

## Critical Review of Emotional Intelligence Article

Published earlier this year, “Effects of Emotional Intelligence and Self-leadership on Student’s Coping with Stress” is a quantitative research paper hailing from the People’s Republic of China. In this project, the researchers sought to quantize the relationships between levels of emotional intelligence (hereafter referred to as EI) and self-efficacy with stress tolerance and adaptations. In order to minimize redundancy, this critical review will be carried out in three parts: (a) summary, (b) methodology review, and (c) logic examination.

### **Summary**

The sample population was selected from two different schools in China within the same courses (introduction to psychology) and consisted of 56.18% females, 43.48% males, and <1% who did not report their gender. The total participants, who signed consent forms and participated voluntarily, equaled 575 students. Ultimately, through measures which will be discussed in the methodology review section of this paper, the researchers concluded that a higher EI score correlated to stronger coping mechanisms and efficiency when dealing with stress. A higher self-efficacy, also associated with a higher EI and thought to overlap in many areas, also indicated greater means of coping with stress than a lower self-efficacy. However, the relationship between self-efficacy and high EI itself was not examined in this paper and therefore the conclusions drawn about its causal relationship are (as admitted by the researchers) tenuous at best.

### **Methodology Review**

Stylistically, Yeifei Wang and colleagues presented a concise paper with clear data in

both graphical and language formats. However, they did not specify some of their operational definitions until either the conclusion or discussion sections of the paper, leaving the reader with only a vague understanding of what was precisely meant by certain terms (active and passive coping styles, in this case, were not explained until the next to last page). Additionally, the definitions provided were short and board without any details or specific examples of the terms. Calling active-coping style problem-oriented does not illuminate the methods through which the students applied their higher or lower EI to coping, and likewise, calling passive coping styles emotion-focused does not provide clarity for what differentiates an emotion-oriented approach from a problem-oriented approach. Rather, since coping styles—like all of human behavior—fall on a spectrum, the researchers could have chosen to instead provide a graphical representation of their relationships and potential examples so as to not inadvertently dichotomize the coping styles.

Fortunately, what the paper lacks in stylistic meticulousness, it makes up for in scientifically sound methodology. Data was collected in the form of questionnaire tailored to the target population (Chinese students), in which the WLEIS (Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale) was favored over the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence test because it had previously been deemed more suitable for the culture of the respondents. Responses to the sixteen point questionnaire were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale in which 1 was the lowest level of agreement and 7 was the highest. Results were tested against statistical models and calculated with several deviation check measures.

### **Logic Examination**

Yefei Wang et. al acknowledged the practical limitations of their research and for the

most part, successfully examined their own scientific weaknesses with suggestions for improvement in future research. However, despite highlighting that their sample population were students and thus could not necessarily be generalized into the whole population, they failed to focus on the specific detail of those students that I think is the most important aspect. They were *psychology* students. Not students of history or art, but students who had chosen to enroll in a class—either degree seeking or not—which specifically entailed learning about the mind and human behaviors. Thus it follows that these students might potentially have a much higher than average coping ability and emotional intelligence rating since they have or are in the process of formally pursuing education in the matter. The participants being psychology students does not immediately invalidate the study, but it is a specific detail which changes the real-world validity of the results. If the same research was conducted with another sub-group of the Chinese population, for instance—fishermen—they would very likely show lower coping skills and emotional intelligence because their daily tasks do not involve the contemplation of the conceptual nature of these things.

## **Conclusion**

The research was conducted with higher precision than it was reported in this paper. Emotional intelligence was never clearly defined and although that did not hamper the ability to understand the information or analysis of it, it does leave the results less precise than they could be. Operational definitions are crucial in any scientific pursuit, but I would argue most crucial when the research involves human psychology or behavior. There are a myriad of similar but not precisely the same definitions to choose from on any given topic within the scope of human psychology and there is never a more pressing need for defining your concepts to your readers

than when contention surrounds the term itself. Additionally, because the research process was tailored to the population, there is limited benefit or enrichment to the international understanding of the relationships between the variables. While it may not have been practical to aim for international understanding and was instead a matter of pure application for the benefit of researchers in China, the lack of international inclusion limits potentially new and diverse explanations for the data that would not be culture-bound or biased. Although it was unintended, this research paper is a good example of the concept of 'avoidant' strategies for managing differences as highlighted on page 38 of our textbook (Harvey and Allard, 2015). Avoidance was an appropriate strategy because it allowed for the management of resources (time, money), but ultimately cost the research the chance for a more well-rounded analysis because no contentious or culturally-unbiased opinions were available for debate.

References

Harvey, C. & Allard, M. (2015). *Understanding and managing diversity: readings, cases and exercises*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.

Yefei, W., Guangrong, X. & Xilong, C. (2016). Effects of emotional intelligence and self-leadership on students' coping with stress. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 44(5), 853-864. doi:10.2224/sbp.2016.44.5.853

Lauren Cochran