

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PROFESSIONAL READINESS**

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Abstract:

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a persons' capacity to identify and express his or her own emotions as well as manage and relate to others. It includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. EI plays a vital role in managing stress and promoting psychological well-being. It helps students regulate their emotions, as poor emotional control under academic pressure may increase anxiety, reduce productivity and affect relationships. As part of the Social Work curriculum, the second-year MSW students at Loyola College, Chennai underwent soft skills workshops on Emotional Intelligence and Stress Management. Two self-assessment tools, namely Quick Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment and Stress Management Assessment were administered using Google form and 44 students participated. Among participants, 59.1% reported moderate stress, 29.5% reported low stress, and 11.4% reported high stress levels. The findings indicated low levels of Emotional Awareness (61.4%) and Emotional Management (54.5%), while Social Emotional Awareness (52.3%) and Relationship Management (47.7%) were at moderate levels. High levels of Emotional Intelligence were observed in only a few students. Although most students showed moderate stress levels, gaps exist in intrapersonal competencies. Structured Emotional Intelligence and Stress Management interventions should be integrated into the academic framework to enhance well-being and professional effectiveness.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Stress Management, Psychological Well-being, Emotions, Stress and Soft Skills.*

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Introduction:

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been recognized as an important factor in mitigating stress and enhancing Psychological Well-being. It has gained significant attention in recent years as a key factor influencing individuals' ability to understand and regulate emotions in personal and professional contexts. Emotional Intelligence refers to a person's capacity to identify, understand, and express his or her own emotions, as well as to manage emotions and relate effectively to others. It includes components such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. EI plays a vital role in managing stress and promoting psychological well-being. It helps students regulate their emotions, as poor emotional control under academic pressure may

increase anxiety, reduce productivity, and affect interpersonal relationships.

According to Vajih Ashhar (2024), Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in reducing perceived stress among students, highlighting the significance of emotional regulation in academic environments. Students pursuing professional courses often encounter academic pressure, interpersonal challenges, and emotional demands that may contribute to stress. Research by Tayyba Saghir and colleagues (2025) indicate that Emotional Intelligence significantly contributes to stress management, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships among university students.

Similarly, Haneen Fteiha and Alaa Awwad (2020) found that individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence

tend to adopt more effective coping strategies when dealing with stressful situations. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to manage emotions, maintain self-control, and respond constructively to challenging circumstances. For students in social work education, emotional competence becomes particularly important as they are trained to work with vulnerable populations and complex social issues. Developing Emotional Intelligence may therefore support both personal well-being and professional competence. Studies have also emphasized that emotionally intelligent students demonstrate better adaptability and psychological resilience in demanding academic settings. In this context, examining Emotional Intelligence and Stress Management among social work students becomes essential for understanding their mental health and professional readiness.

Review of Literature :

Academic stress has emerged as a serious issue among college students because of the rising demands and expectations. Research shows that academic stress is affected by factors such as heavy academic workload, financial constraints, lack of sleep and technological challenges, while time management, social support, and mindfulness are effective in dealing with stress and maintaining psychological well-being (Prajapati and Khatun, 2025). Similarly, research among undergraduate students revealed that stress is affected by factors such as academic workload, family pressure, health issues and uncertainty about the future, and students have been using recreational activities, physical exercise, social interactions and sleep as coping mechanisms (Giri and Sharma, 2025). Another research study revealed that academic stress is widespread among college students because of examination pressure, academic workload and high expectations, but there were no significant gender differences in stress levels and coping strategies among males and females (Titre and Dhawad, 2025).

Some studies have also emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in academic achievement. Research indicates that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of academic achievement, as students with higher emotional intelligence exhibit better emotional control, motivation, and adaptation to college life (Romano, 2022). Further research revealed that emotional intelligence has a positive link with psychological well-being and academic achievement, with psychological variables such as self-efficacy, motivation, and resilience as mediating factors (Shengyao et al., 2024). Likewise, emotional intelligence, specifically stress management and positive mood, has been recognized as a major predictor of academic achievement and higher Grade Point Average (GPA) among undergraduate students (Garner, Carvalho, and Spears, 2024). Though some studies have investigated academic stress, coping mechanisms, emotional intelligence, and academic achievement in the past, there is a lack of research that investigates their cumulative effect on the academic performance and psychological well-being of students.

Methodology:

The current study used a descriptive research design to analyze the levels of emotional intelligence and stress management among social work students. The participants for the study were 44 second-year Master of Social Work (MSW) students from Loyola College, Chennai, who had attended soft skills workshops on Emotional Intelligence and Stress Management as part of their curriculum. Convenience sampling was used since all the available students who had attended the workshop were included in the study. The data was collected using Google Forms before the workshop, and participation was voluntary after making the respondents aware of the purpose of the study.

Two self-assessment instruments were employed for data collection: the Quick Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment, which assessed four areas: emotional

awareness, emotional management, social-emotional awareness, and relationship management, and the Stress Management Assessment, which assessed the participants' capacity for stress management in academic and private life. The results of both instruments were rated according to low, medium, and high levels, as indicated in the scoring guide. The data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) to show the demographic profile and levels of emotional intelligence and stress

Socio-Demographic details of the Participants

management, and the Chi-square test to determine the relationship between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and stress management.

Results and Discussion :

The results are presented in three sections: Characteristics of the Participants, Stress Management Assessment and Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment which give an overview of the profile of the participants and their level of stress management and emotional intelligence.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic details of the participants (N=44)	
Age in years	n (%)
21 to 25	41 (93)
26 to 43	3 (7)
Gender	n (%)
Female	22 (50)
Male	22 (50)
Specialization	n (%)
Community Development	10 (23)
Human Resource Management	13 (29.5)
Human Rights	9 (20.5)
Medical and Psychiatry	12 (27)
Currently working part time	n (%)
No	35 (79.5)
Yes	9 (20.5)
Whether worked after completing UG	n (%)
No	28 (64)
Yes	16 (36)
Number of Family Members	n (%)
2 & Below	3 (7)
3 to 4	25 (57)
5 to 6	12 (27)
7 to 12	4 (9)
Average Monthly Income of Family	n (%)
Less than Rs. 20,000	26 (59)
Rs. 21,000 to Rs. 50,000	8 (18)
Rs. 51,000 & Above	10 (23)
Total	44 (100)

The socio-demographic details of the participants are shown in Table 1. The study had a high proportion of participants belonging to the age group of 21-25 years (93%), indicating the typical postgraduate group. The proportion of males and females was equally distributed in the study, with 50% males and 50% females. With regard to specialization, the highest proportion of participants was from the Human Resource Management group (29.5%), followed by Medical and Psychiatry (27%), Community Development (23%) and Human Rights (20.5%). The majority of the participants

were not working part-time (79.5%), and the proportion of participants with no previous work experience after completing the course was high (64%). Most of the participants had a family size of three or four members (57%), and a significant proportion had a monthly income of less than Rs. 20,000 (59%) reflecting modest economic backgrounds.

Stress Management Assessment:

Table 2. Stress Management Assessment (N=44)

High n (%)	Medium n (%)	Low n (%)
5 (11)	26 (59)	13 (30)

The stress levels of the participants are shown in Table 2. Most students (59%) experienced a medium level of stress in academic life. Also, 30% of the students experienced low levels of stress indicating that the students are coping well with academic and personal requirements. Only 11% of the students experienced high levels of stress. The study suggests that students' lives include stress; however, the levels are still under control.

Emotional Intelligence Self- Assessment

Table 3. Emotional Intelligence Self Assessment (N=44)

Domain	High n (%)	Medium n (%)	Low n (%)
Emotional Awareness	2 (5)	15 (34)	27 (61)
Emotional Management	2 (5)	18 (41)	24 (54)
Social Emotional Awareness	9 (21)	23 (52)	12 (27)
Relationship Management	6 (14)	21 (48)	17 (38)

Table 3 shows the level of Emotional Intelligence for the 44 participants in the four domains. Most of the participants had a low level of Emotional Awareness and Emotional Management, with 61% and 54%, respectively. This shows that most of the participants lack the ability to be aware of their emotions and also manage their emotions. On the other hand, most of the participants had a medium level of Social Emotional Awareness and Relationship Management, with 52% and 48%, respectively.

Emotional Management Vs. Stress Management

Table 4. Emotional Management Vs. Stress Management (N=44)

Emotional Management Rating	Stress Management Rating			Total	Chi-square Value	P value
	High n (%)	Medium n (%)	Low n (%)			
High	0	0	2	2 (5)	10.647	0.031
Medium	0	11	7	18 (41)		
Low	5	15	4	24 (54)		
Total	5 (11)	26 (59)	13 (30)	44 (100)		

Since the p value (0.031) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 5 percent level of significance. Thus, it is concluded that there is a significant association between Emotional Management and Stress Management among the respondents. From the table above, it is clear that most respondents with low Emotional Management have a medium level of Stress Management. Similarly, most respondents with a medium level of Emotional Management have either a low or medium level of Stress Management. This indicates that Emotional Management is related to the ability of respondents to manage stress.

Relationship Management Vs. Stress Management

Relationship Management Rating	Stress Management Rating			Total	Chi-square Value	P value
	High n (%)	Medium n (%)	Low n (%)			
High	0	1	5	6 (13)	13.544	0.009
Medium	1	16	4	21 (48)		
Low	4	9	4	17 (39)		
Total	5 (11)	26 (59)	13 (30)	44 (100)		

Since p value (0.009) is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 1 percent level of significance. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a significant association between Relationship Management and Stress Management among the respondents. The table shows that most respondents with medium Relationship Management have a medium level of Stress Management, while respondents with low Relationship Management are mainly found in the medium level of Stress Management. This indicates that Relationship Management is related to the respondents' ability to manage stress.

Social Work Implications Using the Methods:

Social work methods like casework, group work, and community organization offer key implications for addressing emotional intelligence (EI) and stress among students, enhancing mental health and professional readiness.

Casework Applications: Through individualized coping techniques like cognitive restructuring, individual counseling helps students manage stress by fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation. This promotes resilience for client encounters, which is similar to clinical social work.

Group Work: Through shared experiences and

comments, group therapy and peer support sessions reduce isolation by fostering social-emotional awareness and relationship skills. Workshop assessments demonstrate the benefits for MSW students with poor EI domains.

Community Organization: Through role-playing and mindfulness, curriculum-wide treatments like soft skills seminars encourage group stress management and emotional intelligence. This helps social workers get ready for demanding jobs like community development.

Integrating these methods bridges gaps in intrapersonal competencies, ensuring ethical practice and well-being.

Conclusion :

This study on emotional intelligence (EI) and stress management among MSW students, uncovers moderate stress levels alongside low emotional awareness and management, with moderate social-emotional awareness and relationship skills. Significant associations link emotional and relationship management to effective stress coping, underscoring EI's role in psychological resilience. These gaps in intrapersonal competencies pose risks to students' well-being and future efficacy in serving vulnerable populations. Integrating structured EI and stress management workshops into social work curricula will foster self-regulation, empathy, and adaptability, enhancing professional readiness. Ultimately, equipping social work students with robust EI promotes sustainable mental health, superior client interventions, and stronger contributions to India's social welfare systems, bridging personal growth with societal impact.

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