

Stress Management and Emotional Intelligence among Working Professionals: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Emotions contribute a lot in managing stress and anxiety at workplace and in life in general. The purpose of the present study 'The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Stress among Working Professionals' was to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress among working professionals. The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) were administered on 40 participants (females=19 and males=21) working in private sector with 9-to-5 job criteria and based in Lucknow. Descriptive statistics, Correlation analysis and t-test were used for analysis of data. The t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance showed that there was a significant difference between perceived stress of working professionals with high and those with low emotional intelligence. The result also revealed that there was a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and stress. It indicated that professional with high emotional intelligence suffered less stress in their work environment. On the basis of these findings, suggestions were made to include emotional intelligence as an intrinsic component of selection, placement and training, and integrate emotional intelligence intervention techniques to help working professionals in coping and managing the stress.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Stress, Working Professionals, Perceived Stress Scale.

Introduction

Purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and stress management among working professionals. Working professionals being those who work in 9 – 5 jobs.

EMOTIONS

Emotions are biological states linked with the nervous system (Panksepp et al, 2005).¹ Emotion can be reactions to internal stimuli (such as thoughts or memories) or external stimuli such as events that occur in our environment (Damasio et al, 1998)² and (Ekman et al, 1994)³. Emotions produce different physiological, behavioral and cognitive changes in an individual. The original role of emotions was to motivate adaptive behaviors that would have contributed to the passing on of genes through survival, reproduction, and kin selection in the past (Schacter, et al, 2011)⁴ and (Cabral, et al, 2020)⁵.

The term "emotion" was given by Thomas Brown in 1800s. Paul Ekman has supported the view that emotions are discrete, measurable and distinct. His facial-expression research examined six basic emotions - anger, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise and happiness (Shiota, et al, 2016)⁶. Later in his career he theorized the very existence of other universal emotions beyond these six.

Following are the six major theories of emotions.

- **Evolutionary theory (Charles Darwin)** – emotions exist because they serve an adaptive role. Emotions motivate people to respond quickly to stimuli and also help them to improve the chances of success and survival.
- **James-Lange theory** - one of the best-known examples of physiological theory of emotions and proposed by Psychologist William James and physiologist Carl Lange in 1884, suggests that seeing an external stimulus elicits physiological responses from viscera (the internal organs like heart and lungs). Our perception about our bodily changes, like rapid breathing and running legs following any event, brings forth emotional reaction.
- **Cannon-Bard theory-** (Walter Cannon 1920s). Cannon’s work was later expanded by physiologist Philip Bard in 1930s. According to this theory emotions and physiological reactions like sweating, trembling, and muscle tension take place simultaneously (Friedman BH, 2010)7.
- **Schachter-Singer theory** (also known as two factor theory) is cognitive theory of emotions. The theory suggests that we infer emotions based on physiological responses drawing from both James-Lange and Cannon-Bard theory of emotions.
- **Cognitive Appraisal theory (also called the Lazarus theory of emotions)** - Richard Lazarus was an expert in the area of emotion. According to this theory thinking must occur before experiencing an emotion.
- **Facial Feedback theory-** according to this theory emotions are directly tied to changes in facial muscles. Facial expressions are connected to experiencing emotions.

INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence can be referred to as the ability to accumulate and use knowledge or skills. According to psychologist Robert Sternberg, intelligence is the “mental abilities necessary for adaption to, as well as shaping and selecting any environmental context.” Sternberg’s theory identifies three types of intelligence: practical, creative and analytical. Psychologist Raymond Cattell also gave the concepts of fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence. According to his psychometrically-based theory, general intelligence is subdivided into gf and gc. Crystallized intelligence (gc) is expressed in person’s knowledge, vocabulary and reasoning based on acquired information. Whereas fluid intelligence (gf) is known as the potentiality to get, transform and manipulate differing types of novel information in real time.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) is the ability to assess and handle one’s own emotions. The whole concept of emotional quotient was given by Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Emotional quotient was later popularized by Daniel Goleman an American Psychologist. Goleman in his book ‘Emotional Intelligence’ defines it ‘as the ability to identify, assess and control one's own emotions, the emotion of others and that of group.’

According to Goleman there are five characteristics of emotional intelligence: -

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy

- Social skills

Goleman reports that EI is twice as important as technical skills and more important than IQ for satisfaction in jobs. Weisinger (2008) suggests that EI is related to success at work and that it also plays an important role in certain aspects of effective team leadership and team performance.

Research conducted by Slaski and Cartwright (2002) found that managers high in EI revealed less subjective stress and had better psychological well-being. Similarly, another study by Gardner and Stough (2002) stated the negative relationship between EI and stress. Therefore, above mentioned studies indicate that EI expressed is the ability to recognize and control emotions may have impact on the job stress and the consequences of experienced stress.

Stress is defined as a way of our body's natural respond to threat. When working properly stress helps us to be focused, alert and energetic. Stress can help us rise to meet challenges. Stress could be of two types:

- Eustress (positive stress) - it motivates us, enhances our performance and is short lived. It is mostly under our coping abilities.
- Distress (negative stress) - it causes anxiety or concern. It is mostly considered out of our coping abilities. It decreases our performance.

STRESS

Work- or job-related stress has become very common nowadays. More than the actual stress, people also suffer from perceived stress i.e., the interpretation of being stressed at any given point of time. Occupational stress is experienced when the job requirements do not match with the capabilities, resources, or needs of an individual and in turn it the health and the work output get influenced. Long working hours, heavy work load, targets and deadlines along with changes within the organization are some of the common causes of stress in the job. Occupational stress has become a predominant feature of modern life.

A job is deemed to be professional if it requires special skills and knowledge and the individual doing the job is referred to as a professional. Examples of professionals are teachers, nurses, engineers, and doctors. Jobs considered non-professional are often repetitive and manual in nature like dishwashing. Someone who is full time employed as cashier is not considered to be professional. Professional means a part of a career tract that will be in an ongoing commitment and requires special qualifications.

Due to cut throat competition first in getting the job and later putting extra efforts in the job to receive bonuses or promotions, is creating stress in working professionals. Majority of the working professionals do experience stress at some or the other point of time in their job. Stress could occur due to any reason be it poor working condition or odd hours. Various stress management techniques have come up to help professionals overcome their stress. Most important among them is to work upon and enhance their emotional intelligence (EI). It is expected that people with high level of emotional intelligence will perceive their work environment as less stressful and they will experience less negative health consequences.

The rationale of the present paper is that life is majorly affected by the choices and conditions of one's profession. Working conditions and related aspects have already been investigated by many researchers but very few studies have used emotional intelligence and stress as variables in relation to working professionals. The motive behind this research was to conduct a small-scale study to explore the role of EI and its relationship with perceived stress among working professionals so that it could be later used for further research and studies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The researcher, to the best of her knowledge, could find only two researches conducted in India by Indian researchers. Khan et.al. (2013)¹³ investigated the effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress the result of which showed negative co-relation between the two. Professionals with high score in emotional intelligence suffer less stress at work. Arora et.al. (2014)¹⁴ investigated the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and stress

in medical students faced with unfamiliar surgical tasks. The result showed that the students with higher trait EI are more likely to experience stress during unfamiliar surgical tasks.

Ranasinghe et.al. (2017)¹⁰ found from their cross-sectional study that higher EI was related to better academic performance, and higher EI was observed in students with higher level of satisfaction. Pau et.al. (2014)¹¹ explored the coping with stress among dental students with different levels of emotional intelligence and found that students with high EI are more likely to adopt reflection and appraisal, and social and interpersonal coping styles. According to Yamani et.al. (2014)¹² people with high EI have less Job stress. Por et.al. (2011)¹⁵ have highlighted positive co-relation between EI and well-being, and negative corelation between EI and perceived stress. Landa et.al. (2008)¹⁶ investigated the interrelationships among emotional intelligence, work stress and health and their result were that the nurses scoring high in emotional intelligence had less stress. Also married nurses reported better general health. Oginska-bulik (2005)¹⁷ analyzed the affiliation between EI and perceived stress in the workplace. The result showed an essential but not very strong influence of emotional intelligence in perceiving stress. Nicolaou et.al. (2002)¹⁸ assessed the relationship and association between emotional intelligence and sources of occupational stress on professionals of mental health organizations. The results showed negative relation between EI and stress at work. Ismail et.al. (2002)¹⁹ probed the relationship between EI, occupational stress and job performance. The outcomes showed that relationship between occupational stress and emotional intelligence significantly correlated with job performance.

METHODOLOGY

The phenomenon of emotional intelligence is a growing topic for behavioral assessment as researchers strive to understand its role and influence on various social interactions. Recent studies indicate that emotions play a significant or an integral part in managing stress and anxiety at workplace. **Objective** of the present work was to study the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress among working professionals with the purpose of assessing the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress and to analyze their relationship with each other. **Hypothesis** were a) Emotional Intelligence (EI) negatively co-relates with stress and, b) higher the EI the less is the stress. The **Variables** were Emotional intelligence, Stress, and Gender. The **Inclusive Criteria** was males and females between the age range of 30-40 years working in 9 to 5 jobs in private sector. **Tools** used were The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) with **Sample size 40**. The **Research Design** was Co-relational research design. It is a non-experimental research method in which a researcher measures two variables and understands or assesses the relationship between them.

Procedure

- 40 working professionals, male=21, female=19 who fulfilled all the inclusion criteria were selected for the study.
- Random sampling was done for data collection.
- The questionnaires SSIET & PSS were given to the participants digitally.
- A brief description was given to the participants regarding the data collection and was assured that their responses would be kept confidential.
- After the questionnaires were filled the responses were collected for statistical analysis of data.
- Descriptive statistics, co-relational analysis and t-test were conducted for interpretation of data.

RESULT ANALYSIS

Table no 1: Negative Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Stress.

Groups	Mean	correlation
EI	120.8	-0.64599
Stress	16.7	

Table No 2: Showing descriptive statistics of High Emotional Intelligence.

Groups	Mean	Variance	SD	N
High EI	133.25	45.7875	6.7666	20
Stress	12.25	23.45	4.8425	20

t- 64.8977

Df - 38

Critical value-2.024

t > critical value- there is sig. diff.

Table No 3: Showing descriptive statistics of Low Emotional Intelligence.

Groups	Mean	Variance	SD	N
Low EI	108.35	45.1275	6.7177	20
Stress	19.75	36.5875	6.0488	20

t- 43.8326

DF- 38

Critical value- 2.024

t > critical value – there is sig. diff.

DISCUSSION

To assess and explore the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in managing Stress among Working Professionals a sample size of 40 participants was taken with 21 males and 19 females. Pearson correlation and t-test were applied for the interpretation of the data.

As per table 1, there was a negative correlation between EI and Stress thereby proving the hypothesis of the study correct i.e., the higher the emotional intelligence the less is the stress. The study conducted by N. Yamani et.al. in the year 2014 to find the relationship between EI and Stress shows negative correlation between the two.

The data was further divided between high EI score (120 above) and low EI score (below 119) along with their corresponding Stress scores. The t-test was applied on the two groups. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of high EI group and table 3 indicates low EI group. In both the tables the t value was greater than the critical value therefore the t-test analysis at 0.05 level shows that there was a remarkable difference between perceived stress of working professionals with high EI and those with low EI. The study conducted by S. Satija et.al. in the year 2003 on emotional intelligence and occupational stress also proves the result and hypothesis of the present study. While conducting the study, the researcher came across some differences between the scores of males and females. Though it was quite easy to distinguish between the scores on stress and EI in males but in females, the researcher found that the scores of both EI as well as on stress was high. The results also indicate that females have higher emotional intelligence than males.

The means indicate that EI of females ($M=124.47$) was considerably higher than EI of males ($M=117.47$). The study conducted by Scott E. Bryant et.al. in the year 2015 also show the similar result. They conducted the study on college students and as per their result the female students had higher emotional intelligence than males. Therefore, female students were able to handle stress more effectively than males.

Similarly, in the current study, the means of stress of males (16.48) and females (15.84) show that since females have more EI, they are able to handle stress in their lives in a better and effective way in comparison to males.

The outcome of the present study is acceptance of the hypothesis of the research which is also in concurrence with the results of studies by other researchers. It also correlates with previous researches proving that females are more emotionally intelligent than males.

Further researches may be needed to address the issues like whether EI and stress levels changes overtime or not. The study was foundational level research, for further research the sample should be large enough to represent the whole population and other relevant methodologies can also be used.

Implications of the present study on the basis of the findings are that suggestions can be made to include emotional intelligence (EI) as an intrinsic component for selection, placement and training. Also integrate emotional intelligence intervention techniques to help working professionals in coping and managing their stress levels. The fact that there is a difference in levels of emotional intelligence between males and females working professionals, male workers may need training and development more than female workers. Helping professionals in developing their EI holds promise to help them effectively manage and deal with their stress which may result in better performance at workplace. **Limitations** of the study are limited sample size and non-diversified sample population.

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