

Emotional Intelligence and its Association with Experiences of Childhood Corporal Punishment and Adult Sexual Experiences of College Students in The Bahamas

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Abstract

This study presents the results of a survey which examined the links between childhood corporal punishment (CP), emotional intelligence (EI) and adult sexual experiences as reported by 631 postsecondary students in The Bahamas. Respondents reported that experiences of CP diminished after age 13; however, over half of the participants suffered CP when aged 13-17 years. Mothers were the most likely person to inflict CP and their typical state was one of anger. Male participants were less invested in their sexual relationships than females. No significant difference was found in the EI scores of males and females. Only in the dimension of Emotional Regulation of Others and Emotional Regulation of Self were differences found between males and females. Respondents engaged in more stable relationships had high EI scores than those who were not. Respondents who were either victims or victimisers of sexual abuse, tended to have lower EI scores than other respondents. Experiencing CP when aged 5-12 was linked with a higher risk of being sexually abused. The study indicates the association between EI, child rearing practices and adult sexual experiences in college-aged participants. Diminished EI was associated with various adult sexual experiences of concern. As such, it indicates the need for parents to revisit their parenting practices and to utilise positive means of rearing children and so ensure that their upbringing does not diminish EI. The results indicate that a larger sample size and the inclusion of a wider range of participants would be useful in verifying these results.

Introduction

This study contributes to the University of The Bahamas' research initiatives on the topics of corporal punishment and sexual abuse (Fielding & Ballance, 2022a). In common with other countries in the Caribbean region (such as Trinidad and Tobago, Krishnakumar et al., 2024) and cross-culturally more broadly (Graziano et al., 1992), CP is commonly used by parents in The Bahamas and can result in abuse (Brennen et al., 2010). Many parents are unaware of the long-term unintended detrimental consequences of CP, or its associations with actions of concern in adulthood (Fielding & Ballance, 2021). It is evident that CP has the potential to cause lasting harm to children (Gershoff et al., 2018) and put them at risk of harm even in adulthood (Fielding & Ballance, 2022b). Barnow et al. (2001) highlighted the associations between emotional rejection, child abuse, and broken homes on aggression of young people, which points to the complexity of influences associated with behaviours of concern in childhood. Child-rearing practices in The Bahamas have been described by Carroll et al. (2016) and they show that children across the socioeconomic spectrum are exposed to violence. Therefore, the use of CP on children is a concern throughout society.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) involves the individual's capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Schutte et al., 1998). EI has been typically discussed and its importance highlighted primarily in the context of leadership, the workplace and business (University of The Bahamas, 2023; Styles et al., 2024). Further, various studies have highlighted the lack of "soft skills" (such as communication, teamwork, and

emotional self-management) in The Bahamian workforce (Hartnell, 2017); however, it is not apparent as to why these skills are lacking. A review of research on mental health in the Caribbean included only one study from The Bahamas on mental health and none on EI (Liverpool et al., 2021), which suggests that The Bahamas is not alone in having limited information on EI. In the social sphere, others (for example: Wallace, 2017) have suggested a lack of EI displayed by some Bahamians. This diminished EI is important because EI has been found to be reduced in persons who demonstrate aggressive behaviours (Mambra & Kotian, 2022; Vega et al., 2022). Therefore, low EI may ultimately contribute to the cost of violence in The Bahamas (Perez-Vincent et al., 2024).

Beyond the workforce, what is less often discussed is that EI is equally important in the relational and personal domains of life. EI is important in building relationships and managing emotions (Zahid et al., 2025; Jardine et al., 2022) and is associated with prosocial behaviours (Cao & Chen, 2025). Therefore, it cuts across many aspects of a person's life, both at work and at home as noted above. Given that EI is not fixed, but can be increased or diminished, it is important to determine whether there is a need to support those who may have diminished EI. These abilities are critical in persons learning how to function in intimate relationships, navigate parenting, and respond to interpersonal relationships.

Although previous Bahamian studies have examined associations between CP and executive functioning, aggression, and sexual abuse (Fielding et al., 2025; Moxey-Adderley & Fielding, 2024), no studies have examined whether emotional intelligence may represent an additional pathway linking

childhood corporal punishment with adult relationship experiences. If CP is associated with lower EI, this would further demonstrate that CP is associated with poorer child development outcomes and support consideration of alternative non-violent forms of discipline. Moreover, if EI is associated with relationship instability or sexual coercion in adulthood, this would provide a foundation for intervention strategies that could teach skills to strengthen these capacities. Consequently, this project also responds to a goal in the Bahamas National Task Force for Gender-Based Violence (2015), which called for more research on the topic of gender-based violence.

Study Purpose

This study investigated whether experiences of childhood corporal punishment were associated with emotional intelligence in adulthood, and whether emotional intelligence was associated with adult sexual experiences among Bahamian college students. We hypothesized that greater exposure to corporal punishment would be associated with lower emotional intelligence, and that lower emotional intelligence would be associated with adverse adult sexual experiences. Previous Bahamian studies have shown linkages between CP and aggression (Moxey-Adderley & Fielding, 2024) and between CP and executive functioning (Fielding et al., 2025); this study extends that work by examining emotional intelligence as an additional pathway.

Methodology

Study Design and Setting

This was a cross-sectional survey of students in higher education in The Bahamas. Only one institution, which accounted for the majority of the study respondents, provided information about the demographics of its student population. These students typically emerged from homes where a parent or /guardian had at most a high school education (35%) or bachelors' degree (20%). Cost was the most common factor (82%) in the student continuing their education within the country. These data indicate that students in the study were unlikely to live in higher quintile expenditure households, as described by the Bahamas Department of Statistics (2016). Further, those with more education tend to have higher EI than those with less education, so a sample of a students in a post-secondary setting would be expected to have higher EI than those who lack this level of education (Zahid et al, 2025). This background is important to appreciate given that members of lower- income households as opposed to higher- income households, are at greater risk of being exposed to violence, including corporal punishment (Fielding at al., 2016).

Sampling Strategy

Students in higher education in The Bahamas were the target population. A convenience sampling strategy was used: participating faculty volunteered class time for students to complete the survey electronically on their smartphones or other devices. This approach was chosen because it made the target population accessible for the study and reduced the concern that respondents might not complete the 33-item EI scale, given its length.

Ethical Considerations

The project was approved by The University of The Bahamas Institutional Review Board.

Measures

The primary exposure was childhood corporal punishment (frequency and severity, assessed separately for ages 5-12 and 13-17). The primary outcome was emotional intelligence (overall emotional score and subscale scores). Secondary outcomes were adult sexual experiences, intimate partner violence (Hurt, Insult, Threaten, Scream [HITS] score), and relationship characteristics. Covariates included age and sex of respondents, which were used to obtain adjusted means as indicated in the Results section.

Emotional Intelligence

EI was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT; Schutte et al., 1998), a 33-item self-report measure in which respondents rate agreement with statements about their own emotional perception, expression, regulation, and utilization on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), yielding a possible total score range of 33-165; higher scores indicate greater self-reported EI. Published population benchmarks for the SSEIT are approximately 124 for mixed-sex adult samples, 125 for males, and 131 for females (Austin et al., 2004). The SSEIT's factor structure was interpreted using the six subscales identified by Gignac et al. (2005): Appraisal of Emotions in the Self, Appraisal of Emotions in Others, Emotional Expressions, Emotional Regulation of Self, Emotional Regulations of Others, and Utilisation of Emotions in Problem Solving. Gaps in the scale were imputed using the

mean values from each question calculated separately for male and female respondents. In the present sample, Cronbach's alpha for the total EI scale was .86, indicating good reliability.

Corporal Punishment

CP was assessed using a series of questions taken from Fielding et al. (2025), covering the frequency and severity of physical punishment experienced at two developmental periods (ages 5-12 and 13-17), the person(s) who typically administered punishment, the usual method used, and the emotional state of the person administering the punishment (e.g., angry, out of control).

Sexual Experiences

Questions concerning adult sexual experiences, including characteristics of the respondent's usual and most recent sexual partner, relationship expectations, and experiences of non-consensual intercourse as either victim or perpetrator, were taken from Fielding et al., 2026).

Intimate Partner Violence

A screening tool to assess domestic violence (HITS) was used to assess violence in intimate partner relationships, (Sherin et al., 1998). The HITS is a 4-item scale with each item scored 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*), yielding a total score range of 4-20; higher scores indicate greater exposure to partner violence.

By using questions from previous studies, the information collected from this study has points of reference which may assist in their interpretation.

Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 773 people entered the survey, 16 declined to participate, 31 were aged under 18, and 83 were not enrolled at a Bahamian institution of higher education. After cleaning the data, so that only information provided by adult college students registered at one of three institutions of higher education was retained, and imputing missing values in the EI scale based on sex, the sample of 631 respondents consisted of 83.4% females, and the modal age group was 20-29 (54.4% of respondents) and 9.2% were aged 40 or older. The relatively high number of female respondents compared to male respondents arises from the greater number of females than males who participate in higher education (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2025). The reluctance of Bahamian males to participate in internet-based surveys has been noted in other studies, such as (Bethel & Fielding (2020). The relatively small number of observations from males can be expected to reduce the ability of statistical tests to detect differences between males and females. Relatively few respondents gave their sex as “other”, so this group was omitted from the results when they are presented by sex.

Childhood Experiences of Corporal Punishment

Females and males were punished to with a similar frequency when aged 5-12 ($\chi^2 = 5.47$, $df = 4$, $N = 459$, $p = .24$ and 13-17 ($\chi^2 = 2$, $df = 4$, $N = 460$, $p = .74$). The frequency of punishment was less when respondents were aged 13-17 compared to 5-12. (Wilcoxon signed ranks test, $W = -13.9$, $p < .001$), Table 1.

Table 1
Frequency of Corporal Punishment
(% within age group)

Frequency of punishment	At Age Group	
	5-12 %	13-17 %
Never	7.1	34.8
A few times a year	40.8	37.5
A few times a month	20.9	11.2
A few times a week	14.2	2.8
Daily	3	1.3
Don't know	14.2	12.3
<i>N =</i>	537	528

Females and males were punished with a similar severity when aged 5-12 ($\chi^2 = 8.79$, $df = 4$, $N = 445$, $p = .067$) and aged 13-17 ($\chi^2 = 2.83$, $df = 4$, $N = 245$, $p = .59$). The severity of punishment was less when respondents were aged 13-17 compared to 5-12. (Wilcoxon signed ranks test, $W = -12$, $p < .001$), Table 2.

Table 2
Severity of Corporal Punishment by Age Group
(% within age group)

Severity of corporal punishment	At Age Group	
	5-12 %	13-17 &
Never physically punished	16.8	52.7
Mild pain	32.8	20.3
Moderate pain	25	13.4
Considerable pain	13.2	5.7
Welts and bruises	11.4	6.3
More severe than welts & bruises	0.9	1.5
<i>N =</i>	537	522

For both age groups, mothers were the most likely person to inflict corporal punishment, Table 3.

Spanking remained the most common form of punishment in both age groups although the distribution of punishment methods differed between age groups, Table 4.

Table 3
Respondents Indicating Who Punished Them
(% by age group)

Typically, who inflicted corporal punishment	At Age Group	
	5-12 %	13-17 %
Mother	68.6	57
Father	29.9	21.8
Grandparent	14.5	8.3
Adult sibling	4.7	4.6
Stepfather	1.3	1.2
Stepmother	0.5	
Other (e.g., aunt)	13.1	

Note: Percentages exceed 100% within the columns because respondents could select more than one response.

Table 4
Usual Form of Corporal Punishment (% within age group)

Form of corporal punishment	At Age Group	
	5-12 %	13-17 %
Spanking	36	17.3
Whipping	19.7	16.7
Pinching	14.3	7.2
Slapping	9.8	12.8
Hair/ear pulling	3.5	2.9
Punching	3.3	6.2
Arm twisting	2.8	3.3
Shaking	1.6	1.8
Kicking	1.5	3
Other	7.6	29

Males were more likely than females to report that the state of the person who inflicted corporal punishment on them was “out of control”; in the 5-12 age group, 8.8% and 2.9% respectively ($p < .001$, and for the 13-17 age group, 10.8% and 2% respectively, $p = .012$). Overall, the state of the person inflicting the corporal punishment was most likely to be angry, when the child was aged 5-13 than when aged 13-17 (Wilcoxon signed ranks test, $W = -3.7$, $p < .001$), Table 5.

Table 5
State of the Person Inflicting Corporal Punishment (% within age group)

State of the person who inflicted the corporal punishment	At Age Group	
	5-12 %	13-17 %
Angry	75.2	59.5
Other	19.6	33.1
Out of control	3.8	3.4
Hateful	1.4	4.1
N =	501	417

Sexual Experiences

Consistent with the dominate age group of the sample, 81.7% of males and 80.2% of females were never married. A similar percentage of males (56.1%) and females (57.5%) had had an intimate partner since the age of 16. Males and females reported differences in their sexual associations; for males, the most common usual partner, was someone who was not a usual partner (28.9%) and for females, their usual partner was their latest partner (38.6%), Table 6. This difference was reflected in 59.5% of males and 88.8% of females having had their most recent sexual experience with their usual partner (Fishers exact test, $p < .001$). Openness to sexual experiences with various partners was reported by 11.4% of male respondents having a usual partner who was male, and 2.3% whose usual partner was sometimes a male or female, and in the case of female respondents 1.6% had a usual partner who was female and for 5.2% the usual partner was sometimes a male or female. Females were more likely than males (91% v. 72.2%; Fisher’s exact test, $p = .006$) to hope that the partner with whom they most recently had sex would marry them.

Table 6
Usual Intimate Partner of Respondent
(% within sex)

Usual Partner of Respondent	Sex of Respondent	
	Male %	Female %
The person who whom I am married	15.6	12.4
Long-standing partner (NOT the person to whom you may be married)	8.9	23.3
My latest partner	26.7	38.6
My sweetheart	4.4	3.2
My ex-partner	15.6	9.2
I do not have a usual partner	28.9	13.3
	N = 45	249

Note: $\chi^2 = 13.1$, $df = 5$, $N = 294$, $p = .022$.

Promiscuity was noted in all types of relationships, even within long-standing and formalised relationships, Table 7. More casual or less committed partnerships were associated with a lower chance of being exclusive.

Table 7
Relationship of Respondent with the Person They Most Recently had Sexual Intercourse
(% within most recent sexual partner)

Usual Partner of Respondent	Most Recent Sexual Partner		N
	Usual Partner %	Another Person %	
My long-standing partner (not a spouse)	94.9	5.1	59
The person to whom I am married	94.6	5.4	37
My latest partner	92.2	7.8	102
My ex-partner	78.6	21.4	28
My sweetheart	62.5	37.5	8
I do not have a usual partner	40	60	35

Note: $\chi^2 = 67.2$, $df = 5$, $N = 269$, $p < .001$

Males had a median of four intimate partners and females a median of three intimate partners. Males and females had different expectations/attitudes of the partner with whom they most recently had sexual intercourse. Males appeared to be less likely to be committed to their most recent partner than females, see Table 8.

Table 8
Aspects of the Relationship of Respondents Towards their Most Recent Sexual Partner
(% respondents agreeing)

Aspect of Relationship	Male %	Female %	p
We love each other	72.7	91	.006
This partner makes me feel needed	64	80	.077
I want to have a baby with this partner	50	68.5	.104
This partner is a better lover than my usual partner	37.5	61.1	.151
I hope this partner will marry me	33.3	78.4	< .001
This partner pays for the upkeep of my children	21.4	48.1	.126
This partner gives me be money because I have sex with them	11.1	14.9	> .99
This partner gives me gifts because I have sex with them (not money)	5.9	19.7	.299

Females were 4.6 times more likely to have had sex against their will than males. $OR = 4.64$, 95% $CI[.61-35.3]$, and males were 1.64 times, 95% $CI[.43-6.12]$. more likely than females to have sex against their partner's will. Although these results were not statistically significant, they are in the anticipated direction, that females are at greater risk than males of being sexually abused, and males are more likely than females to sexually abuse their partner(s).

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Overall, 41.9% of respondents had an EI score below 124. The study mean score of 125.6 was significantly greater than 124 ($t = 2.72$, $df = 550$, $p = .007$). While the overall EI score was $M = 125.6$ ($SE = .58$). Although females had a higher EI score ($M = 125.9$, $SE = .62$) than males ($M = 124$, $SE = 1.44$), this difference was not statistically significant (Analysis of covariance, $F_{1,545} = 1.47$, $p = .225$, age group covariate), probably due to the limited number of observations for males ($N = 87$).

Of the six dimensions of the EI score (Gignac et al., 2005), only statistically significant differences associated with sex for Emotional Regulation of Others and Emotional Regulation of Self were found, Table 9.

Table 9
EI Scores by Dimension by Sex of Respondent

Dimension of EI	Max	Male	Female	<i>p</i>
Overall EI	165	124	125.9	.225
Emotional regulation of others	35	19.1	20.1	.001
Emotional regulation of self	40	29.2	30.1	.025
Appraisal of Emotions in Others	35	21.7	22.1	.226
Emotional expression	10	6.6	6.8	.35
Utilisation of emotions in problem solving	20	15.3	15.2	.746
Appraisal of emotions in the self	10	7.8	7.8	.981

Note: Analysis of covariance, for EI; Multivariate analysis of covariance for EI dimensions. Age group covariate

Overall, there were no significant ($p < .05$) Spearman's correlations between any dimension of EI and the frequency or severity of corporal punishment at either age group. Further, there were no significant correlations between the HITS score and EI or any of its dimensions.

Sexual Experiences and EI

The overall analysis of covariance for usual partner type was not statistically significant, ($F_{5, 286} = 1.98$, $p = .082$, sex and age group covariates); mean EI scores by usual partner of respondent are presented in Table 10.

Table 10
EI Score by Usual Partner of Respondent

My usual partner is	EI Score
The person to whom I am married	129.2
My latest partner	128.3
My ex-partner	127.8
My long-standing partner (not a spouse)	126.5
I do not have a usual partner	126.3
My sweetheart	115.2

Respondents who had sex with people other than their usual partner, had lower EI scores, than respondents whose more recent sexual experience was with their usual partner. This analysis suggests that respondents who engaged in sweethearting (marital infidelity) had the lowest EI, Table 11.

Table 11
EI Score of Respondents Classified by Usual Intimate Partner and Whether Their Last Sexual Experience was with That Person.

Usual partner	Most Recent Sexual Partner		Overall	<i>p</i>
	Usual Partner	Another Person		
The person who whom I am married	130	120.6	125.3	
My latest partner	129.9	115.7	122.8	
My ex-partner	129.5	118.2	123.9	
I do not have a usual partner	128.7	123.3	126	.044
My long-standing partner (not a spouse)	126.2	133.2	129.7	
My sweetheart	119.4	100.6	110	
Overall	127.3	118.6		
$p = .004$				

Note: Interaction, ANCOVA, $F_{5, 255} = 1.47$, $p = .202$, sex and age group covariates.

Respondents who engaged in abusive relationships, had lower EI than those who did not (Against respondent's will, ANCOVA, $F_{1, 271} = 4.49$, $p = .035$, sex and age group covariates). While the EI was not significantly lower for abusers, the lack of data in this classification may prevent the difference being statistically significant (Against respondent's partner's will, ANCOVA, $F_{1, 270} = 1.89$, $p = .171$, sex and age group covariates), Table 12.

Table 12
EI of Respondents Who Were Victims or Victimisers of Sexual Abuse

Had sexual intercourse with most recent partner against	Your Will	Their Will
Yes, maybe yes	122.2	122.7
No, maybe no	128	127.7

Note: ANCOVA, Sex and age group covariates.

In the dimension Appraisal of Emotions in Others, respondents who had sexual intercourse against the will of their partner had lower scores than those who had not, Table 13.

Table 13
Appraisal of Emotions in Others by Respondent Victimising Their Partner

	Had sexual intercourse against will of respondent's partner	
	Yes, maybe yes	No, maybe no
<i>M</i>	19.8	22.7
<i>SE</i>	.88	.2

Covariates, age and sex, $F_{1,270} = 10.1$, $p = .002$

Although no difference was found in the Appraisal of Emotions in Others scores of respondents who were or were not victimisers ($p = .085$), those who were victimisers had the lower Appraisal of Emotions in Others score ($M = 21.5$, $SE = .65$) than those who were not ($M = 22.7$, $SE = .21$).

There were no significant differences between the EI scores of respondents' expectations and experiences with the person with whom they most recently had sexual intercourse, Table 14. Respondents who were victims of sexual abuse had significantly higher HITS scores (ANCOVA, age and sex covariates, $F_{1, 266} = 5.12$, $p = .024$), than those who were not sexually abused.

Differences in EI were associated with the types of sexual relationships in which respondents participated. Despite relatively small numbers of observations in some classifications, it is apparent that those who only engaged in heterosexual relationships had higher EI scores than those engaged in other types of relationships, Table 15.

Table 14
EI of Respondents Classified by Experiences / Expectations of Their Relationship with their Most Recent Intimate Partner

Aspect of the relationship	EI score		<i>p</i>
	True	False	
We love each other	128.2	123.1	.068
This partner makes me feel needed	128.6	125.2	.105
I hope this partner will marry me	128.2	128	.93
I want to have a baby with this partner	128.3	126.3	.29
This partner is a better lover than my usual partner	126.8	127.3	.896
This partner pays for the upkeep of my children	126.2	129	.377
This partner gives me gifts because I have sex with them (not money)	123.3	127.3	.278
This partner gives me money because I have sex with them	123.8	126.9	.429

ANCOVA: Sex and age group covariates.

Table 15
EI of Respondents by Type or Sexual Relationship

Sex of usual partner	Male	Female	Overall	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	122.6	128	125.3		240
Female	125.8	102.4	114.1	.003	42
Varies	148.9	125.4	137.2		14
Overall	132.4	118.6			
$p = .011$					
<i>N</i> =	44	252			

Interaction $F_{2, 288} = 5.75$, $p = .004$, Covariates: Age group
Note: The value of 148.9 is based only on one observation and so should be viewed with caution. The number of observations of men having sex with men was five, and women having sex with women was four.

Experiences of Corporal Punishment and EI

For respondents who received CP when aged 5-12, there was a statistically significant correlations between frequency of CP and EI ($r_s = -.121$, $p = .013$), although the pattern across categories was not strictly monotonic; "Daily" category, based on a small number of respondents, had a higher mean EI than several less-frequent categories (Table 16). The results suggest

the trend in the 5-12 age group was driven primarily by differences between the “Never” category and higher frequency categories, rather than a uniform stepwise decline. No similar trend was found for CP experience when age 13-17 ($r_s = -.093$, $p = .12$).

Table 16
EI by Frequency of Corporal Punishment by Age Group

Frequency of CP	At age group	
	5-12	13-17
Never	121.9	125.4
A few times a year	127.6	126.7
A few times a month	126.2	123.3
A few times a week	122.5	124.7
Daily	129.6	127.8
$p =$	.01	.536

Covariates: sex and age

Note: Few respondents reported a daily frequency of CP, so the male respondents group should be interpreted with caution.

While there were differences in the EI of respondents who experienced various severities of CP when aged 5-12 (ANCOVA, age and sex covariates $F_{4, 438} = 2.69$, $p = .031$; Table 17), there was no clear linear association ($r_s = -.089$, $p = .59$). It should be noted that less than 2% of students reported suffering “more severe than welts and bruises”, so these means are based upon a relatively small number of data points, and so should be viewed with caution.

Table 17
EI by Severity of Corporal Punishment by Age Group

Severity of CP	At age group	
	5-12	13-17
Mild pain	127.9	125.8
Moderate pain	125.4	124
Considerable pain	123.4	124.3
Welts and bruises	124.3	126
More severe than welts and bruises	134.4	130.4
$p =$	.031	.696

Covariates: sex and age

Corporal Punishment, Sexual abuse, and EI

A clear finding is that all respondents in heterosexual relationships who had experienced sexual intercourse against their will had also been victims of corporal punishment. Respondents ($n = 25$) who had suffered CP at age 5-12 and had sex against their will had lower EI than respondents in the other groups, Table 18. Although a similar finding was noted when respondents had experienced CP at age 13-17, the result was less evident, Table 19.

Table 18
EI of Students in Only Heterosexual Relationships Who Had and Had Not Experienced Corporal Punishment When Aged 5-12 by Experiencing Sex Against Their Will

Sex against respondent's will:	CP at age 5-12			p
	CP	No CP	Overall	
Yes, maybe yes	122.1		122.1	.02
No, maybe no	128.7	124.9	126.8	
Overall	125.4	124.9		
$p =$	.092			

Covariates, age and sex, $N = 274$.

Table 19
EI of Students in Only Heterosexual Relationships Who Had and Had Not Experienced Corporal Punishment When Aged 13-17 by Experiencing Sex Against Their Will

Sex against respondent's will:	CP aged 13-17			p
	CP	No CP	Overall	
Yes, maybe yes	122.1	123.9	122.6	.057
No, maybe no	128.7	127.8	128	
Overall	125.4	124.7		
$p =$	.69			

Covariates, age and sex, Interaction $F_{1,267} = .315$, $p = .58$

While no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) in EI were found in the case of respondents (only in heterosexual relationships) being victimisers of their sexual partners and their experiences of CP,

for respondents who suffered corporal punishment when aged 5-12 or 13-17, victimisers had lower EI scores than those who were not victimisers, so the EI scores were in the expected direction. The sample size, $n = 14$, of those who admitted to being victimisers is probably insufficient to permit statistical significance to be detected.

Discussion

Emotional Intelligence

No significant difference was found between the overall EI scores of males and females in this sample, which differs from previous studies reporting sex differences in EI. This may reflect characteristics of the present sample, such as restricted age range, self-selection to participate and the focus of students in higher education, the relatively small number of male respondents, or genuine differences specific to the Bahamian context; further research with a larger and more varied sample would help clarify this in the case of the wider population. The overall EI mean score 125.6 was significantly higher than the benchmark figure of 124. This higher figure may be an artifact of the target population, so additional studies could usefully be undertaken to confirm if this figure is biased upward from being based on a sample of higher education respondents.

CP and EI are discussed further below. However, the relationship between CP and EI for those who were victims of CP is contrary to other studies and so may require further verification. Given that CP is common in The Bahamas, this finding may be important. If child rearing practices are associated with EI, as suggested by the present findings, this may be a matter of which parents need to be aware given the research of Cao and Chen (2025) and Darvishi et al. (2025) which links prosocial behaviour with EI.

Sexual abuse is an important issue in The Bahamas, including the fact that the law permits sexual abuse within marriage. The associations between EI and sexual experiences suggest that EI may even affect relationships, and even violence within relationships. The association of CP with sexual violence and EI demonstrates the complexity between these various aspects of lived experience and mental health. The dimensions of EI, emotional regulation of self and others were found to be different in males and females. Emotional regulation can be learnt from parents, so parenting can develop this aspect of EI (Petrova & Gross, 2023). Further, when self-regulation fails this can result in behaviours of concern, so this difference in self-regulation may contribute to differences in sexual abuse associated with males and females (Ward et al., 1998). As noted in Fielding and Ballance (2022), males and females in The Bahamas suffer different level of sexual abuse.

Although in The Bahamas, EI is typically discussed in relation to business and the workforce (e.g. The Knowledge Academy, 2026), our findings suggest that aspects of EI are important in relationships that support the healthy development of children and contribute to societal well-being. This may mean that society needs to reassess its accepted childrearing practices to be more positive and so potentially diminish behavioural problems (Tong et al., 2015). A finding that a father's approval of a child can promote EI may be important, particularly in The Bahamas, where children can grow up with no father figure in the home (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2026). Consequently, these study findings indicate that additional research on EI is necessary to help us understand the social interactions which may underpin the level of violence in the country, a level which can be deemed unacceptably high (interpersonal violence was the seventh

highest cause of death in The Bahamas in 2021 (World Health Organization, 2024).

Corporal Punishment

These results on the experiences of students to CP at both the 5-12 and 13-17 age groups are consistent with that found by Fielding et al. (2024). Their data arose from a 2018 study, and demonstrated the temporal consistency of the use of CP. The choice of an object to inflict CP and the state of the person administering CP (“angry”) are associated with an increased risk of the victim suffering abuse. Again, the use of CP, and the intensity of the pain was reduced in the 13-17 age group compared to the 5-12 age group. The fact that the person administering the CP was more likely to be angry when hitting someone in the 5-12 than 13-17 age group may be associated with those in the 5-12 age group being more likely to suffer considerable pain or worse, than the 13-17 age group. The mother figure was reported to be the most likely person to administer physical punishment. This has been found in previous studies, and so suggests that mother figures would be a useful group to target in teaching people about the long-term harmful effects of CP.

Parenting, Dysregulated Discipline and EI

Males in this sample were significantly more likely than females to report that the person inflicting corporal punishment on them was “out of control,” 8.8% versus 2.9% in the 5-12 age group ($p < .001$), and 10.8% versus 2.0% in the 13-17 age group ($p = .012$). The emotional state of the punishing adult is relevant.

When a child is repeatedly punished by an adult who is visibly dysregulated (i.e., angry, out of control, and lack of composure), the child is exposed to a parenting model in which emotional arousal

leads to loss of control. A child in this negative environment learns through observation and experience, their own maladaptive emotion regulation strategies that become problematic as an adult (Petrova & Gross, 2023).

Males’ disproportionate exposure to this dysregulated parenting style of punishment may therefore be one mechanism associated with their lower Regulations of Others and Emotional Regulation of Self scores in adulthood (see Table 9). This pattern is consistent with research showing that maltreatment in childhood is associated with dysregulated emotions and lack of emotional control as an adult (Dvir et al., 2014). Beyond the punishment experience alone, cultural norms around masculinity in Bahamian society compound this vulnerability. Boys are socialised to suppress or conceal emotional distress in ways that girls are not (Chaplin et al., 2005). This difference in socialisation limits the practice of emotion regulation during the years when these capacities are most malleable.

Additionally, the analysis showed that EI decreased as the frequency of CP increased at ages 5-12, but no similar linear association was found for the 13-17 age group. This age-differentiated patterns aligns with neurodevelopmental research emphasising that early childhood is a critical period for the development of emotional regulatory capacities (Dvir et al., 2014). Disruptions during this window may have disproportionate impact on later development. It is not only the intensity of punishment that matters, but also its frequency (Alampay et al., 2017) and when compounded by the unpredictable emotional state in which it is delivered, may represent a high-risk combination for children’s emotional development.

Limitations

As seen in some tables such as Tables 1 and 2, the number of observations in some groups of respondents is small. Therefore, the values associated with such groups have relatively large uncertainty about them, and so the mean figures should be treated with caution. The target population was students in higher education. Therefore, the results are not necessarily generalisable to the general population of The Bahamas given that EI is associated with level of education (Durand, 2022) and many people in the country have not experienced higher education. While the associations found in this study may also exist in the wider population, they may exist to different extents. Further, surveys can only identify associations between variables, and so no causation can be construed from the results alone.

Implications for Practice and Future Directions

The findings of this study have implications for the development of intervention strategies aimed at several key areas. Firstly, as we have highlighted, EI in the The Bahamas has been typically discussed in relation to the workforce; however, the associations identified in this study suggest that EI is equally, if not more, important in personal relationships and family life. The findings have implications for the development of intervention strategies aimed at addressing several key areas.

When considering an appropriate response to the challenges raised by the findings in this and other research, we can start with parenting education and support programmes. These should address not only whether or how often corporal punishment is used, but the emotional state of the adult administering it. The finding that males disproportionately report dysregulated, out

of control punishment, combined with males' lower regulation scores in adulthood, suggests that the quality of adult emotion regulation during discipline is important. Parents need education and support in managing their own stress and anger as a prerequisite for safe, effective discipline.

Another key intervention strategy should be aimed at EI-building in children, particular boys. This represents a preventative approach addressing childhood adversity prior to the emergence of adult interpersonal difficulties. As indicated these programmes would be most valuable when developmentally targeted to the 5-12 age window, when EI is most malleable and when the effects of early adversity on emotional development are most pronounced. Schools would be crucial in incorporating relationship skills training with explicit attention paid to emotional perception and regulation.

A final consideration is the finding that lower Appraisal of Emotions in Others is specifically linked to sexual perpetration. This speaks to a greater need for consent education that includes EI-based emotional literacy. Not just an acknowledgment of what "no" sounds like but more importantly, what it looks like in terms of accurately reading and responding to a partner's emotional state. This may be more effective than purely focusing on what the partner may be communicating verbally.

Conclusion

This study found associations between childhood experiences of corporal punishment, adult emotional intelligence, and adult sexual experiences among Bahamian college students. Frequency of corporal punishment at ages 5-12 was associated with lower emotional intelligence in adulthood; lower emotional intelligence, and specifically lower capacity to appraise

the emotions of others, was associated with experiences of non-consensual sexual intercourse.

As an observational, cross-sectional study, these findings describe associations rather than causal effects and should be interpreted as hypothesis-generating. They nonetheless add to a growing body of evidence suggesting that corporal punishment may be

associated with a range of adverse outcomes across the lifespan and highlight emotional intelligence as one construct that may warrant further attention in Bahamian research and practice concerning child-rearing, healthy relationships, and violence prevention.

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