

# LOW EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A RISK FACTOR FOR DEPRESSION

Syeda Shahida Batool, Ruhi Khalid

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To assess the relationship between emotional intelligence and depression.

**Design:** Correlational study

**Place and duration of study:** The data was collected from outpatient department of psychiatry at Jinnah Hospital, Lahore and different institutes of Lahore city (Punjab University; National Bank, Garden Town branch & In-service Training College for the Teachers of Disabled Children) from June to September 2008.

**Subjects and Methods:** The sample consisted of 30 diagnosed patients of depression, and 40 aged matched controls. Depression was measured with Beck's Depression Inventory and emotional intelligence was measured with indigenous scale of emotional intelligence.

**Results:** Initial analysis illustrated that there was no significant relationship between demographic variables and depression. Significant gender difference came into view ( $t = -2.80, 2.85; p < .05$ ) consecutively in emotional intelligence and depression. Total emotional intelligence and its components showed significant inverse correlation with depression ( $r_s = -.803, -.726, -.855, -.572, -.557, -.651, -.662, -.664, -.758, -.701, -.666; p < .01$ ). Emotional intelligence emerged as a potential predictive factor as 64% of variance in depression was accounted for by total emotional intelligence. Two out of ten components of emotional intelligence appeared as salient predictors of depression as 77 % of the variance in depression was accounted for by self regard and problem solving in a stepwise regression analysis.

**Conclusion:** The present study shows the adaptive value of emotional intelligence for maintaining and promoting individual's mental health. The results provide support to the notion that lower emotional intelligence individuals are prone to depression.

**Key words:** Emotional Intelligence, Depression, Demographic Variables.

## INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to understand feelings in self and others, and to use these feelings as informational guides for thinking and action<sup>1</sup>. Bar-on (1997)<sup>2</sup> put great emphasis on social as well as emotional aspects of the concept. Bar-On's model<sup>2, 3</sup> consists of cross section of emotional and social competencies that influence behavior, and are measured by combination of self – report<sup>4</sup> and multi-rater assessment<sup>5</sup>. Bar-On describes five composite scales-comprising 15 sub-scales (viz., self regard, emotional self awareness, assertiveness, self actualization, empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship, stress tolerance, impulse control, reality testing, flexibility, problem solving, independence, optimism and happiness).

Mental health experts are giving greater emphasis to EI as a correlate of psychological disorders. In fact the intelligent use of emotions is considered essential for one's physical health and psychological adaptation<sup>6-8</sup>; EI also links to our immune system<sup>9</sup>. Researchers like Woolery & Salovey (2004)<sup>10</sup> have projected EI as a potential risk factor or protective factor in mental and physical health, especially in cases of depression<sup>11</sup>. Inverse relationship between different measures of emotional intelligence and depression has been supported by researchers working in the field of emotional intelligence<sup>11-17</sup>. Emotional intelligence also entails important position in understanding the link between stress and mental health and moderates the relationship between stress and depression<sup>18</sup>.

Dawda & Hart (2000)<sup>15</sup> found moderate to high negative relationship of optimism with depression and suicidal ideation. Dupertuis (1996)<sup>19</sup> found negative correlation between stress tolerance, problem solving and depression. Head (2002)<sup>20</sup> reported significant negative relationship between managing subscale of MSCEIT and depression.

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The purpose of the present study was to examine the association between emotional intelligence and depression. Main hypothesis of the study is as follows: "There will be negative association between emotional intelligence and depression"

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

### Participants

The clinical sample consisted of 30 (13 male & 17 female) outpatients suffering from depression (10 moderately depressed and 20 severely depressed) recruited from Jinnah Hospital, Lahore using purposive sampling strategy of age ranged between 18 to 60 years. Patients fulfilled the criteria of depression of DSM-iv or ICD-10, but not for any other Axis-1 disorder were engaged in the study. The control group comprised 40 aged matched participants (7 male & 33 female), age ranged between 18 to 60 years ( $M = 33.42$ ,  $SD = 9.03$ ). Convenient sampling strategy was used. Control group participants never met current or past criteria for DSM -iv major depressive episode or other Axis-1 disorder. Education of the both groups ranged from intermediate to Masters.

### Measures

a) *Scale of Emotional Intelligence* (SEI) is a 56 item Urdu self-report measure, developed by Batool & Khalid (2009)<sup>21</sup> in Pakistani cultural context for age range 16 to 60 years. It is based on social and emotional intelligence model of Bar-on<sup>2,3</sup>. SEI measures interpersonal skill, self-regard, assertiveness, emotional self-awareness, empathy, impulse control, flexibility, problem solving, stress tolerance, and optimism. Respondents use four point Likert type response options ranging from 1 (*never true of me*) to 4 (*always true of me*). Ten items (viz., 7, 9, 13, 17, 26, 30, 42, 47, 48, and 49) need reverse coding. High score indicates high emotional intelligence and the low score indicates low emotional intelligence. Psychometric properties of the scale were fulfilled during developmental process: Initially generated 72 items of the scale were factor analyzed and the principal component solution was obtained to determine the underlying factor structure of the construct of emotional intelligence and to retain items for inclusion into the final scale. Data of 1547 participants recruited from the four provinces of Pakistan was subjected to an exploratory factor analysis and varimax rotation method was used. Initial analysis revealed the factor solution that converged in 33 iterations. Finally, ten factors with eigen values  $> 1.0$ , comprising 56 items with loading  $> .3$  were retained. 62.7% variance was accounted for by the retained factors. Cronbach's alpha of the total scale was  $\alpha = .95$  and for 10 factors, alpha ranged from  $\alpha = .67$  (stress tolerance) to  $\alpha = .91$  (interpersonal skill). All the factors showed significant positive correlation with the total scale. Average gender based age norms were developed. Convergent validity of the scale was established by finding significant positive correlation

( $r = .686$ ) between SEI and Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i, 1997)<sup>2</sup>. Predictive validity of SEI was determined by using it as a predictor of marital adjustment and 48% of the variance in marital adjustment was accounted for by emotional intelligence. The scale development and validation studies uphold SEI as a promising indigenous psychometric measure for emotional intelligence<sup>21</sup>.

b) *Beck Depression Inventory* (Beck & Steer, 1993) BDI is a 21 item instrument designed to assess the severity of depression in adolescents and adults. BDI has become one of the most widely accepted instruments in clinical psychology and psychiatry for assessing the intensity of depression in clinical population, and for detecting possible depression in normal population<sup>22</sup>. The score ranges from 0 to 63. Higher score indicates severity of depression.

The scale is internally consistent and reliable. The value of Cronbach's alpha of BDI is .93. Validity of BDI is well documented. Meta analysis showed mean correlation .72 with other measures of depression<sup>22</sup>.

### Procedure

After grant of permission from the head of department of Psychiatry, Jinnah Hospital, Lahore; psychiatrists were asked to refer diagnosed patients of depression to the researcher. Questionnaires (SEI & BDI) were given to patients with their informed consent. Questionnaires were administered in hospital setting in a separate room. The controls were given the questionnaires (SEI & BDI) at their home or work place with informed consent. Confidentiality of the given information was assured to both patients and controls.

## RESULTS

Role of demographic variables in depression was initially ruled out, and no significant relationship was found between age and depression, moreover no significant difference appeared between married and unmarried sample regarding depression. Reliability analysis was run to see the alpha values of the measures in the present study and the scales were found reliable (see Table 1). As a pre-requisite of regression analysis; Pearson's correlation was calculated, correlations between emotional intelligence, its components and depression were found significantly negative (see Table 3). In order to establish the predictive potency of EI in depression, regression analysis was run. Results indicate that emotional intelligence significantly predicts depression (see Table 4).  $R^2 = .64$  ( $*p < .000$ ), ( $F = 123.604$ ,  $p < .000$ ). To discover the role of factors/components of emotional intelligence in the prediction of depression, stepwise regression analysis was run. All 10 components of emotional intelligence were put into regression analysis, as all showed significant correlation with depression in initial analysis, but two components (viz., self regard & problem solving) appeared as

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics, of Total Emotional Intelligence, Components of Emotional Intelligence and Total Depression (N=70)**

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.dev	$\alpha$
Total depression	3.00	55.00	21.2857	14.8129	.95
Total EI	84.00	201.00	137.1143	39.5112	.97
Interpersonal Skill	12.00	32.00	22.5800	6.553	.92
Self regard	6.00	24.00	15.2571	7.1235	.96
Assertiveness	6.00	24.00	13.4000	3.8122	.70
Empathy	8.00	27.00	15.6143	4.7036	.75
Emotional awareness	6.00	20.00	11.8571	3.8945	.76
Impulse control	6.00	20.00	12.6286	3.5064	.80
Flexibility	5.00	20.00	12.0429	4.1509	.81
Problem solving	5.00	20.00	11.7000	4.0766	.88
Stress tolerance	5.00	20.00	11.4286	4.5606	.80
Optimism	6.00	20.00	13.1429	4.2357	.87

**Table 2**  
**Showing Gender Differences in Total Emotional Intelligence, Components of Emotional Intelligence, and Depression (N = 70)**

Variables	N	Means	SD	t-value
Total EI Male	20	117.2	33.44	-2.80*
Total EI Female	50	142.42	35.12	
Interpersonal skill Male	20	19.35	6.36	-2.70*
Interpersonal skill Female	50	23.88	6.22	
Self regard Male	20	11.35	5.29	-2.64*
Self regard Female	50	14.98	4.90	
Assertiveness Male	20	13.500	4.04	-2.63*
Assertiveness Female	50	16.46	4.71	
Emotional self awareness Male	20	11.85	2.70	-1.35
Emotional self awareness Female	50	12.94	3.76	
Empathy Male	20	10.30	3.32	-2.34*
Empathy Female	50	12.48	3.96	
Impulse control Male	20	10.65	3.40	-1.99*
Impulse control Female	50	12.60	4.31	
Flexibility Male	20	10.30	3.57	-1.97
Flexibility Female	50	12.26	4.16	
Problem solving Male	20	9.00	4.07	-3.07*
Problem solving Female	50	12.40	4.41	
Stress tolerance Male	20	9.85	4.47	-1.18
Stress tolerance Female	50	11.22	4.11	
Optimism Male	20	10.70	3.67	-3.57*
Optimism Female	50	14.12	3.49	
Depression Male	20	29.30	15.41	2.85*
Depression Female	50	18.08	13.42	

Note. *d.f* = 68, \**p* < .05.

**Table 3**  
**Correlation of the Total Emotional Intelligence, and Components of Emotional Intelligence with Depression (N = 70)**

Variables	Depression
Interpersonal Skill	-.726**
Self-Regard	-.855**
Assertiveness	-.572**
Emotional self awareness	-.557**
Empathy	-.651*
Impulse control	-.662**
Flexibility	-.664**
Problem solving	-.758**
Stress tolerance	-.701**
Optimism	-.666**
Total EI	-.803**

Note. \*\*correlation  $P < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

**Table 4**  
**Linear Regression for Predicting Depression from Emotional Intelligence (N = 70)**

Model	B	SEB	$\beta$
Constant	65.636	4.128	
Emotional intelligence	-.328	.030	-.803*

**Table 5**  
**Step Wise Regression for Predicting Depression from 10-Components of Emotional Intelligence (N = 70)**

Model	B	SEB	$\beta$
1. Constant	54.922	2.642	
Self Regard	-2.422	.177	-.855**
2. Constant	57.458	2.557	
Self Regard	-1.813	.239	-.643**
Problem Solving	-.953	.275	-.293*

significant predictors of depression (see Table 5).  $R^2 = .731$  for model1, and  $R^2 = .772$  for model 2 (\*\*ps < .000), (Fs = 184.804 & 113.418, Ps < .000). 73% of variance in depression was accounted for by self regard, when Prob-

lem Solving combined with self regard, the value of  $R^2$  increased by 4% and 77 % of the variance in depression was accounted for by self regard, and problem solving. T-test was applied to compare the gender differences in two measurements and significant difference appeared (see Table 2). Assumption of normality of data was tested before analyses.

## DISCUSSION

Relationship between EI and depression has been investigated since the last decade to find out the construct validity of emotional intelligence scales<sup>12</sup>. The result of the present study supported the significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and depression, and results are in congruence with earlier researches done in Europe and America<sup>11,12,14,16,17</sup>.

Significant gender differences were appeared between male and female sample on EI. Male showed lower EI as compared to female. Results are consistent with researches supporting higher level of total emotional intelligence and components of EI like, interpersonal skill, empathy, impulse control and optimism in female as compared to male in different cultures<sup>23-26</sup>. The process of socialization may also cause gender differences in EI, as females are usually encouraged to express or share their positive emotions, while male are not supposed to share their feelings and emotions.

Self regard (the ability to be aware of one self and accurately appraise and respect one's self) in the present study appeared as a major predictor of depression. Self-regard emerged structurally as the most important component of the Bar-on model with strong construct validity and has been repeatedly confirmed as a powerful predictor of mental health<sup>12</sup>. People having self regard are better able to repair their mood<sup>27</sup>. One, who lacks the ability of self regard, usually experiences sense of failures, self-dissatisfaction, guilt, self-dislike or accusation, and indecisiveness, which may lead him/her toward the onset of depression<sup>28-30</sup>.

Problem solving (PS) appeared as a second salient predictor of depression and the findings are supported by earlier researches<sup>12, 19</sup>. Inability to solve problem usually co-occur with indecisiveness: a key feature of depression. Depressed persons have negative view of self, others and future, they are reluctant to make decision because of the fear of failure and due to passivity and motivational deficits<sup>31</sup>, and as a consequence they lose their ability to solve problem<sup>29</sup>.

Significant negative correlation between optimism and depression in the present sample is also supported by previous studies<sup>12, 15</sup>. Depressed persons have pessimistic outlook, are inclined to see the negative side of a picture, expect failures in future projects, and anticipate dark future, don't take initiatives due to the fear of failure; this all may lead him/her to toward the onset of depression<sup>28, 29, 32</sup>.

### Limitations & Future Implication

We should be cautious in attributing causality of relationship observed, as bi-variate co relational analysis was carried out between emotional intelligence and depression. Number of patients was small and was taken from one hospital. We can have more reliable results by introducing larger sample from different hospitals in future studies. Measures used in the study were self-report, so factor of common method variance can not be ignored. More authentic results can be taken in future by developing and applying performance based ability measure of EI in Pakistani cultural context.

Despite all the limitations, the present study shows the adaptive value of emotional intelligence for maintaining and promoting individual's mental health. The results provide support to the notion that lower emotional intelligence individuals are prone to poor mental health, as the study reveals that all components of emotional intelligence lack in depressed persons. It may be assumed that if emotional intelligence is strengthened, it will help in the prognosis of depression and will work as a preventive measure of depression as well. Effective use of EI based psychotherapy in psychiatric disorders is supported by the work of Marsh Linehan(1993a)<sup>33</sup>. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) of Linehan has strong focus on helping people with Border line Personality Disorder to control and regulate their emotions; skills, which could be the focus of any treatment approach aimed at developing and enhancing EI<sup>34</sup>.

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## ANNEXURE SCALE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (SEI)

نام..... جنس مرد/عورت عمر..... تعلیم.....  
پیشہ..... ماہانہ آمدن..... ازدواجی حیثیت شادی شدہ/غیر شادی شدہ شہر/علاقہ.....

ہدایات:- ذیل میں بیانات دیے جا رہے ہیں اور ہر بیان کے حوالے سے آپ نے اپنی رائے کا اظہار چار ممکنہ جوابات میں سے کسی ایک پر نشان (✓) لگا کر دینا ہے۔ برائے مہربانی سوچ سمجھ کر اور نہایت ایمانداری سے جواب دیں۔ تمام بیانات پر اپنی رائے کا اظہار کریں۔ مندرجہ ذیل بیانات میں کوئی بیان بھی درست یا غلط نہیں ہے۔  
نوٹ:- آپ کی مہیا کردہ معلومات کو خفیہ رکھا جائے گا۔ اگر آپ چاہیں تو کوئی فرضی نام بھی لکھ سکتے ہیں۔

نمبر شمار	بیانات	ہمیشہ	اکثر	کبھی کبھار	کبھی نہیں
1	میں حالات کا روشن پہلو دیکھتا/دیکھتی ہوں				
2	میں مختلف جذبات/ہیجان (غصے/نفرت اور حسد/رتشک) میں فرق کر سکتا/سکتی ہوں				
3	میں کشمکش میں بغور جائزہ لے کر مسئلہ کا حل تلاش کر لیتا/لیتی ہوں۔				
4	ناکامی کی صورت میں مستقبل کا لائحہ عمل باآسانی تیار کر لیتا/لیتی ہوں۔				
5	میں کوئی بھی کام کرنے سے پہلے اس کی منصوبہ بندی کرتا/کرتی ہوں۔				
6	میں حالات میں تبدیلی کو باآسانی تسلیم کر لیتا/لیتی ہوں۔				
7	میں برملا اپنی ناراضگی کا اظہار کرتا/کرتی ہوں۔				
8	میں اپنی کمزوریوں اور خامیوں کا اعتراف باآسانی کر لیتا/لیتی ہوں۔				
9	لوگ میرے چہرے کے تاثرات سے میرے جذبات کا اندازہ لگا لیتے ہیں۔				
10	کسی مسئلے پر بحث کے دوران میں بہت پرسکون انداز میں دلائل دیتا/دیتی ہوں۔				
11	میں دوسروں کے سامنے اپنے تشویش پریشانی ظاہر نہیں کرتا/کرتی ہوں۔				
12	کسی مسئلے کو حل کرتے وقت اپنے خیالات کو باآسانی مجتمع کر سکتا/سکتی ہوں۔				
13	میں ناکامی کی صورت میں روتا/روتی ہوں۔				
14	اگر صورت حال پیچیدہ ہو تو مایوس ہونے کی بجائے مرحلہ وار اس سے نکلنے کو کوشش کرتا/کرتی ہوں۔				
15	میں باآسانی اپنے غصے پر قابو پالیتا/لیتی ہوں۔				
16	جب کوئی اچھا کام کرے تو میں اس کی تعریف کرنے میں پچکچاہٹ محسوس نہیں کرتا/کرتی۔				
17	میں اپنے بنیادی مسائل پر بھی دوسروں سے شکایت نہیں کر سکتا/کر سکتی۔				
18	میں اپنے ارد گرد کے لوگوں کا خیال رکھتا/رکھتی ہوں۔				
19	میں سماجی ذمہ داریوں کو احسن طریقے سے نبھاتا/نبھاتی ہوں۔				
20	میں اجنبی لوگوں سے آسانی سے گھل مل جاتا/جاتی ہوں۔				
21	لوگ مجھ پر بھروسہ کرتے ہیں۔				
22	میں اپنے کسی بھی کردار کے پس پشت محرک کا واضح علم رکھتا/رکھتی ہوں۔				
23	شدید گرمی/سردی میں غریبوں کو سردیوں کے کنارے سوئے دیکھ کر انتہائی دکھی ہو جاتا/جاتی ہوں۔				
24	ارد گرد کے لوگوں کے موڈ کا میرے جذبات/احساس پر گہرا اثر ہوتا ہے۔				

نمبر شمار	بیانات	ہمیشہ	اکثر	کبھی کبھار	کبھی نہیں
25	میں ان لوگوں کی پریشانی محسوس کر سکتا ہوں جن کے پاس وسائل کی کمی ہے۔				
26	میں مستقبل کے بارے پریشان رہتا/ رہتی ہوں۔				
27	اگر ایک دفعہ کسی کام میں ناکام ہو جاؤں تو ناامید نہیں ہوتا/ ہوتی اور بہتری کے لیے کوشش جاری رکھتا/ رکھتی ہوں۔				
28	میں نئے منصوبوں پر بلا تکیچا ہٹ کام شروع کر دیتا/ دیتی ہوں۔				
29	میں ضرورت پڑنے پر نئی ٹیکنالوجی سیکھنے میں ہچکچاہٹ محسوس نہیں کرتا/ کرتی۔				
30	میں اپنے جذبات/ احساسات کے بارے میں گفتگو کا شکار رہتا/ رہتی ہوں۔				
31	میں جانتا/ جانتی ہوں کہ میری کسی سے نفرت کے پیچھے کیا عناصر کارفرما ہیں۔				
32	میں اپنی ذات کی حدود کا واضح شعور رکھتا/ رکھتی ہوں۔				
33	میں خوشی کے لمحات کو پوری طرح محسوس کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
34	میں دوسروں کو خوفزدہ کیے بغیر ان کو ان کی کارکردگی کے بارے میں بتا دیتا/ دیتی ہوں۔				
35	میں دوسروں کو ناراض کیے بغیر ان سے اختلاف رائے کر سکتا/ سکتی ہوں۔				
36	میں نامساعد حالات میں بھی اپنے آپ کو پرسکون رکھتا/ رکھتی ہوں۔				
37	میں دوسروں کے دکھ درد سنتا/ سنتی ہوں اور اس کو اپنے اندر محسوس کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
38	میں سوچتا/ سوچتی ہوں کہ میں ایک کامیاب انسان ہوں۔				
39	اپنی ناپسندیدگی کا مناسب انداز میں اظہار میرے لیے مشکل نہیں ہوتا۔				
40	میں لوگوں سے جھگڑے کی صورت میں باہمی بات چیت سے ان کے نظریات سمجھنے کی کوشش کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
41	اگر میں غلطی پر ہوں تو باآسانی دوسروں سے معذرت کر سکتا/ سکتی ہوں۔				
42	اگر میرے ذمہ کوئی کام لگا یا جائے تو میں اس کی تکمیل کے حوالے سے شکوک و شبہات کا شکار ہو جاتا/ جاتی ہوں۔				
43	جذبات/ ہیجان میرے جاری منصوبوں کی راہ میں رکاوٹ نہیں بنتے۔				
44	میں بدلتے ہوئے حالات کے مطابق اپنے خیالات میں باآسانی تبدیلی لے آتا/ آتی ہوں۔				
45	میں مشکل ترین حالات میں بھی اُمید رکھتا/ رکھتی ہوں کہ کوئی بہتر صورت حال نکل آئیگی۔				
46	اگر میرے رہنے/ کام کرنے کی جگہ تبدیل ہو جائے تو میں پریشان نہیں ہوتا/ ہوتی۔				
47	میں پسندیدگی کے اظہار میں ہچکچاہٹ محسوس کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
48	میں بغیر کسی ظاہری وجہ سے افسردہ ہو جاتا/ جاتی ہوں۔				
49	اگر میرے ساتھ کوئی برا واقعہ پیش آجائے میرا سارا دن برباد ہو جاتا ہے۔				
50	میں اپنی گھبراہٹ پر جلد قابو پا لیتا/ لیتی ہوں۔				
51	اگر میں کسی سے وعدہ کروں تو اسے پورا کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
52	اگر میرے سماجی تعلقات ناخوشگوار ہو جائیں تو میں ان میں بہتری لاسکتا/ سکتی ہوں۔				
53	لوگ میرے ساتھ کام کرنا پسند کرتے ہیں۔				
54	اگر کسی کو میری مدد کی ضرورت ہو تو میں ہر ممکن تعاون کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
55	میں رشتوں کو قائم رکھنے کی ہر ممکن کوشش کرتا/ کرتی ہوں۔				
56	زندگی میں میری سمت بالکل واضح ہے۔				