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**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF MENTAL HEALTH
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**



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ABSTRACT

The waves of COVID-19 pandemics worldwide have surmounted all static load and psychological distresses amongst the students pursuing higher education. The students of Himachal Himalaya have also witnessed severe mental health problems. The University stage is a critical transitory period wherein the person steps ahead from adolescence to adulthood, plans for the future, experiences the pressure to maintain good grades and civilized life along with career frustration, thereby is a period of stress, strain, anxiety, depression, and other psychological vulnerabilities. This study has explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health among n = 200 (100 Boys + 100 Girls) university students (19 to 27 years) pursuing post-graduation from HPU Shimla. They were assessed by using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim, 1998) and The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38) (The RAND Corporation, 1983). The results revealed a non-significant difference in emotional intelligence and mental health between university students of boys and girls. Further, emotional intelligence was positively correlated with mental health and also exerted a significant impact on the mental health of the students studying at the university.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Mental Health & Students.



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INTRODUCTION

The mental health problems among the youth pursuing higher education have become a grave issue in the present scenario be it a developed or developing countries, it has affected masses in rural as well as in urban areas. The students of rural areas such as of Himachal Himalayas are also enmeshing in its grip. The psychological distress even in a peaceful and lush green environment is witnessed by Himachali people are now visible at every juncture of life. The youth pursuing higher education are the sufferers who besides academic stress also have to manage their economic, religiosity, and socio-cultural problems besides their academic pursuit. According to World Health Organization's ICD-10, there are approximately 970 million people worldwide sufferings from mental health problems. Out of the 792 million (10.7%) are the female who suffer more compared to their male counterparts who suffer from depression (3.4%), anxiety (3.8%), and bipolar disorder (1.2%). Further, 15% of people have substance use disorder. The mental health concerns in terms of depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, disruptive behavior, mood swing, worry, emotionality, loneliness, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and thoughts followed by sleep problems. Roughly 13% of students between 10 to 19 years have suicidal thoughts and attempt issues.

In the COVID-19 pandemics, the severity of stress, anxiety, and depression has increased significantly worldwide. According to a conservative estimate of the World

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Bank (2020), this pandemic has gripped 85% of students of 180 countries. By snatching the external and inner resources, this pandemic has emotionally exhausted the students pursuing higher education by eroding and corroding their motivation, drive, interest, self-efficacy, and esteem. Globalization has affected conceptual, operational, emotional, and learning skills by snatching the resources from this powerhouse. The socio-economic problem, psychological distresses, abuse, violence, socio-emotional learning, worry, emotionality, religiosity, social exclusion, stigma, and discrimination along with the educational and employment difficulties have surmounted threat among the students. Mental health is generally a state of wellbeing whereby an individual recognizes their abilities to cope with stress, work, and productivity and fruitfully make his or her contribution to his family and community.

World health organization has defined mental health as “subjective wellbeing, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and emotional potential among others” (The World Health Report, 2001). More appropriately, is the psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment. From the positive psychology point of view, mental health includes the ability of a person to enjoy life, his ability to create a balance between life activities, and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. It reflects the absence of mental illness and level of

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psychological wellbeing by the realization of one's abilities, coping with normal stresses of life doing productive work, and contributing to their community (WHO, 2012). These adolescents have to strive for the betterment of careers for which they have to face competition that increases their psychological vulnerabilities. For example, the meta-analysis conducted by Daniel Hernandez-Torrano et al. (2020) on 5561 studies explored students' mental health in terms of growth trajectory, productivity, social, intellectual intellect, actual structures. The study found a mild health problem among the students pursuing higher education. However, all types of cases from mild to severe distresses are avail in the soy even in this hilly state.

Therefore, emotion, which excites and moves the individual, is a powerhouse of energy and the emotional intelligence is the ability of a person to regulate his or her emotion for the growth of his consciousness. The unpleasant emotional state inculcates negativity and instability in life whereas the regulated emotions help us in getting blissful state by channelizing the energy to get enjoyment, peace, love, and, compassion (Rama, Ajaya & Ballentine, 1976). If we can regulate, manage and channel our emotions we will experience harmony within different domains of our lives like our relationships and work and this helps us to create the required balance among different aspects of our lives and thus, having Emotional Intelligence promote our psychological wellbeing. Certain studies have revealed a positive relationship between mental health and emotional intelligence

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among school students yet another study concluded that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with mental health (Kaur, 2019; Khan, 2018). Thus, emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to express his or her emotion, motivate himself to control emotion and, regulate one's mood. It helps a person to handle interpersonal relations and facilitates one to be empathetic in interpersonal relations. Emotional Intelligence was first created by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 but the concept came too light after Daniel Goleman's 1995 book "Emotional Intelligence" wherein he reported it as a skill to identify and control emotion within ourselves and others (Goleman, 2001). Mayer and Salovey (1997) described it as the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion, and regulate emotion to promote personal growth. The seed of Emotional intelligence is in Thorndike's 1920 theory of social intelligence. It has four clusters namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and, social relationship. In emotional intelligence, the person uses his self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability to maintain better relationships with others. After Wechsler's cognitive and non-cognitive factors emerged and thereafter Maslow's physical, social, psychological, and spiritual stages in emotional intelligence appear that laid a foundation stone for Emotional intelligence is one of the important cognitive abilities having conscientious attitude equipped to deal with negative emotion and promote better health. Kaul (2019) has found university students as emotionally

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intelligent. Khurshid, Majoka, and Khan (2018) have found emotional intelligence positively associated with success in education and leadership.

Research indicates that there is a significant relationship between happiness and emotional intelligence. It has been seen the regulation of emotions has helped adolescent's to increase their overall well-being. Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden and Build theories have envisaged that the positive experience contributes to flourishing once personal growth and well-being, broadens transitory thought processes, and builds personal resources that in turn help individuals to deal with stress and realize their potential in life (Seligman, 2002). Further, Rachele (2021) in a study on 300 adolescents found emotional intelligence to be positively correlated with self-efficacy. In the words of Shukla et al. (2020) emotional intelligence fosters resilience and wellbeing by curbing depression, anxiety, pressure and other psychological distresses among the youths. Further, Extremer and Fernandez, Berrocal (2006) high emotional intelligence is positively and significantly related to low levels of anxiety and depression. Moeller, Seehuus, and Peisch (2020) found Emotional intelligence as a protector for depression, anxiety, and stress. Malekar and Mohanty (2009) found lots of socio-demographic factors such as poverty, age and gender affecting emotional intelligence in India. Several studies have reported that emotional intelligence had promoted mental health by reducing psychological distresses amongst the students (Barros, & Sacau-Fontenla, 2021; Li, M.,

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Fu, B., Ma, J. et al. 2021; Veltro et al. 2020 & Perisch, et al. 2021) and social functioning (Lawal, Idemudia, & Senyatsi, 2018).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following were the main objectives of the study:-

- To assess and compare the level of emotional intelligence among boys and girls university students.
- To assess and compare the degree of mental health in terms of Anxiety, Depression, Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control, General Positive Affect, Emotional Ties, and Life Satisfaction among boys and girls university students.
- To explore and establish the linkages and effects of emotional intelligence on mental health amongst university students.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Sampling Method:

200 subjects (Boys and Girls) were selected on the bases of stratified sampling method from Himachal Pradesh University Shimla, with the age range of 19-27 years. The selected subjects were pursuing their higher education. The inclusion criterion of the aforesaid sample was locality, gender, education, and age. The subjects who do not follow this criterion were excluded from the study. These subjects were randomly

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selected and given the below-mentioned tool to assess the level of emotional intelligence and mental health.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The Assessing Emotions Scale:

The Assessing Emotions Scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) was administered. It is a self-report inventory that has 33-items focusing on typical emotional intelligence having four sub-domains namely: Perception of Emotion, Managing own Emotions, Managing others' Emotions, and Utilizing Emotion. Scores range from a minimum of 33 to a maximum of 165, with higher scores indicating more characteristic emotional intelligence. The scale is reliable and valid. Its test-retest reliability was found $r = .78$ thereof was used in the present study as it has already been used to assess the emotional intelligence of the students pursuing higher education in this university.

The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38):

The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38) developed by The RAND Corporation (1983) was administered. It has 38 items with six subscales namely: Anxiety, Depression, Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control, General Positive Affect, Emotional Ties, and Life Satisfaction. Higher scores on General positive effect, Emotional ties, effect satisfaction subscales indicate positive states of mental health.

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Higher scores on Anxiety, Depression, and Loss of behavioral/emotional control subscales indicate negative states of mental health. The mental health inventory has reported $r = .93$ Cronbach alpha rating whereas its abbreviated version has $r = .82$. Therefore it is a reliable and valid scale frequently used by university students thereof used in the present study.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The objective of the present study was to explore and establish the linkages and effects of emotional intelligence on mental health amongst university students. Further objectives of the present study were also to assess and compare the level of emotional intelligence among boys and girls university students and to assess and compare the degree of mental health in terms of Anxiety, Depression, Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control, General Positive Affect, Emotional Ties, and Life Satisfaction among boys and girls university students. This study has been conducted on $n = 200$ boys and girls students of Himachal Pradesh University with the age range of 19-27 years pursuing their higher education. Students' emotional intelligence was assessed by The Assessing Emotions Scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and their mental health was measured by The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38) developed by The RAND Corporation (1983). Results were further assessed using correlation and regression analyses.

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STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DATA

In the present study correlation and regression analyses have been used to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health amongst university students. The regression analysis has been used to see the effect of emotional intelligence on mental health among the students pursuing higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table No: I
Table showing the level of emotional Intelligence and Mental Health amongst selected students

VARIABLES	BOYS n=100		GIRLS n=100		T-ratios
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Emotional Intelligence					
Perception of Emotion	34.21	4.96	34.59	4.73	-.554
Managing Own Emotions	33.58	4.93	34.33	4.60	-1.11
Managing Others' Emotions	29.03	4.35	29.32	3.41	-.524
Utilizations of Emotion	22.85	3.91	23.87	3.45	-1.95
Mental Health					
Anxiety	28.10	7.35	27.56	6.88	.53
Depression	10.82	3.60	10.82	3.57	.00
Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control	23.75	7.11	24.84	6.78	-1.10
General Positive Affect	38.26	8.75	38.59	8.81	-.26
Emotional Ties	7.01	2.43	7.20	3.03	-.48
Life Satisfaction	3.69	1.03	3.76	1.06	-.47

**P<.01, *P<.05

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From Table no. I, it is quite clear that a non-significant difference was found on the variables of emotional intelligence and mental health between boys and girls secondary school students. Although the girls were found higher side on both emotional intelligence and mental health dimensions yet, the t-ratio reported non-significant ($t > .05$) between the variables.

Table No: II
Table showing the inter-correlation between four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence with Six dimension of Mental Health among Male Students

VARIABLES	Mental Health					
	Anxiety	Depression	Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control	General Positive Affect	Emotional Ties	Life Satisfaction
E. I.						
Perception Of Emotion	-.123	-.097	-.197*	.136	.021	.052
Managing own emotions	.164	-.105	-.177	.225*	.172	.198*
Managing others' emotions	.094	.045	-.057	.106	-.063	.072
Utilization Of Emotion	-.242*	-.187	-.236*	.091	.104	.261**

**P<.01, *P<.05

Table no. II indicated that one dimension of emotional intelligence i.e., utilization of emotion ($r = -.242, p < .05$) was a significant negative correlation with anxiety indicating



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that higher utilization of emotion lowers the level of anxiety among males students. Further, Perception of emotion ($r=-.197, p<.05$) and utilization of emotion ($r=-.236, p<.05$) are two domains of emotional intelligence which had a significant negative correlation with loss of behavioral/emotional control. Therefore, if boys were higher on the perception of emotion and utilization of emotion they will be lower on the loss of behavioral/emotional control. Table 1 also depicts that the single dimension of emotional intelligence i.e. managing own emotions ($r=.225, p<.05$) is positively correlated with general positive affect, displaying that if male students were higher on managing their own emotions they will experience more general positive affect. Finally, Table I illustrated managing own emotions ($r=.198, p<.05$) and utilization of emotion ($r=.261, p<.01$) had a significant positive correlation with the life satisfaction dimension of mental health among males students. Suggesting that the higher the youth can utilize their emotions higher was their life satisfaction. Other variables were found non-significant. Similarly, the correlation analysis was carried out for the mental health with emotional intelligence for female students, which is presented in Table III


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Table No: III
Table showing the inter-correlation between four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence with six dimension of Mental Health among Female Students


VARIABLES	Mental Health					
	Anxiety	Depression	Loss of Behavioral Emotional Control	General Positive Affect	Emotional Ties	Life Satisfaction
Emotional Intelligence						
Perception Of Emotion	-.141	-.166	-.199*	.233*	.098	.184
Managing own emotions	-.264**	-.237*	-.235*	.291**	.077	.222*
Managing others' emotions	-.079	-.016	-.037	.155	.141	.274**
Utilization Of Emotion	-.153	-.147	-.145	.127	-.033	-.025

**P<.01, *p<.05


It is evident from Table no. III that there was a significant and negative correlation of anxiety among female students with managing their own emotion ($r=-.264$, $P<.01$) a dimension of emotional intelligence. Therefore, the table indicates higher the managing of own emotions among female students lower was the level of anxiety that these females experience. There was a significant and negative correlation between depression and managing own emotions ($r=-.237$, $p<.05$). The females were higher on the dimension of managing their own emotions. It further demonstrates that there is a significant and negative correlation of loss of behavioral/emotional control with two factors of emotional




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intelligence, perception of emotion ($r=-.199, p<.05$) and managing own emotions ($r=-.235, p<.05$). Suggesting that the female students will experience less loss of behavioral/emotional control if they have an increased level of emotional intelligence. Perception of emotions ($r=.233, P<.05$) and managing own emotions ($r=.291, p<.01$) are two dimensions of emotions that have a positive correlation with general positive affect. The girl students were high on the perception of emotion and managing their own emotions. There was a significant and positive correlation of life satisfaction with managing own emotions ($r=.222, p<.05$) and managing others' emotions ($r=.274, p<.01$). Regression analysis was carried out to see the impact of emotional intelligence on mental health. The description is as follows:

Table No: IV
Table showing the impact of Emotional Intelligence on General Positive affect among Boys

Independent Variable (Emotional Intelligence)	Dependent variable(Mental Health)	R	Beta coefficient	T	R ²	R ² Change	F-Value (R ² -Change)
Managing Own Emotions	General Positive Affect	.225*	.225	2.282*	.050	.050	5.207*
Utilization of Emotion	Life Satisfaction	.261**	.261	2.675**	.068	.068	7.154**

**p<.01, *p<.05

Table no. IV presents the regression analysis of various dimensions of emotional intelligence in terms of their importance in predicting the general positive effect of boys

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students. As indicated significant predictor of general positive effect for males was managing own emotions ($\beta=.225$, $t= 2.282$, $p<.05$) dimension of emotional intelligence. Thus, higher general positive affect was predicted by higher managing own emotions. The variable accounted for 5 percent ($F=5.207$, $p<.05$) of the variance in general positive effect among males. The significant predictor of life satisfaction among boys was the utilization of emotion ($\beta=.261$, $t= 2.675$, $p<.05$) dimension of emotional intelligence. Thus, higher life satisfaction was predicted by higher utilization of emotions. The variable accounted for 6.8 percent ($F=7.154$, $p<.01$) of the variance in life satisfaction among males. It is depicted from the above results that emotional intelligence enhances general positive and also increases the level of life satisfaction among boys' students.

Table No: V
Table showing the stepwise regression analysis of Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Anxiety among Female Students

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	Beta coefficient	t	R ²	R ² Change	F- Value (R ² -Change)
Managing Own Emotions	Anxiety	-.264**	-.264	-2.710**	.070	.070	7.344**
Managing Own Emotions	Depression	-.237*	-.237	-2.417*	.056	.056	5.842*
Managing Own Emotions	General Positive Affect	.291**	.291	3.012**	.085	.085	9.070**

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Managing others' Emotions	Life Satisfaction	.274**	.227	2.359*	.137	.050	7.710**
Utilization of Emotion	Life Satisfaction	-.025	-.232	-2.247*	.180	.043	7.038**


**p<.01, *p<.05

Table no. V reveals that the significant predictors of anxiety, depression, and general positive affect were managing own emotions. ($\beta = -.264, t = -2.710, P < .01$), ($\beta = -.237, t = -2.417, P < .05$ and ($\beta = .291, t = 3.012, P < .01$) respectively. Thus, lower anxiety was predicted by higher levels of managing own emotions. Managing own emotion explained 7 % ($F = 7.344, p < .01$) of the variance in anxiety among females. Lower depression among females was predicted by higher levels of managing own emotion. Managing own emotion explained 5.6 % ($F = 5.842, p < .05$) of the variance in depression among females, and higher general positive affect among females was predicted by higher managing own emotions. The variable accounted for 8.5 % ($F = 9.070, p < .05$) of the variance in general positive effect among female students. None of the other variables emerged as a significant predictor of this dimension of mental health for female students.


Table no. V further reveals the significant predictor of life satisfaction for females were managing other emotions ($\beta = .227, t = 2.395, p < .05$) and utilization of emotions dimensions of emotional intelligence ($\beta = -.232, t = -2.247, p < .05$). Thus, higher life satisfaction was predicted by higher managing other emotions and lower utilization of




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emotions among female students. These two variables accounted for 9.3% of the variance for life satisfaction in females. Out of this managing others emotion 5 % ($F=7.710, p<.01$) of variance, utilization of emotion explained 4.3% ($F=7.038, p<.01$) of the variance in life satisfaction among females.

We are driven by our emotions; emotions are the force that makes us move. If an individual can regulate his emotion and can form healthy mental health and interpersonal. Kaur and Niwas (2016) also indicated the importance of emotional intelligence to manage the stress level of daily routine life. Results indicate that among females managing their own emotions, a dimension of emotional intelligence is significantly and negatively related to anxiety. Females bounced back the stress, reported higher emotional intelligence and mental health. Our findings are consistent with the findings of Suneesh et al. (2014) the study revealed that emotional intelligence is negatively related to depression and anxiety and high self-regulation (Suneesh et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

The finding revealed that emotional intelligence had an important role in the mental health amongst university students. Indicating that emotional intelligence enhances the mental health among male and female students by decreasing the level of anxiety and lowering the loss of behavioral/emotional control among both male and female students were found almost in similar way. It can be concluded from the findings

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that emotional intelligence acted as a guard against depression among female students by exerting positive impacts on the mental health among male and female students by increasing the level of general positive effect, it enhances life satisfaction among male students, and increasing emotional ties among female students. However non-significant difference was found between the boys and girls on the variables under study. Hence, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence enhances the mental health of university students. The paper further calls forth the need to enhance emotional intelligence among university students so that they can experience emotional well-being at the most crucial stage of their life when they are expected to maintain balance in different domains of life and also expected to excel in their career pursuits.

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