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## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN SRI LANKA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study aims to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among healthcare workers. Employee engagement is critical for completing and executing activities in any form of organization. It is critical to provide organizations with the opportunity to be in a sustainable state for long-term sustainability and gain a competitive advantage over competitors. Employees must recognize, use, and control their own feelings in productive ways to alleviate tension and resolve obstacles in the workplace. Employees' levels of commitment can be affected by emotional symptoms. They can lead to higher or lower morale, which can positively or negatively impact employee engagement. Though previous studies paid attention to engagement level, little attention was paid to the emotional intelligence of healthcare workers. In addition, this study sheds new light on the emotional intelligence level, engagement level, and effect of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among Sri Lankan healthcare employees. A survey method was used and data were collected from conveniently chosen 212 healthcare employees working in public and private hospitals. The results disclose that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more likely to have high employee



engagement. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** *emotional intelligence, employee engagement, healthcare workers*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human resources are the core and backbone for the success of any organization. Firms employ a diverse workforce to ensure that employees are invested in their organization's goals, priorities, and ideals, are motivated to contribute to corporate performance and improve their sense of well-being at the same time (Khodakarami & Dirani, 2020). To emphasise, employees are far more essential for getting a competitive advantage, which leads to the firms' overall success. Although managing human resources is not as easy as they differ from one to another, the way they engage in works and how they manage their emotions (Albrecht & Marty, 2020). Above all, how every employee perceives and understands their emotions and emotional knowledge and how they are relatively regulated to promote their own emotional and intellectual growth is the matter to be successful (Goleman, 1998). Though having employees who manage themselves is a gift for the companies, every employee must be able to manage their emotions since they work with diversified people.

Concepts of emotional intelligence have gained enormous attention in businesses and the health care industry (Kengatharan & Kunatilakam, 2020; Jensen et al., 2008). Having empathy, motivation to do something, knowing the owners and society, and having social interaction and self-control are the most important aspects of EI to build strong collaboration with people, leading to achieving the goals (Goleman et al., 2002). There

is a need in deed for emotionally competent people in the healthcare industry to succeed in various businesses (Freshman & Rubino, 2004). This emotional intelligence is a sort of societal interactive model which controls various organizational dynamics in terms of the communicational way, leading the people and committing the people towards work (Jensen et al., 2008). The more you manage your emotions, the more you manage your frustration meritoriously to get along with others and to engage in the work (Cherniss, 2000). This emotional intelligence is considered an indispensable skill for everyone for those who work in the healthcare industry and other industries to accomplish their works in the best possible way because the healthcare industry is always in a pathetic situation and with several complexities. The way each individual manages their emotions in the healthcare industry is much needed to cultivate satisfaction in work. Since the healthcare industry is with too many complications and too much workload, each work of them is also interdependent. Thus, managing themselves to perform well is important.

It is said that only fifteen per cent of the world's employees are engaged in their work while other eighty-five per cent of the employees are disengaged in their works (Gallap, 2018). Further, it revealed that the level of work disengagement keeps increasing in the world these days. Though there are many drivers for employee engagement, it is a must to understand the vitality of emotional intelligence of healthcare workers. Since the healthcare industry faces challenges, it is important to have their existence. Most healthcare industry operates with limited resources, unwelcome leadership, increased regulatory frameworks, and stressful with frustrating work environments (Health Leaders Media, 2014). However, these

workers have to engage in their job as much as possible to serve the community. Hence this study focuses on the way to improve emotional intelligence to increase employee engagement.

Based on the emotional intelligence of every people, their engagement in the work will either be going up or going down. Here, the engaged employees are usually willing to work more and harder and more committed to their work and their organization (Alvi, Haider, Haneef, & Ahmed, 2014; Harter et al., 2002). However, disengaged employees are vice versa. This high level of engagement brings a high-performance workplace (Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Nasomboon, 2014). At the same time, managing emotions during stressful situations help to focus on the job and get involved in the job better than before (Vigoda-Gadot, & Meisler, 2010). Therefore, further engaged employees will only value the needs of the patients (Swarnalatha & Prasanna, 2013).

In the light of the problem mentioned above in health care, this study aimed to address whether emotional intelligence impacts employee engagement?. Since the healthcare workers even interact with family members of the patients, they have to maintain their level of emotions as usual as possible. Thus, this study wanted to identify that to what extent emotional intelligence impacts employee engagement. In light of the above background, the study's main objective is to identify the impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among healthcare workers in Sri Lanka, including all dimensions of emotional intelligence with employee engagement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review includes the primary constructs of emotional intelligence dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulations, self-motivation, social skills and empathy, and employee engagement.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

The core concept of Emotional Intelligence is most widespread in the healthcare industry (Jensen et al., 2008). Emotional intelligence is described as the capacity to control one's own and other people's feelings and emotions to direct thoughts and behavior (Shooshtarian et al., 2013). Members with high emotional intelligence have and use self-awareness and self-control to manipulate people by understanding how their actions influence others. Usually, emotional intelligence consists of five factors. They are social skills, empathy, self-awareness, self-management, and motivation (Goleman, 1998). At the same time, EI entails the capacity to perceive, determine, and control one's own, others', and collective emotions (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). All the components are connected to both understanding and controlling feelings in ourselves and others. Each aspect is based on various emotional intelligence competencies that can be used to assess emotional intelligence. All of these variables are linked to job efficiency (Kulkarni, Janakiram and Kumar, 2009).

The application of emotional intelligence assists managers and supervisors in recognizing and understanding feelings and using emotional intelligence to control oneself and relationships with others (Singh et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is assumed that emotional intelligence helps a

person be and act in ways other than those stressed by conventional ideas of intelligence. It is thus possible for the person to cultivate these alternate modes of being to become more productive and successful in both everyday life and the workplace.

### **Self Awareness**

According to Boyatzis (2001), self-awareness is concerned with the meaning of one's own thoughts and emotions. A self-conscious person is aware of his own shortcomings and abilities and all of the influences that can affect him. Similarly, Goleman (1998) noted that self-awareness is a method of recognizing a person's emotions and affecting them.

### **Self-regulation**

According to Schunk (2003), self-regulation encourages people to take a more powerful position in their feelings, emotions, and performances. In a series of levels, self-regulation progresses mainly from social sources to respective sources. According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), the adaptability quality is an essential component of self-management because if a leader possesses this adaptability quality, he or she will establish a high degree of employee productivity and success in the organization. All organizational supervisors often use this consistency to achieve success in a limited period.

### **Self-motivation**

According to Goleman (1995), self-motivation is the ability to restrain one's emotional tendencies to achieve one's goals. Self-motivation also refers to the ability to set goals and build an arduous path and stay centred

and optimistic in the face of setbacks that may arise when setting goals. One way that is based on self-motivation is acknowledging responsibility for one's successes and failures. Furthermore, according to Spinath (2001), self-motivation encompasses all areas that aid in achieving excellence and competitiveness.

### **Social skills**

According to Schuetz (2011), social skills are a person's ability to maintain relationships with others and create systems, also known as people skills. Social skills include respect for others, shared regard, loyalty, openness, tolerance, empathy, negotiation, and communication. Similarly, workers will benefit from social skills in a variety of ways. It may assist with various activities that are difficult to accomplish on one's own, such as gaining team support or completing a project.

### **Empathy**

According to Goleman (1998), Empathy can be used to assess the level of social knowledge of emotionally intelligent people. He said that only a socially conscious person would put himself in the shoes of others in order to consider their feelings and then take appropriate actions in response.

### **Employee Engagement**

The employee engagement study, first suggested by Kahn in 1990, has gotten much attention from academics and practitioners (Kataria, Rastogi, & Garg, 2013). Employee engagement is concerned with determining how committed workers are to something or someone at work, how hard they work, and how long they remain due to that dedication (Alvi, Haider,

Haneef, & Ahmed, 2014). Due to the current economic challenges that companies face, such as achieving more with fewer resources in an increasingly competitive world, employee engagement has piqued the attention of business leaders. Organizations are often drawn to the dual objectives that employee participation entails. Employee engagement incorporates tools to enhance the individual worker's contribution and the organization's overall performance, which is important from the perspective of organizational leadership (Truss et al., 2014).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample and Procedure**

This study aims to determine the impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among health care employees in Sri Lanka. The prime reason for including the health sector is that employees need emotional intelligence and employee engagement to have a prominent growth in Sri Lanka. The people in Sri Lanka share common characteristics too. A sample of 212 respondents was taken from health sector employees, including doctors and nurses, including the private and public banking sector. Convenient sampling regarding snowball sampling were done in order to collect the responses.

### **Measures**

The two types of variables, including emotional intelligence and employee engagement, were utilized in this research. Emotional intelligence is considered as an independent variable and employee engagement is considered as the dependent variable. The data were analyzed by SPSS software version 23.0. The present study has followed Goleman's (1998)

Model of EI and attempted to measure core dimensions of EI, namely: Self-awareness, self-regulation, Motivation, Social Awareness, and Social skill and was measured by 44 items adopted from Goleman (1998), which is usually used in EI early studies. A sample item is: 'I am usually aware – from moment to moment – of my feelings as they change' with high Cronbach alpha among the other questions of EI.

Further, EE was measured by the 11-item scale developed by Saks (2006). A sample item is: 'I really throw myself into my job'. Its Cronbach's alpha was 0.87. All scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = 'Strongly disagree' and 5 = 'Strongly agree'.

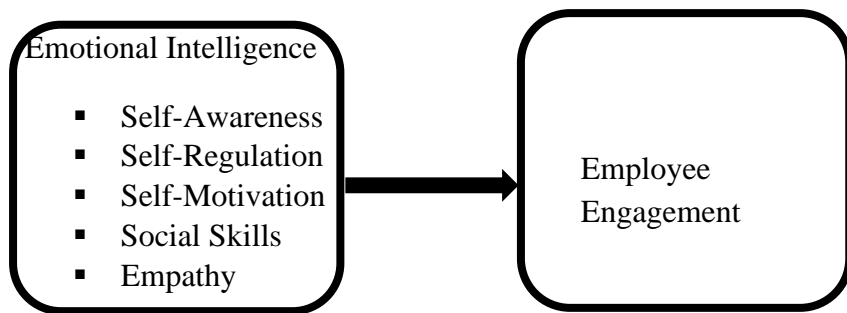
### **Demographics Characteristics**

We used age, gender, marital status, highest educational qualification, work experience, sector and the current position in the organization as control variables since they may influence the emotional intelligence and respondents' engagement. The demographic section of the questionnaires shows the necessary information about age, gender, marital status, highest educational qualification, work experience, and the current position, sector. In this sample, most of the respondents are females as there are N=144 and males are N=66. Above all, most of the respondents are of age between 31-40 years (N=129). The demographics showed that most of the respondents in the sample are married, N=155 whereas unmarried respondents are N=57. Most of the respondents in the sample are the employees in public sectors, N= 183, whereas the rest belongs to public sectors N=39.



Further, it has shown that the highest educational qualifications of respondents are MBBS are N=131. Additionally, the current position of them is Doctor who holds the position as Assistant Registrar in the hospitals whereas rest of the qualification includes BSc. Nursing, FRCS and MD, which includes consultants, surgeons and nurses. The majority of respondents' work experience includes 5 to 10 years, from 170, whereas the rest of the 52 includes all kinds of experience, even fresh workers.

### Conceptual framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

### Hypotheses

There is one prime hypothesis and five sub hypotheses in this study. Based on the conservation of theory (COR) these hypotheses were developed. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the collection of emotion-related self-perceptions and characters at a low level of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Furnham, & Mavroveli, 2007). On the other hand, how we manage our emotions during stressful situations positively to communicate effectively can also be called EI (Goleman, 1998). From the COR theory, the connectivity between EI and EE can be explained. Conservation of resource theory focuses on stress and motivation, which

act as carters to maintain resources to coop with stressful situations (Hobfall, 1989). The basic tenet of COR theory is that people attempt to acquire, keep, save and rise in value.

Further, it argues about resource loss and gains to identify how people engage in works. While people are unable to maintain their emotions, it will lead to stressful situations experiencing. Specifically, it leads to resource loss. On the other hand, while people are about to manage their emotions efficiently, it leads to resource gain. Because once the resources are about to gain, people with high resources would look into opportunities to invest those resources to accumulate resources (Hobfoll, 2001). The individuals who can manage their emotions have strong resource accumulations, which leads to an increase in performance from employee engagement. Thus, the goal of the organization can be achieved. Therefore we hypothesize that:

H1: There is a significant positive impact of Emotional Intelligence on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

H1<sub>a</sub>: There is a significant positive impact of Self-Awareness on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

H1<sub>b</sub>: There is a significant positive impact of Self-Regulation on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

H1<sub>c</sub>: There is a significant positive impact of Self-Motivation on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

H1<sub>d</sub>: There is a significant positive impact of Social skills on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

H1<sub>e</sub>: There is a significant positive impact of Empathy on Employee Engagement among the health care workers in Sri Lanka.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, regression analysis has been utilized to determine the significant impact of emotional intelligence on employees' performance. Generally, regression analysis is used to answer the extent to which independent variables influence the dependent variable. In this context, the research question of whether emotional intelligence impacts employees' engagement is answered. The objective of multiple regression analysis is to predict the single dependent variable by a set of independent variables. EI is considered an independent or predictor variable in this study, and EE is considered a dependent variable.

**Table 4.1: Correlations between predictive variables of Employee Engagement**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. Self-Awareness</b>	3.48	0.43	(.74)					
<b>2. Self-Regulation</b>	3.58	0.66	.375**	(.71)				
<b>3. Self-Motivation</b>	3.53	0.47	.349	.363	(.69)			

<b>4. Social Skills</b>	3.64	0.61	.391 **	.393**	.334**	(.68)
<b>5. Empathy</b>	3.43	0.49	.446**	.479**	.428	.481** (.69)
<b>6. Employee Engagement</b>	3.59	0.52	.442	.397**	.482**	.409** .516** (.82)

*Note: N=212, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, Cronbach Alpha is in parentheses. Further \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed). Source: Survey data (2021)*

Table 4.1 shows the results of the correlation analysis between the aspects of emotional intelligence and employee engagement among health care workers in Sri Lanka. The results have shown that the variables shown in the above table have shared a significant relationship. The results have exposed that empathy ( $r=.516$ ,  $p=.05$ ) was strongly associated with employee engagement, whereas self-regulation ( $r=.397$ ,  $p=.01$ ) was positively associated with employee engagement but with comparatively little effect. Further, self-awareness ( $r=.442$ ,  $p=.05$ ), self-motivation ( $r=.482$ ,  $p=.01$ ), and social skills ( $r=.409$ ,  $p=.01$ ) also have a significant relationship with employee engagement. Further, results of reliability above 0.6 for all variables are also given in table 4.1 as of parentheses.

**Table 4.2 Unstandardized Coefficients and Standardized Coefficients for predictors of Employee Engagement**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig
Variables				
<b>1</b>		<b>B</b>		<b>Std.Error</b>
<b>Beta</b>				
Constant	3.250	.358		9.084 0.000
Self-Awareness	.301	.122 .501		2.471 0.015
Self-Regulation	.253	.082 .589		3.079 0.004
Self-Motivation	.288	.099 .596		2.909 0.015
Social Skills	.317	.098 .604		3.215 0.002
Empathy	.356	.079 .647		4.532 0.000
<b><math>R^2 = .594</math></b>		<b><math>F=72.845</math></b>		
<b><math>P=0.00</math></b>				

*Source- Survey Data (2021)*

*Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement*

Table 4.2 displays the results of the coefficient estimation for employee engagement measure for the study. As shown in table 4.2, there are significant values for all predictor variables, which can be shown as t value ( $P < .05$ ). The regression model variables listed in Table which shows statistically significant impact on employee engagement—i.e. self-awareness ( $t(212)=2.471, p < .005$ ) self-regulation ( $t(212)=3.079, p < .005$ ), self-motivation ( $t(212)=2.909, p < .005$ ), Social skills ( $t(212)=3.215, p < .005$ ) and empathy ( $t(212)=4.532, p < .005$ ) which were significantly influenced employee engagement in healthcare sector. Interestingly, the Beta value between employee engagement and empathy is the highest with 0.647 and employee engagement and self-awareness is

the lowest with 0.501. All the variables' significant level is acceptable as these are less than 0.05 value.

In the coefficient analysis, the regression equation  $Y=3.250 + 0.501x + 589x + 596x + 604x + 647x$  exhibits EI's impact on EE among the healthcare staff in Sri-Lanka. Further, any changes in self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills and empathy would bring 0.501, 0.589, 0.596, 0.604, 0.647 unit changes in employee engagement respectively among the healthcare workers. Specifically, the  $R^2$  value in Table 4.2 indicates that 59.4 per cent, which is nearly 60% of the variability in the employee engagement of the health care workers, can be explained by Emotional Intelligence which consists of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills and empathy and nearly 40% variability would be explained by some other variables which are not tested in this research. The F-statistics and significance levels (sig) in Table show that this model generates statistically significant outcomes. Prime and sub hypotheses which are based on emotional intelligence and employee engagement, were accepted in this regard.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This elicits the findings, limitations and recommendations of the research. The primary aim of the study is to identify the impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement. The results of the correlation analysis have revealed that empathy as a dimension of EI was significantly positively associated with employee engagement than other dimensions of EI, whereas self-regulation was least positively associated with EE. The emotional intelligence of

healthcare workers and its potential impact on employee engagement may become the competitive advantage to health care organizations as they traverse through significant changes driven by health care in Sri Lanka to transform (Suehs & Derrick, 2015). As the study demonstrated, highly emotionally intelligent healthcare workers had higher levels of employee engagement. This study aided in recognizing the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness within the health care setting (Cutler, 2010; Humphreys, Brunsen, & Davis, 2005). The present study answered the question that is “whether the EI impacts employee engagement?” The study results indicated that emotional intelligence impacts employee engagement among the healthcare workers as these staff is working in a high-pressure environment. Further, as per the study, EI impacts employee engagement as healthcare workers spend their time managing their own emotions. It confirms the results of the previous study based on the western side (Suehs & Derrick, 2015).

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications of the study**

This study's significance to the health care industry is an enlargement of the body of knowledge regarding the impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement among healthcare workers. Insightful of the potential contribution of this impact on health care is extremely helpful for the implications. This study has used the conservation of resource theory between EI and employee engagement concerning the theoretical implications. Additionally, this study also confirmed connectivity between EI and employee engagement and

increased understanding. Further, our study ensured the generalizability of EI and EE in a country like Sri Lanka.

Our study revealed that a prospective strategy should be created in order to address the challenges that are usually within the workplace to improve productivity, customer satisfaction and level of loyalty, which will be likely to achieve by healthcare workers with higher EI. Further, this study emphasises that it must have an effective communication channel from which the sector can cascade its vision and strategic focus to employees (Harter et al., 2002; Truss et al., 2014). Having this type of effective channelling would help the employees work harder towards the organizational goal and be more committed in their work (Alvi, Haider, Haneef, & Ahmed, 2014; Harter et al., 2002). Further Emotional intelligence has gained good recognition among individuals, but the awareness level among all the employees should be increased. Therefore, the organization must facilitate workshops and soft skill improvement mechanisms to make the employees aware of it and Training on emotional intelligence can be conducted to increase the emotional stability of the employees and this will increase their performance and also their commitment to the work (Zeidner, Roberts & Matthews, 2008).

Additionally, organizations should take the necessary actions to improve employee engagement and keep the organization as transparent as possible to keep the employees tranquil (James, 2021). Further, there should be prepared for information sharing, experiences and behavioral strategies among co-workers within the organizational



set-up to be more effective (Kailsapathy & Mayuran, 2020). Emotional intelligent workers usually cherish positive attitudes towards work (Carmeli, 2003; Kengatharan & Kunatilakam, 2020). Thus, incorporating EI with competencies would provide a more efficient way to improve capabilities, resulting in emotionally motivated employees subsidising more to work than just doing the job. Moreover, some other seminal studies reported that leader-member exchange (LMX) would ameliorate the negative effect of employees' related outcomes (Kengatharan, 2020). Therefore, providing strong leader-member exchange (LMX) could positively affect engagement. Hospital associations should diagnose the vitality and critical link to improve the engagement (Nasomboon, 2014).

## **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our study also has limitations as of other studies. The first limitation is that the present study concern EI as the predictor variable for employee engagement. However, in practice, there are many predictors such as leadership styles, inter-organizational politics, stress, work overload, and rewards that influence engagement in the healthcare sector. Further, Future research can be conducted to see emotional intelligence effect on different dependent variables like job satisfaction, organizational productivity, employee morale, organizational climate and employees training motivation.

The second limitation is that it is not adequate, though these results are derived from far enough responses. Hence, the sample size can be increased to identify the actual results of healthcare workers EI. The

third limitation is that though this study has been done in both the public and private sectors, the future study can be done comparing the public and private sector healthcare workers' emotional intelligence. Fourth, the study's unit of analysis is individual, but future study can be done in dyads way with doctors and nurses. Fifth, the generalizability of this study among other sectors would be an issue. Thus, future studies can be done on other sectors like technology, academics, the apparel industry, the banking industry, the food industry, etc.

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