

Relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance in nursing professionals

Relación entre inteligencia emocional y desempeño laboral en profesionales de enfermería

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: emotional intelligence is defined as the human capacity to feel, understand, control and modify emotional states in oneself and others, while job performance constitutes the set of actions and behaviors observed in the individual who occupies a position. I work in an organization. This research was carried out with the objective of describing the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance of nursing professionals.

Method: a total of 23 articles in Spanish and English and 2 books were reviewed, from Science, Springer and Researchgate; related to emotional intelligence and job performance, being more than 50 % in the last five years.

Results: individuals with high emotional intelligence are better able to control and manage stress, to effectively confront problems and pressures that arise. Job performance is related or linked to the skills and knowledge that support the worker's actions. Nursing professionals who have an adequate level of emotional intelligence positively affect the quality of care indicator; Adequate levels of emotional intelligence are associated with greater professional success.

Conclusions: the emotional demands implicit in the work performance of nursing staff make the relationship between both variables visible, despite the fact that the available evidence is contradictory to a certain extent.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Job Performance; Nursing; Job Satisfaction.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la inteligencia emocional se define como la capacidad humana de sentir, entender, controlar y modificar estados emocionales en uno mismo y en los demás, mientras que el desempeño laboral constituye el conjunto de acciones y comportamientos observados en el individuo que ocupa un puesto de trabajo en una organización. Se realizó la presente investigación con el objetivo de describir la relación existente entre inteligencia emocional y desempeño laboral de los profesionales de enfermería.

Método: se revisaron un total de 23 artículos en español e inglés y 2 libros, provenientes de Science, Springer y Researchgate; relacionados con la inteligencia emocional y el desempeño laboral, siendo más del 50 % de los últimos cinco años.

Resultados: los individuos con alta inteligencia emocional son más capaces de controlar y manejar el estrés, de enfrentar eficazmente los problemas y presiones que surjan. El desempeño laboral se relaciona o vincula con las habilidades y conocimientos que apoyan las acciones del trabajador. Los profesionales de enfermería que tienen un nivel de inteligencia emocional adecuado, afectan positivamente el indicador de calidad de atención; adecuados niveles de inteligencia emocional se asocian a mayor éxito profesional.

Conclusiones: las demandas emocionales implícitas en el desempeño laboral del personal de enfermería hacen visible la relación entre ambas variables, a pesar de que las evidencias disponibles sean contradictorias en cierta medida.

Palabras clave: Inteligencia Emocional; Desempeño Laboral; Enfermería; Satisfacción Laboral.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, considering the total quality approach, emotional intelligence (EI), motivation, and job satisfaction (JS) are key constructs for human resource management.⁽¹⁾

EI is the human ability to feel, understand, control, and modify emotional states in oneself and others. Emotional intelligence is not about suppressing emotions, but instead directing and balancing them.⁽²⁾ Others define it as the particular ability to identify emotions and differentiate them from somatic reactions, to understand and label them, to use them to guide thought and behavior, and finally to express them appropriately and regulate them.⁽³⁾

EI involves five basic abilities related to emotions and feelings: discovering one's own emotions and feelings, recognizing them, managing them, creating self-motivation, and managing personal relationships. This has been studied extensively since 1999 by Goleman, who is a leading figure in what is currently known about the subject.⁽⁴⁾

On the other hand, job performance (JP) is defined as the set of actions and behaviors observed in an individual who occupies an organization, regarding the content of their job, their responsibilities, and the tasks and activities to be performed in the workplace.⁽⁵⁾

In countries such as the United States, Canada, and Cuba, the ratio of nurses is 7 to 10 times higher than in Peru, where there are only 12 nurses per 10 000 inhabitants. Nursing professionals play a decisive role in the quality of patient care, as they are part of the front line of care. They work under great demands, in circumstances of staff shortages, while continuing to assume their professional responsibility.⁽⁶⁾

EI and DL are phenomena that need to be evaluated and analyzed to improve working conditions. If the relationship of dependency between these two elements were fully understood and, based on this, professionals were trained, the impact on the health sector could be significant.

Emotional intelligence applied in everyday healthcare practice could improve patient care services and create healthier and more functional work environments.

Given the above, this literature review was conducted to describe the relationship between emotional intelligence and the job performance of nursing professionals.

METHOD

A bibliographic review of original articles and reviews was conducted, considering studies in Spanish and English, using the following keywords: emotional intelligence, job performance, nursing, job satisfaction, from databases such as Science, Springer, and Researchgate. Twenty-three articles and two books were selected, of which more than 50 % were from the last five years. The relevant information was extracted, analyzed, and organized, contributing to the proper development of this research.

DEVELOPMENT

Goleman states that emotional intelligence results from a mixture of learned skills and natural talents. It is partly genetic predisposition, partly life experience, and the result of some old lessons. Emotional intelligence used wisely and compassionately stimulates superior performance in leaders, their people, and their companies.

Emotional intelligence

Gil Bazán and Ayuso,^(6,7) report that they have been able to verify that EI is an individual capacity that can be learned throughout life through techniques to develop specific skills, such as: recognizing and knowing how to use one's own emotions, as well as identifying those of others; learning how to defend one's position without being aggressive, thereby developing a specific sensitivity; controlling our impulses; and not allowing harmful elements to distract us from our goals. All of the above aspects have a positive impact on the world of work.

When people have adequate EI, they cope better with the problems and pressures of everyday life, make better decisions, and define their attitudes and behaviors at work more effectively. EI has also been linked to effective leadership and reduced stress and fatigue at work.⁽⁶⁾ IE influences performance from the ground up, meaning that employees and employers can benefit from the proper use and full enjoyment of IE.

People with high levels of IE can effectively deal with problems and pressures that arise, which is why it is directly related to developing and strengthening skills that enable them to guide their actions and define behaviors in the workplace.⁽¹⁾ If we consider that people with higher IQs may have higher levels of EI, and that this, in turn, leads to the improvement of human capabilities, educating professionals in EI and working to gain control in this area could bring about changes in the world of work as we know it today.

From the literature consulted, it has been found that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better able to control and manage stress due to their logical capacity and rational analysis of problems, tolerance, and adaptation to stressful situations with the hope of improving the situation; thus, a high level of EI allows for more successful management of work demands.^(6,8,9)

García Ancira⁽¹⁰⁾ states that people with emotional intelligence have social skills that lead them to have excellent interpersonal relationships, which are essential for good job performance and achieving personal happiness in the family and social environment. The key is to be able to communicate assertively with both people who are pleasant and friendly and those who are not. The author considers that a good working environment is not only determined by material aspects or by the training of staff in that area, but also by how interactions between social groups are established, as this determines the problem-solving capacity of the work team, reduces disputes, and generates professional satisfaction and fulfillment.

Since there is a close relationship between EI and personal self-concept, attitudes, and behaviors, these will be directly affected

by emotions of pleasure, displeasure, happiness, nonconformity, and feelings inseparable from human actions. Effective performance requires a combination of cognitive and emotional conditions that allow the person to analyze their environment and make the best decisions. Therefore, competencies complete the engine that generates actions. These assertions will enable us to consider the relationship between an individual's EI and job competencies, which facilitates the desire necessary to pursue them and feel satisfaction in doing so.⁽¹⁾

Job performance

Job performance has several essential characteristics relevant for analysis and study, including adaptability, communication, initiative, knowledge, teamwork, low standards, skill development, enhancing job design, and maximizing performance. It is divided into three dimensions. Task performance is a fundamental aspect of evaluating and managing an employee's performance in the workplace. Contextual performance refers to how employees contribute to the work environment and organizational culture beyond their specific tasks and responsibilities. Counterproductive performance, "counterproductive behavior," or "dysfunctional behavior at work."⁽¹²⁾ The authors consider that, if DL is analyzed as a variable, it determines whether a center or institution functions properly, which is why studying its relationship with IE is essential.

Like other types of job demands, the emotional demands implicit in specific jobs involve managing emotions and, in this sense, a certain level of emotional competence on the part of the manager will facilitate performance and the proper execution of the job. 10 Employees with a high level of intelligence generally manage their emotions better because they can maintain a positive mental state, which leads to better job performance.⁽¹³⁾

Job performance is vital in organizational practice and research because it influences personnel promotion and retention, positive relationships, effective teamwork, and the building of social capital.⁽¹³⁾ Job performance is essential for authoritative advancement, understanding the important and solid purposes of personnel, understanding the nature of each of the associates, required for an election program, administrative improvement, meaning of capabilities, and foundation of a discerning and impartial basis for compensating performance.⁽¹¹⁾

Goleman⁽²⁾ indicates that performance is primarily influenced by the employee's job expectations, attitudes toward achievement, and desire for harmony. Therefore, performance is related or linked to the skills and knowledge that support the worker's actions to consolidate the company's objectives. It is the actual behavior or conduct of workers, both in professional and technical terms, as well as the interpersonal relationships created in the care of the health/disease processes of the population, which in turn is significantly influenced by the environmental component.

It has been shown that excessive workloads lead to a greater intention to change jobs among professionals, a higher risk of patient death after surgery, and an increase in the rate of falls during hospitalization. This shows that caring requires knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is therefore essential to recognize the power of emotional intelligence during the workday, as decisions and attitudes depend on emotions.⁽⁶⁾

Bautista Cuello,⁽¹²⁾ conceptualizes that the job performance of nursing professionals requires skills and jurisdictions associated with the work, taking into consideration elements to examine the activity of the work performed, such as efficiency, commitment, and compatibility in group work, among others. For his part, Soares,⁽¹⁴⁾ indicates that evaluating the job performance of nurses is vitally essential for promoting plans to improve their professional skills and raise the quality indicators of the services they provide.

In the field of nursing

Nursing is a demanding and stressful profession that involves constant social interaction with people who are mostly ill and their families, as well as with other professionals who make up the healthcare team. Nurses must constantly try to regulate their emotions and those of others in their relationships with them. Nurses are also exposed to challenging situations such as: work overload, excessive job responsibility, shortages of equipment and materials, poor lighting, inadequate or insufficient space for the tasks they perform, lack of job motivation, etc. This generates favorable or unfavorable perspectives on their work, depending on their expectations of the job, the rewards offered, interpersonal relationships, and management style in the workplace; in other words, levels of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.⁽¹⁾

The workload of healthcare personnel is not a new problem, but it is worsening with the current staff shortages, which increases the dysfunctional nature of some services. Therefore, to prioritize patient well-being, healthcare institutions should organize efforts to develop the skills of existing staff, not only professional skills, but also emotional and social interaction skills.

It is essential to consider that nurses must perform their duties efficiently and effectively in their care; to do so, they require cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal skills appropriate to their professional profile. This implies physical, psychological, and ethical balance, with a close relationship between these factors determining their behavior towards the environment and the individuals with whom they interact. For this reason, they could be classified as positive or negative depending on the outcome they offer the individual. For example, at the organizational level, emotions such as sadness and melancholy can be seen as detrimental to people's performance.⁽¹⁾

Morales-Castillejos⁽¹⁵⁾ states that nursing professionals with adequate emotional intelligence positively affect the quality of care indicator. Otherwise, it has adverse effects on personal relationships between peers or clients.

EI in the nursing work context seems to have a positive effect on the self-satisfaction of the care provided, because emotions can be regulated and managed, allowing nurses to modify and change the appearance of one emotion over another and thus use them to improve their job performance, which directly influences job satisfaction; the latter conditions a variety of factors that affect job performance and the quality of services provided.⁽¹⁶⁾ Interaction with patients is crucial in health services, and educational

institutions are responsible for educating future professionals in communication and interaction skills. However, these efforts do not consistently achieve their objectives, so staff are abundant with low capacity to react to stressful situations, do not know how to deal with patients and their companions, and even lack the basic understanding and humanity required in this sector.

Evidence shows that nursing professionals need concentration and mental and emotional control during the workday to cope with physical and psychological stress. Those with adequate emotional intelligence may be more successful professionally, as they have better problem-solving strategies, work well in teams, exercise leadership, communicate effectively, make good decisions, and encourage creativity.⁽⁶⁾

Healthcare professionals working in critical or specialized areas require greater knowledge and skill in providing such care. Added to this is the need for emotional regulation skills, as they frequently experience essential ethical and moral situations with patients, which could affect the emotional health of healthcare personnel and the heavy workload these services represent.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the case of care and procedures in critical care units, this has been controversial in recent years, with new perspectives and approaches to critical care. This personnel, being subjected to a high cognitive load due to the characteristics of these services, tends to experience overload, burnout, and mental fatigue. However, the author considers that using and promoting self-control techniques, social interaction, and adaptation mechanisms, as part of emotional education, could positively influence this type of care.

Villarreal Mata, in his study on the relationship between EI, job satisfaction, and alcohol consumption among nursing staff, found that despite a higher level of EI, job satisfaction is lower in critical areas. These data may suggest that nursing staff who provide crucial care have high EI to perform their work, but do not necessarily find satisfaction. Job satisfaction is staff projection towards their environment, including material resources and social interactions. Therefore, low levels of job satisfaction could indicate poor or inadequate job performance.

A study conducted in Chile found that nurses in surgery, surgical specialties, and medicine reported high workloads: 24,5 % during the day and 57,3 % at night. Another study conducted with nurses in Brazil confirmed that workload contributes to 13 % of job insecurity for nurses. In Peru, a study of nurses in seven hospital departments found that 78,8 % had a moderate workload, which was higher in the emergency department.⁽⁶⁾ In healthcare institutions, stress and anxiety are present due to the management of large numbers of patients and sick people who require care and attention from healthcare professionals. It is therefore essential that employees are trained to deal with uncomfortable situations within the organization and can maintain the best attitude and morale to carry out their activities without complications or setbacks.⁽¹¹⁾

Interventions with nursing staff on the subject

Quintana and Tarqui (2020) investigated the job performance of nursing professionals at a Social Security hospital in Callao, Peru. Twenty-four point five percent performed inadequately, 78,8 % had six or more years of service, 93,8 % had a specialty, 63,0 % felt overworked, 70,2 % did not receive training, and 37,0 % felt pressure from nursing management. Of the total number of nurses with sufficient performance, 66,7 % had ≥ 6 years of service ($p=0,02$), 96,2 % had a specialty ($p=0,01$), 84,3 % felt unmotivated, and 76,5 % thought they were placed according to their specialty ($p<0,05$). In conclusion, most nursing professionals at the hospital have sufficient performance. The relationship between job performance, motivation, and quality of services is a key triad in the quality of care. Providing professionals with positions and work areas where they are satisfied improves patient care and promotes the experiential growth of workers.

Torres Vargas,⁽¹¹⁾ indicates that most nurses have medium to high emotional intelligence. Similarly, Ruiz Toro,⁽¹⁷⁾ in his research on EI in healthcare personnel, shows that the healthcare personnel studied have an average level of emotional intelligence. He also found that 74,4 % of healthcare personnel have average emotional intelligence, know how to deal with complicated situations, have flexible thinking, and have adequate stress and emotion management.

The literature is controversial about the proper relationship between EI and LD, with many studies expressing both positive and negative results.

Torres Vargas,⁽¹¹⁾ in his study on the relationship between EI and DL among healthcare professionals at a hospital in Pucallpa, found that emotional intelligence is related to job performance. When subjected to Kendall's Tau b test statistic, with a confidence level of 95 % and a margin of error of 5 %, a p-value of 0,01 was obtained, meaning a statistically significant relationship exists between the variables. 01, which means that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables.

Guillen,⁽¹⁸⁾ analyzed the level of EI and its relationship with DL in nurses at the Belén Hospital in Trujillo. The results obtained show that there is a significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and job performance in nurses in the surgical center and the surgery A and B services.

Mantilla,⁽¹⁹⁾ in their study to determine the relationship between EI and job performance in nurses working at the San Juan de Dios Clinic, concluded that there is a significant relationship between both variables, since the higher the emotional intelligence of nurses, the better their job performance, as it has been shown that possessing adequate emotional intelligence allows nursing professionals to act and make good decisions during the care process.

Duque,⁽²⁰⁾ investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on job skills. The results show that emotional intelligence, represented by emotional and social skills, has a positive influence on job skills. They find that aspects such as emotion recognition, teamwork, communication, achievement orientation, perception, and negotiation are characteristics of individuals that favor the formation of skills, affecting job performance.

An important finding was that of Pasmay,⁽²¹⁾ in a research project on the relationship between EI and DL levels, who evaluated participants in the dimensions corresponding to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, emotion control, self-motivation, interpersonal skills, and emotional support, in addition to identifying sociodemographic characteristics through data obtained from the company

to describe the main characteristics of the population. Using the information gathered, it was found that the dimensions evaluated were not correlated, indicating that the level of emotional intelligence does not affect job performance. However, a relationship was found between the participants' sociodemographic characteristics and the variables evaluated, resulting in significant levels of correlation.

This coincides with Pérez Ramos,⁽²²⁾ who studied the relationship between EI and DL among nursing professionals in the pediatric cardiology department of a hospital in Lima; the results showed that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the job performance of nursing professionals in the department.

Córdova García,⁽²³⁾ researched to determine the relationship between EI and DL among administrative staff at the San Miguelito Regional University Center. As a result of this research, it was concluded that, due to the low but significantly moderate correlation evidenced by the low correlation coefficient in the statistical analysis, there is no relationship between the level of EI and the DL of the administrative workers at the center.

Given the above, the author wishes to point out the need for research with adequate methodological quality and strong scientific evidence to clarify doubts and dilemmas on the subject. Although the literature shows contradictory results, the authors do consider that there is a close relationship between EI levels and DL, with one being dependent on the other. The characteristics of the populations can justify the variability of results studied, the contexts, the methodology, and the characteristics of the instruments used.

De la Villa Moral Jiménez⁽²⁴⁾ presents research on the influence of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction among Spanish workers. The main finding was to confirm that the field of professional dedication has implications for workers' emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. Other variables, such as years of work experience, do not seem to influence, at least on their own, the professional satisfaction perceived by workers. However, it was found that the professional field is a mediating variable in the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.

Millán and Escandón,⁽²⁵⁾ in their research on EI and its relationship with work stress in nursing staff at the San Antonio Departmental Hospital in the municipality of Roldanillo, identified that, in general, there were adequate levels of emotional attention, clarity, and emotional repair.

The main limitations of this study are that articles from the last five years were prioritized to use the most up-to-date references possible, the number of references consulted was limited to only articles in Spanish and English, and its nature as a literature review.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional intelligence determines how professionals cope with problems, make decisions, and behave at work. The emotional demands implicit in the job performance of nursing staff highlight the relationship between these two variables, despite the controversy surrounding the available scientific evidence.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Elba Carola Espinoza Araujo, Monica Elisa Meneses La Riva, Wilter C. Morales-García.

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