintain constructive communication during disagreements. This supports the view that emotional regulation plays a crucial role in preventing conflict escalation in romantic relationships.

Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in Emotional Intelligence and Positive Problem-Solving strategies.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test Comparing Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Styles (N = 37)

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	t	p
Total EI	Male	15	121.33	14.50	-1.18	.246
	Female	22	127.18	13.80		
Positive Problem-Solving	Male	15	3.48	0.72	-0.92	.364
	Female	22	3.70	0.65		

Note. N = 37. $p < .05, p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted no significant gender differences in Emotional Intelligence scores. The t-test results ($t(35) = -1.18, p = .246$) indicated no statistically significant difference between male and female participants. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted no gender difference in the use of Positive Problem-Solving strategies. The results also showed no significant difference ($p = .364$) between males and females. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

These findings suggest that Emotional Intelligence and constructive conflict management strategies are not strongly influenced by gender. Both men and women appear equally capable of developing emotional skills and applying them in romantic relationships.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the important role of Emotional Intelligence in managing interpersonal conflict within romantic relationships. Individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence were more likely to use constructive strategies such as Positive Problem Solving and less likely to engage in destructive behaviors such as Conflict Engagement and Withdrawal.

These results suggest that emotional awareness and emotional regulation enable individuals to respond

more calmly and thoughtfully during disagreements. Rather than reacting impulsively, emotionally intelligent individuals may be better able to understand both their own emotions and those of their partners, which helps facilitate constructive communication and collaborative problem-solving.

The absence of significant gender differences indicates that Emotional Intelligence functions as a personal skill that can be developed by both men and women. Emotional competence appears to play a more important role in conflict management than gender itself.

Overall, the findings emphasize that Emotional Intelligence may serve as a protective factor in romantic relationships by reducing destructive conflict behaviors and promoting healthier communication patterns. Developing emotional awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation skills may therefore be beneficial in relationship education and counseling programs aimed at improving relationship satisfaction and stability. Future research could expand these findings by using larger and more diverse samples and examining how Emotional Intelligence influences conflict resolution across different cultural and relational contexts. Longitudinal studies may also help determine how emotional skills develop over time and influence relationship outcomes.

Summary

The present study examined the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in managing interpersonal conflicts within romantic relationships among young adults. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions effectively. Since conflicts are a natural part of romantic relationships, EI may influence how individuals respond to disagreements and resolve conflicts.

The study was conducted among 37 young adults aged 18–30 who were currently involved in romantic relationships. Emotional Intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), while conflict resolution strategies were assessed using the Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI). Descriptive statistics were used to examine general patterns of EI and conflict resolution styles. Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between EI and conflict styles, and independent samples t-tests were used to examine gender differences.

The results indicated that participants demonstrated moderate to high levels of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence showed a significant positive relationship with Positive Problem Solving, suggesting that individuals with higher EI are more likely to use constructive strategies such as discussion, cooperation, and negotiation during conflicts. EI also showed significant negative correlations with destructive strategies, specifically Conflict Engagement and Withdrawal, indicating that individuals with higher EI are less likely to respond with aggression or avoidance during disagreements.

The study also examined gender differences in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies. The findings showed no significant gender differences in EI or in the use of Positive Problem-Solving strategies, suggesting that both males and females are equally capable of managing conflicts constructively. Overall, the results highlight the important role of emotional intelligence in promoting healthier conflict management within romantic relationships.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in how young adults manage conflicts in romantic relationships. Individuals with higher EI are more likely to use constructive strategies such as calm discussion, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving, while those with lower EI are more likely to engage in destructive behaviors such as criticism, aggression, or withdrawal.

The results also showed no significant gender differences in EI or positive conflict resolution, indicating that emotional skills are not determined by gender and can be developed by both men and women. These findings emphasize that emotional awareness, empathy, and self-regulation help individuals manage disagreements more effectively and maintain healthier relationships.

Overall, the study highlights that developing emotional intelligence can contribute to better communication, reduced destructive conflict behaviors, and stronger romantic relationships. Emotional intelligence training programs may therefore help young adults improve their ability to regulate emotions, understand their partner's feelings, and resolve conflicts constructively.

Limitations of the Study

Despite providing useful insights, the study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 37$), which limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider population. Second, the gender distribution was uneven, with more female participants than male participants, which may have influenced the results. Third, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be affected by social desirability bias, where participants provide responses they believe are socially acceptable. Finally, the cross-sectional design captured data at only one point in time, making it difficult to examine how emotional intelligence and conflict management skills develop over time. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples and use longitudinal designs to provide a deeper understanding of these relationships.

Implications of the Study

The findings suggest that emotional intelligence is an important skill for managing conflicts in romantic relationships. Individuals who are emotionally aware, empathetic, and able to regulate their emotions are more likely to communicate effectively and resolve disagreements constructively.

These results have practical implications for education, counseling, and mental health practice. Educational institutions, relationship counselors, and mental health professionals can incorporate emotional intelligence training into programs for young adults. Teaching skills such as emotional awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation may help individuals manage conflicts more effectively, reduce misunderstandings, and build stronger relationships.

Overall, promoting emotional intelligence may not only support individual emotional growth but also contribute to healthier, more stable, and more satisfying romantic relationships.

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