
Research Papers



Role of Emotional intelligence in coping with trauma

Dr. Kranti C Gawali

Head, Dept. Psychology.

Bhavan's College Andher(w) Mumbai.

Abstract

Emotional Intelligence(EI) predicts positive mental health. Individuals with high EI are better at understanding and managing their emotions in stressful situations. High EI also predicts use of positive coping mechanisms in face of stress or trauma. This paper highlights the view that Emotionally Intelligent individuals are more resilient implying that they effectively cope and adapt when faced with loss, hardship, or adversity due to their emotion management skills as well as positive coping mechanisms used by them. The paper also suggests a five skills domain that can be enhanced in an individual, to improve the emotional resilience of the individual in facing traumatic events, bouncing back from the same and experiencing a positive mental health.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is one of the recent developments in the area of intelligence. The merging of emotion and intelligence as a cognitive ability under the caption of EI was proposed by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990). They defined it as "ability to monitor one's own others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use them this information to guide one's thinking and actions". There are varied understandings about EI

JOHN MAYER & PETER SALOVEY (1990)

Proposed that EI is about how people appraise and communicate emotions, and how emotion is used in solving problems. It is thought that people differ in their ability to understand and express emotions. These abilities may be categorized into 5 domains, i.e. Self awareness, Managing emotions, Motivating oneself, Empathy, and Handling relationships.

REUVEN BAR-ON (1997)

Bar-On explained EI by dividing it into 5

areas or realms. The intrapersonal realm concerns the ability to know and manage oneself. The interpersonal realm concerns with one's people skills i.e. one's ability to interact and get along with others. The adaptability realm involves the ability to be flexible and realistic, and to solve a range of problems as they arise. The stress management realm – ability to tolerate stress and control impulses. The General mood realm ability to be optimistic and be happy.

JOHN MAYER & PETER SALOVEY (1997)

Proposed a four-branch model of EI

- (i) Emotional perception and expression ability to understand one's own emotions and that of others and to be able to express those accurately.
- (ii) Emotional facilitation of thought (using EI) ability to be optimistic.
- (iii) Emotional understanding of the relationship between various emotions their causes and consequences
- (iv) Emotional management ability to manage

emotions in self and others.

SIMMONS, S. & SIMMONS, J. (1997)

Proposed that EI is not made up of 5 domains but in fact includes 13 major facets of character which are related to success in life. They also developed a highly valid and reliable way to measure them. The 13 aspects that make up EI are, Emotional energy, Emotional Stress, Optimism, Self – esteem, Commitment to work, Attention to detail measures, Desire for change, Courage, Self – direction, Assertiveness, Tolerance, Consideration for others, and Sociability.

ROISER (1994-95)

Information from various other sources was put together to develop the emotional competence framework, which proposed that EI was made up of personal competence, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence, self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovativeness, achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism, social competence, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, political awareness, influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities.

PETRIDES & FURNHAM (2001)

Proposed the concept of Trait emotional intelligence, and stated that (emotional self efficiency) is a constellation of emotion related self perceived abilities and dispositions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchy. The people having a high trait EI are in touch with their emotions and that they can regulate them in a way that promotes well being.

This review of the different models suggests that the understanding about EI and its nature has been changing over the years, with some researchers proposing that EI is predominantly a cognitive ability, while others believing it to be a purely emotional capacity.

Role of EI in coping with Trauma

Each of the models of EI includes the ability to manage emotions and cope effectively with stressful situations in life as an important component of EI. Goleman (1995) proposed the serious consequences of a lack of EI which include: expulsion or dropping out of school, clinical depression; eating disorders; alcohol and drug abuse or addiction; and violent acts leading to arrest. High EI results in an effective management of one's emotions and impulse. Edward and Warelow (2005) found that

Coping in the face of adversity (trauma) involves emotional intelligence and resilience, both of which can be developed through support and education. Resilience has been identified as a part of EI. Cooper (1996/97) In his EQ map Measured EI in terms of self awareness emotional awareness of others, interpersonal connections and also included resilience, creativity, compassion and intuition among other areas. Topping, Bremmer and Holmes (2002) stated that social competence is also a factor in resilience, and that those who are socially competent and integrated are likely to be more able to withstand the stresses of life, and probably more able to withstand temptations to become involved in self damaging behavior such as drug taking. Bansode (1999) found that high EI is related to use of positive coping strategies in face of stressful /traumatic situations, similar results were again found by the researcher (Gawali, 2010). Psychological resilience refers to effective coping and adaptation although faced with loss, hardship, or adversity. Psychological resilience has been characterized by the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences and by flexible adaptation to the changing demands of stressful experiences (J. H. Block & Block, 1980; J. Block & Kremen, 1996; Lazarus, 1993). (cited in Tugade and Fredrikson, 2004). It is therefore the ability to recover rapidly after experiencing some adverse experience. Resilient individuals behave with emotional competence across a great number of stressful experiences. However repeated debilitating experiences may wear out protective influences and erode competent functioning in some domains (Luthar, Doernberger, & Ziegler, 1993) (Cited in Saarni, 2000). Murphy and Moriarty (1976) found that if children are exposed to stressors that are within their coping capacity and are also pushed somewhat to meet the emotional challenge then they are likely to demonstrate improved coping skills when faced with future stressors. The child who is exposed to chronic stressors/trauma and who has little and inconsistent social support will show vulnerability. (Cited in Saarni, 2000).

There are certain protective factors for psychological resilience in children and youth.

A) Within the child

- Good cognitive abilities, including problem solving and attentional skills.
- Easy temperament in infancy; adaptable personality later in development
- Positive self perception; self efficacy
- Faith and a sense of meaning in life

- Good self regulation of emotional arousal and impulses
- Talents valued by self and society
- Good sense of humour
- General appeal or attractiveness to others
- B) within the family
 - Close relationship with care giving adults
 - Authoritative parenting (high on warmth ,structured-monitoring,and expectations)
 - Positive family climate
 - With low discord between parents
 - Organized home environment
 - Post secondary education of parents
 - Parents with qualities listed as protective factors with the child
 - Parents involved in child's education
 - Socioeconomic advantages
- C) within family or other relationships
 - Close relationship to competent ,Prosocial and supportive adults
 - Connections to Prosocial and rule abiding peers
- D) within the community
 - Effective schools
 - Ties to Prosocial organizations ,including school clubs scouting etc.
 - Neighbourhoods with high collective efficacy
 - High level of public safety
 - Good emergency social service
 - Good public health and health care availability.

There are real health and wellness benefits for being resilient. Resilience is a learnable skill as is EI .Dulewicz and Higgs(2004) found that Emotional Intelligence scores change after training and other experiences. Though there is an overlap found between the components of EI and factors of personality the research evidence proving that EI can be taught and learnt points to the idea that it must be an ability that can be acquired by the individual if willing and by putting in efforts.

Growing in emotional resilience requires working towards greater self-knowledge. It is important, for example, that you learn to identify how you react in emotional situations. Becoming aware of how you react when stressed helps you gain better control over those reactions. Emotional Intelligence involves greater awareness of one's emotions and effective management of the same. Emotionally intelligent people are able to accurately recognize and comprehend emotion, both in themselves and in others, to appropriately

express emotion, and to be able to control their own emotion so as to facilitate their own emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth. In short, emotionally intelligent people intentionally use their thinking and behavior to guide their emotions rather than letting their emotions dictate their thinking and behavior. People who are highly emotionally intelligent tend to also be highly emotionally resilient. Emotionally Intelligent or Emotionally resilient individuals therefore are better able to face crisis or trauma in life .Hence in order to equip individual's per se and the society on a whole to face traumatic situations certain remedial measures may be adopted both at the individual level as well as the societal level..

Five skill domains to enhance emotional resilience

In order to become more emotionally intelligent at the individual level, it is necessary to develop the following five skill domains:

§ **Self-awareness.** Self-awareness involves your ability to recognize feelings while they are happening.

§ **Emotional management.** Emotional management involves your ability to control the feelings you express so that they remain appropriate to a given situation. Becoming skillful at emotional management requires that you cultivate skills such as maintaining perspective, being able to calm yourself down, and being able to shake off out-of-control grumpiness, anxiety, or sadness.

§ **Self-motivation.** Self-motivation involves your ability to keep your actions goal-directed even when distracted by emotions. Self-motivation necessarily includes being able to delay gratification, and avoid acting in impulsive ways.

§ **Empathy.** Empathy involves your ability to notice and correctly interpret the needs and wants of other people. Empathy is the characteristic that leads to altruism, which is your willingness put the needs of others ahead of your own needs.

§ **Relationship Management.** Relationship management involves your ability to anticipate, understand, and appropriately respond to the emotions of others. It is closely related to empathy. These various skills work together form the basis of emotionally intelligent behaviour in specific. Such emotion competencies can be enhanced through training programmes at school and college level as well as different organizations. Resilience is a part of EI ,however there can be

certain strategies useful for promoting resilience in general among Children and the youth at the societal level as well through the policy decisions of the state. Masten and Reed (2002) proposed some strategies to promote resilience, as follows.

A) Risk Focused Strategies: Preventing / Reducing Risk and Stressors

- Prevent or reduce the likelihood of low birth weight or prematurity through prenatal care.
- Prevent child abuse or neglect through parent education.
- Reduce teenage drinking smoking or drug use through community programmes
- Prevent homelessness through housing policy.
- Reduce neighbourhood crime or violence through community policing.

B) Asset-Focused Strategies : improving number or quality of resources or social capital.

- Provide a tutor
- Organize a girls boys club
- Offer parent education classes
- Build a recreation centre.

C) process Focused Strategies: Mobilizing the power of human adaptational systems

- Build self efficacy through graduated success model of teaching
- Teaching effective coping strategies for specific threatening situations .
- Foster secure attachment relationships between infants and parents through parental sensitivity training or home visit programme for new parents and their infants.
- Nurture mentoring relationships for children through a programme to match children with potential mentors.
- Encourage friendships of children with Prosocial peers in healthy activities
- Support culture traditions that provide children with adaptive rituals and opportunities for bonds with Prosocial adults ,suc as religious education or classes for children .

Adoption of such measures will ensure adaptive coping of the masses to many types of trauma that we are exposed to.

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