

# Emotional Intelligence and Work-related Stress among Nurses Working in Psychiatric Hospitals

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## Abstract

**Background:** Emotional Intelligence is a broad concept that connecting various personality and cognitive traits of human beings. The concept of emotional intelligence is described as the individual's capability of recognizing their own emotions and the emotions of others, and practice this understanding to navigate important interactions successfully.

**Aims:** The purpose of this study is to assess emotional intelligence among nurses working in psychiatric hospitals, as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace stress.

**Methodology:** A descriptive correlational study design using a convenience sample of (N=109) nurses working in two main psychiatric hospitals. Two separated scales (The Emotional Intelligence Scale-34 items and The Work-related Stress scale-24 items) was used to meet the study objectives.

**Results:** The study findings indicate that emotional intelligence levels were ranged between moderate to high among study participants. However, the majority had moderate work-related stress about (61%). Nurses' work stress was found to have significant relationship with their emotional intelligent level.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** Despite the positive levels of emotional intelligence nurse have, working in psychiatric hospitals is still cause of stress for nurses. The statistical relationship found in this study highlights the importance of enhancing emotional intelligence among nurses working in psychiatric hospitals settings by engaging them in effective training programs to maximize their abilities of adjustment and reduce their levels of work-stress.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence, Work-related Stress, Psychiatric Nurses*

## Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a broad concept that connects different personality and cognitive traits of humans, including emotional processing, emotional understanding, integrating affects and management of feeling states, <sup>16</sup>. The concept first introduced by Salovey and Mayer in 1990, and it was defined as cognitive skills that introspectively can detect and regulate affective states and assess the emotional state of others. In general, emotional intelligence is described as the ability of an individual to recognize own emotions and others emotions, and to practice this understanding to navigate important interactions successfully <sup>9</sup>. A clear understanding of EI and its difficulties is helpful

in the practice of nursing; due to the understanding of how emotions merge with cognition. Generally, EI helps nurses to improve relationships, manage their patients more effectively, make better decisions, and positively affects the quality of care provided to patients and families <sup>11</sup>. The study aims to assess emotional intelligence among nurses working in psychiatric hospitals, as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace stress. Emotional intelligence is mainly focus on people with the ability to express, evaluate, and adjust enthusiasms and emotions of themselves and others, as well as those who can properly guide and control the thought and performance <sup>13</sup>. Therefore, emotional intelligence is considered as an effective power to deal with job stressors. Also, nurses with high emotional

intelligence and emotional managements are able to direct positive feelings exchanged by healthcare individuals to decrease the negative effects of job stress<sup>13</sup>. Nurses experience and suffer from stress and health problems have less traits related of their work characteristics and less contact with patients<sup>(1, 8)</sup>. Emotions can have an impact on job outcomes and emotional intelligence, which could explain the differences among individuals in dealing with work stress.<sup>8</sup> Emotional intelligence can have a direct influence on the quality of the provided healthcare services or indirect influence, through other mediator, variables such as individual's job satisfaction and professional conflict. Studies have shown that nurses communication skills and job satisfaction play significant role in the emotional intelligence of nurses and the quality of the provided services<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, work-related outcomes are more likely to be impacted when nurses feel stressed and insecure in their work environment.<sup>15</sup>

## Methodology

### Study Design and Sampling Plan:

A descriptive correlational study design using a convenience sample of (N=109) psychiatric nurses working in the main psychiatric hospitals in Baghdad Province. Both male and female nurses were included regardless of their working shift. Their age ranged between 20 – 60 years old, with at least one years of experience in the psychiatric hospital.

### Study instrument:

Two separated scales were used to meet the study objectives. The first scale is the Revised Emotional Intelligence Scale-(34) items. The original emotional intelligence scale was developed by<sup>4</sup>, which contains (65 items); then, it was reduced to (34 items). The revised scale is widely used to measure the emotional intelligence cross-cultures. This scale is a self-reported instrument that is measured and rated on three levels rating scale; 1= not applicable to me, 2= applicable to some extent, 3= highly applicable. The levels of emotional intelligence are determined based on mean scores of the total items as follow: 1) nurses with means scores of (1 - 1.66) are considered having low emotional intelligence; 2) nurses with means scores of (1.67 – 2.33) are considered having moderate emotional intelligence; 3) nurses with means scores of (2.34 - 3) are considered having high emotional intelligence. The second scale is the Karasek Professional-Related Stress Scale was adopted and

modified to be used in this study to assess workplace stress among psychiatric nurses. The original scale was developed by Karasek in 1980<sup>2</sup>. This scale is also a self-reported instrument; however, it is measured and rated on four levels rating scale; "1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree". Coding for negative statements was reversed for statistical purpose. The levels of work stress are determined based on total scores of the scale items as follow: 1) nurses with total scores of (58 – 69) are considered having high work related stress. 2) nurses with total scores of (70 – 81) are considered having moderate work-related stress; 3) nurses with total scores of (82 - higher) are considered having low level of work-related stress.

### Scale Validity and Reliability

The Revised Emotional Intelligence Scale and The Karasek Professional-Related Stress Scale were translated to Arabic by two bilingual content experts. The Arabic versions of both scale were presented to panel of content experts related to the fields of mental health, psychology, and community health to maintain the validity of the Arabic versions. Both scales had good reliability levels with a Cronbach's alpha level (0.89) for the emotional intelligence scale and a Cronbach's alpha level (0.78) for the work stress scale.

### Ethical Considerations

Nurses were asked for voluntary participation. Research objectives, risks, and benefits were explained to participants to help them decide whether to participate or not. After they agreed to be a part of the study, participants were given anonymous questionnaire to maintain participants' confidentiality.

## Results and Discussion

This study indicates that majority of the study sample (60.6%) had high level of emotional intelligence, and (39.4%) had moderate level. The results of this study show that female nurses have higher level of emotional intelligence, than male nurses. Recently, there are some studies have been conducted to study nurses' emotional intelligence in several fields. Empathy, emotional awareness, and problem solving were the most common attributes of emotional intelligence that have been reported by nurses. Researchers discovered that the nurses' emotional intelligence was higher than other professionals. This difference is related to the fact that nurses get more training about caring process and

spiritual care<sup>(12,14)</sup>. Another research was conducted in the Netherlands showed higher emotional intelligence scores among mental health nurses compared to the general population. Engaging in more ethical behavior have been indicated by nurses who reported high levels of emotional intelligence. Moreover, it has been found that the high level of emotional intelligence among clinical nurses play a role in organizational justice, specifically regarding interpersonal and informational aspects of relationships<sup>7</sup>. The outcomes of this study show moderate level of work-related stress was identified in (60.6%) of psychiatric nurses; while (14.7 %) had high level of stress related to their workplace. Nursing personnel are considered as professionals with increased level of stress, anxiety, and depression due to their daily routine, which is particularly demanding since they are forced to cope with pain, sadness, and death. Stress also comes from the fatigue resulted from an increased workload, as well as the inability of nurses to cope with the emotional needs of patients and their families<sup>6</sup>. Nurses who work in psychiatric settings are more likely to experience work violence than other nurses who work in different healthcare settings. Violence is negatively impact the provided quality psychiatric care and increase the level of stress among nurses. Shu-Fen Niu et al. (2019) have highlighted alarming percentages about the experienced violence by nurses that cause higher level of work-related stress among nurses population. Researchers indicates that more than 50% of the psychiatric nurses involved in their study experienced physical violence and more than 80% experienced psychological violence by psychiatric patients. Resilience of nurses is another concept could explain the work-related stress among psychiatric nurses participated in this study. Most recent systematic review study was conducted on 38 articles that targeted nurses resilience and work-related factors. Researched pointed out that “Job demands (stress, burnout, posttraumatic stress disorder, and workplace bullying) were negatively associated with resilience, while job resources (coping skills, self-efficacy, social support, job satisfaction, job retention, and general wellbeing) were positively related to resilience”<sup>17</sup>. A significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress was identified among psychiatric nurses, in which that stress decreased when emotional intelligent increased. Several studies have highlighted the link between emotional intelligence and work-related stress among nurses. Nurses who have a high level of emotional Intelligence build relations within an organization and with the people they serve;

whereas, those with low level of EI may tend to create problems for the organization through their individual behaviors. Therefore, developing emotional intelligence should be emphasized in order to overcome stress at workplace and accomplish goals and cope with stress<sup>5</sup>. The study of<sup>6</sup> represent that emotions play an important role in a profession that requires not only technical expertise, but mainly relies on the psychological and physical care of human beings. The positive effects of EI with respect to the quality of nursing work and the ability to mitigate the impact of a difficult working environment via the contribution of emotional self-management and the personal stress management capacity in environments that is full of stress. EI enables nurses to effectively manage and deal with stress at work. Furthermore, the ability of individuals to regulate emotion can have positive effect on group cohesiveness and that the emotional intelligence level of team leaders can improve team empowerment and minimize stress among workers. It has been found that longer careers, job retention, and participation in clinical ladder programs are related to higher emotional intelligence scores of clinical staff nurses. Moreover, there is relationship between emotional intelligence and nurse reports of self-compassion that affect positively on their performance, higher nurse emotional intelligence is associated with lower levels stress and less burnout. In addition, less confrontational anxiety was associated with the ability to regulate emotion<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusion

The recent study aims to measure the phenomenon of emotional intelligence among nurses working in psychiatric hospitals and the relationship with their stress at work. The findings show that more than half of nurses working in psychiatric hospitals had high emotional intelligence level. However, despite the positive results, working in psychiatric hospitals is still a source of stress for nurses. The statistical relationship appears in this study between emotional intelligence and workplace stress highlights the importance of enhancing EI among nurses, as it improves the capacity to exercise skills in a manner that benefits patients, families, peers, and themselves as practitioners. Furthermore, increased emotional intelligence can lead to more successful management, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, better patient health outcomes, and less workplace stress.

**Table 1: Emotional intelligence levels among psychiatric nurses**

Emotional Intelligence Levels	F.	%
Moderate emotional intelligence	43	39.4
High emotional intelligence	66	60.6
Total	109	100

**Table 2: Work-related stress among psychiatric nurses**

Work-related Stress levels	F	%
Mild stress	27	24.8
Moderate stress	66	60.6
High stress	16	14.7
Total	109	100.0

**Table 3: Relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress**

Dependent and independent variables		Emotional Intelligence	Work-related Stress
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.345**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
Work-related Stress	Pearson Correlation	.345**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

**Table 4: Regression analysis to predict work-related stress from nurse’s emotional intelligence.**

Dependent & Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.364	.223		10.612	.000
Emotional intelligence	.354	.093	.345	3.807	.000

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of Babylon, Iraq and all experiments were carried out in accordance with approved guidelines.

**Conflict of Interest:** None to declare.

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**Ethical Clearance:** All experimental protocols were approved under the College of Nursing/University

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