



Self-Esteem Mediates the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Life Satisfaction in Iranian Students

Fatemeh Zarei¹, Isa Akbarzadeh¹, Ahmad Khosravi^{2*}

¹ Student Research Committee, School of Public Health, Shahroud University of Medical Sciences, Shahroud, Iran.

² Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, Shahroud University of Medical Sciences, Shahroud, Iran.

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Abstract

Background: It is demonstrated that students with better emotional intelligence (EI) had better self-esteem. The aim of study was to assess the role of self-esteem in the relationship of EI and LS.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was done on 403 students of Shahroud university of medical sciences (northeast of Iran). In this study we used Schering emotional intelligence questionnaire and Diener satisfaction questionnaire and Cooper Smith self-esteem questionnaire. Mediation analyzes was done to assess the role of SE in the relationship of EI and LS.

Results: About 82% of students had high emotional intelligence level. Comparison of the mean scores of EI, SE and LS by sex showed that there was no significant difference between gender means. The mean score of LS in the groups with high and moderate levels of EI score showed a significant difference between the life satisfaction score between two groups. The results of the mediation analysis showed that SE has a mediatorial role in the relationship between EI and LS, as 98% of the effect of emotional intelligence relationship is through mediating role of self-esteem.

Conclusions: Self-esteem showed as an important mediator in the relationship of EI and LS. Regarding this valuable finding, better EI which results in better self-esteem and life satisfaction and these three items could separately results in a series of good results.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Life satisfaction, Emotional intelligence

*Corresponding to: A Khosravi, Email: khosravi2000us@yahoo.com

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large number of studies, and only some of them have found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction.⁶ In recent years, some studies have examined the effects of emotional intelligence on individual's health status.⁷

According to some researchers,⁸ both self-esteem and life satisfaction reflect a view on general status of a person, but the criteria for these assessments are different; self-esteem reflects a person's view of himself, while life satisfaction includes an overall assessment of life including education, family, friends, and himself.⁹ Self-esteem is referred to as an individual's assessment of his characteristics, as well as the sense of value and respect that one considers for himself.^{10,11} Few studies have been conducted to evaluate relationship between life satisfaction and self-esteem.^{8,12}

Students need to develop values and attitudes that help guide and transfer the application of pure knowledge to real life challenges and personal, social, scientific and professional development scenarios.^{13,14} Those skills that have been upgraded to higher education for decades, although they are still necessary, are no longer sufficient.¹⁵ For example, aspects such as improving intellectual-scientific capacity based on deductive and inference reasoning and classical theories of scientific intelligence is essential for students; but in recent decades, the approach has focused on more precise educating subjects such as social and emotional abilities,¹⁶ critical thinking, creativity and improvement of personal initiative, in order to take advantage of these abilities throughout student's lives.^{17,18}

These findings reinforce the importance of emotional intelligence and self-esteem in students, especially in medical students who are part of the future of clinical and health care in the country.

Materials and Methods

In this study, 403 medical students among the students who were studying at Shahroud university of medical sciences, Shahroud (Northeast of Iran) in 2018 were selected by multi-stage random sampling method. Regarding the number of semesters studying in each faculty, according to the population of each faculty, 25% of studying students in each faculty were randomly selected using classes as clusters and all students in that classes were be questioned. The protocol of the study was approved at the Shahroud university of medical sciences, IR.SHMU.REC.1396.68.

In this study, Schering emotional intelligence questionnaire and Diener et al. satisfaction questionnaire and Cooper Smith

Introduction

Life satisfaction is a measure of well-being that measures the extent of correlation between dream and real life¹ and is defined as a general judgment of a person's life, this judgment is unique and often based on the standards of the person himself and the degree to which the standards have been reached. People who are able to reduce the gap between the current situation and their ideal conditions often have better life satisfaction.² The overall pleasure that a person feels of his/her life is another definition of life satisfaction.³

Emotional intelligence is defined as a facet of social intelligence, including the ability to monitor one's self feelings and others, distinguishing between these two and using this information to guide their thinking and actions.⁴ People with high emotional intelligence are able to understand, use and manage their feelings in ways that benefit themselves and others.⁵ Whether is there a meaningful relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, was investigated in

self-esteem questionnaire were used. The Schering emotional intelligence questionnaire (SEIQ) has 33 questions and evaluates five components of emotional intelligence that include self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills. The highest score in this questionnaire is 165 and the lowest score is 33. The Persian version of this questionnaire was translated and validated by Mansouri, so that the internal consistency of this scale was reported to be 0.85 using Cronbach's alpha.¹⁹

The satisfaction with life scale satisfaction questionnaire (SWLS) consists of 5 items, and each item has 5 options, which are scored from one (completely disagree) to five (totally agree). The lowest score in this test is 5 and the highest limit is 25 points. This questionnaire has been validated in Iranian studies. The correlation between questions with test retest analysis was 0.69 and the internal consistency of this questionnaire was 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha in sample of Iranian students. The reliability of this scale in a group of infertile women was acceptable (alpha = 0.88).^{20,21}

Cooper Smith's self-esteem questionnaire contains 58 questions; the answers are yes (similar to me) and no (unlike me). This questionnaire assesses general self-esteem, family self-esteem, social self-esteem and occupational / academic self-esteem. The level of self-esteem is divided into three categories: weak, moderate, strong. Eight of the questions in this questionnaire are lie detector and if a person earns a score of more than 4, it indicates low credibility. The reliability coefficients of Iranian version of this inventory for girls and boys were 0.9 and 0.93, respectively.²²

The questionnaire was completed by students in self-administrated mode and after explaining the goals of the study. Also, the subjects of research, how to perform and the confidentiality of information were justified and all of them were joined to study by will.

We used a four-stage hierarchical regression analysis method using the SPSS regression analysis Macro program of PROCESS procedure. Bootstrapping technique was applied to test the indirect effect of the self-esteem. The quantitative

variables were presented using mean and standard deviation and qualitative variables presented by frequency and percent. The significance level was set at .05 for all tests.²³

Results

In this study, 403 medical students with an average age of 21.4 years and a standard deviation of 3.9 years, including 160 boys (39.7%) and 243 female students (60.3%) were studied. Demographic characteristics of students are presented in table 1.

In this study, the status of emotional intelligence in students showed that 331 (82.2%) had high emotional intelligence and 72 (17.9%) had moderate emotional intelligence level. Univariate analysis showed that there was not a significant difference between emotional intelligence status according to gender ($P = 0.49$). Comparison of the mean scores of emotional intelligence, self-esteem and life satisfaction by sex showed that there was no significant difference between gender means (table 1).

The mean score of life satisfaction in the group with high emotional intelligence score was 16.4 ± 7.3 and in the group with moderate level of emotional intelligence was 14.1 ± 9.9 , which showed a significant difference between the life satisfaction score between two groups. Also, the mean score of self-esteem in the group with high and moderate emotional intelligence score was 37.8 ± 5.8 and 29.2 ± 6.6 , respectively, and the difference between the two groups was significant. The results of the mediation analysis in table 2 showed that self-esteem has a mediatorial role in the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, as 98% of the effect of emotional intelligence relationship is through mediating role of self-esteem, and emotional intelligence status does not directly affect the mean score of life satisfaction. The results of this table showed that by one unit increasing in self-esteem score, people with high emotional intelligence in comparison with people with moderate emotional intelligence, have an average 2.4 score higher in life satisfaction. The average effect of the high level of emotional intelligence on the life satisfaction that operates through the self-esteem is 2.14.

Table 1. Comparison of means of life satisfaction, emotional intelligence and self-esteem in term of sex

Variables	Male (n = 160)		Female (n = 243)		Test	Pvalue
	(Mean \pm SD)	No (%)	(Mean \pm SD)	No (%)		
Age	21.4 \pm 4.3	--	21.4 \pm 3.6	--	--	--
Residency (nonnative)	--	111 (69.4)	160 (65.8)	--	0.54	0.46
Marital status	--	--	--	--	--	--
--Single	--	147 (91.9)	204 (84.0)	--	5.04	0.02
--Married	--	13 (8.1)	39 (16.0)	--	--	--
Life satisfaction	15.6 \pm 4.2	--	16.5 \pm 3.5	--	-1.79	0.07
Emotional intelligence	113.9 \pm 14.3	--	113.3 \pm 13.8	--	0.42	0.67
Self-esteem	35.4 \pm 6.4	--	37.0 \pm 6.5	--	-2.04	0.04

Table 2. Estimated effects and 95% confidence interval for mediation model between EQ and Life satisfaction in Iranian students

Model pathway	Estimated effect	95%CI	Pvalue
Total effect (EQ-LS)	2.18	1.01-3.35	<0.001
Direct effects (EQ-LS)	0.04	-1.20 - 1.27	0.96
Indirect effects (EQ-SE-LS)	2.14	1.33-3.07	---

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the role of self-esteem on the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction in a sample group of Iranian college students. According to analysis done in this study, there was a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction; which has been proved in other recent studies.^{24,25} Also it is demonstrated that students with higher emotional intelligence had greater self-esteem scores. This finding was supported with other studies.^{26,27}

We found emotional intelligence had not a direct relation with life satisfaction. Some papers²⁸ have suggested there might be a mediating factor which is influencing this relationship. In this study we have proven crucial role of self-esteem mediating the relationship of emotional intelligence with life satisfaction. In two other studies the mediating role of self-esteem were studied.^{29,30}

This finding means individuals with higher control and awareness of their feelings and emotions can show more self-esteem; which makes them have greater satisfaction with their life. According to this model, by improving ones emotional recognition and feelings managing, a precious result seems to be achieved: greater self-esteem, which was also affecting a number of other important factors such as relationships, decreased depression and anxiety,^{31,32} decreased risk of suicide³³ and so on. And of course most important result of higher self-esteem is life satisfaction, which was shown in this study. Again greater life satisfaction brings lots of benefits and positive and good influences. It was shown in a study²⁹ that greater self-esteem results in receiving more social support from others and social support also has a positive influence on life satisfaction.

Although the general ideas of society suggest that males are emotionally more stable and self-controlled than females (“Boys Don’t Cry”) or even some claim that females have more awareness of their feelings and have more power on it, but there were no gender differences on overall score of emotional intelligence in this study. This finding was in accordance with some of the previous studies.^{34,35} But we have evidence in other studies that emotional intelligence is significantly higher in female sex,^{36,37} and also emotional intelligence higher in male sex.^{38,39} This controversy might be due to variation in samples and populations. Other possible factor could be measuring instruments. For instance, in some studies those used Schutte emotional intelligence scale, females showed greater emotional intelligence scores than men; and in some studies which used Trait emotional intelligence questionnaire, males showed stronger in emotional intelligence factors. Given that there is a disagreement between studies on the subject of gender differences on emotional intelligence it seems further studies might be worthy.

This study designed to illustrate the emotional intelligence and life satisfaction relation with mediating role of self-esteem in Iranian college students. Regarding the psychological importance of emotional intelligence, life satisfaction and self-esteem, the results of this study can help authorities and health care providers to understand the crucial roles and interactions

between these three factors, and to help them, as a guidance, to make decisions on improving emotional intelligence which results in better self-esteem and the valuable achievement of life satisfaction and also these three items could separately results in a series of good results.

Some of notable limitations of this study are including: First of all, design of this study was cross-sectional and could not show a causation relation. To get more valuable results on mediating role of self-esteem on relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, other longitudinal studies is required. Second, the population of this study was medical sciences students and because of that the result of this study could not be generalized to whole community. Third, the data collecting method in this study (self-report) could make some problems into internal validity such as self-report bias. The strengths of this study also are mentioned as: First, the well-designed method of random sampling from whole population (students) which minimizes random bias. Second, the precise data collecting exactly as designed. Third, mediation analysis which was performed in this study and showed the main result of this study.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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