



Emotional Intelligence as a Protective Factor Against Mental Health and Way to Happiness

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to explain how emotional intelligence (EI) works as a protective factor against mental health outcomes, thereby increasing happiness in life. This chapter presents a review based on numerous studies that support the above speculation. Lastly, some recommendations suggested that training in EI skills is an effective tool to fight against adversity. If people use EI skills before the onset of any challenges, it may protect them against adverse mental health outcomes by increasing happiness. The key objective of mental and public health research is to find ways to lessen negative, stressful situations' lasting mental health impact and increase happiness. Thus, the current chapter suggests that building emotional intelligence skills may be crucial to such efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is considered a continuum with two sides: positive and adaptive functioning on one end and negative and impaired functioning on the other end. The ability to adapt to change, deal with adversity, and successfully bring about productive change is on the positive side of the mental health continuum. However, on the other end, conditions characterized by shifts in or anomalies of mood, thinking, or behavior (Alexander, Larosa, & Alexander, 2009) are on the negative continuum (Alexander, Larosa, & Alexander, 2009). The Scottish Public Mental Health Alliance, 2002, as cited in Creek and Lougher (2008), defined mental health as a positive resource enabling an individual not only to cope with life's demanding situations but also to recognize one's self-worth, to have empathy, the ability to express emotions, to form and uphold healthy relationships, and to communicate as essential characteristics of an individual.

Mental health is inextricably related to our emotions. Emotions might be jarring sometimes. If we have ever gone through a period of intense terror, rage, or despair, we are aware of how uncomfortable and depleting these emotions can be. Feelings are linked to our behaviors, thoughts, and interactions with our

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selves and others, and individuals are also impacted by their weaker emotions. Numerous symptoms of mental illness are linked with emotional problems, such as major depressive disorder, borderline personality disorder, and substance abuse disorders. Many depressed people suffer intense melancholy. People who are bipolar maniacs could be angry or excited. Any deficiency in the capacity to control and comprehend emotional information is the most conspicuous feature in patients with mental disorders. However, patients with different mental health issues vary in reflecting specific emotional deficits. It appears that emotional deficits are a general phenomenon in mental illness. At the same time, thinking about emotional intelligence and mental health issues is not the first thing that comes to mind. The connection between emotional intelligence and mental health is crucial to one's overall wellbeing. It frequently determines whether or not people can enjoy a rich and fulfilling life experience.

Everyone's life is occupied with emotional experiences and the nature of the feelings one comes across each day. These emotional experiences determine the standard of one's life, and happiness in life depends upon them. A balanced mental state can be maintained with the aid of emotional intelligence (EI). The probability of mental illness is more significant in people with low emotional intelligence. However, emotional quotient (EQ) is not a natural trait. One can hone this ability to support one's mental wellness by learning. Emotional intelligence requires the capacity to identify and effectively respond to the emotional states of oneself and others. Given that emotional intelligence aids in a person's ability to better understand possible stressors, it makes sense that it has an immunizing effect against mental health illnesses. This can lessen unpleasant hyper-arousal and help people with anxiety more quickly return to a calmer state by making the environment seem less dangerous. The inoculating effect of EI against mental illness is that it helps a person understand potential stressors better. For example, in cases of anxiety, it may help people with anxiety feel less threatened by the outside world, reducing their unpleasant hyper-arousal and making it easier for them to return to a calmer state of being.

EI as a protective factor against mental health

"Experience is not what happens to you—it's how you interpret what happens to you."

Aldous Huxley

Research has suggested that higher EI is associated with improved physical and mental health (Martins *et al.*, 2010). People with a higher EQ can better manage interpersonal interactions and deal with challenging circumstances. The ability to navigate difficult situations without feeling overwhelmed or upset is a skill that is linked with improved mental wellbeing (Augustolenda *et al.*, 2006; Gilaninia *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2009; Kaur, 2019). For example, a cross-sectional study by Nguyen and Ngoc Quynh (2022) on Central Vietnam's 1,593 enrolled adolescents demonstrated that high rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and lifelong suicidal thoughts were present among students. Intervention in emotional regulation was given, and it was discovered that EI emerged as a protective factor against mental health issues in Vietnamese teenage populations. Therefore, by tackling EI through early intervention and prevention programs or guidance, the mental health of adolescents in Vietnam may be improved.

In support of the notion that EI may serve as a protective factor for mental health, recent studies have explored the benefits of EI during the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher EI was linked to the lower intensity of negative emotions experienced during a week of lockdown (Moroń & Biolik-Moroń, 2021), such as decreased depression, stress, and anxiety in frontline nurses (Sun *et al.*, 2020), the use of effective coping strategies for handling government-mandated preventative restrictions (Prentice *et al.*, 2020), and higher levels of social support (Zysberg & Zisberg, 2020). Thus, the ability to have emotional intelligence is related to enhancing life longevity, satisfaction, and success (Field & Kohlbert, 2006; Pellitteri *et al.*, 2006).

In another study (Auerbach *et al.*, 2016; Castillo *et al.*, 2013; Martins *et al.*, 2010; Moeller *et al.*, 2020), the underlying mechanism between EI and mental health was understood in adolescents, indicating that prevention and intervention programs based on the regulation of emotional skills may help reduce

perceived rejection in adolescents and promote their wellbeing. A wealth of data demonstrates that high EI is linked to a range of positive mental health outcomes reflected in improved social relationships, low risks for suicidal behavior, including ideation attempts (Dominguez-Garcia & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2018), and stress and hardship adaptability markers.

The reason why EI acts as a protective factor against mental health illness can be understood based on the availability of psychosocial resources and adequate processing of stress and violence. Since high EI individuals can understand, express, and use their emotions appropriately in their thinking and practice, which protects them against social damages (i.e., through social support), indicating access to psychosocial resources (Mavroveli *et al.*, 2007; Zeidner *et al.*, 2012), additionally, when people evaluate violence as a challenge rather than a threat, they designate resourceful psychosocial processes (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2012; Keefer *et al.*, 2018; Schneider *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, emotional intelligence helps to self-regulate during emotionally charged situations, thus preventing problems due to impulsivity or extreme reactions, which usually have detrimental effects on each person. High emotional intelligence is crucial to sustaining healthy, positive, and good mental health. It increases one's ability to handle a variety of social circumstances and conflicts and facilitates resilience, motivation, empathy, reasoning, stress management, and communication skills. EI equips people to control their emotions constructively and build good connections. It enhances a person's sense of belonging, improving their capacity to comprehend their emotions, control and connect with others, and feel more comfortable and accepted, resulting in an overall sense of wellbeing.

EI as a Way to Happiness

People with higher emotional intelligence tend to be happier in life; they are more able to control their emotions, have an understanding of the external and internal circumstances that lead them to manage their negative emotions, and have the ability to understand a variety of facets of successful adaptation, from social interactions to affective functioning, contentment, and the deep joy of pleasant

mental and emotional states (Veenhoven, 2013). For instance, a study by Koshla and Dokania (2010) titled 'Does happiness promote emotional intelligence'? On 208 participants between 18 and 24 years old at Delhi University revealed a significant gender difference between males and females concerning EI and also demonstrated that happy individuals (including both men and women) had more EI than unhappy EI individuals.

According to Mayer *et al.*, individuals with excellent trait EI are better at controlling their emotions and, as a result, at managing pressures that are critical to pleasure. Emotional intelligence accounts for more than half of the variance in happiness, and empirical data suggests that those with a higher trait EI are happier than those with a lower trait EI. Because happiness is linked to hopefulness and optimism, people with higher EI traits thrive more because they are better at managing relationships and circumstances. These situations explain why those with high trait EI do better in satisfaction and enjoyment than those with low trait EI (who frequently struggle to navigate others and their emotions during stressful events). For example, Ghahramani and his colleagues (2019) reported that emotional intelligence predicted happiness in medical students, stating that people with higher emotional intelligence are healthier and happier; however, this observation was found in extroverts only.

Similarly, Furnham and Petrides (2003) have revealed a high positive correlation between trait EI and happiness. Further, several studies have reported similar findings. The reason behind the observation is that happy people tend to have better non-verbal cue recognition skills, such as the ability to read facial expressions and identify and describe emotions, that make them more emotionally intelligent (Bustamante *et al.*, 2020; Kugbey *et al.*, 2018; Kosroshahi *et al.*, 2013; Shaikh & Gilmour, 2019).

In support of this notion, studies on happiness and emotional intelligence have demonstrated that they are positively correlated. The results suggest that personality traits play a part in determining the link between emotional intelligence and happiness (Ramesh, 2020). A study by Ghahramani, Jahromi, Sepehrpoor, *et al.* (2019) exhibited that happiness was determined by emotional intelligence in

medical students. Extroverted students reflected more EI skills and reported themselves as healthier and happier than introverted students. Other findings demonstrated that people with higher emotional intelligence had greater happiness and flourishing.

Similarly, a study conducted by Sasanpour *et al.* (2012) demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence, happiness, and mental health in medical sciences students at Isfahan University. Students with high emotional intelligence reported greater happiness and mental health. Likewise, Reza Shami *et al.* (2017) reported a significant reverse relationship between teachers' mental health and emotional intelligence and their burnout. The results revealed that teachers with high emotional intelligence have less stress and mental pressure and better intrarelations, indicating good mental health.

People with emotional intelligence are happier than those who are not emotionally intelligent, as they can control their emotions more. First, it is vital to understand how emotions and feelings are expressed. That means being wholly attentive and aware of what is happening inside an individual so that their actions match their emotions. However, focusing on the present is essential, which will automatically pursue the present. People can manage their emotions in social situations and, at the same time, react positively to the emotional needs of others who want attention and connection. They can cheer up or calm down others, whatever the context. It is an easy transition to a happy mindset.

Additionally, happiness is characterized by three fundamental elements: a pleasant feeling, a sense of fulfillment, and a negligible negative feeling. According to Anderson, cheerful people tend to have a good outlook on life and the world around them. They do not dwell on failure; they take advantage of opportunities wisely and approach events optimistically. Because of this, joyful people who feel more positive emotions and are happier, as a result, feel better about themselves and their lives, leading to a higher quality of life (Anderson & Burckhardt, 1999).

Further, emotionally intelligent people endeavor to improve the quality of their relationships, develop leadership skills, and gain the respect and love of

others, all of which lead to higher personal happiness (Kong, Gong, Sajjad, Yang, & Zhao, 2019). They demonstrated that high emotional intelligence may promote wellbeing if received through social support. The scientific literature emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence in determining individual happiness. Numerous studies have linked emotional intelligence and other psychological constructs such as happiness, subjective wellbeing, high positive and low negative affect, life satisfaction, better psychological functioning and social competence, and better social relations. Other research has focused on the association between emotional intelligence and characteristics associated with wellbeing in young people, such as physical and mental health (Fernández-Berrocá *et al.*, 2016; Martins *et al.*, 2010; Petrides *et al.*, 2016) and stress perception (Mikolajczak *et al.*, 2007). There is clear evidence that emotional intelligence capacities predict components of personal wellbeing, and a positive relationship exists between life satisfaction and subjective happiness (Mikulic *et al.*, 2010; Rey *et al.*, 2005). Previous research has mentioned that emotionally intelligent individuals are also satisfied with life. These individuals have better health and are less prone to death, indicating better health and longevity. They are seen to be satisfied with their employment, themselves, and their environmental situations. It was noted that people with high emotional intelligence lead a much happier life, regardless of their circumstances (Escoda & Alegre, 2016). It is also mentioned that these individuals seek positive emotions and expressions and restrict themselves from negative ones (Extremera & Rey, 2016). This, in turn, relates to the fact that people with positive affect have an absence of anxiety and depression, which leads to higher life satisfaction. In contrast, high negative emotions lead to lower life satisfaction in an individual (Landa, Zafra, Antoñana, & Pulido, 2006).

Adopting the different skills and strategies mentioned earlier in this paper is expected to help individuals improve and enhance their emotional intelligence and attain happiness, which can help them handle and overcome the outcome of negative stressors and other potential difficulties in life. It's crucial to keep in mind that tests can have

errors, and bad days or challenging life events can skew results. Their value comes from the private learnings we make about ourselves and what we want our lives to mean so that we are better able to build the equanimity, happiness, and success we crave. Based on the reviewed studies in the above sections, it can be said that emotional intelligence predicts happiness and is a crucial component of it (Hasaan Nia *et al.*, 2014; Seyed Reza & Soleimani, 2018; Tuzhandehjani *et al.*, 2013). According to emotional intelligence theorists, emotional intelligence increases happiness, and high emotional intelligence protects oneself from getting afflicted by mental health issues (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, Mayer, & Snyder, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The current paper aims to produce insight by reviewing how learning the skill of emotional intelligence may emerge as a protective factor against mental health issues. EI includes emotional, social, and personal competencies and motivation to successfully adapt to stressful situations (Afolabi, 2013; Bar-On, 2010; Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Emotional intelligence and mental health are bidirectional; they both influence each other. However, research examining the relationship between EI and happiness suggests that EI protects us from being in contact with mental illness and significantly contributes to happiness. Adopting various skills and strategies such as regulating one's negative emotions and feelings (where failing to regulate leads to various mental illnesses), building rapport to maintain relationships in life, and understanding the emotions of others (essential for empathy).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the studies mentioned previously, it is recommended that emotional intelligence skills be strengthened through training that is introduced at a very tender age and that can bring better outcomes in the present and future.

Considering the pivotal role of EI in people's mental health, it is advisable that healthcare professionals give due attention to coaching and managing emotional hacks, which may likely improve

people's emotion regulation, relationship skills, and social competence, reflecting in terms of their happiness and satisfaction in life.

Training in EI skills, such as how to perceive emotions to facilitate thought, to appreciate one's emotions, to give connotation to their emotional states, and to recognize how particular situations can trigger mood changes may help people to improvise their emotional skills, which help people to fight with potential threats or stressors not only at work but in every sphere of life. Training in emotional intelligence would provide people with the skill to protect against the adverse effects of mental health disorders such as depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, etc. (Brackett *et al.*, 2011; Mayer *et al.*, 2008; Resurreccion *et al.*, 2014).

Further, a psychologist or counselor must be appointed to each educational setting or organization to *assess and identify people with low EI, as these people may be at risk for depression*. Hence, assessment of emotional intelligence may not only help people in *early detection but also in the prevention of depression by introducing programs based on emotional intelligence into psychotherapy for the management of depression*.

Further, regular practice of yoga or meditation may help people balance their mind and body. It helps people get more in sync with their feelings, which may make them better at recognizing emotions in others. For example, if someone is upset with you about anything, take a moment to calm down before reacting rather than responding angrily. This will assist you in calming down and focusing on the best way to handle the situation without letting yourself become emotional. This is possible through the practice of yoga, as it helps to build up self-awareness skills. Thus, yoga brings control to one's body and life and helps relieve stress, allowing people to build emotional intelligence, which is indispensable for the future.

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