

Original article**Does increased emotional intelligence reduce students' tendency toward substance abuse?**

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Abstract

Background: Substance abuse is a learned social behavior that is the result of interaction between individual and social factors. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence is one of the factors affecting the formation of social relationships.

Aim: The present study was conducted to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance abuse among students in Iran.

Methods: In this cross-sectional correlation study, the research population included 120 students from Iranshahr School of Medical Sciences in 2016 who were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Brad and Greaves Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the Zargar et al.'s Addiction Potential Inventory.

Results: The mean scores of emotional intelligence in the population and the tendency toward addiction were 91.3 ± 17.4 and 80.8 ± 29.0 , respectively. The results of Pearson correlation test indicated the presence of a significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance use such that people with higher emotional intelligence had a lower tendency toward substance use (p value <0.05).

Conclusions: An inverse relationship existed between emotional intelligence and tendency to use substances. Thus, it is recommended using strategies for increasing emotional intelligence and proper management of emotions in students to reduce their tendency toward substance use.

Keyword: Emotional Intelligence; Substance abuse; Student

Introduction

Substance abuse is a patterned use of a drug in which the user consumes the substance in amounts or with methods which are harmful to themselves or others. Substance abuse as a critical health-related social problem in today's world has turned into a major concern for communities. Undoubtedly, the entire communities are fairly involved in it and have expended a great part of national capitals in preventing and overcoming this problem [1, 2].

Although addiction refers to an increased desire due to the physiological and psychological changes in the individual, it should be considered that the first step of addiction is a tendency that arises from the subjective evaluations of the individual toward substance use [3]. Despite sufficient information and awareness of people about addiction and substance use, it seems that victims do not appear to have a comprehensive and scientific perspective toward this issue. Among these victims are young students. Many studies have investigated their tendency toward substance use. According to the research report by Serajzadeh and Feyzi in 21 Iranian state universities, 5.8% of the interviewed substance consumers claimed to be somewhat substance dependent and 3.1% claimed a high substance dependency, suggesting that 8.9% of them have substance dependency [4]. Sohrabi et al. investigated the mental health status among university students under the coverage of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology in the 2006-2007 academic year. Using a sample size of 44094 students, they concluded that 21.99% of students are at risk of substance abuse [5]. Hall et al. studied the use of stimulant medications at the Midwestern University and found that the illicit use of stimulant compounds and illegal substances is 17% in male and 11% in female students [6].

Researchers have attempted to explain the reasons for the tendency of people toward substances abuse over the last decades. Based on the proposed theories, a wide range of genetic and psychological predisposing factors may influence substance use [7]. The most effective

approaches to prevent such substance abuse are derived from psychosocial theories. They mainly emphasize the risk and protective psychosocial factors that cause the initial use of substances. According to the rehabilitation approach, substance abuse is considered a learned social behavior that results from the interaction of individual and social factors [8]. This approach suggests that individuals with poor personal and social skills are not only vulnerable to factors encouraging the use of substances but also tend to use the substances as an alternative for compromised coping skills [9]. Currently, one of the factors affecting social relationships is emotional intelligence [10]. This element is a set of interconnected cognitive and emotional abilities that assist the individual to be aware of the emotions that facilitate thought, to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion, to make wise decisions, and to behave responsibly through balancing their thoughts and emotions [11]. Emotional intelligence can best be described as the appropriate processing of emotional information and as a guide for thinking and establishing effective relationships [12]. In this respect, Pellitteri believes that emotional intelligence is associated with psychological compatibility, success and its prediction, and the overall satisfaction of life [13]. Individuals with high emotional intelligence have better ability in coping with stress, deal more effectively with problems, and use effective coping skills. On the other hand, individuals with low emotional intelligence, constantly feel emptiness and collapse, showing improper emotional reactions [14, 15]. Thus, low emotional intelligence can be considered a risk factor causing problems in the people's adaption to the environment [16], because the problem-solving ability is significantly lower in these individuals and they lack the ability to use coping skills when encountered with psychological stresses of life [17]. Studies on emotional intelligence have revealed that emotional intelligence is an effective factor in real-world outcomes such as health functioning and cognitive ability [18, 19]. The impact of emotional intelligence on substance abuse has not been well studied.

Considering the significance of preventing substance abuse and considering the health promotion of students as the founders of a country's future, the present study investigates

whether there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and the tendency toward substance abuse among students in Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences.

Method

This cross-sectional correlation was conducted at the nursing and midwifery school affiliated with Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences (IRSHUMS) in the southeast of Iran in 2016. According to similar studies [20], the sample size was determined to be 120 with a confidence interval of 95% and a test power of 80%. The research units were selected in this cluster style. In this way, each of the fields of study as a class and the academic term in each discipline was considered as a cluster. Given the number of students in each discipline and each class, the sample size for that field and class was determined; Inclusion criteria included the willingness to participate in the study, studying at the Iranshahr School of Medical Sciences during the research, and non-use of psychoactive substances. After obtaining permission from the authorities, researcher explained to the students about the research. After obtaining consent, questionnaires were distributed among students and then collected. Students who refused to participate during the study or transferred to another university while conducting the research were excluded from the study.

The research population was selected using stratified cluster method, where each study field was considered as a class and the academic years of each field were considered as a cluster. The sample size of that field and class was determined according to the number of students in each field of study and class.

Following tools were used:

Demographic questionnaire consists 14 questions about the personal and educational characteristics of individuals.

Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire: The Brad & Graves questionnaire is designed to accurately assess emotional intelligence skills. This instrument consists of 28 items. This

questionnaire assessed the emotional intelligence in four dimensions. These dimensions are further subdivided into self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, and each dimension was measured with seven items. The lowest score of this questionnaire was 0 and the highest score was 140. The higher scores of the questionnaire indicate greater emotional intelligence [21]. The validity of the Persian version of this questionnaire has been confirmed by Abbasi et al. (2007). The questionnaire was validated with a correlation coefficient of 0.68. The validity of this tool has also been confirmed by Hasanzadeh and Sadati (2009) [21]. Hasanzadeh and Sadati (2009) have also confirmed the reliability of this tool [21]. In this research, the validity of content was also confirmed by 10 expert professors. The reliability of this questionnaire was confirmed by Abbasi et al. using the test-retest method, where the dimensions of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management had correlation coefficients of 0.73, 0.87, 0.78, and 0.76, respectively.

Iranian Addiction Potential Scale: The Readiness for Addiction Scale was developed by Weed and Butcher (1992) and attempts have been made to determine its validity in Iran. This questionnaire is an Iranian addiction readiness scale, which was localized according to the psychosocial condition of Iranian society by Zargar (2006). This questionnaire is a combination of both active and passive readiness. Active readiness is related to antisocial behaviors, desire to use drugs, positive attitude towards drugs, depression and excitement. In the second factor (passive readiness), the highest number of subjects is related to lack of expression and depression [22]. This questionnaire consists of two factors with 36 articles and 5 polygraphs. In the study of Zargar et al. (2008), two methods were used to calculate the validity of this scale. In criterion validity, the addiction potential questionnaire was used to discriminate substance addicted and non-addicted groups from each other well.

The validity of the scale structure was calculated by correlating it to the 25-point scale of the clinical list of clinical signs of 0.45, which was statistically significant. The reliability of the

scale was calculated by Zarger et al. using Cronbach's alpha to be 0.90, which was satisfactory [22]. The scoring of each question was on a scale of 0 (completely disagree) to 3 (completely agree). However, this method of scoring was reversed in questions 6, 12, 15, and 21.

Ethical considerations

The Ethics Committee affiliated with IRANSHAHR University of Medical Sciences approved this study and the informed consent procedure (Medical Ethics No: IR.IRSHUMS.REC.1394.12). First, the researcher presented the letter of introduction for the required coordination with the context of the study. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and the procedure for the data collection was provided to the eligible participants prior to the data collection. Then, verbal agreement of the participants was obtained and they were ensured in terms of confidentiality and anonymity of the data as well as voluntary participation in the study. Informed consent was implied from returning the completed questionnaires.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed by SPSS 19 using Pearson correlation and Spearman correlation coefficient tests to determine the relationship between variables related to personal and educational characteristics with emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance use. Moreover, the chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between qualitative variables.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The mean age of the population was 22.4 years (18 to 24 years old), and of them were of either gender. Majority were unmarried and were studying in nursing courses (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Studied Students of Iranshahr School of Medical Science

Variable		Number	Percent
Age(Mean±SD)		120	22.4±5.33
Gender	Female	60	50.8
	Male	58	49.2
	Total	118	100
Marital Status	Married	12	10.4
	Single	102	88.7
	Other	1	0.9
	Total	115	100
Field of Study	Nursing	57	50.9
	Midwifery	19	17.0
	Medical Emergency	8	7.1
	Surgical Technologist	16	14.3
	Anesthesiology	11	9.8
	Total	111	100
Interested in Academic Field	Interested	77	68.1
	Not Interested	30	26.5
	No Comment	6	5.3
	Total	113	100

The tendency toward substance abuse

The mean score of the tendency toward substance use in the population ranging from 41 to 105 was 80.8 ± 29.0 . The findings of this study indicated that the tendency toward substance use in male and unmarried students is higher than that in female and married students (p -value <0.05). Furthermore, no significant difference existed between the students in terms of a tendency toward substance abuse among different fields and academic years, and no significant relationship existed between the residence and substance use (p value > 0.05).

Emotional intelligence

The mean score of emotional intelligence in the studied population was 91.3 ± 17.4 . The mean score of self-awareness in the range of 0 to 30 was 20.8 ± 4.2 ; the mean score of self-management in the range of 0 to 45 was 27.4 ± 6.0 ; the mean score of social awareness in the range of 0 to 30 was 16.3 ± 4.0 ; and the mean score of relationship management in the range of 0 to 40 was 26.5 ± 6.2 . According to the findings of this study, no significant relationship existed between emotional intelligence score and demographic variables (Table 2).

Table 2: The Mean Scores of Emotional Intelligence and its Correlation with Tendency toward substance use in the Students of Iranshahr School of Medical Sciences

Indicators of Tendency toward Substance Use	Frequency	Mean\pmSD	Correlation Coefficient	P value
Total Emotional Intelligence	120	91.3 \pm 17.4	- 0.340	0.000
Self-Awareness	120	20.8 \pm 4.2	- 0.390	0.000
Self-Management	120	27.4 \pm 6.0	- 0.222	0.015
Social-Awareness	120	16.3 \pm 4.0	- 0.377	0.000
Relationship-Management	120	26.5 \pm 6.2	- 0.348	0.021

Relationship between emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance abuse

The results of Pearson correlation test indicated that a significant inverse relationship existed between emotional intelligence (in all dimensions: self-management intelligence, higher self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management) and the tendency toward substance use such that individuals with higher emotional intelligence had a lower score of tendency toward substance use (p -value $<$ 0.05). (Table 2).

Discussion

In index study most of the population was average in terms of emotional intelligence. This finding is consistent with the results of Ghaderi et al [23]. Ghaderi et al, Dizje and Mehdizadeh et al also reported the emotional intelligence of students at the moderate level [23, 24,25] .The

findings of Ghanbari et al and Nasiri et al. indicated that the emotional intelligence of most students is in the optimal level which is not consistent with our study results; the reason for the difference in findings can be due to the different tools used and their sub-scales, the level of emotional intelligence of individuals, and different cultural context of the studied societies [23,26].

In this study, the mean score of a tendency toward substance use was 80.8 ± 29 , which was in the average range; this result is consistent with the results of Nasiri et al. and Ghanbaritalab et al. [20,26]. According to the findings of this study, a significant inverse relationship existed between emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance use such that individuals with higher emotional intelligence have a low tendency toward substance abuse; this finding is in line with the results of Dajn et al., Bagheri, Sader and Akbarzade, Bar-on, Trinidad, Narimani and Habibi, Ghanbari Talab et al., Musab Ghaderi et al., and Nasiri et al. [20,23,26-32].

In another study, researchers reported a positive significant relationship between students' emotional distress and nicotine dependency [33], all of which were consistent with the results of the present study. This result can be explained by the fact that individuals with higher emotional intelligence may have more mental capabilities in understanding the situations and responding to the unwanted pressures of those around them [34]. These capabilities obviously lead to increased resistance to substance use and allow access to more effective solutions. When an individual is under pressure from peer groups, not subjecting to peer pressure as one of the components of emotional intelligence reduces the risk of accepting and using the substance. Emotional intelligence plays an important role in personal, social, and professional success and plays a major role in regulating negative emotions [35]. In other words, the ability to control and manage emotions causes individuals to use effective coping approaches in challenging situations such as substance use offer. In this respect, individuals with high emotional intelligence showed more capability of predicting others' demands, understanding the peer pressure, controlling their emotions, and refusing the substance use offer [29].

Emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with the range of social network and its quality and presentation and has a negative relationship with psychological distress and depression [36]. In other words, the ability to control and manage emotions causes individuals to use effective coping approaches in challenging situations, such as substance use offer. In this respect, individuals with high emotional intelligence were more capable of predicting others' demands.

Among the findings of this study, a negative relationship existed between self-management and tendency toward substance use. According to Bradberry and Greaves, individuals with low self-management skills were less skilled in regulating their emotions, show less social and emotional adaption, and take advantage of less social support and satisfaction [37].

The results of a study conducted by Khodaie on a group of addicted people indicated that the difference between addicted and non-addicted subjects was significant in the studied components of emotional intelligence; i.e., attention to emotions and recognition of emotions, emotional facilitation of thought, emotional comprehension, and emotional management [38]. This finding is consistent with the findings of the present research. In another study conducted by Ciarrochi and Anderson on high school students, the results indicated that adolescents with maladaptive behavior have less ability in emotional intelligence, particularly in the ability to perceive, understand, and manage the emotions [39]. Thus, the lower the self-management in an individual, the higher the tendency of substance abuse. Another finding of this study was a negative correlation between relationship management and a tendency toward substance use. Individuals who obtained high scores in relationship management showed more flexibility, have a sense of duty and take steps toward success. This characteristic also influences the ability of individuals to provide more powerful emotional support resources and affect an individual's ability to avoid stressfully and make desirable emotional conditions [40]. Further, the results of this study indicated that components of self-awareness and emotional intelligence have a negative correlation with the tendency toward addiction. In other words, the less the

social-awareness of individuals, the higher the tendency to use addictive substances; and the higher the social-awareness of individuals, the lower the tendency to use addictive substances. Generally, these characteristics are not found in substance addicts. Addicts often suffer from insecurity, incompetence, loneliness, hatred, depression, severe anxiety, emotional sensitivity, particularly intrapersonal conflicts, and tensions, and feel that they are unable to solve problems [41]. The results of this research indicate that individuals who are not able to use their emotional intelligence skills are more likely to use other methods that are less effective in managing their morale and mood [42]. Thus, the lower the score of an individual in relationship management, the higher his/her tendency to use substances. Overall, the findings of this study indicate the role of emotional intelligence and its components in predicting the tendency toward addiction. Since addiction has many harmful effects in various aspects of cultural, social, political, and economic issues and also affects the physical and mental aspects of the individual, dealing with these causes could play a very constructive role in identifying the predictive factors and, consequently, planning to counter these factors, establishing health promotion plans, and adopting preventive approaches [43].

Limitations of this study are as follows: First, the subjects of this study were selected from one university that could affect the generalizability of the results. Second, students' individual differences in perception of questionnaires because they are completed in a self-report manner. The results of Pearson correlation test indicated that a significant inverse relationship existed between emotional intelligence and tendency toward substance use such that people with higher emotional intelligence had a lower tendency toward substance abuse. However, using more accurate tools in order to assess all aspects of personality can give better results.

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Conflict of interest-none declared

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