

# Testing the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Occupational Stress: Evidence from Egypt

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## **Abstract:**

### **Purpose:**

This research tests the relationship between emotional intelligence, using its four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal; others' emotion appraisal; use of emotion; and regulation of emotion, and perceived occupational stress among a selection of tourism and hospitality employees in Egypt.

### **Design/methodology/approach**

This is a deductive explanatory research that is correlational in nature. It uses a simple random sample of 390 employees working in the tourism and hospitality sector in Egypt. An on-line survey is used to collect the data. SPSS20 has been used to analyze the collected data. Relevant statistical techniques are used to test this research hypotheses.

### **Findings**

The four dimensions of emotional intelligence have been proved to be significantly and negatively associated with perceived occupational stress.

### **Practical implications**

This research results clarify the importance of the four dimensions of emotional intelligence in lowering the level of perceived occupational stress among tourism and hospitality employees in Egypt.

### **Originality/value**

The value of this research lies in testing the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and perceived occupational stress, during COVID-19 pandemic, in the tourism and hospitality industry as one of the most leading economic sectors on which the GDP in Egypt depends. Although COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected almost all business sectors, the tourism and hospitality sector comes at the top of the list of the negatively affected sectors.

**Key words:** emotional intelligence, self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, regulation of emotions, use of emotions, perceived occupational stress, tourism and hospitality, Egypt.

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## **1. Introduction**

Global competition, the nature of the external business environment, scarce resources, and changing nature of jobs and its qualifications have been a considerable source of stress that both organizations and individuals experience in today's business environment.

Occupational stress is increasing worldwide, due to a variety of factors. For example, COVID19 pandemic has forced many national and international organizations to restructure, downsize, shrink their operations nationally and internationally, and bankrupt, as this pandemic limits the organizations' accessibility to its resources, markets, and customers which in turn puts both the organizations and employees under a severe stress. Moreover, although advanced technology has a number of advantages, it still has some negative effects that cannot be ignored on a considerable number of employees and organizations, as some jobs are expected to disappear while other jobs with different skills will be gained.

Both organizations and employees pay increasing attention to occupational stress (Ongori and Agolla, 2008), as stress is perceived by many researchers as a major problem that affects organizations negatively (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994; Varca, 1999; Ornelas and Kleiner, 2003; Midgley, 1996). Occupational stress is expected to negatively affect the employees physically and psychologically, which in turn is expected to increase the costs that organizations incur to effectively handle the negative consequences of occupational stress.

In addition, in recent days, almost all countries have decided to stop the tourism movement in response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). This worldwide decision has strongly and negatively affected all counties as well as the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector, after witnessing some indicators of getting recovered from the strong negative effect of 2011 and 2013 revolutions Egypt has experienced, and its employees have been exposed to a new very strong stressful situation including the very high possibility of losing their jobs as a result of the dramatic decrease in the number of tourists heading to Egypt.

Hence; this current research aims to test the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and perceived occupational stress among a selection of employees in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1 Emotional Intelligence**

To identify what emotional intelligence is, it is important to understand what social intelligence is, as these two concepts are related. In human interactions or relations people differ. While some persons behave in a wise way, others tend to behave in a foolish way. When the person has the ability to interact with others in a wise way, it is said that he is socially intelligent. Hence; social intelligence reflects the individual's ability to act wisely in human relations or interactions (Thorndike, 1920). To assess the level of wisdom in a person's human relations, it seems important to know how he deals with himself and others. According to Gardner (1993), social intelligence has two categories; (1) intrapersonal intelligence, which reflects the individual's intelligence in understanding himself, and (2) interpersonal intelligence, which indicates the person's intelligence in dealing with others. To understand oneself and to be able to deal wisely with others, the person needs to be emotionally intelligent.

Emotional intelligence has been defined by many researchers. For example, Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as "the subset of SI that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p.189). They describe emotional intelligence as "a type of emotional information processing that includes accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotion, and adaptive regulation of emotion in such a way as to enhance living" (p.773). Emotional intelligence is also defined as "the capacity to reason about emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the ability to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso 2004: 197). Emotional intelligence skills include the ability of the person to effectively recognize, understand, and manage emotions in self and others (King and Gardner, 2006).

Emotional intelligence has four dimensions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990):

1. Self-emotion appraisal. It reflects the ability of the person to understand his deep emotions and express it naturally.

2. Others' emotion appraisal. This dimension reflects the ability of the individual to perceive and understand others' emotions.
3. Regulation of emotion. It reflects the person's ability to regulate his emotions which will help them to recovery more quickly from psychological distress.
4. Use of emotion. It relates to the person's ability to make use of his emotions by directing them towards constructive activities and personal performance.

These four dimensions of emotional intelligence are widely accepted as they represent the entire emotional intelligence literature (Wong and Law, 2002; Law, Wong, and Song 2004; Shih and Susanto, 2010), hence; these four dimensions of emotional intelligence have been adopted in this current research.

Emotional intelligence is conceived as a continuum from low to high (Furnham and Rosen, 2016). Those who score very high on the emotional intelligence continuum are expected to easily and effectively appraise their emotions and others' emotions; regulate their emotions to recovery more quickly from psychological distress; and direct their emotions to support constructive activities and personal performance (Petrides, Hudry, Michalaria, Swami, and Sevdalis, 2011).

## **2.2 Perceived Occupational Stress**

Stress at work is inevitable especially in today's hyper competitive business environment. At the same time, organizations admit the negative consequences of stress at work and they tend to exert more effort and invest more time and money to keep stress in a positive form (Cotton and Hart, 2003).

Although there is a disagreement between researchers about the definition of stress (Hart and Cooper, 2001), but almost all stress definitions consider two things; (1) the person's ability and, (2) the environmental and personal demands. When the person believes that he does not possess the ability and the resources needed to meet the environmental demands, he feels stressed. The incapability of the person to cope with stressful situations could be due to a shortage in the resources he has an access to including controllable resources, such as his personal traits, and uncontrollable resources, such as what the organization allows him to use. In other words, when the person perceives that his coping strategies are ineffective in controlling the prolonged and increased pressures he is exposed to (Kyriacou, 1987).

To understand the nature of stress, Gillespie, Walsh, Winefields, Dua, and Stough (2001) argue that four issues should be considered: (1) the stress antecedents (environmental and personal); (2) how the person deals with these antecedents (intervening processes); (3) indicators of the immediate stress response; and (4) the consequences of stress at both the individual and organizational levels.

Perceived occupational stress could be defined as "a perception that environmental demands exceed the abilities of the individual or that environmental supplies and opportunities will leave major needs or motives of the person unmet" (LaRocco, House, and French, 1980: 203).

A number of researchers has identified different sources of occupational stress including, for example, interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, and workload (Lazarus, Eiser, and Rodafinos, 2009), role conflict and ambiguity (Brief and Aldag, 1975; Ivanceyich, Matteson, and Preston, 1982; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal, 1964; Manning, Ismael, and Sherwood, 1981; Rosse and Rosse, 1981), and specific events that occur at work (Motowidlo and Manning, 1986). Motowidlo and Manning (1986) add that the level of stress the person perceives or experiences depends on the frequency and intensity of the event-related stress.

## **2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress: Hypotheses Development**

The relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and occupational stress has attracted the attention of a considerable number of researchers, and the results most of the researchers have reached are very similar, as a statistically significant negative relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and occupational stress has been reported by the majority of research. For example, Slaski and Cartwright (2003, 2002) report a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and subjective stress,

which in turn positively leads to better physical and psychological well-being of a selection of surveyed managers. Gardner and Stough (2003) also report a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress. A significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress has been indicated by Bar On, Brown, Kirkcaldy, and Thome (2000); Nikolaou and Tsousis, (2002); and Sy, Tram, and O'Hara, (2006), as low emotional intelligence employees have less self-awareness, hence; in tough conditions, they fail to cope with their emotions and as a result, they have too much occupational stress.

Landa, Lo'pez-Zafra, Martos, and Aguilar-Luzon (2008) also report a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress. Moreover, Cooper and Sawaf (1997) indicate that emotional intelligence significantly and negatively influences occupational stress. Nikolaou and Tsousis (2002) report that when individuals are capable of regulating their emotions they tend to be healthier as they correctly appraise their emotions, express their feelings and regulate their moods. Nikolaou and Tsousis (2002); and Jordan, Ashkanasy, and Hartel, (2002) argue that high emotional intelligence employees tend to adopt more effective coping strategies to better handle stressful situations and to control their emotions, which is expected to improve the physical and psychological health outcomes associated with stress. Lazarus (1999) argues that when the individuals have the ability to interpret and regulate their emotions in relation to the excessive demands they are facing, this tends to facilitate the effective management of personal resources. When individuals are capable of understanding and managing their self-emotions, and when they are able to understand and manage others' emotions, they tend to appraise the stressful situations as challenging more than a threat (Matthews, Zeidner, and Roberts 2002). Which means that those individuals' ability to appraise their emotions and others' emotions is expected to positively influence their ability to cope effectively with work-related demands and to use effective problem-focused coping (Cassidy, 1999; Matthews et al., 2002).

Better understanding of others' emotions tends to equip the persons with the ability to effectively gain others' support in stressful situations (Slaski and Cartwright, 2002).

Finally, individuals who are able to manage their emotions and others' emotions are more likely to cope effectively with stressful situations (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1998, 2003; Salovey and Mayer, 1990, Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Based on the previous literature review, the following four hypotheses have been developed and tested in this current research:

**H1:** There is a statistically significant negative relationship between self-emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress in tourism and hospitality organizations in Egypt.

**H2:** There is a statistically significant negative relationship between others' emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress in tourism and hospitality organizations in Egypt.

**H3:** There is a statistically significant negative relationship between use of emotion and perceived occupational stress in tourism and hospitality organizations in Egypt.

**H4:** There is a statistically significant negative relationship between regulation of emotion and perceived occupational stress in tourism and hospitality organizations in Egypt.

Hence; the current research proposed model is presented in Figure (1).

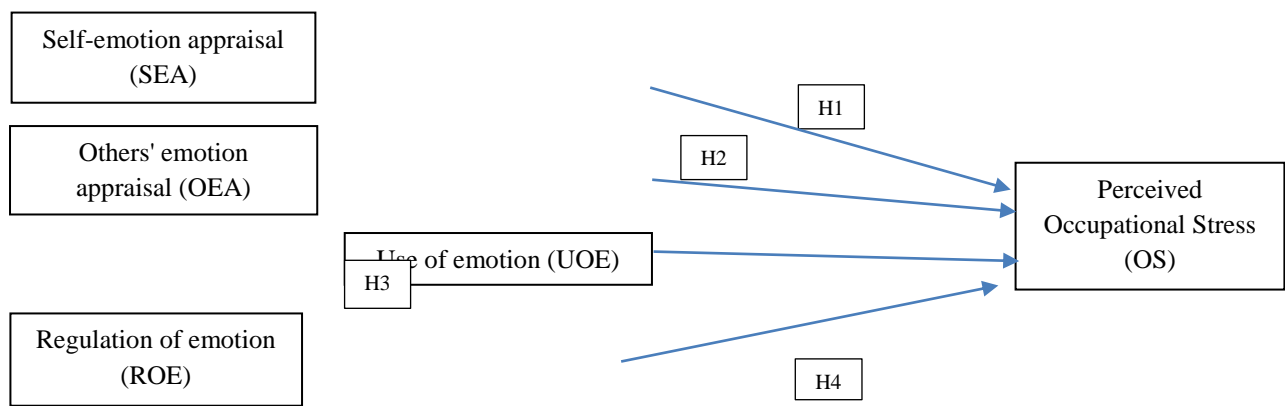


Figure (1): Proposed Research Model

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This is an explanatory, deductive research. It is correlational in nature as it aims to test the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and perceived occupational stress in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector. The field study approach has been used to collect the required data using the self-administered questionnaire, which has been distributed electronically.

#### 3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this current research includes all employees in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector. According to the Ministry of Tourism statistics (2019), the total number of employees working in this sector has reached 300,000 employee (205,000 in the Hotel sector and 95,000 in the remaining sectors). This number does not include the employees who are working indirectly with or in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector. The calculated sample size, using Krejcie and Morgan's formula, is 384 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). The simple random sampling technique has been used to withdraw the targeted sampling subjects. The expected response rate in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality sector is approximately 53% (Abdeen and Ahmed, 2019), hence; a total number of 725 questionnaires has been distributed. The total number of returned questionnaires is 400, of which 10 questionnaires have been excluded because of some missing data. Hence; the number of completed questionnaires is 390, with an actual response rate of 54%.

#### 3.3. Measures

##### Perceived Stress Scale

The 10-item, 5-point Likert type, Perceived Stress Scale, developed by Cohen (1994), is used to collect the data required to measure perceived occupational stress. Responses range from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very often). Perceived stress scale scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. Perceived stress scale is one of the more popular tools for measuring psychological stress (Lee, 2012). Perceived stress scale has been used in many researches to assess the occupational stress experienced by different employees in different occupations (Graf, 1986; Walvekar, Ambekar, and Devaranavadag, 2015). The reported Cronbach's alpha of the perceived stress scale-10 is evaluated at > 0.7, and the test-retest reliability of it is assessed in four studies, and meets the criterion of > 0.7 in all cases (Lee, 2012). In this current research, the calculated Cronbach alpha of perceived stress scale-10 has reached 0.97.

##### Emotional Intelligence Scale

The 16-item, 5-point Likert-type, scale developed by Wong and Law (2002), is used to measure the four dimensions of emotional intelligence. Responses range from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The reported reliability estimates for the four dimensions of self-emotion appraisal, use of emotion, regulation of

emotion, and others' emotion appraisal are .89, .88, .76, and .85, respectively (Wong and Law, 2002). In this current research the calculated Cronbach alpha for the four dimensions of self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion has reached 0.96, 0.95, 0.96, and 0.96 respectively.

## Data Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

### Testing the first research hypothesis:

Table (1): Regression Analysis – Hypothesis 1

Independent Variable	Perceived OS (Dependent Variable)				
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t	β	Sig.
SEA	.727	.528	-20.847	-.727	.000

Note: R<sup>2</sup> = Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>

According to Table (1) *R* value (Correlation Coefficient) is 0.727, which means there is a high degree of correlation between self-emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress, and it also shows that 53% of the total variation in the dependent variable; perceived occupational stress, can be explained by the independent variable; self-emotion appraisal ( $R^2 = 0.528$ ), which is a very high percent. Table (1) shows that Beta is (-0.727), which means there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) strong negative correlation between self-emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress. ANOVA analysis in Table (1) shows that the regression model statistically and significantly predicts the outcome (dependent) variable well ( $p < 0.000$ ) (i.e., it is a good fit for the data), hence; the first research hypothesis is supported and accepted.

### Testing the second research hypothesis:

Table (2): Regression Analysis – Hypothesis 2

Independent Variable	Perceived OS (Dependent Variable)				
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t	β	Sig.
OEA	.720	.518	-20.440	-.720	.000

Note: R<sup>2</sup> = Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>

According to Table (2) *R* value (Correlation Coefficient) is 0.720, which means there is a high degree of correlation between others' emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress, and it also shows that 52% of the total variation in the dependent variable; perceived occupational stress, can be explained by the independent variable; others' emotion appraisal ( $R^2 = 0.518$ ), which is a high percent. Table (2) shows that Beta is (-0.720) which means there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) strong negative correlation between others' emotion appraisal and perceived occupational stress. ANOVA analysis in Table (2) shows that the regression model statistically and significantly predicts the outcome (dependent) variable well ( $p < 0.000$ ) (i.e., it is a good fit for the data), hence; the second research hypothesis is supported and accepted.

### Testing the third research hypothesis:

Table (3): Regression Analysis – Hypothesis 3

Independent Variable	Perceived OS (Dependent Variable)				
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	t	β	Sig.
UOE	.696	.484	-19.095	-.696	.000

Note: R<sup>2</sup> = Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>

According to Table (3) *R* value (Correlation Coefficient) is 0.696, which means there is a high degree of correlation between use of emotion and perceived occupational stress, and it also shows that 48% of the variation in the dependent variable; perceived occupational stress, can be explained by the independent variable; use of emotion ( $R^2 = 0.484$ ). Table (3) shows that Beta is (-0.696) which means there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) strong negative correlation between use of emotion and perceived occupational stress. ANOVA analysis in Table (3) shows that the regression model statistically and significantly predicts the

outcome (dependent) variable well ( $p < 0.000$ ) (i.e., it is a good fit for the data), hence; the third research hypothesis is supported and accepted.

#### Testing the fourth research hypothesis:

Table (4): Regression Analysis – Hypothesis 4

Independent Variable	Perceived OS (Dependent Variable)				
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	T	$\beta$	Sig.
ROE	.718	.515	-20.317	-.718	.000

Note: R<sup>2</sup> = Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>

According to Table (4) *R* value (Correlation Coefficient) is 0.718, which means there is a high degree of correlation between regulation of emotion and perceived occupational stress, and it also shows that 51% of the variation in the dependent variable; perceived occupational stress, can be explained by the independent variable; regulation of emotion ( $R^2 = 0.515$ ). Table (4) shows that Beta is (-0.718) which means there is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) strong negative correlation between regulation of emotion and perceived occupational stress. ANOVA analysis in Table (4) shows that the regression model statistically and significantly predicts the outcome (dependent) variable well ( $p < 0.000$ ) (i.e., it is a good fit for the data), hence; the fourth research hypothesis is supported and accepted.

## 4. Discussion

This current research shows a clear statistically significant negative relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Its findings show that the ability to manage one's own emotions plays an important role in appraisal and coping with occupational stress. The results of this research are consistent with a number of previous researches' results. For example, a negative relationship between four dimensions of emotional intelligence and occupational stress has been reported by a number of researchers (Slaski and Cartwright, 2003; Slaski and Cartwright, 2002; Gardner and Stough, 2003; Bar On et al., 2000; Sy et al., 2006; Nikolaou and Tsousis, 2002; Landa et al., 2008). This current research results tend to be accepted as when the individual has the ability to appraise his emotion, read others' emotion, regulate his emotion, and use the emotion to facilitate performance, it is expected that the level of occupational stress he experiences will be low; in other words, it is believed that emotional intelligence protects the individual against occupational stress.

It is also believed that one of the potential sources of stress is the personality traits, including the level of emotional intelligence the person enjoys. When the person has a high level of emotional intelligence, it is expected that he tends to have a high belief in his locus of control, hence; he tends to perceive stressful situations positively, as challenges, based on his belief that he is able to deal with such situations or challenges. In addition, those who have a high level of others' emotion appraisal; use of emotion; and regulation of emotion are expected to have a high ability to get the social support they might need to deal with the occupational stress they are exposed to. Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence are expected to cope better with stressful situations, as they are able to control their emotions more effectively than individuals with low levels of emotional intelligence, which is expected to improve the physical and psychological health outcomes associated with the experienced stress.

Emotional intelligence is expected to positively affect the individual's self-confidence, which in turn is expected to affect his behavior in stressful situations.

When people are aware of their emotions and can express these emotions naturally, they are more likely to be able to correctly appraise their emotions, express these emotions, and regulate their emotions which is expected to lower the level of occupational stress they might experience, as they are able to correctly use effective coping strategies to be able to adapt to stressful situations.

The ability of the individual to perceive and understand others' emotions is also expected to lower the level of stress he experiences. When the person has a high level of others' emotion appraisal, he will be able to equip himself with the social support he needs to deal with occupational stress.



The ability to recovery more quickly from psychological distress is also considered an important factor that leads to better stress management. When people have a high level of regulation of emotion, they tend to believe in their ability to deal with stressful situations and they have a high level of self-confident which is expected to support their ability to recovery more quickly. The high level of emotional intelligence that some individuals have tends to contribute to reducing experienced occupational stress by better identifying feelings of frustration and stress and, consequently, regulating those emotions.

Finally, when people are able to make use of their emotions by directing them towards constructive activities and personal performance, they tend to handle stress more effectively than those who are not able to use their emotions correctly.

## 5. Recommendations and limitations

Based on the results of this current research, emotional intelligence is one of the recommended solutions for reducing occupational stress. Individuals are recommended to pay more attention to the level of emotional intelligence they have, as it is reported that people who are high on emotional intelligence are less likely to experience occupational stress. Individuals are recommended to invest in enhancing their level of emotional intelligence to be able to perform better in stressful situations as they become well-organized under stress, which helps them enhancing their organization's performance as well as keep themselves more self-confident and more satisfied. Organizations, on the other hand, are recommended to exert all necessary effort to retain the employees with high emotional intelligence believing in the positive value they are expected to add to the organizational overall performance.

Organizations are recommended to provide emotional intelligence and stress management training especially as a part of managerial development programs, to provide their employees the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to handle their job requirements more effectively. These training programs are expected to be designed to train the employees on handling emotions to improve emotional intelligence abilities and enhance their abilities to cope with occupational stress.

There are some limitations of this current research. It depends on self-report measurements, and it adopts cross-sectional research design, as opposed to a longitudinal methodology, hence; testing the causal relationships among this current research variables is not possible.

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