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Research Paper

How Does Emotional Intelligence Shape the Mental Health of University Students?

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping the mental health of every individual, influencing their ability to manage stress, navigate social challenges, and maintain psychological well-being. **Objective:** The main objective of this study is to investigate the role of emotional intelligence and its sub-dimensions in predicting the mental health of university students. **Material and Method:** The participants of the study comprised 180 university students from different universities across Haryana (India). The data were collected from the sample using self-reported measures such as the *Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale* and the *Mental Health Inventory*. The collected data was statistically analyzed using descriptive analysis and regression analysis on SPSS - 26 software. **Results and Discussion:** The outcomes of the study determined that the dimensions of emotional health including 'appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of other's emotions, regulation of own emotions, and utilization of emotions' along with the overall emotional intelligence are statistically found to predict the mental health of the university students. However, the dimension 'regulation of other's emotions' does not act as a significant predictor of mental health. **Conclusion:** The present study concluded that emotional intelligence is one of the important factors in our mental health. This evidence suggests that emotional intelligence is an integral part of our lives and should be encouraged at every stage of our lives.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Mental Health, University Students*

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has been defined as "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The concept of Emotional Intelligence has gained significant attention in psychological research, particularly for its impact on mental health. Emotional intelligence which is defined as the ability to identify, comprehend, manage, and successfully use emotions, is critical in deciding how people deal with obstacles in life and interact with others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). For university students, a demographic often facing considerable stress due to academic pressures, social dynamics, and life transitions,

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emotional intelligence has been posited as a protective factor that can enhance mental well-being and buffer against psychological distress (Schutte et al., 2007).

The scientific literature has recorded a positive relationship between high emotional intelligence and improved mental health status. For example, Extremera et al. (2007) revealed that students with a higher level of emotional intelligence had less depression, anxiety, and stress, which means emotional intelligence may act as a protective factor for the psychological well-being of students. Saklofske et al. (2012) affirmed that emotional intelligence enhances adaptive coping that is required for handling academic and interpersonal stress, typically at the university level.

Petrides et al. (2004) identified that both ability emotional intelligence as well as trait emotional intelligence are pertinent to subjective well-being and also stated that trait emotional intelligence is more relevant. The data points to higher levels of emotional intelligence acting as a buffer against the effects of negative emotions in students because such students see stress as a challenge, meaning they approach problem-solving differently from regular students. In addition, Fernandez-Berrocal et al. (2012) found existing evidence that emotional intelligence training interventions can increase the participants' emotional regulation thus helping boost students' well-being.

However, there is still a gap in knowing the behavioral processes of emotional intelligence that enhance the probed dimensions of mental health among university students. Ciarrochi et al. (2000) observed that though emotional intelligence seems to mediate the protective role against stress the precise mechanisms wherein it functions – whether through increased social support, improved resilience, or better coping style, are not yet very clear. Also, most of the previous research involves mainly Western samples, thus, many of the papers lack an examination of the cultural aspects that can impact the association between emotional intelligence and mental health in diverse groups of students.

Despite the considerable research interest in emotional intelligence, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that explore how specific components of emotional intelligence, such as emotional regulation and empathy, distinctly contribute to the mental health of university students. So, the present research aims to explore the influence of emotional intelligence along with its sub-variable on the mental health of the university students.

Objectives:

- To study whether emotional intelligence and its sub-variables predicts mental health of university students.

Hypotheses:

1. High level of appraisal of own emotions will promote mental health.
2. High level of appraisal of other's emotions will promote mental health.
3. High level of regulation of own emotions will promote mental health.
4. High level of regulation of other's emotions will promote mental health.
5. High level of utilization of emotions will promote mental health.
6. High level of overall emotional intelligence will promote mental health.

METHOD

Sample: To fulfill the purpose of the present study 180 university students were recruited. The present sample was selected from various districts of Haryana. Voluntary participation

was ensured. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used in order to collect the sample:

Inclusion criteria:

- Voluntary participation
- Not have severe psychological ailments
- Can read or write English and Hindi

Exclusion criteria:

- Not willing to participate
- Having severe psychological ailments
- Cannot read or write English and Hindi

Tools

Self-reported measures were used to collect the data from the sample. A Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale was given by Davies et al. (2010) which was used to assess the emotional intelligence of the participants. The scale comprises ten items that help to evaluate *'Appraisal of own emotions, Appraisal of other's emotions, Regulation of own emotions, Regulation of other's emotions, and Utilization of emotions'* along with overall emotional intelligence. The Mental Health Inventory developed by Veit and Ware (1983) comprises 18 items. This inventory helps in assessing the level of *'anxiety, depression, behavioral control, and positive affect'* of an individual. The inventory further can evaluate the overall mental health. Both tools possess good internal consistency.

Statistical Analysis

After collecting the data from the sample, the obtained data was compiled and analyzed in order to prepare the results. For this purpose, descriptive analyses, including mean, standard deviation (SD), and regression analysis were computed using IBM SPSS - 26. The regression analysis was computed to test whether the independent variables are predicting the dependent variables. The analyses of the results are explained in the results and discussion section.

Ethical considerations

When conducting this research, various ethical concerns were considered to ensure that high ethical standards were fulfilled. After being a part of the research, informed consent was given to all the participants which covered thorough information about the objectives, procedures, and also the potential risks of the study. Participants were assured about the confidentiality of their data, which was later protected with the help of a password-protected system. Sufficient efforts were made to reduce the harm as well as to provide additional support services to the participants. Participants were also aware of their right that they can withdraw themselves from the study at any moment without facing any consequences. After that, the research process was started, assuring the participants that the study aimed to provide practical insights while reducing risks and enhancing their general well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Statistical Packages of Social Sciences (SPSS - 26) is used to evaluate the findings. Descriptive analysis and regression analysis are used to analyze the data. Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics including mean, standard error, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	*Mean*	*SEM*	*SD*	*Skewness*	*Kurtosis*
1	7.14	.141	1.888	-.996	.362
2	7.48	.140	1.874	-1.008	1.014
3	6.97	.124	1.664	-.829	.397
4	7.30	.116	1.560	-.921	1.134
5	7.72	.120	1.611	-1.249	1.889
6	36.61	.498	6.683	-1.467	2.356
7	68.85	.863	11.583	.082	.572

Note: *'1 - Appraisal of own emotions, 2 - Appraisal of other's emotions, 3 - Regulation of own emotions, 4 - Regulation of other's emotions, 5 - Utilization of emotions, 6 - Overall emotional intelligence, 7 - Mental Health'*

The mean scores of participants on the dimension of appraisal of own emotions is 7.14 (SEM = .141) with an SD of 1.888 whereas, the mean scores of the participants on the dimension of appraisal of other's emotions is 7.48 (SEM = 1.140) with an SD of 1.874. The mean score of the participants on the dimension of regulation of own emotions is 6.97 (SEM = .124) with an SD of 1.664, whereas, the mean score of the participants on the dimension of regulation of other's emotions is 7.30 (SEM = .116) with an SD of 1.560. The mean score of the participants on the last dimension i.e., utilization of emotions is 7.72 (SEM = .120) with an SD of 1.611.

The mean score of the participants on the overall emotional intelligence is 36.61 (SEM = .498) with an SD of 6.683 whereas, the mean score of the participants on the variable of mental health is 68.85 (SEM = .863) with an SD of 11.583. Table 2 represents the regression analysis of emotional intelligence along with its sub-variables in predicting the mental health of university students.

Table 2: Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Health

Variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	β	F	Sig.
1	.302	.091	.086	.302	17.882	.000
2	.162	.026	.021	.162	4.789	.030
3	.293	.086	.081	.293	16.755	.000
4	.109	.012	.006	.109	2.122	.147
5	.207	.043	.037	.207	7.967	.005
6	.279	.078	.073	.279	15.031	.000

Note: *'β = Standardized Coefficient, 1 - Appraisal of own emotions, 2 - Appraisal of other's emotions, 3 - Regulation of own emotions, 4 - Regulation of other's emotions, 5 - Utilization of emotions, and 6 - Overall emotional intelligence'*

Regression analysis depicts that appraisal of own emotions (R = .302, F = 17.882) explains approximately 9.1% of the variance in mental health which is significant at p <. 001. Further, for each unit change in 'appraisal of own emotions' there will be a corresponding .302 unit increase in mental health. So, our first hypothesis stating *'high level of appraisal of own emotions will promote mental health'* is accepted. This indicates that the dimension 'appraisal of own emotions' significantly predicts the mental health of the participants.

The dimension appraisal of other's emotions (R = .162, F = 4.789) explains approximately 2.6% of the variance in mental health which is significant at p <. 05. Further, for each unit

change in 'appraisal of other's emotions' there will be a corresponding .162 unit increase in mental health.

So, our second hypothesis stating that *'high level of appraisal of other's emotions will promote mental health'* is accepted. This indicates that the dimension 'appraisal of other's emotions' significantly predicts the mental health of the participants.

The dimension regulation of own emotions (R = .293, F = 16.755) explains approximately 8.6% change in the variance in mental health which is significant at p <. 001. Further, for one unit change in the 'regulation of own emotions' there will be a corresponding .293 unit change in mental health. So, our third hypothesis stating *'high level of regulation of own emotions will promote mental health'* is also accepted. This indicates that the dimension 'regulation of own emotions' significantly predicts the mental health of the participants.

The dimension regulation of other's emotions (R = .109, F = 2.122) explains approximately 1.2% change in the variance in mental health which is significant at p = .178, which is lesser than the required value of significance. So, our fourth hypothesis stating *'high level of regulation of other's emotions will promote mental health'* is rejected. This indicates that the dimension 'regulation of other's emotions' does not significantly predict the mental health of the participants.

The dimension utilization of emotions (R = .207, F = 7.967) explains approximately 4.3% variance in mental health which is significant at p<.005. Further, for each unit change in the 'utilization of emotions' there will be a corresponding .207 unit change in mental health. So, our fifth hypothesis stating *'high level of utilization of emotions will promote mental health'* is accepted. This indicates that the dimension 'utilization of emotions' significantly predicts the mental health of the participants.

Further, overall emotional intelligence (R = .279, F = 15.031) explains approximately 7.8% change in mental health which is significant at p<.001. Further, for one unit change in the 'overall emotional intelligence' there will be a corresponding .279 unit change in mental health. So, our last hypothesis stating *'high level of overall emotional intelligence will promote mental health'* is also accepted. This indicates that the dimension 'overall emotional intelligence' significantly predicts the mental health of the participants.

These results are in line with the previous research which also states a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health (Shabani et al., 2010). Zeidner and Mathews (2016) also deduced that mental health is positively associated with well-being and is negatively associated with distress. Further, social support was found to mediate the relationship. Many meta-analyses and extensive reviews have also confirmed the same (Schutte et al., 2007; Martins et al., 2010; Domínguez-García & Fernández-Berrocal, 2018). Our results are also supported by Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera (2016) who also reported a negative association of emotional intelligence with depression and a positive association with well-being. Further, Sánchez-Alvarez et al. (2016) in their meta-analysis also found a positive association between emotional intelligence and subjective well-being. People with better levels of emotional regulation abilities reported more pleasant relationships and perceived parental support, as well as fewer negative encounters with peers (Lopes et al., 2003). Moeller et al. (2020) also stated that emotional intelligence acts as a protective factor against mental health problems including stress, depression, and anxiety.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper aims to explore whether an increased level of emotional intelligence is conducive to positive mental health in the academic environment. Our research findings concluded that all of our research hypotheses were accepted excluding the one that affirmed the influence of the dimension 'regulation of other's emotions' on mental health. Yet, overall research concluded that overall emotional intelligence predicts the mental health of university students. These findings imply that emotional intelligence is one of the crucial factors in our mental health. Mental health practitioners and policymakers in academic settings should consider emotional intelligence while addressing mental health as it is a necessary component of our overall mental health that cannot be ignored. These findings suggested that emotional intelligence is an integral part of our lives and should be encouraged at every stage of our lives.

Limitations and Future Directions

Along with the insightful implications this research also has some shortcomings that cannot be ignored and should be overcome in the upcoming research that will be conducted in the future. First, the sample used in this research is small to generalize the findings. Furthermore, the research has taken a cross-sectional approach, leaving a gap in longitudinal studies that could capture the long-term effects of emotional intelligence development on mental health trajectories. Addressing these gaps is crucial for designing effective emotional intelligence-based interventions that are culturally sensitive and targeted to the unique stressors faced by university students. Further research should be conducted on different social strata using other psychosocial variables.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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