Perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

In a collectivistic culture, a prime example of which being India, Social Support (SS) factors including relationships provided by families, friends, and close acquaintances as well as the social networks provided by the same are valued at a higher degree than in an individualistic culture. Perceived Social Support (PSS) emphasizes the individual's personal perception of how supportive social relationships are. Emotional Competence (EC) is a measure that can be learned and is defined as "people's perception of their own emotional abilities". The present study aims to identify patterns in PSS across five varying age groups along with gender differences in an Indian sample by means of a cross-sectional study. The study also examines if there is a relationship between PSS and EC. Two questionnaires, the "PSS from Family and from Friends" Scale and "The Profile of EC", were administered in a sample of 324 individuals of men and women. The results confirmed a positive correlation between PSS and EC. Differences in the levels of PSS with respect to gender and age were seen with the 15-19 age group showing the highest levels of PSS from friends while higher levels of PSS from family were seen in the 45-49 and 55-59 age groups.

1. INTRODUCTION

Shumaker and Brownell (1984) define Social Support (SS) as "an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient." SS is said to be composed of three elements — affect, affirmation, and aid. While affect is concerned with "expressions of respect and love," affirmation refers to the "acknowledgement of the appropriateness of individuals' behaviors or attitudes" and aid involves "direct assistance" (Abbey, 1985). Lian and Geok (2009) state that SS is a mutual network of caring that is instrumental in enabling one to effectively cope with stress. In fact, SS is studied so frequently with stress and, in turn, coping capability that many a time, it is defined in terms of its effect on stress (Kaya, Akgemci & Celik, 2012). The distinction between the social network of an individual, which is measured quantitatively, and the SS that is perceived by an individual, measured quantitatively, is where the differences in SS literature arise (Pearson, 1986; Marsella & Snyder, 1981).

Perceived SS emphasizes the individual's personal perception of how supportive social relationships are. It is the person's impression of whether his or her social network is supportive or not (Kayaet *et al.*, 2012). Cobb (1985) defines SS in terms of perceived SS and says that it is "the information leading the subject to believe that he or she is loved,

esteemed, and belongs to a network of mutual obligation." It is more appropriate to measure perceived SS than simply SS for one must perceive support for it to be useful (Ortiz, 2015). Procidano and Heller (1983) state that perceived SS and the perception of it being available or not might be influenced by within-person factors such as long-term personality traits and even temporal changes such as change in attitude or mood.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Two conceptual models explain how SS affects physical and psychological health — the main effect model and the buffering model. The main effect model proposes that "SS enhances well-being irrespective of people's stress levels" and the buffering model postulates that SS acts as a buffer against the negative effects of stress. The buffering model is associated with the perceived SS measure. According to this model, perceived SS may enhance the individual's perception of their ability to cope. Secondly, it can also act as a buffer between the experience of a stress reaction and a potential physical or psychological pathological process that may follow, by reducing or even removing the stress reaction (Rodriguez & Cohen, 1998). In a study conducted by Lian & Geok (2009) on perceived SS and coping capability in young adults, the results revealed a significant positive relationship between the two, indicating that the higher the perceived SS, the greater the coping capability.

In a study conducted by Özpolat *et al*., (2014), perceived SS was associated with a decrease in psychological symptoms in cancer patients. The results showed that those who perceived more SS had less difficulty in maintaining their family relationships, implying that the communication problems that generally follow after a cancer diagnosis were perhaps overcome by those who perceived the availability of support in times of stress. Perceived SS was found to prevent symptoms of depression (Ramezankhani *et al.,* 2008). Perceived SS is also relevant in the academic field as it is associated with academic achievement and perceived parental SS was found to predict academic achievement (Cutrona *et al*., 1994). Iglesia, Stover and Liporace's study (2014), revealed that higher levels of perceived SS was associated with increased academic achievement in college students but only for females due to the fact that women's SS networks are wider as they give more importance to establishing and maintaining relationships.

Similarly, other studies show that there is a significant gender difference in the levels of SS perceived. For example, the findings of Lian and Geok (2009) state that females have higher perceived SS than males and the source of this support was family. The same study states that secondary school students, being less mature in comparison to university students, perceive less support from family than university students, owing to high levels of parent-child conflict that is typical at this age. In the case of young adults, although perceived SS from family may be a basic source of SS, as one grows older, there is a tendency of the decrease in physical proximity between the individual and his or her family, and subsequently the tendency to turn to friends for SS instead.

When a sample of Paediatric Haematopoietic Progenitor Cell Transplant (HCPT) survivors was studied, over time, adolescents' perceived SS from classmates increased. Children and adolescents perceived SS patterns were thus seen to vary with age (Barrera, Andrews, Barnes & Atenafu, 2007). In older individuals, studies have shown that in men, contact with friends decreases, but in women, it doesn't which may result in lesser levels of perceived SS from friends in older men (Cornman *et al*., 2004). Social networks shrink for older individuals but evidence suggests that these individuals report that these relationships, though few, are more deep and intimate (Knoll & Schwarzer, 2002). Levels of perceived SS

from family in older individuals could perhaps be attributed to having children who live closer to them, or traditional beliefs that are concerned with taking care of parents in old age (Cornman *et al.*, 2004). Others believe that changes in SS in older people are more to do with their health status rather than social and economic factors and circumstances (Kelman, Thomas & Tanaka, 1994).

Interpersonal relationships and affirmative interactions are important in facilitating well-being and efficiency in various aspects of life- whether it is in the organizational sphere or the personal sphere. An important predictor of such positive interactions and relationships is the relationship between perceived SS and EC (Macula, 2017). EC is concerned with "people's perception of their own emotional abilities (Petrides, 2011)." While emotional intelligence (EI) is a "set of innate factors," EC "can be developed." Studies have shown that the effect of EI on general performance is significant only when EI is mediated by EC. EC is concerned with intrapersonal and interpersonal identification, expression, comprehension, regulation and utilization of emotions (Brasseur *et al.,* 2013).

EI has two different constructs—trait and ability. Trait EI involves understanding emotional intelligence as a set of personality traits that are assessed through self-report tests (Mikolajczak & Bellegem, 2017). Mikolajczak *et al.* (2015) as well as other experts use the term 'EC' in place of trait EI, as the term is consistent with recent developments in research that indicates that EC can be taught and learned. The study of EC, for this reason, has found its way into the organisational field. A study examined the association between EC and employability, post EC intervention and training. Following this intervention, employability also increased (Nelis *et al.,* 2011).

Similarly, EC was found to be associated with contextual performance, as seen in the outcome of a study conducted by Cichy, Kim and Cha (2009) on executives of the automated and vending service industry. A positive relationship was found between the two. EC has been studied extensively with its relation to health. Research reveals that the higher the level of EC, the lower the healthcare expenses (Mikolajczak & Bellegem, 2017). By increasing EC, the study conducted by Nelis *et al.* (2011) saw a decrease in somatic complaints and a general improvement in physical health. Other studies have shown that EC has predicted various psychological constructs including life satisfaction, psychological well-being and SS.

A comparative study between German and Indian samples shows that EC predicts life satisfaction. In the Indian sample, perceived SS had a mediating effect on EC in predicting life satisfaction (Koydemir *et al.*, 2012). In a study conducted on Japanese eldercare nurses, EC had a direct positive influence on perceived SS, thus indicating the undeniable role of EC in an individual's social network and SS patterns (Toyama & Mauno, 2017). Interpersonal EC and intrapersonal EC are said to be of different levels of importance in different cases. According to Brasseur *et al.* (2013), while intrapersonal EC is more relevant in predicting health, interpersonal EC is more relevant in predicting the quality of social relationships.

While a vast amount of literature studies EC in its relation with and its influence on perceived SS (Marroquín, 2011), the present study attempts to examine the relationship between perceived SS and its influence on EC. The current study also attempts to gain a better understanding of differences with respect to age and gender in the levels of SS perceived from two sources- friends and family. The point of commonality in the two definitions of perceived SS and EC that gives individual perception precedence sparked the interest to examine the relationship between the two in the present study.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence?
2. Is there any difference in the levels of perceived Social Support with respect to gender?
3. Is there any difference in the levels of perceived Social Support with respect to age?
4. Is there any difference in the levels of perceived SS from two core sources—friends and family—between individuals in different age groups?

3.2 Objectives

1. To find out whether there is a relationship between Perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence
2. To study if adolescents and young adults perceive higher levels of Social Support from friends than other groups do.
3. To study if middle adults and older adults perceive higher levels of Social Support from family than what the other groups do.

3.3 Hypotheses

1. **H_1**: There is a relationship between Perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence.
2. **H_2**: There is a difference in the levels of Perceived Social Support with respect to Gender.
3. **H_3:** There is a difference in the levels of Perceived Social Support with respect to Age.
4. **H_4**: Individuals in the age groups 15-19 years and 25-29 years perceive more Social Support from friends than what other age groups perceive.
5. **H_5**: Individuals in the age groups 45-49 years and 55-59 years perceive more Social Support from family than what the other age groups do.
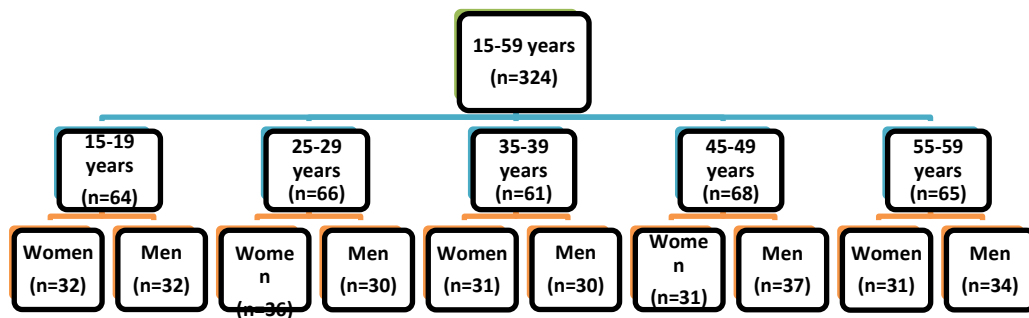
4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study used a co-relational design to explore PSS and its relationship with EC in a sample consisting of five different age groups. The study also used a between age groups design to understand whether levels of PSS from two core sources- friends and family—differ between different age groups. Age and gender-based differences in the sources of PSS and the levels of EC were also analyzed in the study.

4.2 Sample

The sample consisted of **324** individuals, both men and women, residing in different cities in India including Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Mumbai, and Bangalore, belonging to five age groups: 15-19 years, 25-29 years, 35-39 years, 45-49 years and 55-59 years, with a minimum of 60 in each age group. Purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling techniques were used to collect data.

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                                    │ 15-59 years  │
                                    │   (n=324)    │
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│ 15-19  │ │ 25-29  │ │ 35-39  │ │ 45-49  │ │ 55-59  │
│ years  │ │ years  │ │ years  │ │ years  │ │ years  │
│ (n=64) │ │ (n=66) │ │ (n=61) │ │ (n=68) │ │ (n=65) │
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| Women (n=32) | Men (n=32) | Women (n=36) | Men (n=30) | Women (n=31) | Men (n=30) | Women (n=31) | Men (n=37) | Women (n=31) | Men (n=34) |

4.3 Inclusion Criteria

1. Individuals who met the previously specified age criteria.
2. Individuals of Indian origin scattered across various cities in India.
3.

4.4 Exclusion criteria

Individuals who were not of Indian origin.

4.5 Instruments

To measure the variables, the following questionnaire tools were used.

4.6 Demographic Data Sheet

The demographic data sheet inquired specific details of the individual participating in the study including age, sex, ethnicity, religion, family type, size, and physical health status and whether they experienced any traumatic experience(s) over the last six months from the date of filling the sheet.

4.7 Perceived Social Support from Family and Friends Scale (PSS-Fa and PSS-Fr scales)

The questionnaire was developed by Procidano & Heller in 1983. This scale was used to collect data related to the independent variable of the study, perceived SS. The current study is using the 20-item version developed by Glozah in 2017. This 20-item scale has two subscales, namely, PSS from Friends (PSS-Fr) and PSS Scale from Family (PSS-Fa). The first 10 questions measure the perceived support received from friends and the last 10 questions cater to the PSS received from family. The response option was on a five-point Likert scale: 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree.' All negatively worded items were reverse scored. The total scores range from 10 to 50 for each subscale. The PSS scales have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 and Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 for the PSS-Fa and the PSS-Fr respectively. The negatively worded questions were reversed scored.

4.8 Profile of EC (PEC)

The questionnaire was developed by Sophie Brasseur, Jacques Gregoire, Romain Boirdu, and Moira Mikolajczk and was published in 2013. It was used to collect data regarding the dependent variable of the study, EC. The questionnaire has 50 items and 10 subscales. 5 subscales are linked to the management of one's emotions — Intrapersonal EC, and 5 subscales are linked to the emotions of others — Interpersonal EC. For each of these two, the corresponding subscales are Identification, Expression, Comprehension, Regulation and

Utilization. The items 20, 49, 29, 40, 44, 1, 2, 26, 43, 5, 18, 34, 25, 38, 42, 28, 31, 46, 37, 27, and 9 were reversed scored, after which the items corresponding to each subscale was averaged. Three global scores were calculated- the Global EC score, the Intrapersonal EC score and the Interpersonal EC score. The PEC's total score has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, and the Cronbach's alpha for Intrapersonal EC and Interpersonal EC is 0.86 and 0.89 respectively.

4.9 Procedure

While collecting data from the sample, men and women were approached in various settings and were asked to participate in the study after confirming whether they fit the age criteria for the study. Data was collected both through physical questionnaires and also through an online form that was circulated to individuals that met the age criteria *via* Google forms. All participants willingly consented after being informed of the study's adherence to standard APA ethics. Participants were told that the study was to gain insight into their likes, dislikes attitudes and interests. They were told that there was no right or wrong answers, and that they must answer truthfully. Participants were also made aware that there was no stipulated time limit, but that it would approximately take 15-20 minutes to answer the questionnaire.

4.10   Scoring and Treatment of Data

SPSS was used to analyze the data set. Descriptive Statistics (mean, standard deviation) for the variables- Perceived SS and EC- were calculated across the five age groups: 15-19 years, 25-29 years, 35-39 years, 45-49 years and 55-59 years. Correlations were computed to measure the relationship between the total perceived SS and EC along with their respective subscales. Independent samples t-tests were used to measure gender-based differences in the variables under study in the sample, across the different age groups. Inferential statistics (One-way ANOVA) were computed to determine whether there is a difference in the means of the different variables and their dimensions across the sample. Finally, a post ad hoc analysis was conducted to examine the differences in means revealed by ANOVA between the different age groups.

5. RESULTS

The current study examined the relationship between perceived SS and EC along with analyzing the differing trends in PSS across five varying age groups in a sample of 324 individuals.

5.1 t-tests

A t-test was used to measure gender-based differences in the 15-19 years category. The mean score of perceived SS for women (M=76.59; SD=12.62) was higher than that of men (M=68.78; SD=14.78). This difference was significant (t=2.273; p<0.05). The mean score of perceived SS from friends for women (M=39.81; SD=6.05) was higher than that of men (M=35.96; SD=7.76). This difference was also significant (t=2.20; p<0.05). There was no significant gender difference in the mean scores of perceived SS from family (t=1.55), EC (t=-.47), intrapersonal competence (t= 1.14) and interpersonal competence (t=.42).

TABLE—1

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t values for **15-19** years old women and men

	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	t
Perceived SS	76.59 (12.62)	68.78 (14.78)	**2.27***
Perceived SS- friends	39.81 (6.05)	35.96 (7.76)	**2.20***
Perceived SS- family	36.78 (10.61)	32.81 (9.74)	1.55
EC	170.96 (21.71)	168.53 (24.16)	-.47
Intrapersonal EC	82.68 (13.40)	84.21 (12.40)	1.146
Interpersonal EC	88.28 (11.19)	84.31 (16.07)	.424

*p<0.05

TABLE—2

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t values for **25-29** years old women and men

	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	t
Perceived SS	75.02 (10.95)	72.76 (12.46)	**7.8**
Perceived SS- friends	32.88 (7.40)	34.63 (6.47)	**2.39***
Perceived SS- family	42.13 (6.76)	38.13 (9.60)	1.00
EC	161.91 (18.37)	174.83 (25.40)	1.98
Intrapersonal EC	79.94 (9.98)	89.56* (13.88)	3.26*
Interpersonal EC	81.97 (11.75)	85.26 (14.76)	1.00

*p<0.05

A t-test was used to measure gender-based differences in the 25-29 years category. The mean score of perceived SS from friends for men (M=34.63; SD=6.47) was higher than that of women (M=32.88; SD=7.40). This difference was significant (t=2.392; $p<0.05$). The mean score of intrapersonal EC for men (M=89.56; SD= 13.88) was higher than that of women (M=79.94; SD=9.98). There was no significant gender-based difference in the mean scores of perceived SS (t=.78), perceived SS from family (t= 1.0), EC (t=1.98), intrapersonal EC (t= 1.14) and interpersonal EC (t=1.009).

TABLE—3
Mean, Standard Deviation, and t values for **35-39** years old women and men

	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	t
Perceived SS	69.35 (14.34)	73.60 (12.02)	**1.25**
Perceived SS- friends	32.32 (7.50)	33.43 (8.24)	**.55**
Perceived SS- family	37.03 (9.04)	40.16 (7.69)	1.45
EC	169.16 (18.97)	170.26 (21.85)	.21
Intrapersonal EC	86.38 (9.29)	86.63 (12.39)	.08
Interpersonal EC	82.77 (10.93)	83.63 (12.16)	.29

*p<0.05

Table-3 shows no significant gender differences in the mean scores of perceived SS (t=1.25), perceived SS from friends (t=.55), perceived SS from family (t=1.45), EC (t=.21), intrapersonal EC (t=.08) and interpersonal EC (t=.29).

TABLE—4
Mean, Standard Deviation, and t values for 45-49 years old women and men

	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	t
Perceived SS	**77.83** **(10.63)**	**74.89** **(13.74)**	.97
Perceived SS- friends	**33.87** **(9.12)**	**34.56** **(7.79)**	.98

Perceived SS- family	**43.96** **(6.99)**	**40.32** **(8.50)**	**.33**
EC	**178.93** **(24.98)**	**185.02** **(25.94)**	**1.90**
Intrapersonal EC	**90.48** **(14.47)**	**93.97** **(13.26)**	**1.03**
Interpersonal EC	**88.45** **(13.05)**	**91.05** **(14.41)**	**.77**

Table—4 shows no significant gender-based differences in the mean scores of perceived SS (t=.97), perceived SS from friends (t=.98), perceived SS from family (t=.33), EC (t=1.90), intrapersonal EC (t=1.03) and interpersonal EC (t=.77).

TABLE—5

Mean, Standard Deviation and t values for 55-59 years old women and men

	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	t
Perceived SS	**75.83** **(12.80)**	**76.23** **(10.18)**	.13
Perceived SS-friends	**34.22** **(8.95)**	**34.61** **(8.08)**	.49
Perceived SS-family	**41.61** **(6.96)**	**41.61** **(7.06)**	.18
EC	**173.96** **(17.98)**	**176.47** **(22.63)**	.00
Intrapersonal EC	**88.64** **(11.89)**	**90.44** **(12.71)**	.58
Interpersonal EC	**85.32** **(10.79)**	**86.02** **(11.78)**	.25

Table-5 shows no significant gender based differences in the mean scores of perceived SS (t=.13), perceived SS from friends (t=.49), perceived SS from family (t=.18), EC (t=.00), intrapersonal EC (t=.58) and interpersonal EC (t=.25).

5.2 Correlations

Correlations were computed to assess the association between perceived SS and EC along with their respective subscales for the sample in its entirety. Significant correlations between

all subscales were found. Values in **Table—6** show that there was a correlation between perceived SS and EC (r=.32; p<0.01), perceived SS and intrapersonal EC (r=.28; p<0.01), perceived SS and interpersonal EC (r=.29; p<0.01), perceived SS from friends and EC (r=.28; p<0.01), perceived SS from friends and intrapersonal EC (r=.20; p<0.01), and between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal EC (r=.30, p<0.01). The findings suggest that there also exists a co-relational relationship between perceived SS from family and EC (r=.21, p<0.01), perceived SS from family and intrapersonal EC (r=.22, p<0.01), and also between perceived SS from family and interpersonal EC (r=.15, p<0.01).

TABLE—6
Correlation between Perceived SS, Perceived SS from friends, perceived SS from family, EC, intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC in the sample

	EC	Intrapersonal EC	Interpersonal Emotional Competence
Perceived SS	**.32**[**]	**.28**[**]	**.29**[**]
Perceived SS- friends	**.28**[**]	**.20**[**]	**.30**[**]
Perceived SS- family	**.21**[**]	**.22**[**]	**.15**[**]

** p<0.01

TABLE—7
Correlation between Perceived SS, Perceived SS from friends, perceived SS from family, EC, intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC in 15-19 age group

	EC	Intrapersonal Emotional Competence	Interpersonal Emotional Competence
Perceived SS	**.23**	**.16**	**.22**
Perceived SS- friends	**.34**[**]	**.15**	**.42**[**]
Perceived SS- family	**.07**	**.12**	**.01**

** p<0.01

The correlation coefficients revealed that perceived SS from friends was significantly correlated with EC (r=.34; p<0.01). Additionally, PSS from friends was significantly correlated with interpersonal EC (r=.42; p<0.01). However, no significant correlation was found between perceived SS and EC (r=.23), between perceived SS and intrapersonal EC, or between perceived SS and interpersonal EC (r=.22). Perceived SS from friends was not significantly correlated with intrapersonal EC (r=.15). Perceived SS from family was not significantly correlated with EC (r=.07), intrapersonal EC (r=.12) or with interpersonal EC (r=.01).

TABLE—8

Correlation between perceived SS, perceived SS from friends, perceived SS from family, EC, intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC in 25-29 age group

	Emotional Competence	Intrapersonal Emotional Competence	Interpersonal Emotional Competence
Perceived SS	.32**	.30*	.25*
Perceived SS- friends	.31*	.36**	.18
Perceived SS- family	.18	.11	.20

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table—8 shows that perceived SS was significantly correlated with EC (r=.32; p<0.01). Perceived SS was also significantly correlated with both subscales of EC: with intrapersonal EC (r=.30; p<0.05) and with interpersonal EC (r=.25; p<0.05). There also exists a correlation between perceived SS from friends and overall EC (r=.31; p<0.05), as well as a correlation between perceived SS from friends and intrapersonal EC (r=.36; p<0.01). However, perceived SS from friends did not share a correlation with interpersonal EC (r=.18). Perceived SS from family was not significantly correlated with EC (r=.18), intrapersonal EC (r=.11) or with interpersonal EC (r=.20).

TABLE—9

Correlation between PSS, PSS from friends, PSS from family, EC, intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC in 35-39 age group

	EC	Intrapersonal Emotional Competence	Interpersonal Emotional Competence
Perceived SS	.33**	.30*	.30*
Perceived SS- friends	.36**	.32*	.33**
Perceived SS- family	.18	.17	.16

** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Values in **Table— 9** show that there is a correlation between PSS and EC (r=.33; p<0.01), perceived SS and intrapersonal EC (r=.30; p<0.05), perceived SS and interpersonal EC (r=.30; p<0.05), perceived SS from friends and EC (r=.36; p<0.01), perceived SS from friends and intrapersonal EC (r=.32; p<0.05), and between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal EC (r=.33, p<0.01). However, perceived SS from family was not significantly correlated with EC (r=.18), intrapersonal EC (r=.17) or with interpersonal EC (r=.06).

TABLE—10
Correlation between PSS, PSS from friends, PSS from family, EC, intrapersonal
EC and interpersonal EC in 45-49 age group

	EC	Intrapersonal EC	Interpersonal EC
Perceived SS	**.29***	**.26***	**.27***
Perceived SS- friends	**.27***	.19	**.30***
Perceived SS- family	.16	.21	.10

* p<0.05

Table—10 shows that there is a correlation between perceived SS and EC (r=.29; p<0.05), between perceived SS and intrapersonal EC (r=.26; p<0.05), and between perceived SS an interpersonal EC (r=.27; p<0.05). There also exists a correlation between perceived SS from friends (r=.27; p<0.05) and EC, and also between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal EC (r=.30; p<0.05). Perceived SS from friends was not correlated with intrapersonal EC (r=.19). Perceived SS from family was not significantly correlated with EC (r=.16), intrapersonal EC (.21) or with interpersonal EC (r=.10).

TABLE—11
Correlation between PSS, PSS from friends, PSS from family, EC, intrapersonal
EC and interpersonal EC in 55-59 age group

	EC	Intrapersonal EC	Interpersonal EC
Perceived SS	**.44****	**.34****	**.44****
Perceived SS- friends	**.27***	.20	**.28***
Perceived SS- family	**.39****	**.31***	**.37****

** p<0.01, *** p**<0.05

Correlation exists between all scales except between perceived SS from friends and intrapersonal EC (r=.20). Correlation exists between perceived SS and EC (r=.44, p<0.01), between perceived SS and intrapersonal EC (r=.34, p<0.01) and between perceived SS and interpersonal competence (r=.44, p<0.01). There is a correlation between perceived SS from friends and EC (r=.27, p<0.05) and a correlation between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal EC (r=.28, p<0.05). Furthermore, perceived SS from family and EC are significantly correlated (r=.39, p<0.01). Perceived SS from family is also correlated with intrapersonal EC (r=.31, p<0.05) as well as with interpersonal EC (r=.37, p<0.01). Perceived SS from friends, however, was not correlated with intrapersonal EC (r=.20).

5.3 One-way ANOVA

TABLE—12

Mean, Standard Deviation and F ratio of Perceived SS, Perceived SS from friends, perceived SS from family, EC, intrapersonal EC, and interpersonal EC

	15-19 years Mean (SD)	25-29 years Mean (SD)	35-39 years Mean (SD)	45-49 years Mean (SD)	55-59 years Mean (SD)	F
Perceived SS	72.68 (14.19)	74.00 (11.62)	71.44 (13.31)	76.23 (12.42)	76.04 (11.41)	1.75
Perceived SS-friends	37.89 (7.17)	33.68 (7.00)	32.86 (7.83)	34.25 (8.37)	34.43 (8.44)	**3.87****
Perceived SS-family	34.79 (10.30)	40.31 (8.35)	38.57 (8.48)	41.98 (8.00)	41.61 (6.96)	**7.72****
EC	169.75 (22.82)	167.78 (22.62)	169.70 (20.28)	182.25 (25.50)	175.27 (20.43)	**4.59****
Intrapersonal EC	83.45 (12.83)	84.31 (12.76)	86.50 (10.83)	92.38 (13.83)	89.58 (12.26)	**5.79****
Interpersonal EC	86.29 (13.88)	83.46 (13.20)	83.19 (11.46)	89.86 (13.76)	85.69 (11.24)	**2.92***

*p<0.05, ****p**<0.01

TABLE—13
Multiple comparisons between the five age groups: 15-19 years, 25-29 years, 35-39 years, 45-49 years and 55-59 years

	(15-19)-(25-29)	(15-19)-(35-39)	(15-19)-(45-49)	(15-19)-(55-59)	(25-29)-(35-39)	(25-29)-(45-49)	(25-29)-(55-59)	(35-39)-(45-49)	(35-39)-(55-59)	(45-49)-(55-59)
Perceived SS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Perceived SS-friends	4.20*	5.02*	3.64*	3.45*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Perceived SS-family	-5.52*	-3.77*	-7.18*	-6.81*	NS	NS	NS	-3.41*	-3.04*	NS
EC	NS	NS	-12.50*	NS	NS	-14.46*	NS	-12.54*	NS	NS
Intrapersonal EC	NS	NS	-8.92*	-6.13*	NS	-8.06*	-5.26*	-5.87*	NS	NS
Interpersonal EC	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	-6.39*	NS	-6.67*	NS	NS

*p<0.0

Table-12 shows that there were significant differences between the five different age groups with respect to perceived SS from friends (F=3.87, p<0.01), perceived SS from family (F=7.72, p<0.01), EC (F=4.59, p<0.01), intrapersonal EC (F=5.79, p<0.01) and interpersonal EC (F=2.92, p<0.05). There were no significant differences between the age groups with respect to the total perceived SS (F=1.75). Moreover, **Table-12** shows that there was a significant difference between the different age groups with respect to the perceived SS from friends subscale (F=3.87, p<0.01). As evident from the mean scores, the 15-19 age group scored highest (M=37.89, SD=7.17), followed by the 55-59 age group (M=34.43, SD=8.44), followed by the 45-49 age group (M=34.25, SD=8.37), then followed by the 25-29 age group (M=32.86, SD=7.83) and finally the 35-39 age group who scored the lowest (M=32.86, SD=7.83). As evident from the post hoc results in Table 13, 15-19 age group scored significantly higher (MD= 4.20, p<0.05) in comparison to the 25-29 age group, higher in comparison to the 35-39 age group (MD=5.02, p<0.05), higher in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=3.64, p<0.05), and higher in comparison to the 55-59 age group (MD=3.45, p<0.05). There was no significant difference between the 25-29 age group and 35-39 age group, between the 25-29 age group and 45-49 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 55-59 age group, between the 35-39 age group and the 45-49 age group, between the 35-39 years and the 45-49 age group, or between the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group.

Additionally, Table 12 shows that there was a significant difference between the different age groups with respect to the perceived SS from family subscale (F=7.72 p<0.01). As evident from the mean scores, the 45-49 age group scored highest (M=41.98, SD=8.00), followed by the 55-59 age group (M=41.61, SD=6.96), followed by the 25-29 age group (M=40.31, SD=8.35), then followed by the 35-39 age group (M=38.57, SD=8.48) and finally the 15-19 age group who scored the lowest (M=34.79, SD=10.30). As evident from the post hoc results from Table 13, the 15-19 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 25-29 age group (MD=-5.52, p<0.05), lower in comparison to the 35-39 age group (MD=-3.77, p<0.05), lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-7.18, p<0.05), and lower in comparison to the 55-59 age group (MD=-6.81, p<0.01). The 35-39 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-3.41, p<0.05). 35-39 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 55-59 age group (MD=-3.04, p<0.01). There was no significance between 25-29 age group and 35-39 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 45-49 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 55-59 age group, or between the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group

Table-12 also shows that there is a significant difference between the different age groups with respect to the EC scale (F=4.59, p<0.01). As evident from the mean scores, 45-49 age group scored highest (M=182.25, SD=25.50), followed by the 55-59 age group (M=175.27, SD=20.43), followed by the 15-19 age group (M=169.75, SD=22.82), then followed by the 35-39 age group (M=169.70, SD=20.28) and finally the 25-29 age group who scored the lowest (M=167.78, SD=22.82). As evident from the post hoc results from Table 13, the 15-19 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-12.50, p<0.05). The 25-29 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-14.46, p<0.05). The 35-39 age group scored significantly lower than the 45-49 age group (MD=-12.54, p<0.05). There was no significant difference between the 15-19 age group and the 25-29 age group, between the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group, between the 15-19 age group and the 55-59 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 35-39 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 55-59 age group,

between the 35-39 age group and the 55-59 age group, or between the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group.

Furthermore, **Table-12** shows that there is a significant difference between the different age groups with respect to the intrapersonal EC subscale (F=5.79, p<0.01). As evident from the mean scores, the 45-49 age group scored highest (M=182.25, SD=25.50), followed by the 55-59 age group (M=175.27, SD=20.43), followed by the 35-39 age group (M=169.75, SD=22.82), then followed by the 25-29 age group (M=169.70, SD=20.28) and finally the 15-19 age group who scored the lowest (M=167.78, SD=22.82). As evident from the post hoc results from Table 13, 15-19 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-8.92, p<0.05), and also lower in comparison to the 55-59 age group (MD=-6.13, p<0.05). 25-29 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 55-59 age group (MD=-5.26, p<0.05). The 35-39 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-5.8, p<0.05). No significant difference was found between the 15-19 age group and the 25-29 age group, between the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 35-39 age group, between the 35-39 age group and the 55-59 age group, or between the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group.

Moreover, **Table-12** shows that there is a significant difference between the different age groups with respect to the interpersonal EC scale (F=2.92, p<0.05). As evident from the mean scores, 45-49 age group scored highest (M=89.86, SD=13.76), followed by the 15-19 age group (M=86.29, SD=13.88), followed by 55-59 age group (M=85.69, SD=11.24), then followed by the 25-29 age group (M=83.46, SD=13.88) and finally the 35-39 age group who scored the lowest (M=83.19, SD=11.46). As evident from the post hoc results from Table 13, the 25-29 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-6.39, p<0.05). 35-39 age group scored significantly lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD= -6.67, p<0.05). There were no significant differences between 15-19 age group and 25-29 age group, between the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group, the 15-19 age group and the 45-49 age group, between the 15-19 age group and the 55-59 age group, between the 25-29 age group and the 35-39 age group, the 25-29 age group and the 55-59 age group, between the 35-39 age group and the 55-59 age group, or between the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to understand the relationship between perceived SS and EC in a sample of five different age groups. It attempted to understand the differing trends of SS patterns in terms of the sources from which different age groups perceive SS. A series of t-tests were conducted and there was a significant difference between women and men in the perceived SS of the 15-19 age group. Women had a mean of 76.59 which was higher than the mean value of men which was 68.78. It means that women perceive higher levels of SS than men. This finding can be supported by a study done by Iglesia, Stover and Liporace (2014) on Argentinean college students which suggested that women's SS networks are wider as women give more importance to establishing and maintaining relationships, which is why they tend to perceive more SS. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that the 15-19 years old women perceive more SS from friends (M=39.81) in comparison to their male counterparts (M=35.96).

Several studies have been conducted on the patterns and sources of perceived SS in adolescents and early adolescents which reveal significant gender differences that are similar to the current study. For example, a study by Reuger, Malecki and Demaray (2008), showed

that girls perceived higher levels of SS from their close friends and classmates than boys did. Adolescence is characterized by shifting SS patterns and relationships, in which there is an increased reliance on peers and friends (Reuger *et al.*, 2008).

A gender difference was revealed with respect to the perceived SS from friends in the 25-29 age group as well. Here, men perceived significantly higher levels of SS from friends (M=34.63) in comparison to women (M=32.88). This result is similar to a previous research finding from a study conducted on depressed patients (Soman, Bhat, KS Latha and Praharaj, 2016). In the same the 25-29 years old category, a difference with respect to intrapersonal EC was found. Men scored higher on this subscale (M=89.56) in comparison to women (M=79.94, SD=9.98). In a study that examined gender difference in employees regarding emotional intelligence, it was suggested that men score higher in intrapersonal emotional intelligence than women (Bhatti, 2013), thus supporting the findings of the current study.

The study hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between perceived SS and EC. After employing a correlation matrix between the scales and subscales, a significant correlation was found between the two variables (r=.329) along with their respective subscales. This finding is in accordance with a previous study conducted by Koydemir and his colleagues in 2012 (Koydemir *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, both subscales of perceived SS- friends and family- shared a positive correlation with the two subscales of EC- intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC.

In all age groups barring the 15-19 years age group, a correlation was found between overall perceived SS and total EC. Perceived SS was also correlated with both dimensions of EC. This finding was not surprising as several studies in the past are congruent with these results (Koydemir *et al.*, 2012; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2012). The absence of significance between the two variables in the 15-19 age group is perhaps because perceived SS patterns tend to shift during adolescence. These patterns may be relatively unstable rendering these patterns difficult to measure accurately (Reuger *et al.*, 2008). This factor may contribute to the inability to predict EC. However, the present study reported that in the 15-19 age group, perceived SS from friends was correlated with EC as well as interpersonal EC. As Brasseur *et al.* (2013) postulate that there is a possibility for interpersonal EC to be more important than intrapersonal EC in predicting social relationships, the significant correlation between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal competence, can perhaps be attributed to this.

Perceived SS from friends in the 25-29 years age group shared a significant correlation with the total EC of that group. Perceived SS from friends was also correlated with intrapersonal EC. In the 35-39 age group, perceived SS from friends was correlated with EC, intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC. There was a significant correlation between perceived SS from friends and EC in the 45-49 age group. Significance was also seen between perceived SS from friends and interpersonal EC. In the 55-59 age group, a similar pattern of correlation was seen between perceived SS from friends and EC, with a significance also seen with interpersonal EC. Additionally, the 55-59 years age group was the only age group where in there was a significant correlation between perceived SS from family and EC, between perceived SS from family and intrapersonal EC and also between perceived SS from family and interpersonal EC.

Although the 55-59 age group has fewer social relationships, these relationships are reported to be more intimate, and to an extent these relationships are shared with individuals who have a relatively stable presence in their lives, such as family members (Lynch *et al.*, 2004). Such intimate relationships are associated with good psychological well-being and thus, may also be associated with higher levels of EC. There were no significant differences found in the levels of total perceived SS among the various age groups. Yet, differences

were found in perceived SS from friends (F=3.87), perceived SS from family (F=7.72), EC (F=4.59), intrapersonal EC (F=5.79) and interpersonal EC (F=2.92) among the groups.

The findings of the present study show that there are significant mean differences (MD) with respect to the perceived SS from friends subscale between 15-19 age group and the 25-29 age group (MD=4.20), between the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group (MD=5.02), between the 15-19 age group and the 45-49 age group (MD=3.64), and also between the 15-19 age group and the 55-59 age group (MD=3.45). In all these cases, the 15-19 age group scored higher in perceived SS from friends in comparison to all other groups (M=37.89). the 35-39 age group had relatively lower levels of perceived SS from friends (M=32.86). As adolescents derive different provisions from different relationships, when one relationship is inadequate, other relationships that provide the necessary provisions tend to become more important and relevant (Ikiz and Cakar, 2010). Since parent-child conflict is prevalent at this age (Lian & Geok, 2009), the tendency to turn towards friends for SS strengthens.

Significant differences were seen with respect to the perceived SS from family subscale between the 15-19 age group and the 25-29 age group (MD= -5.52), the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group (MD=-3.77), between the 15-19 age group and the 45-59 age group (MD= -7.18) and between the 15-19 age group and the 55-59 age group (MD=-6.81). Significant differences were also seen between the 35-39 age group and the 45-49 age group (MD=-3.41), and between the 35-39 age group and the 55-59 age group (MD=-3.04). Here, the 35-39 age group perceived lesser SS from family in comparison to the 45-49 age group and the 55-59 age group. The 15-19 age group scored relatively low in perceived SS from family. As mentioned earlier, parent-child conflict that is a characteristic feature of adolescence decreases the likelihood of parental perceived SS. Moreover, higher levels of perceived SS from family were seen in 45-49 age group (M=41.98) and in the 55-59 age group (M=41.61). Evidence suggests that the rates of social interaction in middle aged adults have a tendency to decline, and later life relationships decrease in number (Knoll & Schwarzer, 2002). However, the perceived SS from family is likely to increase in older aged individuals. According to Lynch, Goldman & Weinstein (2004), this may strongly be due to an array of social and economic characteristics.

For example, having children living nearby may be a contributing factor for increased perceived SS from family. Furthermore, a study conducted on Taiwanese elders speculated that another reason for increased perceived SS from family could be due to traditional beliefs of an adult child's obligation to take care of their parents in old age (Lynch *et al.*, 2004). It would be safe to say that this particular casual factor may apply even in the Indian context.

The findings of the present study showed that significant differences with respect to EC and its subscales existed between the different age groups. Significant differences vis-a-vis overall EC were seen between the 15-19 age group and the 45-49 age group (MD=-12.50), wherein the 15-19 age group scored lower in EC. There was a difference between the 25-29 age group and 45-49 age group (MD=-14.46), the former having lower levels of EC than the latter. A difference was also seen between the 35-39 age group and the 45-49 age group (MD=-12.54, p<0.05), wherein levels of EC in the 35-39 age group were lower in comparison to the 45-49 age group. The 45-49 age group, thus, had relatively higher levels of EC (M=182.25). According to Atkins and Stough (2005), particular aspects of trait emotional intelligence increases with age as adults become better equipped at regulating their emotions as they grow older.

Yet, it must be acknowledged that emotional regulation is not the only aspect of EC. That being said, middle aged individuals' social ties are intimate and deeper in intensity,

which yield improved levels of psychological well-being (Knoll *et al.*, 2002). Since psychological well-being and EC as an entirety share a positive co-relational relationship (Nelis *et al.*, 2011), it may explain why the 45-49 age group scored higher levels of EC in the present study.

Additionally, the 45-49 age group also scored relatively high in both intrapersonal EC and interpersonal EC. Significant differences were observed with respect to intrapersonal EC, among the different age groups. The 15-19 age group was found to have lower levels of intrapersonal EC in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-8.92) and also the 55-59 age group (MD=-6.13). The 25-29 age group were found to have lower levels of intrapersonal EC in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD= -8.06) and also the 55-59 age group (MD=-5.26). The 35-39 age group had lower levels of intrapersonal EC in comparison to the 45-49 age group. The 15-19 age group (M=83.45) and the 25-29 age group (M=84.31) thus scored relatively lower in intrapersonal EC while the 45-49 age group (M=92.38) and the 55-59 age group (M=89.58) scored relatively higher. Development of emotional regulation in adolescents is extremely important for their social adjustment (Sabatier *et al.*, 2017) and it is a key component of intrapersonal EC. In adolescents, biological and neurological processes of development and maturity play an instrumental role in the development in the cognitive, physiological and behavioural spheres. However, some of these processes may even hinder development of emotional moderation in adolescents, leading to inadequate development of skills in emotional regulation. A conflicting family environment and other such environmental and contextual factors (Sabatier *et al.*, 2017) could also be the reason for low levels of intrapersonal EC in the 15-19 age group as observed in the present study. Poor development of emotional regulation skills in childhood may carry on to later in life. Relatively low levels of EC in the 25-29 age group could be explained with this reasoning.

With respect to interpersonal EC, the 25-29 age group had lower levels of interpersonal EC in comparison to the 45-49 age group (MD=-6.39). There was also a difference found between 35-39 age group and 45-49 age group where 35-39 age group scored lower in interpersonal EC. EC not only involves regulation, expression and understanding of one's own emotions, but also the regulation, expression and understanding of other's emotions. As previously explained, skills required for emotional regulation may fail to develop during adolescence due to various factors (Sabatier *et al.*, 2017). According to Lau and Wu (2012), attachment styles also play a role in the development of EC-in both the interpersonal level and the intrapersonal level. An inadequate attachment style may lead to suppression of one's own emotions which may further lead to the inability to understand other emotions. This suppression may continue on to later stages in life- from infancy to adulthood. Thus, the lower levels of interpersonal EC for some groups could also be attributed to this cause. Furthermore, the finding that suggests that the 45-49 age group has higher interpersonal EC than some other younger age groups can be supported by a study by Doerwald *et al.* (2016) which reported that older adults were slightly better at understanding others' emotions than younger individuals.

7. LIMITATIONS

The current study did not take into account socio-economic differences in the sample, which may have also been a determining factor in the level of SS perceived by the individual. It is suggested that future research should consider taking the socio-economic status of the sample. Additionally, being a cross-sectional study, the study does not analyze behavior over a period of time, and since perceived SS, many a time, depends on temporal factors

such as mood and attitude, a more longitudinal study could yield more accurate and consistent results. The present study did not consider individuals older than 59. In order to gain a better understanding of perceived SS levels in the older generation, it is important to take into consideration this specific population, since much of the existing literature focuses more on adolescents and young adults.

Future research should explore more comprehensively the reasons behind the differences in perceived SS across different age groups. As the present research gave more importance to age differences regarding levels of perceived SS, research in the future could be done further exploring the age differences with respect to EC. Future research should also further study perceived SS and its ability to predict EC rather than the inversed model that is studied conventionally.

8. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and the results, it can be concluded that **H_1** which stated that Perceived Social Support (PSS) and Emotional Competence (EC) are positively correlated, holds true and subscales for the respective scales were also significantly correlated in the whole sample. Although, correlation patterns differed in different age groups, they were similar in the sense that they all pointed towards the general significant correlation between Perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence. **H_2** stated that there will be a difference in the levels of Perceived Social Support with respect to gender. The hypothesis was partially accepted as it held true for only the 15-19 years age group and the 25-29 years age group. 15-19 years old women perceived more Social Support and more Social Support from friends than men did. And in the 25-29 age group, men perceived more Social Support from their friends than women did. As multiple differences between age groups were observed, **H3** was also accepted. **H_4** hypothesized that the 15-19 age group and the 25-29 age group would perceive more Social Support from friends than other groups did. The 15-19 age group did perceive the highest levels of Perceived Social Support from friends.

However, the 25-29 age group perceived lesser Social Support from friends in comparison to the 15-19 age group and no significant differences were found in the 25-29 age group in comparison with other age groups, thus showing that the hypothesis was accepted with respect to the 15-19 age group only. H_5 postulated that individuals in the age groups 45-49 years and 55-59 years would perceive more Social Support from family than other age groups did. The 45-49 age group perceived more SS from family in comparison to the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group. Similarly, the 55-59 age group perceived more Social Support from family in comparison to the 15-19 age group and the 35-39 age group. This shows that the hypothesis, to an extent, did hold true.

9. APPLICATION VALUE

The findings from this study will be helpful in understanding Perceived Social Support (PSS) patterns across varying ages, specifically in the Indian context. The findings will also help individuals understand how the levels of Social Support that they perceive may reflect and predict how they regulate, understand, and express their own emotions as well as others' emotions. As the relationship between Perceived Social Support and Emotional Competence predicts affirmative and positive interaction and relationships, a study of the two will be extremely useful in both the personal and organizational spheres.

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