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Journal of Development Economics and Management Research Studies (JDMS)
A Peer Reviewed Open Access International Journal
ISSN: 2582 5119 (Online)

 Crossref Prefix No: 10.53422
11 (22), 50 - 58, October - December, 2024
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Role of Emotional Intelligence in Stress Management of Healthcare Professionals - Literature Review

Ms.T.Lakshmi Pradha¹ and Dr.M.Soundarapandian²

ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to understand one's own emotions and that of others and use them in the right way to guide one's actions and thinking. The healthcare sector is one of the largest employing sectors that poses high demanding needs to the professionals like long working hours, emotional demands, patient demands and expectations which in turn causes a stressful work environment. To manage both the occupational and personal stressors these noble professionals need to adapt strategies and interventions. This paper is an attempt to identify the role of emotional intelligence in the stress management practices of the healthcare professionals like doctors, nurses, paramedical workers, technicians, etc.

Goals and aims: *The main objective of the study is to understand the role of emotional intelligence in different sectors specifically emphasise its role in managing stress levels of healthcare employees and suggest interventions and strategies for stress management.*

Methodology: *A comprehensive review-based study to discover the role of emotional intelligence in the stress management practices of healthcare employees is attempted across different countries.*

Results: *The integrative reviews pointed out that employees with higher emotional intelligence levels experienced less stress in their work and exhibited better performance in their work in various sectors including the healthcare industry. It is evident that emotional intelligence can act as an influencer to lessen the stress levels of employees.*

Conclusion: *The study identifies the need for developing emotional competencies like an individual's emotional awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills to produce visible results in enhancing the employees' productivity, quality of work life, job satisfaction, reduced stress levels, empathy, better communication and decision-making skills in achieving both individual and professional growth.*

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Stress management, Healthcare sector, work performance

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Rural Industries and Management, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University), Gandhigram, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu.

² Professor, Department of Rural Industries and Management, The Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed to be University), Gandhigram, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

The healthcare sector in India is one of the largest sectors that provides employment opportunities to many professionals namely doctors, nurses, paramedical workers, technicians, etc., both in the public and private sectors. Equivalently, these healthcare professionals face a highly demanding situation that leads to stressful work environments because of their long working hours, workplace demands that target their emotional levels and patient expectations. To manage these high-pressure situations in the work environment of healthcare employees can use their emotional intelligence as an effective tool to understand, manage and cope with occupational stressors. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability of an individual to understand and manage one's own emotions and all others' emotions (Mayer and Salovey, 2005). This paper is a comprehensive review-based attempt to understand the role of emotional intelligence in the stress management of healthcare employees.

The book 'Working with Emotional Intelligence' defines emotional intelligence as the most important factor than IQ. Goleman lists the competencies like self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, taking initiative, integrity, commitment, influencing personality, better communication ability, adaptability, group and interpersonal effectiveness, etc are the skill sets expectations from employers in today's organisations. Moving up the career ladder and taking leadership positions demands higher emotional intelligence than IQ levels.

Smith and Pergola (2003) discuss stress management strategies for individuals and define stress as tension when more demands exceed an individual's handling capacity. The causal factors for this tension like work, family-related, social, etc., called stressors Further, the major signs of stress like headaches, tense muscles, sweaty palms, etc to severe signs like chronic sleeping disorder, persistent and intense depression levels, frequent illness, etc. This study attempts to find an intervention and strategy to cope with this stress.

Further, a comprehensive work of the various characteristics or traits that a manager needs to possess related to effective performance in different managerial positions in various organisations discussed by Richard E Boyatzis (1982) found the majority of the competencies identified for an outstanding manager were related to the emotional intelligence component and these appropriate practices and models when adopted by managers can become competent. They can help their organisations to effectively utilize their human resources and manage stressful environments. This study identifies the role of emotional intelligence in coping with stress in the employee's work environment.

Objectives of the study

1. To understand the role of emotional intelligence in the different sectors.
2. To emphasize the role of emotional intelligence in managing the stress levels of healthcare employees.
3. To suggest interventions and strategies to overcome stress and highlight the role of emotional intelligence in coping with stress of healthcare sector employees.

Methodology

A comprehensive review of available literature is carried out for this study to discover the role of emotional intelligence in the stress management practices of healthcare employees. The review of literature is pursued within the domain of the above objectives. The sources of the literature are books, research articles, journals and publications by reputed publishers. The available literature on the theme has been put into bibliographic tools to identify the trends and

gaps across multiple studies. Literature with conflicting interests and lacking research validity are not considered. The studies are presented here in APA citation style.

Results and Discussions

Role of Emotional Intelligence:

This part of the paper exhibits the role of emotional intelligence in different sectors. Many researchers have stated that people need abilities or competencies to use their knowledge and make things happen. The competencies like cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies are critical for success in work. The second and third competencies join to make up the emotional intelligence competencies leading to the discussion of the role of this ability and cost effectiveness in the workplace. There exists a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and managerial effectiveness and recognized emotional intelligence as a key determinant of a manager's success in today's stressful environment. Developing emotional intelligence is an optimal process in an organisation and it can be done following four phases namely the preparation, training, transfer and maintenance and evaluation phase as outlined by Goleman to achieve success (Aarti Singh, 2012).

Similarly, analysing how much emotional intelligence contributes to employees' capability to handle their emotional experiences it is found that cognitive skills might find people suitable for the job. Still, the factor of emotional intelligence assists people to grow in their careers and is regarded twice as valuable as technical and analytical skills. This factor plays a significant role in an individual's behaviour and stress management strategies (Navas et al, 2022).

Yet another study identified the link between emotional intelligence levels and the work performance of male executives from selected companies in India and the results revealed that executives with higher emotional intelligence levels exhibited better performance in their work profile compared to those with lower emotional intelligence levels. It was also identified that factors like self-awareness, empathy, motivation, social skills and self-regulation are crucial in predicting the executives' work performance (Khokar & Kush, 2009).

Further, a survey to measure emotional intelligence, turnover intention, work-family conflict and job burnout with perceived organisational support among 722 commercial bank employees in Vietnam found that emotional intelligence has a negative relationship with work-family conflict, job burnout and turnover intention indicating employees with higher emotional intelligence levels play an important role in reducing work-life conflict, job burnout and decreased turnover intention with perceived organisational support. It was also found that bankers with high levels of work-family conflict and job burnout had high levels of turnover intention (Giao et al, 2020)

On the contrary, a study taking the software industry to measure the influence of emotional intelligence on their work attitude showcased that emotional intelligence does not have much of an impact on the worker's attitude in this sector (Imran Basha et al, 2020).

Likewise, Wells, Torrie and Prindle (2000) explored the role of emotional intelligence in occupational success among Canadian community college students involving two populations namely the adult education group at the end of a year of their education and the automotive service technicians in the pre-employment centre in their first and second-year program. This analysis also exhibited the population did not have any differences in their mean scores but there was a higher correlation between attitude and interpersonal (0.74) and also

between interaction and stress management (0.63) among the second-year program automotive service technology groups.

On examining the emotional intelligence levels of young women in Hyderabad, India revealed that the majority of the respondents exhibited moderate and lower emotional intelligence levels which highlights the role of emotional intelligence in young women's lives to cope with the changes in society and show the reasons for emotional distress due to pressures and stress in their life that affect their emotional intelligence levels. The research suggests a life skills intervention programme can improve their emotional intelligence levels and increase their work productivity (Aprajita Raj et al, 2021).

Understanding the role of emotional intelligence in healthcare sector:

So, far the role of emotional intelligence in different industries led to the curiosity of understanding its importance in a field like the healthcare sector.

Lara Carminati (2021) examines how emotional management and emotional intelligence can help healthcare employees bridge the developmental gap between the mentioned abilities enabling them to overcome emotional difficulties that they encounter in the workplace. According to her, the emotional regulation process incorporates emotional management, and emotional intelligence is needed by healthcare professionals to sustain and perform their day-to-day activities and also overcome emotionally challenging circumstances in their work environment.

Likewise, there exists a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational agility. As agility in a healthcare organisation requires attention to match the speed of changes and increasing demands in today's environment (Pazhouhan et al, 2019).

A case study approach was done in Pakistan to understand the role of emotional intelligence in hospital administration. It was found that the private-sector hospital employees' performance was relatively better than that of public-sector hospital employees. Female employees had better emotional intelligence levels compared to male employees in both sector hospitals. Interpersonal traits have a greater impact on the performance of the employees in the healthcare sector and training through simulation or any other techniques can improve emotional intelligence levels and encourage employees to take part in community development programs (Samiuddin Khan et al, 2017).

It was also found that emotional intelligence is a core component that can lead to better patient care services by healthcare employees. Doctors with higher emotional intelligence levels lead to patient satisfaction as they can better understand them. Further, the discussion on the interconnection between stress, burnout and emotional intelligence of healthcare employees points out the impact of emotional intelligence in an organization's transformation and change management practices. There exists a link between emotional intelligence and nurses' behaviour and performance in their work featuring emotional intelligence as a crucial factor to integrate across all the levels of employees in healthcare organizations (Ugwu et al 2023).

Another attempt aimed to identify what skills can help healthcare professionals meet the contemporary challenges in their work environment. The dynamic factors in the work environment, patient literacy levels, societal orientations, communication barriers, limited time and resources, need for patient-centered care, demand for continuous skill development and occupational professionalism pose major challenges for healthcare employees. To overcome these challenges the emotional intelligence of healthcare professionals acts as a tool to harness

their emotions, recognise, regulate, apply and use these emotional competencies as a valid strategy to be successful in their profession (Aelita Skarbaliene 2019).

The relationship between emotional intelligence and stress management:

Understanding the role of emotional intelligence paves way to realise its relationship with stress management strategies of the employees. Research among a group of managers examined if there exists a relationship between emotional intelligence and stress management in South Africa considering emotional intelligence as the independent variable and stress management as the dependent variable. The correlation and regression results of the quantitative research indicated that stress management is a component of emotional intelligence. In contrast, stress can be either an input or output of emotional intelligence (Saras Ramesar et al 2009).

An exploratory study conducted by Neeraj Pandey (2022) among private-sector working professionals identified the role of emotional intelligence in managing the stress levels of these professionals and found that professionals with higher emotional intelligence levels experienced less stress and exhibited better work performance.

Ismail et.al (2009) studied the outcome of emotional intelligence in association with job stress and the work performance of employees that showcased the degree of relatedness of emotional intelligence with job stress which in turn has an impact on the work performance of the employees.

Another empirical study among the Indian Border Security Force personnel with three aims namely to understand the major causes of stress, to identify if there is any relationship between emotional intelligence and stress and finally to recommend strategies to cope up with stress in the workplace. The major causes of stress for these personnel like inadequate sleep and rest, leave availing process, pressure to perform well, separation from near and dear ones, etc. The correlation results of the study showcased the negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress accepting the hypothesis that people with higher emotional intelligence experience lower stress levels in their workplace. The study also recommended providing adequate training programs to the Indian Border Security for personnel to improve their stress management and emotional intelligence levels by developing customized stress measuring instruments, appointing counsellors, and developing institutional responses to reduce their stress levels and work-life balance policies (Manoj Chhabra and Bindu Chhabra (2012).

Considering the secondary school teachers working in Government, aided and self-financed schools in the Ujjain district of Madhya Pradesh identified significant differences among the three streams of teachers' intrapersonal management, personal stress levels, family stress and overall stress management practices. It was also identified that experienced teachers had better awareness levels towards themselves and others, professional orientation and interpersonal management than the other categories. It was also found that these experienced teachers could handle stress-causing factors in their personal, family and job environments better than their counterparts (Inderjeet Singh Bhatia (2021).

Brillo et al (2024) aimed to determine the emotional intelligence, time management skills and perceived stress levels of first-year students during their post-pandemic transition in their education and determine the correlation among these variables as it reflects in their education and development. It was found that students had moderate emotional intelligence levels, high time management skills and moderate perceived levels of stress during the period of study.

Role of emotional intelligence in managing stress levels of healthcare employees:

Realising the role of emotional intelligence in effective stress management practices this part of the paper exhibits the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress levels of healthcare employees. An integrative review paper examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and healthcare management considering stress, burnout, employee turnover and increasing demands of patients. Indicating emotional intelligence practices leads to reduced stress levels, better performance in the workplace and job satisfaction (Deeba Hasan & Kamalanabhan (2018).

A study on emotional intelligence and stress coping styles of Doctors conducted by Sharma and Kumar (2016) among selected private hospital doctors in and around Chandigarh revealed that the emotional intelligence and stress coping styles are moderately high among the doctors in the chosen area of study. Meanwhile, there was a positive and significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and their stress coping styles providing scope for further interventions, assertiveness training, personality development programmes, the introduction of recreational activities to reduce stress and a conducive work environment for the doctors.

A Romanian medical environment study indicated that physicians with lower levels of emotional intelligence perceived more workplace stressors compared to physicians with higher emotional intelligence levels who were resilient and better at handling the varied occupational demands in the work environment and managing their stress levels. Further, workplace relationships, lack of resources and poor communication were perceived as the main stressors whereas the intrapersonal emotional intelligence variance accounted for a lack of work-life balance and other aspects of the job as perceived stressors through the inventory. (Cirstoveanu et. Al., 2020).

A study based on the public and private hospital nurses in Islamabad and Rawalpindi revealed the relationship between subjective well-being and perceived stress, emotional intelligence and job experience of nurses showcasing a new understanding of the factors influencing the general well-being of healthcare professionals. The study promotes a supportive work environment, implementing stress management programmes, providing support to improve the nurse's emotional intelligence levels and resilience-building that in turn improves their work performance (Hameed et. al, 2023).

Ramzan Shahid et al (2018) aimed to identify if the educational intervention can improve the emotional intelligence levels, stress management and wellness scores of US physicians in the residents' training program focussing on the four dimensions namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills. A comparative analysis of the pre and post intervention was also carried out indicating a significant increase in emotional intelligence levels, stress management and wellness scores and thereby reducing burnout levels before and after the training program.

Conclusion:

A comprehensive review of literature portrays the role of emotional intelligence in the stress management of employees in different sectors and specifically the healthcare sector points the need for developing emotional competencies like an individual's emotional awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills to produce visible results in enhancing the employees' productivity, quality of work life, job satisfaction, reduced stress levels, empathy, better communication and decision-making skills in achieving both individual and professional growth (Aelita Skarbalienė 2019). A significant change can be brought in the

instructional practices to transform the students with a commitment from the institution (Wells and Torrie, 2000) and specifically, the educational intervention can be adopted in the curriculum and as a self-awareness training for the medical graduates. (Ramzan Shahid et al, 2018). Likewise, Employee Assistance Programs can act as practical training to improve emotional competence, hiring emotionally intelligent people by conducting personality tests during recruitment, fair and supportive working environment to create beneficial outcomes for organisation (Giao et al, 2020)

Further, improved leadership abilities, better communication skills, academic success, personal and professional life and resilience in the face of challenges and stressful scenarios can enhance an individual's emotional intelligence levels (Innocent Igbokwe et al, 2023). The organizations can provide training to both the management and employees, to pay attention and lessen and remove stress-causing factors by following job redesign and follow policies that help employees to have better control in their workplace (Agila and Padmanabhan, 2017). And practices like emotional awareness, adaptability, conscientiousness, initiativeness, self-control, self-management, empathy, optimism, teamwork abilities, leadership capacities, conflict management, power relationships and leveraging diversity to promote its development and uses in unlocking the full potential of individuals (Innocent Igbokwe et al, 2023). Similarly, the coping strategies like staying strong and healthy and using stress management practices effectively can boost the morale of the employees (Smith and Pergola)

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