

## EMOTIONALITY AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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**Abstract:** The trait Emotional Intelligence (trait E.I.) construct shifted the interest in personality research to the investigation of the effect of global personality characteristics on behaviour. In this article the role of personality traits in the occurrence of emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties was investigated. Five hundred fifty-nine students aged 12-14 years, completed The Trait E.I. Questionnaire Adolescent Short Form, and The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Students with higher Trait E.I. were less likely to present emotional and behavioural difficulties and were more likely to present prosocial behaviour. The study describes potential predictors of students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties and discusses the implications of the findings for educators.

**Key words:** Adolescents, Trait Emotional Intelligence, Emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties

### INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s and 1980s, a popular topic of research in psychology was the relation between personality traits and morally relevant behaviour such as prosocial behaviour and aggression (Eisenberg, 2000). Although it is well documented that personality traits affect academic performance (Dennis, 2004; Eysenck, 1997; Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004), the question whether personality traits affect behaviours which are not merely related to academic achievement but to personal growth and well-being still remains to be answered. This question becomes crucial in reference to adolescence that signifies the transition to adulthood and is the peak risk period for the development of behaviour disorders. A fundamental assumption guiding the study of personality development is that early emerging temperamental differences shape the course of development, its problematic manifestations and healthful outcomes (Caspi, 2000). The contribution, however, of personality traits in

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the prediction of behavioural adjustment has to be determined. The present study investigated the potential role of personality traits, and specifically of trait E.I., in students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties, in the years of early adolescence. In what follows, firstly, I present studies on trait E.I. and behavioural strengths and difficulties. Then, the empirical evidence that emerged from the present study is presented and discussed.

### *Personality characteristics and emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties*

In personality research there is one category of studies that focuses on the developmental process through which certain personality characteristics relate to social behaviour. Eisenberg (2000), for instance, underscored the association between temperamental negative emotionality and externalizing problems in different developmental periods: Thus, in infancy and early childhood the ability to inhibit and control one's behaviour has repeatedly been associated with a range of measures of conscience and committed compliance. In childhood, behavioural regulation has been associated with low externalizing problem behaviours whereas children prone to negative emotions (dysphoria, anger and anxiety) exhibit relatively high levels of aggression and externalizing problems (bullying, stealing and lying). In adulthood, lack of inhibitory control, which involves impulsivity and low behavioural control, has been associated with antisocial behaviour, antisocial personality traits and substance abuse. Eisenberg (2000) concluded that temperamental or personality traits, such as impulsivity and voluntary behavioural inhibition, appear to be intimately related to the development of conscience and antisocial behaviour.

Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, and Reiser (2000) maintained that dispositional emotionality and self-regulation interact with each other or with factors in the social environment to predict problem behaviours and social adjustment. Eisenberg et al. (2000) developed a heuristic model for the prediction of adjustment and quality of social behaviour from the level of emotionality and type of self-regulation. They assumed that relatively high emotion and moderately high behaviour self-regulation are associated with positive outcomes. In contrast, low levels of self-control (e.g., low emotion and behaviour self-regulation) and high negative emotionality predict externalizing problems and low social competence. In turn, low emotion self-regulation and behavioural over-control combined with high emotional intensity, predict severe or frequent internalizing problems. Thus, it seems that negative emotionality is a general risk factor, related to both internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems. In fact, relations between self-regulation and/or emotionality and social competence or adjustment are often linear and direct. Concern for others

has also been found to be an important aspect of young aggressive and disruptive children's interpersonal repertoires (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000). Children with externalizing problems and high concern for others are most likely to show a decrease in their problem behaviours over time. This suggests that concern for others may play a protective role in the development of children's externalizing behaviour problems.

Besides concern for others in children, there are studies that associate relevant personality characteristics with dimensions of internalizing or externalizing behaviours in adolescence. Petrides et al. (2004) found that individuals (mean age = 16.5 years), who engage in reappraisal emotion regulation strategies, are less likely to experience and externalize distress through antisocial behaviours. Empathy (as a personality disposition) has been found to be lower among conduct-disordered youth compared to a non-disordered group and inversely related to antisocial and aggressive attitudes (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Moreover, dispositional sympathy/empathy has been associated with low levels of aggression and externalizing problems (Eisenberg, 2000).

### ***Emotional intelligence as trait***

Research to date has investigated the relationship between isolate personality dimensions (e.g., emotional negativity or empathy) and behaviour, either mapping the developmental process underlying such a relationship or describing this relationship in specific age groups. Research on Trait Emotional Intelligence (Trait E.I.), however, by introducing a global personality construct, shifted the interest in personality research to the exploration of the effect of broader personality constructs on behaviour. Idiosyncratic characteristics, namely personality traits, have a strong influence both on students' academic performance and their antisocial behaviour in school (Petrides, Chamorro-Premuzic, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2005). Personality traits have been found to influence students' adaptive coping strategies, depressive thoughts and somatic complaints (Mavroveli, Petrides, Shove, & Whitehead, 2008). The role of personality traits has also been highlighted in a study done by Miller, Miller, Newcorn, and Halperin (2008) that revealed a link between ADHD and the degree to which symptoms persist into adolescence and affect personality structure. The study suggested that, in many individuals, personality traits may be more highly related to psychosocial functioning than the presence of an underlying psychiatric disorder.

The concept of Emotional Intelligence was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), as a set of four classes of abilities: *perception of emotions*, which involves the attention and recognition of feelings, *integration of emotions in thought*, involving the expression of feelings in thought and communication, *understanding emotions*, which

refers to the ability to reason using feelings, and *management of emotions* (Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer & Cobb, 2000). In fact, there are two dominant approaches in the conceptualization of emotional intelligence: The first one, called *ability E.I.*, is measured with performance measures and refers to cognitive abilities or skills involved in emotional intelligence. The second one, *Trait E.I.*, is measured with self-report measures and refers to behavioural dispositions and self-perceived abilities (Bar-On, 1997, 2000; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Πατσίδου, 2010). In the present study the construct of Trait E.I., which provides a comprehensive coverage of emotion-related personality facets, was adopted. The focus is on “individual differences in the tendency to behave, think and feel in certain consistent ways” (Caspi, 1998, p. 312) as traits.

Trait E.I. refers to a construct unrelated to capabilities, competencies and skills, and encompasses domains such as adaptability, assertiveness, emotional appraisal, emotion expression, emotion management, self-regulation, impulsivity, relationship skills, self-esteem, self-motivation, social competence, stress management, trait empathy, happiness and optimism (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). In the present study, the attempt was to investigate the contribution of Trait E.I. in students’ emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties.

### ***The present study***

Adolescence represents a crucial phase in the development of the individual, full of complex developmental demands in the move of the young person from childhood to young adulthood. Promoting prosocial behaviour and positive peer relationships, while diminishing conduct or social anxiety difficulties, are among the issues of increasing concern for educators and educational researchers (Ryan & Shim, 2008). A key to finding solutions to these concerns is the unveiling of the underlying factors of students’ adjustment difficulties.

The aim of this study was to identify the relations between trait E.I. and adolescents’ emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties. The assumption was that students’ trait E.I. would provide a better understanding of the mechanisms implicated in students’ behavioural adjustment at schools. Specifically, high Trait E.I. has been found to be negatively related to unauthorized absences and exclusions from school (Petrides et al, 2004), more nominations for “co-operation” and “leadership” and fewer nominations for “disruption”, “aggression” and “dependency”, by both peers and teachers (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, & Frederickson, 2006). Therefore, based on prior research, the prediction was that children who report more emotional and behavioural difficulties would have lower Trait E.I. scores than

children who report less emotional and behavioural difficulties. This latter group of children would also report higher scores on prosocial behaviour. Hence, the hypothesis was that students' trait E.I. will be positively related to prosocial behaviours and negatively to emotional and behavioural difficulties (Hypothesis 1).

In addition, the studies associating personality traits and adjustment behaviour indicate the prevalence of male gender in conduct problems. Aggression and overt inappropriate social behaviours are higher among boys, while boys with emotional problems tend to display such problems more frequently than girls (Matson, Rotatori, & Helsel, 1983). Hedonistic moral reasoning (that is, lacking in empathy, interpersonal sensitivity and respect for social approval) was associated with acting-out behaviour in the classroom and lack of social competencies, especially among boys (Bear & Rys, 1994). Finally, in Slobodskaya, Safronova, and Windle's (2005) study, gender was not a significant factor on emotional problems, while conduct problems were predicted solely by personality and temperament factors, especially for boys. In an attempt to highlight the role of gender in Greek adolescents, this study further aimed to investigate gender differences in students' perceptions of their trait E.I. and emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties in schools. The hypothesis here was that gender, and specifically male gender, will dominate the behavioural difficulties, while female gender will dominate the emotional difficulties and prosocial behaviour (Hypothesis 2).

## METHOD

### *Participants*

A total of 559 students (294 boys, 52.6% and 265 girls, 47.4%) from state junior high schools of central (perfection of Attiki) and south Greece (prefectures of Rethimno, Chania and Herakleio) voluntarily participated in the study. Of these, 184 students (33.1%) attended the first grade of junior high school, 225 (40.5%) the second and 147 (26.4%) the third grade. The age range of the students was 12-14 years ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = .76$ ).

### *Instruments*

***Trait E.I. Questionnaire - Adolescent Short Form (TE.I.Que-ASF)***. Students' reports of Trait E.I. were measured with the Trait E.I. Questionnaire-Adolescent Short Form (TEIQue-ASF). The TEIQue-short form is a simplified version of the adult form of the TEIQue, designed to measure global Trait E.I. (Petrides & Furnham,

2001). TEIQue encompasses dispositions from the personality domain, such as empathy, impulsivity and assertiveness, as well as elements of social and personal intelligence. All 30 items of TEIQue-ASF are sampled from the 15 subscales of the adult trait E.I. sampling domain (two items per subscale): adaptability, assertiveness, emotion perception, emotion expression, emotion management (others), emotion regulation, impulsiveness, relationship skills, self-esteem, self-motivation, social awareness, stress management, trait empathy, trait happiness and trait optimism. Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale, in which a score of 1 represents a response of “strongly disagree” and 7 “strongly agree”. Higher scores on the TEIQue-ASF indicate higher levels of Trait E.I. Evidence of the TEIQue-ASF criterion and incremental validity comes from its administration in populations of the UK, New Zealand and Spain (Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Petrides, Perez-Gonzalez, & Furnham, 2007). The TEIQue has been translated into Greek (Petrides, Pita, et al., 2007), and the internal consistency was .89. Cooper and Petrides (2010) provided evidence about the validity of TEIQue-ASF. In two studies, they examined the psychometric properties of the TEIQue-ASF and showed that most items had good discrimination parameters, indicating that they are effective at discriminating individuals across the range of the latent trait. The internal consistency reliability of the scale in the present sample was Cronbach’s alpha = .76 (for boys .77, for girls .75).

*The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).* The SDQ is a community-wide screening inventory used for the detection and treatment of child behavioural problems (Goodman, 1999). The self-report version of the SDQ can be completed by children and teenagers aged 4-16 years. There is evidence that the SDQ functions as well as the long-established Rutter questionnaire, with the additional advantages of a focus on strengths as well as difficulties and better coverage of items referring to inattention, peer relationships and prosocial behaviour. It is also regarded as functioning at least as well as the Child Behaviour Checklist (Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 1998). The SDQ has been used in studies of different populations (Goodman et al., 1998; Goodman, Ford, Simmons, Gatward, & Meltzer 2000; Goodman, Renfrew, & Mullick, 2000; Goodman, Ford, Simmons, Gatward, & Meltzer, 2003; Goodman, Ford, Corbin, & Meltzer, 2004). It consists of 25 items, divided into five scales of 5 items each, generating scores for both behavioural problems and prosocial behaviour: “*Hyperactivity Scale*” (i.e., I am restless, I cannot stay still for long); “*Emotional Symptoms Scale*” (i.e., I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful); “*Conduct problems Scale*” (i.e., I get very angry and often lose my temper); “*Peer Problems Scale*” (i.e., I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself), and “*Prosocial*

Scale” (i.e., I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings). Each item can be marked as 0 (“not true”), 1 (“somewhat true”) or 2 (“certainly true”). With the exception of the prosocial scale, higher scores indicate more difficulties. In the Greek version of the questionnaire, population validity information comes from the self-report version given to students (Giannakopoulos, Tzavara, Dimitrakaki, Kolaitis, Rotsika, & Tountas, 2009; Μπίμπου-Νάκου, Στογιαννίδου, Κιοσέογλου, & Παπαγεωργίου, 2012).

Confirmatory factor analysis procedures were employed to examine the underlying structure of the SDQ scores. Based on the existing body of literature, a five-factor model was tested and retained as the most tenable option. The validity of SDQ was assessed by running a CFA in AMOS. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the five correlated factor model had a better fit in comparison to a unidimensional model. The model fit statistics were:  $\chi^2(177) = 288.677$ ,  $CMIN/DF = 1.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMR = .018$ ,  $CFI = .92$ ,  $RMSEA = .034$ . The associations among the five latent factors along with their internal consistency values are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for SDQ subscales*

	1	2	3	4	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Emotional symptoms					.63	0.63	0.44
2. Conduct problems	.17**				.43	0.60	0.37
3. Hyperactivity	.22**	.42**			.59	0.71	0.44
4. Peer problems	.26**	.23**	.24**		.57	0.49	0.38
5. Prosocial behaviour	-.01	-.42**	-.28**	-.29**	.62	1.50	0.42

**Note:**  $N = 559$ . SDQ scores: 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat true and 2 = certainly true. \*\* $p \leq .05$ , \* $p \leq .01$

### **Procedure**

A letter explaining the aims of the research was sent to head teachers of the participating schools. Having students', parents' and teachers' consent, the administration of the instruments took place, by the researcher, following a pilot test to 10 students to ensure the comprehension of the items. Students were given oral information about the research aims and written instructions about the completion of the instruments. Testing took place exclusively in class, with no time constraints imposed. The participants and their parents were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of the information they provided.

## RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, students reported higher ratings on hyperactivity ( $M = 0.71$  and  $SD = 0.44$ ) and prosocial subscales ( $M = 1.50$  and  $SD = 0.42$ ) and lower ratings on peer ( $M = 0.49$  and  $SD = 0.38$ ), emotional ( $M = 0.63$  and  $SD = 0.44$ ) and conduct problems ( $M = 0.60$  and  $SD = 0.37$ ), implying that although they have behaviour difficulties they maintain satisfactory relationships with peers.

The hypothesis that trait E.I. would be positively related to prosocial and negatively related to emotional and antisocial behaviours was tested with Pearson product-moment correlations. There were low but significant correlations between trait E.I. and the SDQ subscales scores. These findings are in accordance with Hypothesis 1 (see Table 2). However, when trait E.I. was split into high and low trait E.I. scores ( $M$  low E.I.  $\leq 4.66$ ,  $M$  high E.I.  $> 4.66$ ;  $M = 4.66$  and median = 4.66), significant correlations were obtained only between high trait E.I. and SDQ subscales scores. This was not true for low trait E.I. Therefore Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed our initial hypothesis.

*Table 2. Correlations of Trait E.I. and SDQ subscale scores as a function of level of E.I.*

	Low trait E.I.	High trait E.I.	Trait E.I.(total)
Emotional symptoms	-.20**	-.25**	-.43**
Conduct problems	-.07	-.28**	-.32**
Hyperactivity	-.09	-.22**	-.34**
Peer problems	-.18**	-.21**	-.35**
Prosocial behaviour	.05	.30**	.32**

Note:  $N = 559$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ , \* $p \leq .01$

Next, a MANOVA was performed with trait E.I. (high, low) and gender as the independent variables, and the five SDQ subscales scores as the dependent variables. Both trait E.I. (Wilks' Lambda<sup>1</sup> = 0.00,  $F(1285, 735,7) = 1.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and gender (Wilks' Lambda=0.77,  $F(5, 146) = 8.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ), had statistically significant multivariate main effects. Their interaction did not turn out to be significant at  $p \leq .05$ , Wilks' Lambda = 0.22,  $F(245, 732,4) = 1.04$ ,  $p = .32$ . The follow-up ANOVAs revealed that trait E.I. did not have main effects in conduct problems,  $F(290, 225) = 1.12$ ,  $p = .18$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .10$ , and hyperactivity,  $F(290, 223) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .12$ . Trait E.I. had main effects on emotional problems,  $F(289, 227) = 1.51$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $R^2_{adj}$

<sup>1</sup> Wilks' lambda = Determinant of error SSCP matrix / Determinant of (error SSCP matrix + hypothesis SSCP matrix)

= .19  $p < .001$ , in a way that students who had low trait E.I. scores also reported more emotional difficulties ( $M_{low} = 0.80$ ,  $M_{high} = 0.46$ ) and peer problems,  $F(285, 227) = 1.27$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .12$ . Students of low trait E.I. reported more peer problems than their peers of high trait E.I. ( $M_{low} = 0.59$ ,  $M_{high} = 0.37$ ). Trait E.I. also had significant main effect on students' prosocial behaviour,  $F(298, 229) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .09$ . Students with low trait E.I. scores reported less prosocial behaviour than their peers with high trait E.I. scores ( $M_{low} = 1.40$ ,  $M_{high} = 1.62$ ).

With the exception of the hyperactivity scale,  $F(1, 512) = 0.87$ ,  $p = .35$ , gender had significant main effects on the behaviour strengths and difficulties scores. Girls reported less conduct problems,  $F(1, 514) = 9.24$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $M_{boys} = 0.65$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ,  $M_{girls} = 0.54$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ) and peer difficulties,  $F(1, 511) = 8.29$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $M_{boys} = 0.54$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ,  $M_{girls} = 0.43$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ). They also reported more emotional difficulties,  $F(1, 515) = 58.36$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $M_{boys} = 0.50$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ,  $M_{girls} = 0.78$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ), and prosocial behaviour,  $F(1, 526) = 37.15$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $M_{boys} = 0.139$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ,  $M_{girls} = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) than boys.

Furthermore, in order to find out whether adolescents' emotional, conduct, hyperactivity, peer difficulties, and prosocial behaviour scores are differentially predicted by trait E.I. and gender, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted (see Table 3). Trait E.I. turned out to be significant predictor for all types of emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties, especially for emotional difficulties (Beta = -0.44), in a direction that higher Trait E.I. predicted less emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties, and higher prosocial behaviour. Gender also turned out to be significant predictor for emotional, conduct, peer difficulties and prosocial behaviour.

**Table 3. Beta regression coefficients and multiple R for trait E.I. and gender as predictors of emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties**

	Emotional symptoms		Conduct problems		Hyperactivity		Peer problems		Prosocial behaviour	
	Beta ( $p$ )	$t$	Beta ( $p$ )	$t$	Beta ( $p$ )	$t$	Beta ( $p$ )	$t$	Beta ( $p$ )	$t$
Trait E.I.	-0.42 ( $p < .001$ )	-11.28**	-0.29 ( $p < .001$ )	-7.17**	-0.30 ( $p < .001$ )	-7.30**	-0.33 ( $p < .001$ )	-7.98**	0.30 ( $p < .001$ )	7.55**
Gender	0.32 ( $p < .001$ )	8.70**	-0.12 ( $p < .001$ )	-3.04**	-0.03 ( $p = .45$ )	-0.74	-0.12 ( $p < .001$ )	-2.91**	0.24 ( $p < .001$ )	6.19**
$F$	100.04 ( $p < .001$ )		30.78 ( $p < .001$ )		53.38 ( $p < .001$ )		36.56 ( $p < .001$ )		49.07 ( $p < .001$ )	
Multiple R	0.55		0.35		0.34		0.36		0.40	
$R^2$	0.28		0.10		0.09		0.12		0.15	

Note:  $N = 559$ , \*\* $p \leq .05$ , \* $p \leq .01$

## DISCUSSION

This study represents an initial step in the investigation of potential factors contributing to students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties. Driven by the shift in personality research from the study of behavioural effects of individual personality characteristics towards that of broader personality characteristics, the aim was to determine the degree to which trait E.I. is related to students' adaptive or maladaptive behaviour in school. The hypothesis was that students who report higher scores on trait E.I. would also report less emotional and behavioural difficulties and higher prosocial behaviour compared to their counterparts with lower scores of trait E.I. The results gave support to our hypothesis. The present study revealed that it was actually high trait E.I. rather than low trait E.I. that made a significant difference in students' behaviour. This result is consistent with Petrides et al.'s (2006) findings, according to which high trait E.I. pupils were more likely to be seen as having leadership qualities, being more cooperative, and less likely to be seen as disruptive, aggressive and dependent compared to their low trait peers. Further research is needed, though, in order to explore other possible factors that have an effect on students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties. Specifically, it is unclear whether the low correlations between low trait E.I. and emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties are due to a possible psychometric weakness of TEIQue-SF (as a simplified adult version) or that the correlations between these constructs are actually weak.

The present study provided evidence that trait E.I. can predict both behavioural strengths such as prosocial behaviour and difficulties - mainly emotional difficulties. This finding is in agreement with research evidence suggesting that traits play an important role in the etiology and stability of childhood disorders (de Pauw, Mervielde, & van Leeuwen, 2009). Pakaslahti, Karjalainen, and Keltikangas-Jarvinen (2002), for instance, in their study of 14-year-old adolescents in Finland, explained prosocial behaviour in terms of emotional characteristics, such as empathy and sympathy, and sociocognitive skills such as perspective taking and moral reasoning. Research with Russian adolescents also showed the contribution of personality and temperament factors to behavioural adjustment (Slobodskaya et al., 2005). This finding is also consistent with a growing body of literature suggesting that emotion and its regulation play a fundamental role in the development of high quality behaviour and social adaptation (Eisenberg et al., 2000).

In addition, the present study showed that gender was related to students' behavioural strengths and difficulties, when taken in isolation from trait E.I. Moreover, there was no interaction between trait E.I. and gender, reinforcing the arguments that

trait E.I. has a direct impact on peer relations over and above the gender factor (Petrides et al., 2006), and that the educational field has yet to reach consensus on the effect of gender on the emotional intelligence (Reiff, Hatzes, Bramel, & Gibbon, 2001).

**Limitations.** When interpreting the results of the present study one should bear in mind several caveats. First, the use of the unidimensional construct of trait E.I. in the present study might obscure the significance of the various aspects of the construct. According to Eisenberg et al. (2000), it is often more useful to study the specific constructs delineated by temperament theorists than to study the broader constructs that are examined in personality research. Research investigating the global personality constructs in parallel to measures of the subdomains that constitute the constructs, would probably eliminate this drawback. Furthermore, the use of the TEIQue-ASF was based on a simplified version of the adult short form of the TEIQue. Future research needs to provide measures of trait E.I. specifically designed for adolescents and children of younger ages.

Second, the relatively low multiple R values in the regression analysis suggest that other factors could be relevant in predicting students' perceptions of their behaviour. Research on possible predictors of students' strengths and difficulties such as perceptions of social skills, interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, to name a few, could clarify students' behaviour. Such a hypothesis could serve as an incentive for future research.

Third, the results were based on students' perceptions of their behaviours. While valuable, there is no evidence as to whether similar findings would be obtained had teachers' or parents' perceptions of students' strengths and difficulties been used. Further research needs to be conducted with teachers and should also include qualitative information such as interview data or observations at school.

Finally, the results of the present study illustrated the way in which Trait E.I. and emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties are related. Trait E.I. mainly referring to the intrapersonal aspects of emotional intelligence, as defined in the TEIQue instrument, provides significant information about the possible sources of students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties. It also reveals the complexity of the interactive nature of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Additional research is needed to examine, for example, whether Trait E.I. or more situation-specific social and emotional competences determine students' behaviour.

**Practical implications.** The present study was an initial attempt to delineate the effect of dispositional characteristics, such as Trait E.I., on adolescents' adaptive or not behaviour at school. The findings extend the conceptualization of trait E.I. as regards its relations with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Taking into consideration Goleman's (1995, 1998) claim that emotional intelligence is an

alterable characteristic that can be learned and the results of studies indicating that effective coping skills can be taught and such training has positive effects on adjustment (Thuen & Bru, 2004), the findings of the present study could have practical implications for teachers and school administrators as well. Educators could tailor their strategies in order to improve their students' behaviour, social and emotional skills and personal relationships. Teachers and teacher trainers can use this information to reflect on the way they implement classroom management strategies. Researchers, educators and parents are increasingly concerned about children's social adjustment, especially in the critical developmental phase of early adolescence. This study takes a first step to better understand factors that have a bearing on students' emotional and behavioural strengths and difficulties, with the hope that such an approach would improve the quality of students' lives in school.

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