Emotional intelligence and coping styles with stress

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and coping styles with stress in a sample of students. Four hundred and thirteen students (140 boys, 273 girls) were included in this study. All participants completed the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and the Tehran Coping Styles Scale (TCSS). The results revealed that EI was positively associated with problem-focused and positive emotional focused coping styles, and negatively associated with negative emotional focused coping style. EI is supposed to influence coping strategies through management and regulation of emotions, utilization and facilitation of emotions, and appraisal of emotions.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, stress, coping, emotion regulation, student.

1. Introduction

The concept of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) was defined as ‘‘the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions (p. 189).’’ Mayer and Salovey (1997) identified four components of emotional intelligence, involving emotional perception, emotional facilitation, emotional understanding, and emotional management. Emotional perception refers to the ability to perceive and to express feelings. Emotional facilitation refers to the ability to use emotion to facilitate cognitive activities. Emotional understanding concerns the ability to label emotions with words and to understand how emotions can change. Emotional management refers to the ability to manage emotions for both emotional and personal growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

There is increasing interest in the associations of EI with health and well-being. EI covers individual differences in emotional capabilities, both intrapersonal (e.g. stress management) and interpersonal (e.g. perceiving emotions). Several ways in which EI might be associated with health behaviors can be identified. Interpersonal EI would be expected to lead to better interactions with health professionals and thus to a greater tendency to seek help and follow advice (Ciarrochi & Deane, 2001).
A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that EI correlates robustly with a variety of outcomes that signal social-emotional success, including more frequent positive affect, higher self esteem, greater life satisfaction, social engagement, academic performance, job satisfaction, self efficacy and well-being (Kafetsios, & Zampetakis, 2008; Song, peng, law, wong, & chen, 2010; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009; Zeidner & shemesh, 2010).

EI has been linked to coping (Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007), particularly rational/problem focused coping (Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007). The link between EI and stress is also well established in the academic literature (see Ciarrochi, Dean, & Anderson, 2002; Gohm, Corser, & Dalsky, 2005).

Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. Two general coping strategies have been distinguished: problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

The primary approaches toward the process of coping differentiates three major styles: the problem-focused coping which its difference is direct function to reduce pressures or increase stress management skills; avoidant-focused coping style which its main characteristic is to confront stress factor; and emotional-focused coping which its difference is cognitive strategies that delay solving or removing stress factor by giving a new name and meaning (Billings & Moos, 1981; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). Newer classifications of four coping styles include logical, detached, emotional and avoidant styles. (Roger, Jarvis, & Najarian,1993). Logical coping as a problem-focused strategy and detached coping as an approach based on which the individual gets far away from the problem to face it and reduce the potential influence of emotional. Logical and detached coping is generally regarded as efficient styles and emotional and avoidant styles as inefficient styles (Roger et al., 1993).

Is the individual’s coping style different from stress conditions based on his emotional intelligence? It is foreseen that increasing EI helps the individual so as to use more efficient strategies to fight stress conditions and in the contrary, reducing EI helps the individual to employ more inefficient strategies to control stress conditions. The main objective of this research is to study the relationship between EI and the coping styles with stress.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Statistical population of this research was all students of bachelor’s degree in Tehran University. 413 students (140 male and 273 female) of various fields of study voluntarily participated in this research. After encouraging the subjects, Persian version of emotional intelligence scale (EIS) and the Tehran Coping Styles Scale (TCSS) about students in team work in class. Total mean age of subjects was 20.77 years with standard deviation of 2.70, the mean age of male students was 21.53 years with standard deviation of 3.27 and mean age of female students was 20.38 years with standard deviation of 2.26. The present research is a descriptive study of correlation type, and to analyze its data statistical indices and methods including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, multi-variable variance analysis, correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used.

2.2. Measures

Emotional Intelligence Scale(EIS)- The EIS is a 33- question test which has been made by Schutte et al (1998) based on Salovey and Mayer 1990; Mayer and Salovey, 1997, emotional intelligence. The questions of test assess three subjects of emotional intelligence including regulation of emotion, utilization of emotion and appraisal of emotion in Likert –degree scale from score 1 (quite opposing) to score 5 (quite agreeing). internal consistency of test questionsased on Chronbach alpha from 0.84 to 0.90 (Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2004; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Schutte et al., 1998). test-retest reliability coefficient of scale in a 28-individual sample of students was calculated with a time interval of two weeks at 0.78 (Schutte et al., 1998). Reliability of emotional intelligence scale has been reported sufficient through its correlation with relevant structures (Austin et al., 2004). In Farsi form of this scale (Besharat, 2007) Chronbach alpha of scale questions in a 135-individual sample of students was calculated 0.88 which shows good internal consistency of test. Correlation coefficients of the scores of 42
individuals of the said scale was calculated 0.83 with an interval of 0.83, which showed reliability of satisfactory retesting.

**Tehran Coping Styles Scale (TCSS)** - The TCSS (Besharat, 2006) is a 60-question test and assess three styles of problem-focused coping style, positive Emotional-focused coping and negative Emotional-focused coping in a 4-degree Likert scale from 1 to 4. Minimum and maximum score of subject in each of the test subscales will be relatively 20 and 80. Carver, Scheier, and Weintrub (1989) studied reliability and validity of this scale within three researches. Retesting reliability coefficients were confirmed from r=0.42 to r= 0.67 for various scales (Carver et al., 1989) was implemented for comparison of TCSS a sample of 457 students of Tehran university and Chronbach alpha coefficients of problem-focused coping style, positive Emotional-focused coping and negative Emotional-focused coping were respectively calculated at 0.93, 0.91 and 0.89 which show good internal consistency of the scale. Correlation coefficients were calculated for assessing retesting reliability in two turns with distance of 2 to 4 weeks. These coefficients were meaningful for problem-focused coping style, positive Emotional-focused coping and negative emotional-focused coping at respectively r=0.71, r= 0.65, r= 0.59 in the meaningful level of P<.001 which showed satisfactory retesting reliability of scale.

3. Results

Table 1 shows statistical indices of subjects about the scores on EI and coping styles.

![Table 1. Means and standard deviation](image_url)

To analyze data and test of research hypotheses, first the results of multi-variable variance analysis test for comparison of male and female students about EI and coping styles were studied. results of variance analysis showed that male and female students were not meaningfully different in any of the subscales of EI and coping styles. For this reason correlation coefficient between research variables for male and female students were made altogether. Results of pierson correlation showed that EI has positive relation with problem-focused coping, positive emotional-focused coping style and negative relation with negative emotional-focused coping style (table 2).

![Table 2. Pierson correlation between EI and coping style](image_url)

Then to determine the influence of each of variables of EI on the variance of coping styles, emotional intelligence subscales were analyzed as foreseeing variables and problem-focused coping style, positive emotional-focused coping and negative emotional-focused coping as standard variable in regression equation. The results of variance and regression analysis showed F= 53.88 between the scores of problem-focused coping style with emotional intelligence subscales which is meaningful in P<.001 and (R= 0.532) was obtained. Therefore 28% of the variance related to problem-focused coping style is determined by emotional intelligence subscales.
show that the three subscales of regulation of emotion (B = 0.458, t = 4.823), utilization of emotion (t = 5.453, B = 0.822) and appraisal of emotion (t = 2.276, B = 0.211) could determine the style of problem-focused meaningfully. The direction of variables correlation shows that the more EI, the individual uses more problem-focused coping strategies in confronting stress.

Variance analysis and regression among the score of positive emotional-focused coping with the subscales of emotional intelligence resulted in F = 12.74 and it was meaningful in P < 0.001 and (R² = 0.292) was obtained. Therefore 08% of variance related to positive emotional-focused coping is determined by emotional intelligence subscales regression coefficients. Show that only the following two subscales of regulation of emotion (B = 0.275 and t = 3.280) and utilization of emotion (t = 2.226, B = 0.297) may explain meaningfully the variance of emotional-focused coping style. The direction of variables correlation shows that the more EI, the individual will use more strategies of positive emotional-focused coping styles in facing the stress.

Variance analysis and regression statistical indices showed the following results among the average of negative emotional-focused coping style with emotional intelligence scales (P < 0.001, F = 22.42) and (R² = 0.376), then 14% of the variance related to negative emotional-focused coping is determined by emotional intelligence scales. Regression coefficients show that only two subscales regulation of emotion (t = -3.1010, B = -0.296) and utilization of emotion (t = -3.355, B = -0.269) could determine the variance of negative emotional-focused coping style in a meaningful way. The direction of variables correlation shows that the more EI, the individual will employ less negative emotional-focused coping strategies in facing stress.

4. Discussion

The results of research showed that EI has positive relationship with problem-focused coping and positive emotional-focused coping and negative emotional-focused coping style are negatively correlated. These results which confirm the foresees of the present research and conforms to the results and necessities of findings of previous research in relation with EI (Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 1999; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2000; Saarni, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2003; Saklofske et al., 2007; Zins, Travis, & Freppon, 1997). Increase emotional intelligence through components of adjusting and managing emotional productivity or facilitating emotional and evaluation and perception of emotional, using the problem-focused coping styles and positive emotional-focused coping and reduce using negative emotional-focused coping style.

In summary, the results of research showed that EI foresee changes related to the strategies of stress control. The constraints related to research statistical population (students) and the type of research (correlation) study constraints in generalizing, interpreting and cognitive causes of studied variables which should be considered. In addition, probable problems related to reliability of the tools used in this research should not be ignored.

References


