



The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress

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Introduction

Emotional intelligence is defined by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) as the set of abilities that accounts for how people's emotional reports vary in their accuracy and how the more accurate understanding of emotion leads to better problem solving in an individual's emotional life. More formally, it is referred to as the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). When considering the fundamental presence of emotion in response to stressful situations, and the fundamental role stress plays in all our experiences, the innovative development of emotional intelligence as a practical tool becomes more intriguing.

Regardless of the angle from which you approach emotional intelligence, it is undoubtedly self-benefitting for the individual and their interactions with the world, including their own personal consciousness. Fernandez-Berrocal, Alciade, and Extremera (2007) found that self-reported emotional intelligence was related to emotional adjustment. Adolescents who reported a higher ability to discriminate clearly among feelings and to regulate emotional states showed less anxiety and depression, independent of the effects of self-esteem and thought suppression (experienced when an individual does not properly attend to their moods and feelings). Such findings suggest that emotional intelligence can serve as a homeopathic preventative measure for both anxiety and depression among transitioning college students.

Rude and McCarthy (2003) ran a similar study in which they found that depressed participants scored significantly higher on thought suppression than non-depressed participants. In addition to this, depressed participants scored significantly lower on the paying attention to their moods, as well as clarity and lack of confusion about their feelings than non-depressed participants. Considering that the overall awareness of genuine emotion is more accurate among non-depressed individuals, it is likely that higher levels of emotional intelligence would improve their emotional clarity and decrease their vulnerabilities to fall into depression. The relevance of these results each offer psychiatric background to the potential hazardous outcomes of poor emotional regulation for young adults.

Hypothesis

Based upon the reviewed literature, the topic of interest for this experiment involved emotional intelligence and its benefits towards psychological responses and behavioral outcomes to stress and coping tactics. It is hypothesized that emotional intelligence speaks for self-awareness and regulation regarding emotional responses to external stimuli. Therefore, an elevated level of this kind of intelligence may result in a decrease in impulsivity and an increase in multi-weighted responses to emotional experiences.

Consequently, it was hypothesized that self-assessed levels of emotional intelligence, assessed through subscale scores of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, will be negatively correlated with perceived stress of hypothetical life events scores.

Methods

Participants

- 40 undergraduates participated
- Recruited through the on-line subject pool system (Sona).

Measures

- Demographics
- Life Events Scale for Students (LESS)
 - Scored by absolute values and overall means
- Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS)
 - Select items called for reverse scoring
 - Scored by sums of subscales Attention, Clarity and Repair as well as Total sum

Procedures

Completed through the Emmanuel College's online Sona System, participants were presented with a consent form following by demographic information.

Participants were then asked to complete the LESS to assess their perceived stress followed by the TMMS to assess their emotional intelligence. Students were thanked after the completion of the study and anonymity of responses was assured.

Results

One-tailed Pearson's r correlations were conducted for all variables. Results revealed no negative correlations between LESS and TMMS subscale Attention ($r(39) = -.105, p = .260$). Similar results were also found between LESS and TMMS subscales Clarity ($r(39) = -.174, p = .142$) and Repair ($r(39) = -.157, p = .167$). No correlation between LESS and TMMS Total scores was found ($r(39) = -.197, p = .112$).

Overall, no scientifically significant correlations were found among all five variables (see table 1).

Table 1:

	Attention (TMMS)	Clarity (TMMS)	Repair (TMMS)	Total (TMMS)	LESS
LESS	-.099	-.177	-.145	-.192	
Attention (TMMS)		.087	.346*	.742	
Clarity (TMMS)			.414**	.685**	
Repair (TMMS)				.710**	
Total (TMMS)					
* .05					
** .01					

Reliability tests were run for each of our measures and subscales. The modified version of the Life Events Scale for Students (Clements & Turpin, 1996) was used to assess hypothetical perceived stress responses to various events was a reliable measure (Cronbach's alpha = .814). Overall, the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey and Palfai's, 1995) was a reliable measure of emotional attention, clarity and management (Cronbach's alpha = .853). Each individual TMMS subscale, Attention (Cronbach's alpha = .852); Clarity (Cronbach's alpha = .830), and Reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .769) also showed similar reliability scores.

Conclusion

The hypothesis that the total scores of perceived emotional intelligence will negatively correlate with the means of perceived stress was not supported. Only a general pattern in the direction of a negative relationship was exhibited among all five variables. However, considering the studies previously cited have clearly demonstrated the importance of emotional intelligence in one's personal, social, and professional life, perhaps this specific genre of intelligence is not receiving the proper institutional attention it deserves.

The (2006) Bay and McKeage study yielded similar results, indicating that the development of emotional intelligence among students and academic curriculums in general must be taken. However, Bay and McKeage also addressed the frequency and use of emotional intelligence during decision-making and problem-solving. It is suggested that EI scores are not actually indicative of the use of this intelligence. Therefore, while the assessment may be accurate, numbers may not accurately represent how often an individual utilizes those skills. Overall, it seems the implementation of emotional intelligence development classes are necessary to introduce to students the proper way of maturing these intellectual abilities.

Future studies may aim to recruit a greater number of undergraduate students to yield more significant results. Additional variables such as pre- and post- EI development training may also provide valuable insight into the value of such previously suggested implementations.

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