

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STRESS: A RELATIONSHIP STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have showed that emotional intelligence (EI) helps in managing the stress in professional as well as personal life. Most of the earlier studies were limited only to the corporate sector. The present study made an attempt to find the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among nurses. The study has been conducted on a sample of 150 nurses from Government hospitals of Chandigarh. The Emotional Intelligence scale developed by Wong and Law (1990) and Inventory of Stressful Events developed by Motowidlo, Packard, and Manning (1986) have been used in this study. Statistical tools such as Pearson correlation and multiple regression have been used for the purpose of analyses. The results showed that emotional intelligence and its dimensions were correlated negatively with stress. Negative correlation of emotional intelligence with stress indicates that emotional intelligence will be useful tool in dealing with stress. The results provided further support that emotional intelligence and its dimensions were significant predictors of stress. Therefore, there is a need to build emotional competencies among nurses through training programs, for better efficiency at the workplace.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Stress.

INTRODUCTION

Research on emotional intelligence (EI) is increasing and becoming one of the most relevant areas of organizational research (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). The concept of emotional intelligence was developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), but interest in EI has increased after the publication of Daniel Goleman's bestseller in 1998 entitled, 'Working with Emotional Intelligence'. Goleman (1998) says that an emotionally intelligent person is likely to be skilled in two key areas namely "personal competence" – how one manages the self and "social competence" – how one manages relationships. Emotional intelligence is nothing but the ability to understand one's emotions and those of people around us.

Emotional Intelligence came out of the term emotion, which refers to a feeling with its distinct thoughts, psychological and biological states, and ranges of tendencies to act. Thus, it may be an agitation or disturbance of mind, passion, any fervent but certainly related to the person's mental state. There can be a number of emotions like love, anger, fear, sadness, enjoyment, surprise, disgust, shame etc. Paying attention to emotions, using them in human relationship, understanding one's own and other emotions, self-restraint, controlling instantaneous desires, sympathy with others and using emotions in thinking and understanding are among subjects discussed in the field of emotional intelligence.

While the term Stress occurs when people perceive that events are placing excessive demand on the mental and physical energy which can disrupt the normal psychological as well as physiological functioning of an individual. Though stress in moderate doses is necessary as it gives energy to increase one's performance and can actually stimulate one's abilities to dig deep into and discover one's true potential. But on the other hand, if the magnitude of the stressor exceeds the individual's capacity to cope, it leads to negative moods and emotions and excessive demands made upon the energy, strength and resources of a person lead to burnout or stress. A stress situation can be real or perceived. The process of stress depends on the person's self-appraisal of the situation. To the same stress situations different individuals respond differently. It is formed by what we think rather than by what has really happened.

These days' nurses face long shifts, physical fatigue, complex work systems and a tremendous pressure to better take care of their patients and their relatives. Because of all such changes which are arisen in the health care sector, the workplace had become a high stressed environment. In order to cope up with such type of problems, nurses need to possess some competencies of emotional intelligence. Therefore, an attempt was made in the present study to determine the relationship of emotional intelligence with stress and to predict the emotional competencies required to reduce the stress among nurses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown that Emotional Intelligence is the common component that influences the different ways in which people develop in their personal lives, jobs, social skills, handle frustration, control their emotions more effectively and get along with other people. Eventually, it is Emotional Intelligence that commands the way people deal with one another and understand emotions.

Studies on Emotional Intelligence

Gibbs (1995) suggested that it not IQ but the emotions, which may be the right measure of human intelligence. In the world of corporate sector, IQ gets you promoted but accounts for only 20 % of success. **Feist & Barron (1996)** conducted a research on a sample of 80 Ph.D.'s in science and pointed that in determining professional success, social and emotional abilities were four times more important than IQ. Bar-On said, "This scientifically demonstrates that emotional intelligence is just as important, if not more important, than cognitive intelligence in predicting success in the workplace". **McClelland (1998)** said that IQ was remarkably unsuccessful at predicting success in a work role. Though intelligence lays necessary foundation for successful performance, it is other characteristics that distinguish superior from average performers. These characteristics are called competencies or in other words emotional competency. It is a learned capacity based on emotional intelligence that adds to effective performance at the workplace. **Stein and Book (2000)** found that Emotional Intelligence is highly as well as significantly correlated with job performance, while cognitive intelligence shown a very low and insignificant correlation with job performance. **Turner (2004)** identified that emotional intelligence is the softer element of total intelligence and that it contributes to personal as well as professional lives. Old-fashioned IQ means the ability of an individual to learn, understand, and reason. It is now said to contribute only 20% to one's success in life, whereas emotional quotient (EQ), is the ability of an individual to understand one self and intermingle with people, which contributes to 80% to success. EQ is necessary for effective leadership also. IQ has been linked to job performance and plays a key role in recruitment and selection. On the other hand, EQ is evident in the leaders'/managers' ability to keep their positions and be successful in their roles. The fact is that most of the organizations hire for intelligence (IQ) and sack because of attitude (EQ).

Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Stress

Bar-On (2000) has identified that the emotional intelligence is a factor of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and unknown skills that affects the ability of an individual to succeed in overcoming any kind of stress. Emotional intelligence is the ability of expressing feeling, expressing, understanding, and sentiment regulation. An employee can deal with work environment stress, which has high emotional intelligence (**Cooper, et. al., 2001**). The occupational stress is significantly reduced by emotional Intelligence by identifying the stressed feelings and subsequently, regulating those emotions (**Cooper & Sawaf, 1997**). Another study, **Bar-On et. al. (2000)** found that police officers scored significantly higher on emotional intelligence were less susceptible to experience stress and better able to cope with it. **Slaski and Cartwright (2002)** identified that manager high in emotional intelligence revealed less stress and had better psychological and physical well-being. Similarly, **Gardner and Stough (2003)** found in their study that there is a negative relationship between EI and occupational stress. Similarly, **Duran and Extremera (2004)**, found in their study where professionals employed in institutions with people having intellectual disabilities, that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout syndrome, and personal accomplishment in particular.

Naidoo et. al. (2008) has conducted a study to identify the explanatory factors for stress and an evaluation of the role that emotional intelligence plays in the experience of perceived stress. The correlation indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) was inversely associated with perceived success (PS). Further, using t statistic, it was found that emotional intelligence (EI) is relatively the most important predictor of perceived stress (PS). Hence, the findings revealed that low level of emotional intelligence is associated with stress.

Gangai and Agrawal (2013) studied the relationship of emotional intelligence with stress and its effects on employees. They found that there was a inverse correlation between emotional intelligence and stress and emotional intelligence moderately effects in managing stress among employees at job place.

Wolf et. al. (2015) found that nursing students with higher levels of emotional support and self-esteem had lower levels of stress. Positive thinking and social support were identified as the coping strategies for stress. Emotional support in the form of social support has been stated as a useful coping strategy to deal with stressful situations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present study were:

- (1) To study the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress among nurses under study.

(2) To study the significant effect of Emotional Intelligence on Stress among nurses under study.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The hypotheses of the present study were:

- H1. There is a negative correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress.
- H2. There is a negative correlation between the Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Stress.
- H3. There is a significant effect of Emotional Intelligence on Stress.
- H4. There is a significant effect of Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence on Stress.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected by going to three Government Hospitals of Chandigarh and all the respondents selected under study were apprised of the nature of the research work. The importance of participation and the purpose and significance of the research were clearly explained to the respondents. Simple random sampling was used to draw the sample for the study. In this sampling, each individual is chosen randomly and entirely by chance, such that each individual has the same probability of being chosen at any stage during the sampling process. A sample consists of 150 nurses, out of which there were 12 male and 138 female nurses.

Measure of Emotional Intelligence

The Emotional Intelligence Test developed by **Wong and Law (2002)** was used for the purpose of measuring the variable of Emotional Intelligence. It is a 16-item self-report measure with four subscales i.e Self Emotional Appraisal (SEA), Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotions (UOE) and Regulation of Emotions (ROE) based on the Mayer and Salovey model of EI. The internal consistency is adequate ($r = .78$ to $.89$) with similar consistency for the subscales. The dimensions of emotional intelligence are described below:

- (1.) Self Emotional Appraisal (SEA): This refers to the individual's ability to understand their deep emotions and be able to express these emotions naturally. People who have great ability in this area will sense and acknowledge their emotions well before most people.
- (2.) Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA): This refers to individual's ability to perceive and understand the emotions of other people who were around them. Persons who are high in this ability will be more sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others as well as good in reading their minds.
- (3.) Use of Emotions (UOE): This refers to the ability of individuals to make use of their emotions by leading them towards productive activities and personal performance.
- (4.) Regulation of Emotions (ROE): This refers to the ability of individuals to regulate their emotions, which will enable them to more rapidly recover from psychological stress.

The items were scored on a six-point scale according to the following response categories.

- 6- Strongly Agree
- 5- Agree
- 4- Slightly Agree
- 3- Slightly Disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly Disagree

Measure of Stress

A measure of Inventory of Stressful Events developed by **Motowidlo, Packard and Manning (1986)** was used. It contains 45 items which measure the frequency of stressful occurrences in a job.

The items were scored on a five-point scale according to the following response categories.

- 1: Not at all stressful
- 2: Rarely Stressful

- 3: Sometimes Stressful
- 4: Rather Often Stressful
- 5: Extremely Stressful

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Objective 1: To study the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress

H1) There is a negative correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress.

Correlation was aimed at examining the degree of association between the two variables i.e emotional intelligence and stress. The Pearson Correlation between emotional intelligence and stress ($r = -.693, p < 0.01$) as indicated in table 1 is very strong.

Table 1: Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress

	Emotional Intelligence	Stress
Emotional Intelligence	1	-.693**
Stress	-.693**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This makes us accept the first hypothesis that emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with stress, indicating that lower the emotional intelligence (EI), high would be the stress among nurses. The correlation between emotional intelligence and stress is strongly negative and thus significant.

Hence, the hypothesis {H1}: “There is a negative correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress” is accepted.

H2) There is a negative correlation between the Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Stress.

Table 2 shows that the dimensions of Emotional Intelligence (EI) namely- Self Emotional Appraisal (SEA), Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA), Use of Emotions (UOE) and Regulation of Emotions (ROE) ($r = -.631, -.623, -.636$ and $-.634, p < 0.01$, respectively) had a strong negative correlation with stress.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Stress

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence	Stress
Self Emotional Appraisal (SEA)	-.631**
Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA)	-.623**
Use of Emotions (UOE)	-.636**
Regulation of Emotions (ROE)	-.634**

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

It depicted that the nurses having low self emotional appraisal, others emotional appraisal, use of emotions and regulation of emotions, had high stress level.

Hence, the hypothesis {H2}: “There is a negative correlation between the Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Stress” is accepted.

Objective 2: To study the significant effect of Emotional Intelligence on Stress

H3) There is a significant effect of Emotional Intelligence on Stress

To understand the relationship between dependent variable (i.e stress) and independent variable (i.e emotional intelligence), regression analysis was computed. The results of multiple regression analysis for the independent variable (i.e emotional intelligence) are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Stress

Regression Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	F	p-value
Stress	-	-	-	-	-
Emotional Intelligence	.693	.480	.477	136.88	.000**

**** significant at $p < 0.01$**

The results of the regression analysis in table 3 showed that Stress can be predicted from Emotional Intelligence as R-Square = .480 and F = 136.88, which is significant at .001 probability level. Findings indicate that 47% of variance in the dependent variable (i.e stress) could be predicted by the independent variable (i.e emotional intelligence) as Adjusted R-Square = .47. It shows that there was a significant effect of emotional intelligence on stress.

Hence, the hypothesis {H3}: “There is a significant effect of Emotional Intelligence on Stress” is accepted.

H4) There is a significant effect of Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence on Stress

The above hypothesis was tested through a regression model, taking dimensions of Emotional Intelligence as independent variables and Stress as a dependent variable (table 4).

Table 4: Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Stress

Regression Model	B	SE	t-value	p-value
Self Emotional Appraisal (SEA)	-.771	.684	-1.128	.261
Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA)	-1.002	.712	-1.409	.161
Use of Emotions (UOE)	-1.369	.707	-1.935	.055*
Regulation of Emotions (ROE)	-1.725	.670	-2.574	.011**

**** significant at $p < 0.01$**

*** significant at $p < 0.05$**

The results reveal that the Emotional Intelligence (EI) dimensions namely- Regulation of Emotions (ROE, $p = .011$) {significant as $p < 0.01$ } and Use of Emotions (UOE, $p = .055$) {significant as $p < 0.05$ } emerged as the significant predictor of stress among nurses. It revealed that two out of the four dimensions of EI contributed significantly towards high stress among nurses. Thus, the hypothesis accepted.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the nurses who were better able to regulate and use their emotions can prove to be less stressful. Thus, it can be inferred that emotionally intelligent nurses were better able to deal with others confidently, competently and safely, which in turn reduce their stress.

Hence, the hypothesis {H4}: “There is a significant effect of Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence on Stress” is accepted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The more complex is the job, the more important is emotional intelligence for a deficiency in these abilities can hinder the use of whatever technical expertise or intellect a person may have. Researchers have been making efforts to understand how EQ and IQ complement one another, for instance, how a person’s ability to handle stress affects his/her ability to concentrate and put his/her intelligence to use. The present study was intended to study the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among nurses working in government hospitals of Chandigarh. The findings of present study show that emotional intelligence as well as its dimensions i.e self emotional appraisal, others emotional appraisal, use of emotions and regulation of emotions have a negative significant relationship with stress among nurses. Negative correlation of emotional intelligence with stress indicates that high emotional intelligence scores experience less stress. Further, the results show that emotional intelligence and its dimensions were significant predictors of stress. Thus, in the present study, it was found that the emotional intelligence should be used as a technique to deal with the stress among nurses. The studies conducted by Bar-On et al. (2000), Slaski and Cartwright (2002), Gardner and Stough (2003), Naidoo et al. (2008), Gangai and Agrawal (2013) etc, also reveals similar results. Thus, emotional intelligence is the ability to control negative feelings i.e stress and emphasis on positive ones like confidence, empathy and congeniality. Therefore one must emphasize on developing emotional competencies to overcome stress and to achieve success in personal as well as professional life.

Therefore, the results clarify the importance of EI and its usefulness in stress management. It is recommended that there should be an effort by the hospitals to conduct sessions and hold seminars through training programs which will help to built emotional intelligence among nurses. Further, there is an extensive need for implementing EI and associated concepts into the nursing curriculum. An ever-increasing number of accidents, diseases, illness etc, there is a need among nurses to be emotionally strong, so that they will be able to handle stressful situations in a better manner as well as take independent decisions in their live and at the workplace. In all, there is a need to build and create emotional competencies among nurses for better efficiency at the workplace.

However, other effective factors besides emotional intelligence should be investigated which will reduce the stress in the future studies. The sample of this study is limited to Chandigarh area; a more diverse sample drawn from other hospitals of other regions would facilitate better understanding and generalizations of the findings. Despite of the limitations, the present study gives note worthy findings.

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