

Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress among Young Adults during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to explore the relationship of emotional intelligence and perceived stress among young adults during covid-19. Through online survey two questionnaires were distributed to group of young adults aged between 18 and 25 years (N=65 females and N=60 males). A total of 125 samples were selected from various colleges and working sectors of Kerala for the study. Quantitative approach was used along with Cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted and the sampling technique was purposive. Emotional Intelligence Self-Administered Tool (Sterrett, 2000) was used to assess the emotional intelligence among young adults and Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1994) was used to determine the perceived stress levels among young adults. Pearson Correlation and Independent sample t-test was incorporated to reach the findings. According to Pearson Correlation the results indicated a significant negative low correlation between emotional intelligence and perceived stress levels. Independent sample t-test was computed on gender and results were found to be rejecting the null hypothesis, females were found to be higher in perceived stress than males and it was found that emotional intelligence has no significant difference based on gender, therefore the hypothesis was accepted. Hence there is a need to take measures by the authorities to reduce the stress among female adult population.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence; Perceived Stress; COVID-19*

Pandemics are life experiences associated with confusion, ambiguity, and lack of control, each of which is known to cause stress, emotional distress, and internalising symptoms (anxiety and depression) from a psychological perspective. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has spread to 216 nations, regions, or territories since December 2019. On July 20th, the number of confirmed cases had risen to 14,348,858 and the death toll had risen to 603,691. The Covid-19 pandemic has posed multiple challenges to the world; everybody, from organisations to governments, societies, and individuals, must deal with a new and urgent danger, as well as a set of rules that restrict their daily operations and routine (WHO, 2020).

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Received: April 14, 2021; Revision Received: May 09, 2021; Accepted: May 25, 2021

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A prospective cross-sectional research on emotional intelligence and perceived stress among a group of young adults during covid-19 pandemic outbreak 2020 is the current study. Young adults are facing many stressful normative transformations (Arnett, 2000; Shanahan et al., 2020), including in their educational and professional advancement (e.g. major tests, entrance into the job market, financial stresses, and uncertainties), social and romantic relationships, and changes in their living environment (e.g. first-time living away from family). These normative shifts and stresses may be exacerbated by stressors and disturbances associated with covid-19 (e.g., shrinking job market and inability to socialise with friends), hence it is important to assess whether high emotional intelligence can help better handle perceived stress.

Emotional intelligence was defined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 as "a subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to track one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to differentiate among them, and to use this knowledge to direct one's thinking and behaviour" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to Dr. Daniel Goleman, the components of EI; self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skill can help one manage stress better. While self-awareness would help a person notice that he is becoming stressed, social skill should help him to be more effective in expressing what he is feeling (Baker & Waring Jr, 1999). There is growing evidence that suggests emotional abilities are related to one's health and well-being (Schutte et al., 2007).

Perceived stress associated with covid-19 is also likely to play a significant role in increased poorer mental health outcomes (Gallagher et al., 2020). Stress is the adaptation reaction of a person to internal or external threats (Lecic-Tosevski et al., 2011). Perceived stress represents the degree to which one views their lives as stressful by leveraging how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded their lives are perceived (Cohen et al., 1983). Perceived stress is the outcome of an individual's perception of a stressor as threatening or non-threatening, as well as one's own capacity to cope (e.g. one's perceived effectiveness or threat response resources) (Liu et al., 2020).

The Level of perceived stress might be connected to underlying emotional intelligence. There have been studies saying that significant correlation existed between emotional intelligence and perceived stress (Gupta et al., 2014; Sen et al., 2020). Talking about gender differences, 'females show higher rate on perceived stress than males' (di Fronso et al., 2020; Limcaoco et al., 2020). As well as, there are studies that showed no significant difference between male and female for emotional intelligence and perceived stress (Gupta et al., 2014). Also few studies have revealed stress level is increasing day by day during covid-19 pandemic (Dangi et al., 2020; Shanahan et al., 2020).

The objective of this study is to assess emotional intelligence and determine its relationship with perceived stress among young adults during covid-19, to evaluate current emotional state on the general young adult population with a web-based survey, which was considered a useful and fast method that could help us determine how much people are stressed due to covid-19. Thereby to add to the growing evidence for the necessity of incorporating emotional intelligence among young adults in order to improve their mental and emotional health to better handle with stress.

METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling methods are used in this cross-sectional survey design. The key variable targeted in this investigation is: Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress. The target population is: Young adults.

Objectives

1. To assess emotional intelligence and perceived stress among young adults during covid-19.
2. To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress among young adults.
3. To study the gender difference on perceived stress among young adults.
4. To study the gender difference on emotional intelligence among young adults.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There will be no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress.

Ho2: There will be no significant gender difference on perceived stress among young adults.

Ho3: There will be no significant gender difference on emotional intelligence among young adults.

Participants

A sample of 125 young adults (n=), 65 females and 60 males between the age group of 18 to 25 hailing from Kerala were selected based on the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the study. Purposive sampling technique was applied for collecting sample of 125 young adults which includes students from various colleges and working sectors of Kerala.

Tools used for the study

1. **Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1994)** The Perceived Stress Scale was developed by Sheldon Cohen in the year 1994. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the most commonly used psychological tool for assessing stress perception. A variety of direct questions about current levels of experienced stress are also included on the scale. The PSS questions inquire about emotions and thoughts from the previous month. The PSS is available in three version: the original 14-item scale (PSS-14), a 10-item scale (PSS-10), and a 4-item scale (PSS-4). A previous systematic review of the psychometric properties of three PSS instruments concluded that PSS-10 was superior to PsS-14 and PSS-4. In this study PSS-10 version is used. This scale has six items that are negatively stated and four items that are positively stated, and it measures how stressful a person's life is. Reliability is .85 for PSS and validity ranges from .52 - .76. PSS scores are calculated by reversing responses to the four positively listed items and then adding them up across the entire scale. The PSS has a range of score between 0 to 40. A higher score indicates more stress.
2. **Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment Tool (Sterrett, 2000)** Assessment of EI is based on a standardized, self-evaluating questionnaire-Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment Checklist patterned after the Manger's Pocket Guide to Emotional Quotient by Emily. A. Sterrett, 2001. It is divided into four interrelated domains which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Each of the four domains is evaluated separately in the questionnaire which is to say 5 questions are specific to each domain. The subjects were instructed to enter a rating for each question in accordance with the five-point Likert scale.

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These four aspects of emotional intelligence will range from a low of 5 to a high of 25. Any component where score is below 18 is the area which could be improved.

3. **Socio-demographic data sheet** The socio-demographic data sheet includes information such as name, age, and gender.

Procedure

The participants in this study were selected based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria. Informed consent was obtained from all the respondents before collecting the data. Two questionnaires regarding the emotional intelligence and perceived stress were administered to them along with the socio-demographic data sheet. The scale was administered to the participants through Google Forms. The respondents were given assurance based on the ethical guidelines of this study as well.

RESULTS

1. There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress among young adults during covid-19.
2. Females had higher perceived stress levels compared to males.
3. There is no significant gender difference on emotional intelligence among young adults.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of socio-demographic variables

Variable	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	65	52%
	Male	60	48%

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness, Relationship management and Perceived stress.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-awareness	17.72	3.10
Self-management	16.69	3.11
Social-awareness	17.96	3.21
Relationship management	17.48	2.68
Perceived stress	19.28	5.22

Table 3: Correlation between Emotional intelligence and Perceived stress

N=125 F=65, M=60	Emotional Intelligence	Perceived Stress
Emotional Intelligence		-.323**

Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4: Independent t-test of perceived stress among young adults based on gender.

Perceived Stress	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p-value
Females	65	20.59	5.41	.67	2.937	123	.004
Males	60	17.90	4.68	.60			

Table: 5 Independent t-test of emotional intelligence among young adults based on gender

Emotional Intelligence	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p-value
Females	65	71.05	9.74	1.20	1.435	123	.154
Males	60	68.55	9.92	1.28			

DISCUSSION

The table 1 shows the descriptive statistics socio-demographic variances. The gender of the sample contained both males and females' young adults from various colleges and working sectors that were 65 females and 60 males having 52% females and 48% males respectively. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of various subscales of emotional intelligence. The mean of 4 subscales of emotional intelligence is self-awareness 17.72, self-management 16.69, social-awareness 17.96, and relationship management 17.48. And the standard deviation of 4 subscales of emotional intelligence is self-awareness 3.10, self-management 3.11, social-awareness 3.21, and relationship management 2.68. From table 3, it is understood that there is a significant negative low correlation between emotional intelligence and perceived stress ($r = -.323$, $p < 0.05$). The significant negative correlation indicates that those with higher Emotional Intelligence have a lower level of Perceived Stress. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and we can say that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress. There have been studies revealed association between emotional intelligence and perceived stress (Sen et al., 2020)(Gupta et al., 2014)(Forushani & Besharat, 2011). From table 4, we can understand that there is a difference on Perceived stress based on gender. The obtained Sig. value was (2.937, $p < 0.05$) and scores on perceived stress among Females ($M = 20.59$, $SD = 5.41$) and Males ($M = 17.90$, $SD = 4.68$) indicating that females had higher perceived stress compared to males. Therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis. The findings of the study are supported by previous research, with females found to be high in perceived stress than males (di Fronso et al., 2020)(Limcaoco et al., 2020)(Anbumalar et al., 2017). However, in research done by Gupta et al., (2014) revealed no significant difference between males and females in their perceived stress levels. And from table 5, it is understood that there was no significant difference in the scores of emotional intelligences based on gender. Females ($M = 71.07$, $SD = 9.74$) and Males ($M = 68.55$, $SD = 9.92$). Statistically not significant at (1.435, $p > 0.05$) levels. Therefore, accepting the null hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

Since the major purpose of the study was to examine relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress levels during covid-19. Depending on the findings of the study, the following concluding notes were made:

- There was significant relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress among young adults during covid-19. It was observed significant negative low correlation between emotional intelligence and perceived stress ($r = -.323$, $p > 0.05$).
- The present study revealed that there was a difference among young adults with respect to their gender, based on their perceived stress. It was noted that females had higher perceived stress levels compared to males. Females ($M = 20.59$, $SD = 5.41$) and Males ($M = 17.90$, $SD = 4.68$).
- It was observed that there was no significant gender difference on emotional intelligence among young adults. It was statistically not significant were females ($M = 71.07$, $SD = 9.74$) and males ($M = 68.55$, $SD = 9.92$).

Implications

- According to the findings it was witnessed that females have higher perceived stress levels when compared to males. So, providing female young adults more psychological support and assurance can help them to overcome the stress during pandemic situations.

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- As per the result it is observed that emotional intelligence had significant influence on perceived stress level among young adults. Although there is ongoing debate as to whether Emotional Intelligence can be improved, some evidence exists to suggest that it can be enhanced (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003). If emotional intelligence skills can be developed then should lead, in turn, to better handle of perceived stress.

Limitations of the study

- As the sample was taken from a particular state it cannot be generalized to the whole population.
- Participants had to fill the questionnaire online. This also could have affected the concentration of participant resulting in inaccurate responses.
- The study was only based on young adults therefore perceived stress level among other individuals in other stages of the life cannot be taken into consideration.

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Acknowledgement

Thanking all the participants who took part in the study, my research guide, family and my friends for their constant and unwavering support and love. Lastly thanking God for guidance.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Neethu E. & Lokesh L. (2021). Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress among Young Adults during Covid-19. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 9*(2), 1119-1125. DIP:18.01.118.20210902, DOI:10.25215/0902.118