






Gender and age differences in emotional management among elite taekwondo coaches

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ABSTRACT

Emotional management is a psychological aspect that has been widely researched in the sports context; however, most of these studies have focused on evaluating athletes, overlooking other key figures such as coaches. To identify gender and age differences in the emotional management of elite taekwondo coaches. This is a quantitative, descriptive study with a non-experimental design to describe and identify differences within a sample of 20 elite taekwondo coaches. Emotional intelligence was assessed using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). Welch's t-test and ANOVA were conducted to determine differences by gender and age groups among the coaches. Significant differences were found in emotional intelligence between men and women ($p < .065$) and in emotion perception, where women scored higher than men ($p < .012$). No significant differences were found between men and women in self-emotion management, managing others' emotions, and emotion utilization. Regarding age groups, no significant differences were observed in emotional intelligence, emotion perception, self-emotion management, and emotion utilization. However, a marginally significant difference was found in managing others' emotions ($p < .051$), suggesting a possible age influence on this variable. The study revealed that female taekwondo coaches have significantly higher emotional intelligence and emotion perception than their male counterparts. No significant differences were found in other areas of emotional management between genders. However, a positive influence of age on managing others' emotions was observed. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender and age in the training of taekwondo coaches and the need for further research in these areas.

Keywords: Physical activity psychology, Emotional intelligence, Gender differences, Taekwondo, Emotional management.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the psychological constructs that has gained attention in the international field of sport psychology is Emotional Intelligence (Cowden, 2016; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Emotional intelligence is defined as individual responses to emotional stimuli both interpersonal and intrapersonal, and it is closely related to the regulation of one's own emotions and those of others (Mayer et al., 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). Although research on emotional intelligence began in the 1990s (Lima & Quevedo-Silva, 2016), its application in the sports context has developed more extensively in the past two decades (Ribeiro et al., 2018). During this period, researchers recognized the relevance of studying emotional intelligence as a crucial psychological skill in sports (Botterill & Brown, 2002), as it helps athletes manage their emotions and affects their performance (Botterill & Brown, 2002; Lott & Turner, 2018).

Research has linked emotional intelligence to the management of various emotions (anger, calm, happiness, distress, confusion) as factors influencing optimal and dysfunctional performance in sports (Arribas et al., 2017; Laborde et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2009). Similarly, Laborde et al. (2016) demonstrated in a systematic review that emotional intelligence significantly impacts emotions, physiological stress responses, successful use of psychological skills, and better sports performance. Despite the extensive study of emotional intelligence in the sports context (Castro et al., 2020; Swayer et al., 2018), most of these studies have focused on athletes, neglecting other key players such as coaches.

It is crucial to consider the importance of emotional intelligence in coaches, as it can significantly influence the performance and motivation of the athletes they supervise. Goleman argues that emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive and manage one's own emotions, as well as those of others, using this information to guide thinking and behaviour (Goleman, 1995). A coach with high emotional intelligence can understand and respond to the emotional needs of their athletes, improving the coach-athlete relationship, communication, and mutual understanding, which can positively influence their behaviours (Castro et al., 2018).

Recent studies have found evidence of the relationship between coaches' emotional intelligence and athletes' performance. For instance, a study by Castro et al. (2018) found that athletes with coaches who had high emotional intelligence showed better performance and greater satisfaction in their training. Additionally, athletes also reported greater confidence and commitment to the team. Other studies have found that coaches with high emotional intelligence are better able to handle stress and conflicts with athletes and other team members (Aguinaga et al., 2023). It has also been found that coaches' emotional intelligence is positively related to their leadership capacity and their ability to create a positive team environment (Llanos et al., 2023). In this regard, emotional intelligence proves to be an important factor in athletes' performance and motivation, and it is important to consider and evaluate it in the selection and training of coaches.

Recognizing the importance of assessing emotional intelligence in groups such as coaches, it is essential to identify differences based on gender and age. Various studies have shown that several emotional functions vary according to age and sex, such as positive and negative affect (Grühn, Kotter-Grühn, & Röcke, 2010); shame, guilt, and pride (Orth, Robins, & Soto, 2010); and empathic concern and perspective-taking (O'Brien, Konrath, Grühn, & Hagen, 2013). Social norms and expectations often demand that women be more expressive and empathetic. From an early age, they are taught to identify and manage both their own emotions and those of others, which may result in higher emotional intelligence (Gartzia et al., 2012). In contrast, men are often socialized to repress their emotions and focus less on empathy and more on self-sufficiency, which may limit their emotional development compared to women (Olvera & Angeles, 2022).

Research indicates that women tend to identify more with expressive and emotional traits, facilitating better perception and management of emotions (Gartzia et al., 2012). Similarly, emotional intelligence theory predicts that this capacity develops with age and the accumulation of life experiences (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Salovey & Sluyter, 1997).

Developmental psychologists have detailed milestones and trajectories for the dimensions of EI from childhood to adolescence, tracing how these emotional skills emerge over time in a social context (Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010; Saarni, 1999). However, previous research in this field, especially in adults, is limited and often inconsistent. Therefore, the objective of this study was to identify gender and age differences in the emotional management of elite taekwondo coaches.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A quantitative study with a descriptive observational, non-experimental design was conducted to describe and identify differences within a sample of elite taekwondo coaches. The research focused on coaches from sports camps sponsored by USA Taekwondo (USAT) during 2023.

Population and sample

The study group consisted of 20 participants from various categories, conveniently selected by the researchers through a non-probabilistic sampling method. Inclusion criteria required that participants be volunteers, affiliated members of USA Taekwondo (USAT), and have completed all stages of the study. Informed consent was obtained through signed consent forms.

Measurement instruments

To measure the emotional intelligence of the coaches, the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was selected (Schutte, Malouff, et al., 1998; Extremera & Fernández, 2005). The SSEIT is a tool specifically designed to measure individuals' emotional intelligence, developed by psychologist Mark Schutte and his team in 1998. This test comprises 33 questions evaluating emotional intelligence across four subscales: perception of emotions, management of one's own emotions, management of others' emotions, and utilization of emotions. Each question is answered using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "*strongly disagree*" and 5 indicates "*strongly agree*." Scores for each subscale are obtained by summing the responses to the corresponding questions. Subsequently, the subscale scores are totalled to obtain the participant's overall emotional intelligence score (Schutte, Malouff, et al., 1998; Extremera & Fernández, 2005). The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale has been reported to have high reliability, with a reliability rating of 0.90. Generally, emotional intelligence scores are quite reliable for both adults and adolescents; however, the Utilization of Emotions subscale may show slightly lower reliability (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001).

Procedure

To gather the necessary data, formal permission was requested through letters addressed to the directors of the Taekwondo camps. Upon receiving authorization, all participants were invited to an informational meeting where the study's purposes, procedures, and expected outcomes were explained. Additionally, an informed consent and assent form was provided for signature. Basic sociodemographic data such as age, gender, and category were then collected. Finally, evaluations of the main variables of interest in this research were conducted.

The measurements were taken in the morning at each Taekwondo camp during the preparatory period, when the athletes were not in competition stages. This timing is crucial as self-reported data can be influenced by the evaluation period.

Ethical considerations

Throughout this study, strict adherence to the guidelines established by the Human Subjects Protection Act of 1974, also known as the Biomedical Research Act, was maintained. Additionally, respect for the fundamental rights protected by the 2013 Declaration of Helsinki by the World Medical Association was ensured (Declaration of Helsinki and World Medical Association, 2013). All participants were provided with detailed information about the research purpose, involved procedures, voluntary participation, and absolute confidentiality of personal data. To ensure full compliance, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Furthermore, participants' names were replaced with codes in the database to maximize privacy.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then transferred to SPSS Version 25 for statistical analysis. Categorical variables were analysed using percentages and frequencies. For continuous variables, normality was first evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test for samples less than 50. Continuous variables that did not show a normal distribution were described using the median and interquartile range, while normally distributed variables were presented using the mean and standard deviation. Welch's t-test for two independent samples was used to analyse gender differences; this test was chosen over Student's t-test due to the failure to meet the homogeneity of variance assumption as indicated by Levene's test. For analysing mean differences between age groups, ANOVA for two or more independent samples was used, with a significance level set at $p < .005$.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the studied population. Regarding the gender of the coaches, 17 are men (85%) and 3 are women (15%), totalling 20 coaches. In terms of age groups, 20% of the coaches are between 21 and 30 years old, 50% are in the range of 31 to 40 years old, and 30% are between 41 and over 50 years old. The median age of the coaches is 38.65 years, with a standard deviation of 9.23 years.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the population.

| Characteristics | N | % |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Coaches' Gender | | |
| Male | 17 | 85 |
| Female | 3 | 15 |
| Total | 20 | 100 |
| Age groups | | |
| 21 to 30 years | 4 | 20 |
| 31 to 40 years | 10 | 50 |
| 41 to >50 years | 6 | 30 |
| Total | 20 | 100 |
| | M | SD |
| Age of coaches | 38.65 | ±9.23 |

Note. M = median; SD = standard deviation.

The following table presents the results obtained from the Shapiro-Wilk test applied to various variables. This test is used to determine whether a data sample follows a normal distribution. For the variables of emotional intelligence, emotion perception, self-emotion management, management of others' emotions, and utilization of emotions, the *p*-value is greater than .005. Consequently, there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that the data follow a normal distribution for these variables.

Table 2. Shapiro-Wilk Test for key variables.

| Characteristics | N | Test Statistic | Significance |
|---------------------------------|----|----------------|--------------|
| Emotional intelligence | 20 | 0.949 | .347 |
| Emotion perception | 20 | 0.968 | .703 |
| Managing self-relevant emotions | 20 | 0.949 | .349 |
| Managing others' emotions | 20 | 0.943 | .272 |
| Utilizing emotions | 20 | 0.972 | .794 |

Table 3 shows the mean differences by gender in emotional management variables using Welch's t-test. For emotional intelligence, there is a significant difference between men (134.35 ± 8.93) and women (140.33 ± 3.21) with a *p*-value of <.065. In emotion perception, women (45.33 ± 1.52) scored significantly higher than men (41.06 ± 4.22) with a *p*-value of <.012. No significant differences were found in self-relevant emotion management (*p* < .536), management of others' emotions (*p* < .863), and utilization of emotions (*p* < .758) between men and women.

Table 3. Gender differences in emotional management variables using Welch's t-Test.

| Characteristics | Total (n = 20) | | Male (n = 17) | | Female (n = 3) | | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------|---------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | |
| Emotional Intelligence | 135.25 | ±8.55 | 134.35 | ±8.93 | 140.33 | ±3.21 | .065* |
| Emotion perception | 41.70 | ±4.207 | 41.06 | ±4.22 | 45.33 | ±1.52 | .012* |
| Managing self-relevant emotions | 38.00 | ±3.129 | 37.88 | ±3.35 | 38.67 | ±1.52 | .536 |
| Managing others' emotions | 31.60 | ±3.747 | 31.53 | ±3.82 | 32.00 | ±4.00 | .863 |
| Utilizing emotions | 23.95 | ±2.32 | 23.88 | ±2.42 | 24.33 | ±2.08 | .758 |

Note. M = median; SD = standard deviation; *p* = significance. * = statistically significant.

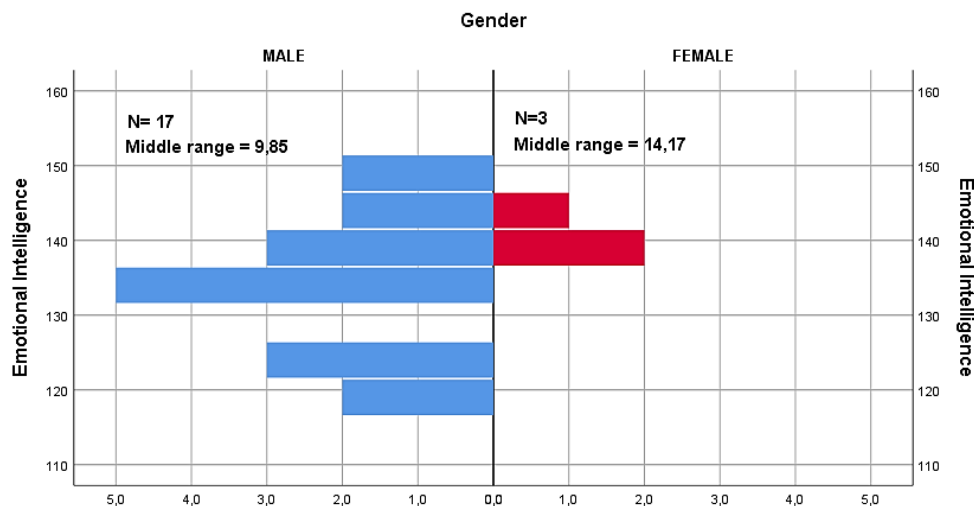


Figure 1. Distribution of emotional intelligence levels between men and women.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of emotional intelligence levels between men and women. According to the data, a large proportion of men have a score of 134 in emotional intelligence, while the majority of women have a higher score of 140. This indicates a general trend that women possess higher levels of emotional intelligence compared to men in this sample, with these differences being significant. Additionally, the difference between the mean ranges tends to be higher in women compared to men.

Table 4 presents the mean differences in emotional management variables across different age groups using the ANOVA test. For emotional intelligence, emotion perception, self-relevant emotion management, and emotion utilization, no significant differences were observed between the age groups, with *p*-values of .236, .249, .960, and .569, respectively. However, a marginally significant difference was found in the management of others' emotions, with a *p*-value of .051, suggesting a possible influence of age on this variable.

Table 4. Mean differences by age groups using ANOVA in emotional management variables.

| Characteristics | Total (n = 20) | | 21 to 30 yr. (n = 4) | | 31 to 40 yr. (n = 10) | | 41 to >50 yr. (n = 6) | | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|----------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | |
| Emotional intelligence | 135.25 | ±8.55 | 129.00 | ±6.68 | 134.90 | ±8.87 | 140.00 | ±7.12 | .236 |
| Emotion perception | 41.70 | ±4.20 | 37.75 | ±3.09 | 42.80 | ±4.18 | 42.50 | ±3.78 | .249 |
| Managing self-relevant emotions | 38.00 | ±3.12 | 37.50 | ±3.10 | 38.00 | ±3.55 | 38.33 | ±2.87 | .960 |
| Managing others' emotions | 31.60 | ±3.74 | 31.00 | ±5.47 | 30.00 | ±2.87 | 31.60 | ±1.86 | .051* |
| Utilizing emotions | 23.95 | ±2.32 | 22.75 | ±2.63 | 24.10 | ±2.60 | 24.50 | ±1.64 | .569 |

Note: yr. = years; M = median; SD = standard deviation; *p* = significance. * = statistically significant.

Figure 2 displays a boxplot illustrating the distribution of emotional intelligence levels across different age groups. It can be observed that the median emotional intelligence level for the age group between 21 and 30 years is approximately 129, with a range of dispersion from around 125 to 139. For the age group between 31 and 40 years, the mean is higher compared to the previous age group, at around 134, with a dispersion ranging from approximately 125 to 139. Finally, regarding the age group of 41 to 50 years, the mean is even higher, at approximately 140, with a dispersion ranging from about 133 to 147.

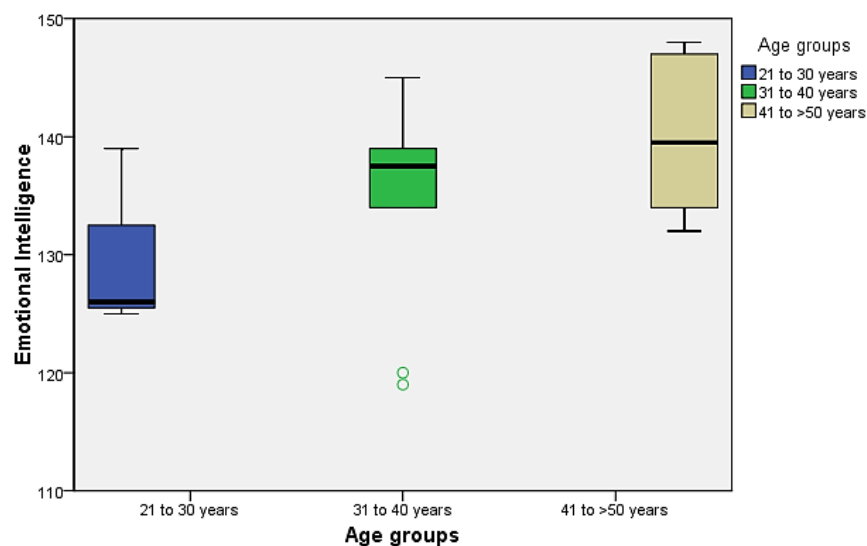


Figure 2. Boxplot showing mean differences in emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to identify differences in emotional management among taekwondo coaches based on gender and age. The results showed significant differences between men and women regarding emotional intelligence, with men scoring an average of 134.35 ± 8.93 and women scoring 140.33 ± 3.21 , with a p -value of $<.065$. Regarding emotion perception, women scored significantly higher than men, with averages of 45.33 ± 1.52 and 41.06 ± 4.22 , respectively, and a p -value of $<.012$. A considerable number of studies have indicated the existence of gender differences in the development of Emotional Intelligence (Bindhu & Thomas, 2006; Fernandez 2012; Ahmad et al., 2009; Cabello et al., 2019). Specifically, most research examining this type of intelligence by analysing differences between men and women has shown that women tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence. These studies suggest that these differences are due, at least in part, to women's greater identification with expressive identity traits (Bindhu & Thomas, 2006; Fernandez 2012; Ahmad et al., 2009; Cabello et al., 2019). This identification could facilitate better perception and management of emotions, which is reflected in higher scores in emotional intelligence and emotion perception. Additionally, gender roles and social expectations may influence the development of different emotional skills between men and women. Women are often socialized to be more expressive and empathetic, which could contribute to greater emotional competence compared to men (Shutte, et al. 2001).

On the other hand, some research has not found differences between sexes, such as a recent study by Hart & Holmes (2022) involving a sample of ($n = 325$) university students from the United States. This research showed similar scores on the SSEIT (emotional intelligence) subscales between men (32.16 ± 4.85) and women (32.11 ± 3.57). However, the results of that study tend to be lower compared to our findings in some of the emotional management variables, especially in aspects such as emotion management (32.17 ± 3.79), emotion perception (34.82 ± 3.75), and emotion utilization (23.07 ± 2.52). These differences may be due to various reasons, such as the unique characteristics of the taekwondo coach population compared to university students, including greater exposure to high-pressure and competitive situations, which could influence the development of emotional intelligence. Additionally, taekwondo coaches work in an environment where emotional management is crucial for performance and teaching, which could lead to a more pronounced development of these skills compared to university students, who may not face the same emotional demands in their academic environment.

Regarding age group differences, a marginally significant difference was found in managing others' emotions, with a p -value of $<.051$, being higher in the age group of 41 to 51 years, suggesting a possible influence of age on this variable. This may be because emotional maturity tends to increase with age. Older individuals tend to have greater control over their own emotions and are more capable of empathizing and understanding others' emotions. This emotional development can significantly improve a person's ability to manage others' emotions, which is crucial for a coach who must effectively motivate and support their athletes (Márquez-González et al., 2008). Additionally, social skills tend to improve with age, including communication and conflict resolution abilities. Older coaches have likely had more time to refine these skills, enabling them to better manage others' emotions in a competitive sports environment. This ability to manage others' emotions can be crucial for maintaining team cohesion and motivating athletes.

Older coaches often serve as models of emotionally intelligent behaviour for their younger athletes. By demonstrating advanced skills in emotion management, these coaches can positively influence their athletes, showing the importance of emotional intelligence in sports performance and life in general. In summary, the marginally significant difference in managing others' emotions between age groups can be attributed to

factors such as experience, emotional maturity, development of social skills, perspective, and empathy that increase with age. These qualities enable older coaches to more effectively manage their athletes' emotions, suggesting a positive influence of age on this variable. This is supported by previous studies that have shown that, at least in the case of managing others' emotions, older individuals tend to develop greater emotional regulation skills (Márquez-González et al., 2008).

Corroborating the above, a recent study by McGuire (2023) in a sample of health science university students evaluated the influence of age on emotional intelligence using logistic regression, demonstrating a significant predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and age. The findings of the multiple linear regression were significant ($F_{2,194} = 58.48$, $p < .001$, and $R^2 = 0.376$). The coefficient of determination R^2 indicated that approximately 37.6% of the variance in emotional intelligence was explained by age. Comparing with the findings of this study, it can be said that as people age, they accumulate more life experiences and develop a greater understanding of social and emotional dynamics. Older taekwondo coaches, in this case, the 41 to 51 age group, have likely had more opportunities to interact with a wide range of individuals in various situations, allowing them to develop better skills for managing others' emotions. This accumulated experience can translate into greater competence in this specific area.

Limitations

This study, based on a non-experimental design and adopting a descriptive and analytical approach, presents several limitations and offers opportunities for future research. One of the main limitations is the use of non-probabilistic sampling, where participants are selected for convenience, which could introduce biases and limit the generalization of the results to the general population of coaches. Additionally, the descriptive nature of the study may hinder the identification of causal relationships between the measured variables, such as emotional management, and other potential factors. For future research, it would be beneficial to incorporate more rigorous sampling methods and use experimental designs that allow for the evaluation of causal relationships. Additionally, considering the inclusion of additional measures or exploring influencing variables could enrich the understanding of the determinants of the level of emotional management in coaches, thus providing a more comprehensive and robust view of this phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found significant differences in emotional intelligence and emotion perception between male and female taekwondo coaches, with women scoring higher in both areas. No significant differences were found in other areas of emotional management between genders. However, a marginally significant difference was observed in managing others' emotions based on age, suggesting a positive influence of age on this variable. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender and age in the development and training of taekwondo coaches and underscore the need for future research to delve deeper into these aspects.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Guillermo Andrés Sáez Abello: study design, manuscript development, manuscript review, research supervision. Andrés Mauricio Ariza Viviecas: manuscript development, statistical analysis, manuscript preparation, adjustments, and stylistic corrections. Paul Sebastián Once Saca: data collection, information gathering, study design. Felipe Andrés Rosas Treuque: data collection, information gathering, study design.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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