

The Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Occupational Stress among the Nurses

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among the nurses. Prolonged exposure to multitudinous demands has been found in dysfunctional effects on the individuals, leading to occupational role stress. It has been observed that employees with higher emotional intelligence are more aware of the coping strategies to deal with stress. This paper has taken emotional intelligence as an important independent factor to study its effect on occupational stress among nurses. The study was conducted on the emotional intelligence variables (Self-awareness and Self-regulation) and occupational stress variables (Physical environment and Role overload). The sample size of the study was 200 nurses selected randomly from private hospitals of Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh in India. The data were collected and analyzed by using mean, standard deviation and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The study found a significant relationship between the emotional intelligence and occupational stress among the nurses under the study.

Key words: Emotional intelligence, Occupational stress, Coping strategies, Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Role overload.

Introduction

Every individual faces stress in their daily lives and even organizations due to the globalization, the revolution of information technology and the speed of life. The most important effects of these aspects can be seen in the business world, and they can manifest themselves and change organizational structures, strategies, activities, and technologies. The organizations those who are changing constantly can impose new roles and

duties on the employees and the employees who want to handle new roles and duties need to have efficiency in intelligence quotient and efficiency in emotional quotient in the processes of decision making and problem solving. Stress has become a characteristic of human existence and a stress-free life becomes impossible. Individuals are using different methods to handle the stress by using their Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Sirin, 2007).

In order to sustain the modern organizations in the dynamic and competitive environment of today they have to make use of full potential of employees. Generally in the dynamic organization, the employee feels stress at the workplace due to his/her role performance. This role stress is one of the important factors of successful adjustment and subsequent performance of employees. The stress induced due to roles performed by individuals as employees have been a potent organizational stressor. Such stress would cause various dysfunctional outcomes for the organizations such as employee job dissatisfaction, disturbance in interpersonal relations, lower performance, and job related tensions. Some of the stressors are identified in any work environment that has a major impact on employee performance include unsupportive relationship, poor working conditions, work-life imbalance, work overload, poor communication, and changes in organizational process. Towards this, the emotional intelligence has been a tool to be very effective in preventing stress among employees.

Determining the level of role stress among employees undoubtedly is important in identifying the factors influencing the stress but also will be of great help in formulating the coping strategies.

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman (2001) observed that emotional intelligence is a skill that

everyone who owns it tries to control his/her life with self-awareness and improve it with self-management and can become aware of its effects. He includes a set of emotional competencies within each construct of EI. Emotional competencies are not innate talents, but rather learned capabilities that must be worked on and can be developed to achieve outstanding performance. He posits that individuals are born with a general emotional intelligence that determines their potential for learning emotional competencies.

Mayer and Salovi (2004) remarked that emotional intelligence is the ability of evaluation, cognition and expressing emotions, and the ability of controlling emotions to improve the growth of emotional balance. Bar-On (2000) stated that emotional intelligence is a determinant of adequacy, abilities and unknown skills that affects the ability of individual to succeed in overcoming the environmental stress. Antonakis and Ashkanasy (2009) felt that emotional intelligence includes inborn factors (self-control, feeling independence, self-awareness and capacity) and external factors (ease in sympathy, relationship and amenability).

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is a “mechanism whereby the human body attempts to adapt to the environment.” The body has a normal mechanism for dealing with stressful situations that is known as the “fight or flight” response. As soon as the brain senses the danger, it sends

messages that stimulate the extra energy needed to fight over the danger or run away from it. The stress cycle always includes the danger stimulus, the removal of the danger, and a state of relaxation. It is one of the major health hazards of the modern workplace. It accounts for much of the physical illness, substance abuse, and family problems experienced by millions of blue and white-collar workers. Also, occupational stress and stressful working conditions have been linked to absenteeism, low productivity, and increased rates of accidents.

Work is a central part of human life. It is the expression of the basic need to accomplish, to create, to feel satisfaction, and to feel meaningful. Rewarding work is an important and positive part of our lives. However, when work denies people an opportunity to utilize their creativity, intelligence, and decision-making ability, it causes stress. There are many facets like personal facet, environmental facet, process facet, human consequences facet, organizational consequences facet, adaptive responses facet and time facet that employees feel stress at workplace.

Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress among Nurses

Nursing is a profession that involves continues stress and maintenance of good interpersonal relationships with the doctors on one hand, and the patients on the other. Researchers found that healthcare professionals who are high in emotional intelligence are found to be

more effective in a number of key performance areas, including stress management, showing that these skills are critical for healthcare professionals and especially those in leadership positions.

Nurses, however, because of their profession that sets them constantly next to the patient in such a way that doesn't entail any self-seeking seem to have the greatest potential for the development of emotional intelligence. This could prove to be the main tool in disease management as well as in the constant and stable function of the health system, it being the main link in creating emotionally intelligent health organizations. Caring for both the mental and physical health of the patient is especially important for nurses; thus, their roles have continued to expand over the years, in association with the growing importance of healthcare services across the nations.

The employee turnover rate for nurses is generally high mainly due to a high level of work stress. Work related stress has negative influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization, since the persons working under stressful conditions are not able to appropriately fulfill their duties. Long term experience of stress in the workplace leads to inefficient job performance, declining job satisfaction, physical and mental health disorders, reduced motivation and morale of employees, burnout and job fatigue, repeated absence, anxiety, depression, lack of trust, and even job quitting.

Emotional Intelligence Variables

The researcher had taken two variables from the model introduced by Daniel Goleman (1998) focuses on EI as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership performance. The two emotional variables are useful to help one to make sense of and navigate the social environment in hospital setting where dealing with staff and patients. It is difficult to face the situations which happen in the workplace and balance and uphold them with emotions. These are used to describe the ability of individuals, to recognize their own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different feelings and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking, behave and regulate themselves in a work setting.

Self-awareness is the ability to know one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and goals and recognize their impact on the others while using gut feelings to guide decisions. It is useful to recognize realistic self-assessment and understand the personal emotions which effect on others. It depends on one's ability to monitor one's own emotion state and to correctly identify and name one's emotions.

Self-regulation is the ability to regulate one's emotions and behavior so that the individual acts appropriately in various situations. It involves delaying or resisting an impulse, drive, and temptation to act. Self-regulation is the control or redirect disruptive feelings and moods, and the propensity to suspend

judgment and to regulate before doing a negative task.

Occupational Stress Variables

A variety of factors contribute to occupational stress such as excessive workload, isolation, extensive shift hours, toxic work environments, lack of autonomy, difficult relationships among coworkers and management, management bullying, harassment and lack of opportunities or motivation to advancement in one's skill level. The two important occupational stress variables are taken that cause stress in hospital setting.

Physical environment in hospital poses stress for staff members. They are prone to risk due to the perceived medical errors and hospital-acquired infections. Nursing staff are also open to risk of injury from medical equipment such as high-intensity surgical-light, harmful chemicals, X-ray, radiations, noise, crowd and unpredictable or uncontrollable situations.

Role overload involves doing lots of work than the job. Quantitative role overload appears when someone does not have enough time to do the job, whereas qualitative role overload means that someone does not have enough ability to do a special job. Excessive role overload leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure.

Related Literature

A brief review of certain recent literature in respect of emotional intelligence and occupational stress of the staff working in healthcare organizations is given hereunder:

Maryam Khaniyan et al. (2013) conducted a study to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress among rehabilitation staffs in Tehran's training hospitals. A cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 169 staff members selected from a total of 300 rehabilitation staff recruited by random cluster sampling. Data obtained from this study was analyzed using Pearson's correlation and multiple regression tests. An inverse significant relationship existed between occupational stress and emotional intelligence ($P < 0.001$, $r = -0.33$). There were, also, significant relationships between sub-scales of emotional intelligence including self-awareness ($P = 0.031$, $r = -0.18$), social skills ($P < 0.001$, $r = -0.302$), empathy ($P = 0.006$, $r = -0.238$) and occupational stress. This study confirmed the relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Promotion of emotional intelligence through implementing training courses may lower the occupational stress of the staff.

Nikoo Yamani et al. (2014), in their study on healthcare professionals especially clinicians, aimed at investigating the relationship between EI and JS in the faculty members of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Iran. This is a correlational study performed on 202 faculty members of IUMS. The researchers used descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression analysis ($\pm = 0.05$).

Results: 142 individuals (70.30%) filled out the questionnaires. There was an inverse correlation between the total score of EI and the level of JS ($r = -0.235$, $p = 0.005$). Moreover, among the factors of EI, self-awareness and self-management scores had significant inverse relationship with the level of JS. Linear regression analysis showed that the EI factors explained approximately 7% of the variance of JS levels of the teachers. It concluded that individuals with high EI have less JS. Since the EI can be taught, it can be expected that the JS of faculty members can be reduced through training them on emotional intelligence. Therefore, it is recommended that short-term training courses be scheduled and designed based on the concepts of EI for teachers, particularly clinicians.

Brenda Tyczkowski et al. (2015), in their study found that only less than 12.5% of nurses aspired to leadership roles, noting lack of support and stress as major factors in their decision not to pursue leadership roles. Psychological resiliency, described as the ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity, is the key to successful nurse managers. EI is a related concept to resiliency and is another noteworthy predictor of leadership and management success. A descriptive, exploratory study design was incorporated, with a convenience sample of nurse managers working in six large Midwestern health systems. There were statistically significant positive relationships noted between EI and transformational leadership and the result

of leadership (satisfaction, effectiveness, and extra effort). There were no statistical significant relationships noted between EI and transactional or laissez-faire leadership styles.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To investigate the effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among the nurses working in private hospitals in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh in India.
2. To find out the relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress among the nurses.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses were framed as:

H_0 : There is no significant effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress in respect of the respondents.

H_1 : There is significant effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress in respect of the respondents.

Research Methodology

In the study, the researchers used a conceptual model to study the effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress. The two variables of emotional intelligence (Self-awareness and Self-regulation) were taken from the model introduced by Daniel Goleman (1998). Similarly, the two variables of occupational stress variables (Physical environment and Role overload) were taken for this study. The variables of emotional intelligence were considered as

independent variables and the occupational stress variables as dependent variables.

The convenient sampling technique was used for the selection of the respondent-nurses. The universe of the study was 1000 nurses working in private hospitals in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh (India) from which 20% of the respondents were taken for the study. Thus the study was conducted on 200 nurses (male=100 & female =100) from different private hospitals in Guntur district. The primary data were collected by administering a well-designed questionnaire among the respondents.

The collected data were analyzed by using statistical tools and techniques with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0 version.

Results and Discussion

The researchers have used the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to pertain the results i.e. significant relation of emotional intelligence on occupational stress. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. The mean to know the averages of the variables, and the standard deviation to quantify the amount of variation of the variables have been calculated. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient is a measure of the linear correlation between two variables X and Y, giving a value

between +1 and “1 inclusive, where 1 is correlation, and “1 is total negative total positive correlation, 0 is no correlation.

Table 1: Mean and SD of EI and Occupational Stress Variables

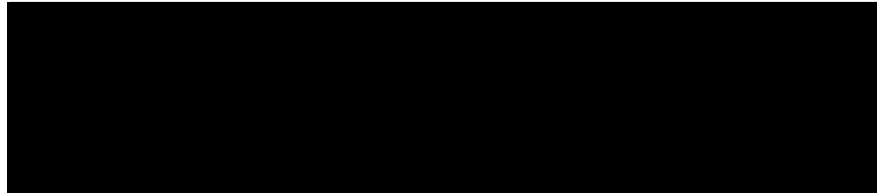


Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the observed variables. As noted, the descriptive statistics were worked out to know the pattern of score distribution. In respect of EI variables, the table reveals that the mean score of self-awareness was 2.44 with maximum deviation of 1.15 which indicates that half of the respondents were not aware of self in work setting. The mean score of self-regulation was 2.69 with maximum deviation of 1.23 which indicates that the more than half of the respondents were not able to regulate themselves in work setting. In case of the

occupational stress variables, the means score of physical environment was 4.18 with maximum deviation of 1.01 which shows that nearly three-fourth of the respondents feel stress in physical environment of hospital. The mean score of role overload was 4.06 with the SD of 1.06 which means that nearly three-fourth of the respondents feel stress in role overload in work setting. The EI mean scores were ranged average with maximum deviation. Similarly the occupational stress was ranged above average with maximum deviation.

Table 2: Correlation between EI and Occupational Stress Variables

	Physical environment	Role overload	Self-awareness
Physical Environment	1		
Role Overload	0.952	1	
	0		
Self-Awareness	0.722	0.763	1
	0	0	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data

Correlations among all the variables were computed through Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. It was aimed to measure

the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured on at least an interval scale i.e., to measures association between the

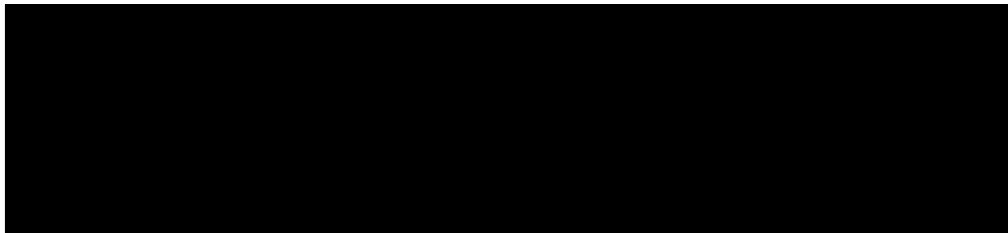
two variables of EI and occupational stress.

Table 2 exhibits the relationship between EI variable and occupational stress variables. The physical environment has statistically significant with self-awareness ($r = .722, p < 0.01$), indicates that environment is positively and strongly correlated with the above independent variable. The role overload

has statistically significant with self-awareness ($r = .763, p < 0.01$), indicates that role overload is positively and strongly correlated.

Therefore, H_1 is proved that there is a significant effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress. It means that self-awareness plays an important role in occupational stress among the nurses.

Table 3: Correlation between EI and Occupational Stress Variables



Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 exhibits the relationship between EI variable and occupational stress variables. The physical environment has significant correlation with self-regulation ($r = .792, p < 0.01$), which indicates that environment is positively and strongly correlated with the above independent variable. The role overload has statistically significant with self-regulation ($r = .808, p < 0.01$), which indicates that role overload is positively and strongly correlated.

Therefore, H_1 is proved that there is a significant effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress. It means that self-regulation plays a significant role in occupational stress

among the nurses. It may be inferred that when emotional intelligence is less, there is more stress. It shows that the nurses under the study who were less emotionally intelligent were prone to higher degree of occupational stress.

Conclusions

Emotional intelligence is directly related to organizational development and growth of human resources, because it is a new way of perceiving and understanding human behavior, management models and intrapersonal relationships. The results of the study showed that there is an effect of EI on occupation which leads to stress on the hospital nurses. It indicates that EI plays

a key role in managing the occupational stress. By increasing the emotional intelligence, occupational stress can be reduced, leading to improved work behavior.

EI variables (self-awareness and self-regulation) help to know the deep perception of emotions, ability to regulate emotions, thoughts and behavior so that the people at work can act appropriately in various situations and get self-motivated. Occupational stress variables (physical environment and role overload) can be managed well by taking care of hospital design, and by strengthening interpersonal relationships through creating a positive work environment. High emotional intelligence helps to understand one's and others' emotions to form

healthier relationships, to achieve greater success at work and to lead a more fulfilling life. It would help to navigate the social complexities of the workplace, and to excel in career paths. Minimizing negative attitudes in the workplace would help in creating healthy work environment.

By analyzing the responsibilities and daily tasks, a balanced schedule can be made to manage the role overload. It is suggested that training the nurses on a regular basis to improve their emotional intelligence is necessary to prevent a high level of occupational stress. Management should strive for achieving an effective and efficient functioning of the health system in an effort to create and sustain emotionally intelligent health organizations.

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Life is like a game of chess, in which there are an infinite number of complex moves possible. The choice is open, but the move contains within itself all future moves. One is free to choose, but what follows is the result of one's choice. From the consequences of one's action there is never any escape.

- Shelly Smith

The Ballad of the Running Man

The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching.

- John Wooden