

From Emotion To Action: The Role Of Coping Styles In The Emotional Intelligence-Stress Relationship Among Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has had such an impact on human life that everything revolves around the challenges and techniques for dealing with the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. This abrupt threat to human life and the adjustment to the new normal has resulted in a great deal of anxiety (Singh & Gujral, 2022). Employees working in stressful settings are a significant problem for businesses since their performance suffers (Clerxq, Azeem, & Haq, 2021; Nauman, Raja, Haq, & Bilal, 2019, Chhabra, 2019). It is unavoidable to recognize the consequences of a circumstance in which the entire country came to a halt for a while and fought valiantly to rescue the lives of its residents.

An uneven situation between an individual's perception and actual demand causes psychological stress (Aslan, Ochnik, & Cinar, 2020). Increased stress is concerning since it leads to the development of poor coping mechanisms to deal with stress and worry (Park, Russell, Fendrich, Finkelstein - Fox, Hutchison, & Becker, 2020). Individual mental health suffers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which includes psychiatric disorders, behavioural troubles, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and despair (Arslan, Yildirim, Tanhan, Buluş, & Allen, 2021). In such a panic situation, understanding the role of EI in stress management is critical and advantageous.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is an individual's ability or capability to make reasonable decisions in order to properly interact with his environment (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In 1997, Mayer and Salovey proposed four EI dimensions: perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. Researchers have summed up the understanding of emotional intelligence into two broad categories (Singh et al., 2022): the Ability model (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1993) and the Mixed model (Goleman, 1995; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000). The Ability model defines EI as an individual's ability (Gujral, 2016), whereas the Mixed model views it as a combination of ability and skills (Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2004). Davies, Stankov, & Roberts in 1998 categorized EI into four categories - "appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself", "appraisal and recognition of emotion in others", "regulation of emotion in oneself and use of emotion to facilitate performance". EI manages others' emotions to motivate them to get the job done creatively and efficiently (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000; Salovey & Grewal, 2005; Baba, Makhdoomi & Siddiqi, 2021).

Stress Coping

Coping refers to cognitive or behavioural efforts to manage or control stress. A study on 69 students found that learning coping skills can help lessen the detrimental effects of stress on one's mental ability (Mosley, et al., 1994). There are personality qualities that assist an individual in dealing with stress. Still, to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to evolve according to the demands of time and the severity of the issue. According to Lazarus (1993), there are two types of coping strategies - problem-focused coping with resolving the situation and emotion. -focused coping with altering one's perception. According to Satow, the stress coping styles are divided into two categories – adaptive coping style (positive style) and maladaptive coping style (negative style) (Satow, 2012; O'Rourke, Budimir, Pieh, & Probst, 2021).

Perceived Stress

Stress is a relationship between an individual and surroundings, involving individual's assessment of stressors, resulting in a highly individualized process (Lecic-Tosevski, Vukovic, & Stepanovic, 2011). Perceived stress refers to an individual's feelings or thoughts about how stressed they are at a specific moment in time or over a specified time period. It does not assess the types or frequency of stressful events that have occurred in a person's life, but instead how a person perceives the overall exposure to stressors of one's life and the ability to cope with such stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Liu, Lithopoulos, Zhang, Garcia-Barrera, & Rhodes, 2021). Higher levels of perceived stress are associated with negative health behaviours (Enns, Eldridge, Montgomery, & Gonzalez, 2018; Ng & Jeffery, 2003).

Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress

People's emotions are a product of how they interpret (value) their continual interactions with their surroundings. Emotions have a lot of diagnostic significance since they show how people think they're managing what's important to them in any particular situation (Stevens, Loudon, Yow, Bowden, & Humphrey, 2013; Bailey & Clarke, 2013). High level of emotional intelligence leads to lower level of acute and chronic perceived stress (Singh & Sharma, 2012). Improving emotional intelligence and resilience could help people avoid perceived stress. One way to ease stress among professionals would be to help them improve their emotional intelligence, developing and obtaining effective stress coping strategies (Jurado et. al, 2019; Sarrionandia, Ramos-Daz, and Fernández-Lasarte, 2018). H0: There exists no relationship between EI and Perceived stress among employees of financial institutions

H1_a: There exists a relationship between EI and Perceived stress among employees of financial institutions

Emotional Intelligence and Stress Coping

Previous studies have linked emotional intelligence to stress management, well-being, and mental health (Ciarrochi, Deane, & Anderson, 2002; Gujral, 2013). Emotional intelligence is a factor that aids in coping with stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing programs to improve emotional intelligence should be designed for individual wellbeing and mental health (Baba, 2020). Most studies show a link between EI, stress, and coping methods (Pau & Croucher, 2003; Gujral, 2013; Coiro, Bettis, & Compas, 2017; Fetiha & Awwad, 2020; Pau, et al., 2004). EI is a sort of social intelligence that assists adolescents in dealing with stress, personal issues, anxiety, and depression (Fahriza, Rayaginansih, & Agustina, 2020). According to a study in the United States, they faced a variety of stresses in all aspects of their lives, the most prevalent of which was worry and anxiety over the Covid-19 outbreak (Park, et al., 2020).

H0: there exists no relationship between EI and Stress coping styles of employees of financial institutions

H2_a: there exists a relationship between EI and Stress coping styles of employees of financial institutions

H0: there exists no relationship between EI and Adaptive Stress coping style of employees of financial institutions

H2A_a: there exists a relationship between EI and Adaptive Stress coping style of employees of financial institutions

H0: there exists no relationship between EI and Maladaptive Stress coping style of employees of financial institutions

H2B_a: there exists a relationship between EI and Maladaptive Stress coping style of employees of financial institutions

Stress Coping and Perceived Stress

Coping can help to improve the relationship between the distressed individual and the surroundings. The individual's coping strategy for dealing with the impact of a stressor lessens the degree of stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). The research indicates three issues of coping which are: (a) the right concept & method for measuring coping, (b) the classification of stress coping styles/strategies and (c) the utility of findings (Dewe, Cox & Ferguson, 2007). Muller and Spitz discovered that planning, active coping, acceptance, or positive reframing approaches to coping were negatively related to perceived stress, whereas denial, behavioural disengagement, self-blame, or substance use were positively related (Doron et al., 2014).

H0: there exists no relationship between Stress coping styles and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

H3_a: there exists no relationship between Stress coping styles and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

H0: there exists no relationship between Adaptive Stress coping style and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

H3A_a: there exists no relationship between Adaptive Stress coping style and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

H0: there exists no relationship between Maladaptive Stress coping style and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

H3B_a: there exists no relationship between Maladaptive Stress coping style and Perceived stress of employees of financial institutions

EI is considered as a mechanism to reduce and regulate the perceived stress levels. There is an evident association of stress coping strategies with the level of EI and also perceived stress level (López & Perez, 2019). A study on 203 students revealed that higher level of emotional intelligence is associated with lower perceived stress. The study also concluded that adaptive and maladaptive stress coping act as a partial mediator in the relationship between EI and perceived stress (Enns, et al., 2018). Individuals with a high EI are self-aware, giving them an edge in suitable coping mechanisms and a low-stress environment (Forushani & Besharat, 2011). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect the possible mediation by stress coping strategies between EI and perceived stress level.

H0: Adaptive Stress coping does not act as a mediator between EI and Perceived stress

H4A_a: Adaptive Stress coping acts as a mediator between EI and Perceived stress

H0: Maladaptive Stress coping does not act as a mediator between EI and Perceived stress

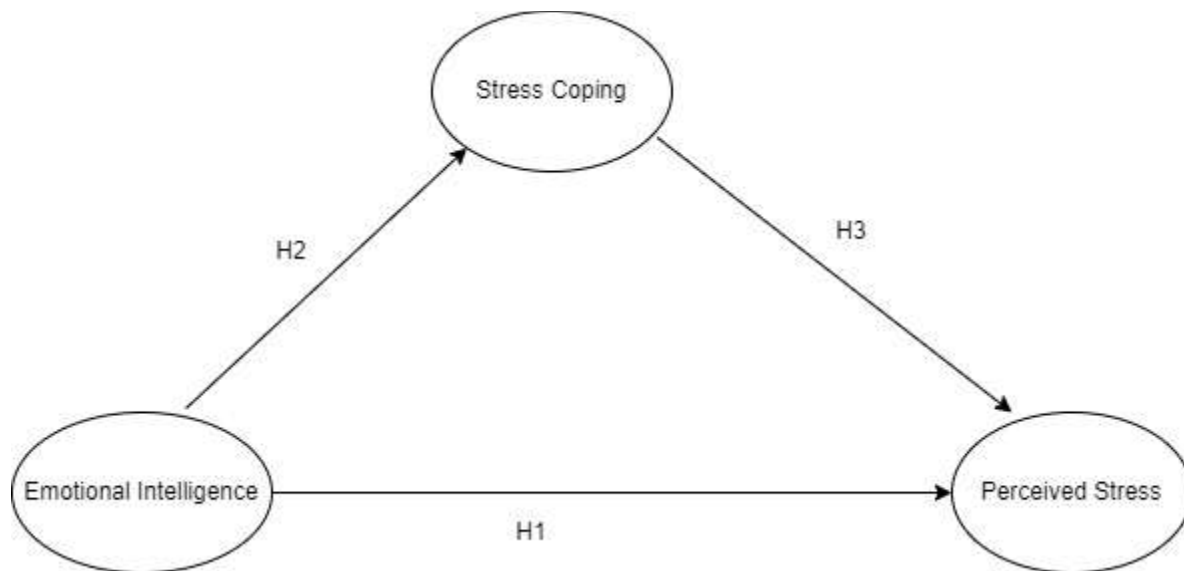
H4B_a: Maladaptive Stress coping acts as a mediator between EI and Perceived stress

Limitations of the literature: In the literature, EI has a significant impact on perceived stress and stress coping (Naidoo, 2008; Pau & Croucher, 2003; Pau et al., 2007; Birks, McKendree & Watt, 2009; Ranasinghe et al., 2017; Prentice, Zeidan & Wang, 2020; Davis & Humphrey, 2012; Noorbakhsh, Besharat & Zarei, 2010). The influence of stress coping methods on perceived stress was also identified in prior studies (Lim, Tam & Lee, 2013; Furman, Joseph & Miller-Perrin, 2018). The mediating function of stress coping mechanisms in the association between EI and perceived stress has also been identified (Enns, et al., 2018), but no literature in the Indian context has been located to the best of the researcher's knowledge. In addition, while many studies focus on EI, perceived stress or EI, and stress coping mechanisms among students, there is very little research in the working professional arena, and almost no research focuses on Indian financial institutions.

Objective of the study

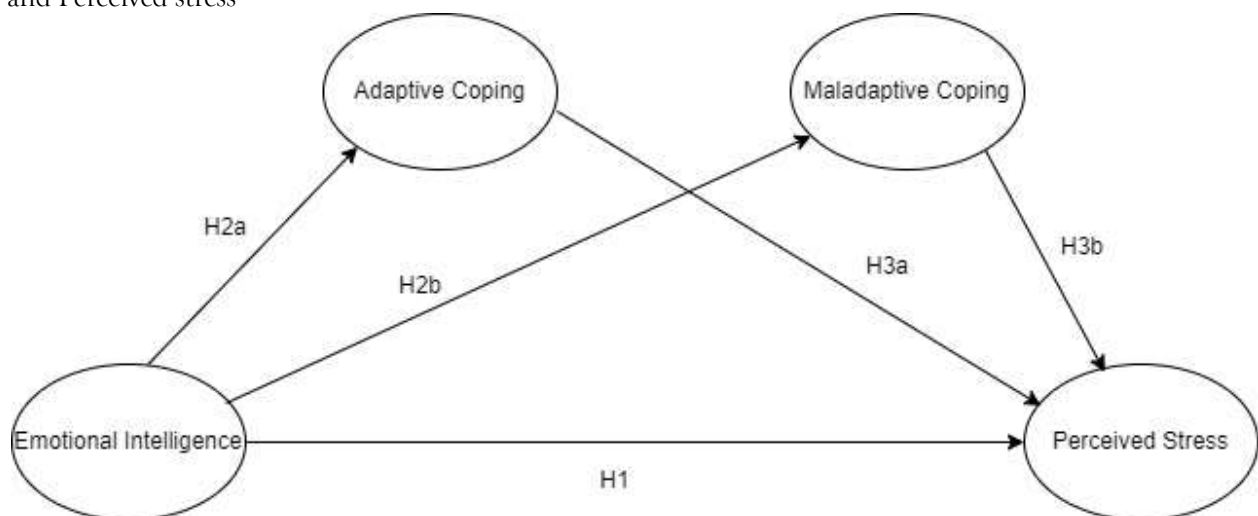
Based on the above literature, this study aims to study the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Stress coping styles and Perceived stress in India (refer to figure 1). Additionally, the study examines the mediating effect of stress coping styles on Emotional Intelligence and Perceived stress in Indian financial institutions (refer to figure 2).

Figure 1: Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Stress Coping styles and Perceived Stress



Source: Author

Figure 2: Relationship between, Emotional intelligence, Adaptive stress coping, Maladaptive stress coping and Perceived stress



Source: Author

Rationale of the study

In today's fast-paced world, it's critical to recognize the relevance of emotional intelligence in the workplace for any company's success (Makkar & Basu, 2017; Dawda & D. Hart, 2000; Bar-On, 1997; Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004). This study aims to investigate the relationship of Emotional Intelligence, Stress Coping Styles, and Perceived Stress in India, based on the findings of prior research. This paper includes data collected after pandemic, which depicts that resilience and adaptive coping styles have emerged as fundamental pillar for stress management. Also, to see if stress coping styles mediate the relationship between employees' emotional intelligence and perceived stress in Indian financial institutions. Since, Emotional Intelligence level helps an individual to cope with environmental demands and pressures (Singh & Gujral, 2020), it plays an important role in stress management and perception of stress. The level of perceived stress impacts the emotional and physical wellbeing of an individual. It is necessary to study the impact of emotional intelligence in selecting the right coping strategy for reducing the perceived stress. This research will add to

the body of knowledge on Emotional Intelligence, stress coping styles, and perceived stress. It will also shed light on how to reduce employees' stress to better their personal and professional lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An exploratory study was conducted to examine the relationship between EI and perceived stress. It also examines whether Adaptive and Maladaptive stress coping styles act as a mediator between EI and perceived stress.

Participants

The 213 participants who completed the survey were employees from financial institutions of the NCR region. The duration of collection of data is March 2021 to October 2021.

Materials

1. *The Assessing Emotions Scale*: It's a 33-item inventory in which the respondents rate themselves using a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5. The higher the points achieved, the higher is the level of emotional intelligence (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009).

2. *Stress Coping styles*: It's a 20-item inventory in which the respondents rate themselves using a four-point scale from 1 to 4. The higher score for adaptive coping styles indicates a better fit, whereas it is vice-versa for the maladaptive coping style (Satow, 2012).

3. *Perceived Stress Scale*: It's a 10-item inventory in which the respondents rate themselves using a five-point Likert scale from 0 to 4. The higher score indicates a higher level of perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1983).

Results

The research aims to examine the relationship between EI, Stress coping styles and Perceived stress. To analyze the multivariate data, Structural equation modelling is done with the help of PLS-SEM. The items related to the constructs are tested for convergent validity, discriminate validity and construct validity. All path linkages are analyzed to establish the structural model for the study. Mediation analysis is done with the help of the Sobel test to examine the mediating effect of Coping styles on the relationship between EI and Perceived stress. Pearson correlation was used to study the correlation between all the variables with the help of SPSS 23.

Demographic profile

Table 1: Demographics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age					
Valid	20 & below 20	21	9.9	9.9	9.9
	21-30	27	12.7	12.7	22.5
	31-40	129	60.6	60.6	83.1
	41-50	31	14.6	14.6	97.7
	Above 50	5	2.3	2.3	100.0
	Total	213	100.0	100.0	
Gender					
Valid	Female	48	22.5	22.5	22.5
	Male	165	77.5	77.5	100.0
	Total	213	100.0	100.0	
Experience					
Valid	10 & below	20	9.4	9.4	9.4
	11-20	107	50.2	50.2	59.6

	Above 20	86	40.4	40.4	100.0
	Total	213	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

As shown in Table 1, the total number of participants is 213, out of which majority of participants are male (77.5%) as compared to females. The majority of responders (60.6 percent) are between the ages of 31 and 40 and have between 11 and 20 years of experience (50.2 percent).

Descriptive statistics & hypothesis testing

The descriptive analysis Table 2 reveals that the overall mean score for EI are 113.38, which are above the mid-point level of the scores indicating the higher emotional intelligence of the research participants. The overall mean score of Adaptive coping style is 56.92, which is above the mid-point level, on the contrary the mean score of Maladaptive coping style is 7.72, which is lower than the mid-point level. This clearly indicates that the participants adopt adaptive coping as their coping strategy. Similarly, the mean score of perceived stress is 25.31, which is the mid-point level score, this indicates that the stress perceived by the respondents is moderate.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	213	113.38	24.190
Maladaptive Coping	213	7.72	2.504
Adaptive Coping	213	56.92	13.579
Perceived stress	213	25.31	7.695
Valid N (listwise)	213		

Source: Author

The common method bias in this study is 40.528 per cent of the total variance, which is below than the 50 per cent recommended cut-off (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Raman, Peng and I-Chi, 2020)

Measurement model

The convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) are determined. The items loading above the accepted value of 0.500 are retained for convergent validity ((Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Two factors from EI construct and one factor from Stress coping construct were below the accepted value, hence deleted (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Factor loadings, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted & Cronbach's Alpha

Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbachs Alpha	Goodness of Fit
Emotional Intelligence		0.5117	0.9632	0.9532	
EI2	-0.5281				
EI3	0.6166				
EI4	0.6604				
EI5	0.7529				
EI6	0.5717				
EI7	0.6276				
EI8	0.6324				
EI9	0.7304				
EI10	0.8037				
EI11	0.7192				
EI12	0.5358				

EI13	0.6257				
EI14	0.6433				
EI16	-0.5215				
EI17	0.7529				
EI18	0.7169				
EI19	0.6855				
EI20	0.7438				
EI21	0.7383				
EI22	0.719				
EI23	0.8194				
EI24	0.8239				
EI25	0.6652				
EI26	0.771				
EI27	0.8346				
EI28	0.7778				
EI29	0.7914				
EI30	0.7894				
EI31	0.8107				
EI32	0.8365				
EI33	0.7473				
Perceived Stress		0.5062	0.9107	0.8907	0.4620
PS1	0.6924				
PS2	0.7244				
PS3	0.7393				
PS4	0.7486				
PS5	0.7553				
PS6	0.6986				
PS7	0.7189				
PS8	0.7529				
PS9	0.6919				
PS10	0.574				
Adaptive coping		0.8814	0.9674	0.9551	0.66663
Active stress coping		0.6352	0.8743	0.8085	
SC3	0.67				
SC7	0.7026				
SC12	0.7538				
SC17	0.7828				
Positive Thinking		0.663	0.8872	0.8309	
SC1	0.6693				
SC5	0.7079				

SC6	0.8205				
SC16	0.8036				
Social Support		0.6479	0.8803	0.8185	
SC4	0.7479				
SC13	0.7336				
SC15	0.7566				
SC19	0.7783				
Support in Faith		0.6807	0.8948	0.8424	
SC8	0.7623				
SC9	0.7542				
SC10	0.7531				
SC18	0.7074				
Maladaptive coping		0.7099	0.8794	0.7954	0.5370
Alcohol and Cigarette consumption		0.7099	0.8794	0.7954	
SC2	-0.5284				
SC11	-0.4959				
SC14	-0.5464				

Source: Author

As depicted in Table 3, the constructs' AVE is above the recommended value of 0.500 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The composite reliability values are above the acceptable value of 0.7 (Hamid & Hafizal, 2017). Additionally, all the constructs have Cronbach's alpha value above the accepted value of 0.6 (Ursachi, Horodnic, & Zait, 2015). The Goodness of fit values for perceived stress, adaptive coping style and maladaptive coping style are higher than the recommended value of 0.36 (Akter et al., 2011).

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

	Adaptive coping	Maladaptive coping	Emotional intelligence	perceived stress
Adaptive coping	0.938829	0	0	0
Maladaptive coping	-0.4688	0.841784	0	0
Emotional intelligence	0.7101	-0.638	0.715332	0
perceived stress	-0.5327	0.4449	-0.6377	0.711477336

Source: Author

In addition to this, the discriminant validity of all the three constructs are evaluated (refer to Table 4) using Fornell and Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This clearly indicates that the measurement model is adequate for evaluating the model's structural properties.

Structural Model

The structural model is analyzed to study the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Stress Coping styles and Perceived Stress.

Table 5: Effect size (f^2) and Stone Geisser's Q^2

	f^2	Perceived Stress	
		Effect size	Q^2 effect size
Stress Coping style	0.0308	Small	.5110
Adaptive Coping style	0.0205	Small	.4429
Mal-adaptive Coping style	0.0033	No effect	.2860

Emotional Intelligence	0.1851	Medium	.2086
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Source: Author

The study investigated for the effect size (f^2) and Stone Geisser's Q^2 for determining the effect size of exogenous variables and the predictive relevance of the model. Cohen (1988) defines f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Hair et al., 2014). The value in table 5 clearly demonstrates that the effect size of coping styles is tiny, and that maladaptive coping strategies have almost no effect on perceived stress. Employees' emotional intelligence has a moderate effect on their perceived stress. A Q^2 value greater than 0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014). As indicated in table 5, all of the values are greater than zero, confirming the variables' predictive importance with relation to perceived stress.

Table 6: Hypothesis testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	Standard Error (STERR)	T Statistics (O/STERR)	R square
EI -> PS	-0.6417	-0.6493	0.0323	0.0323	19.8679	0.412
EI -> SCS	0.7624	0.7728	0.0529	0.0529	14.4069	0.581
EI -> ACS	0.7175	0.7117	0.0666	0.0666	10.7672	0.514
EI -> MCS	-0.6397	-0.6427	0.0456	0.0456	14.0252	0.375
SCS -> PS	-0.5677	-0.5812	0.0412	0.0412	13.7728	0.322
ACS -> PS	-0.5369	-0.5431	0.0476	0.0476	11.2788	0.288
MCS -> PS	0.459	0.4678	0.0503	0.0503	9.1273	0.204

Source: Author

Note: $p < 0.05$, EI - Emotional Intelligence, PS - Perceived Stress, SCS - Stress Coping Styles, ACS - Adaptive Coping Styles, MCS - Maladaptive Coping Styles

The relationship between EI and perceived stress was the first hypothesis examined in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that EI and perceived stress had a relationship ($\beta = -0.6417$, $t = 19.868$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a negative relationship between EI and perceived stress because the β value is negative, and the t-value is greater than 1.96. The R^2 value of 0.412 implies that emotional intelligence accounts for 41.2 per cent of the variance in perceived stress. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between EI and stress coping style was hypothesis 2 in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that EI and stress coping style had a relationship ($\beta = 0.7624$, $t = 14.407$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a favourable relationship between EI and stress coping because the β value is positive and the t-value is greater than 1.96. The R^2 score of 0.581 implies that emotional intelligence explains 58.1 per cent of the variance in stress coping. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between EI and adaptive stress coping style was hypothesis 2A in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that EI and adaptive stress coping style had a relationship ($\beta = 0.7175$, $t = 10.7672$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a favourable relationship between EI and adaptive stress coping style because the β value is positive, and the t-value is greater than 1.96. The R^2 value of 0.514 implies that emotional intelligence explains 51.4 per cent of the variance in adaptive stress coping style. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between EI and maladaptive stress coping was hypothesis 2B in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that EI and stress coping had a connection ($\beta = -0.6397$, $t = 14.025$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a negative relationship between EI and maladaptive stress coping because the β value is negative and the t-value is greater than 1.96. The R^2 score of 0.375 implies that

emotional intelligence explains 37.5 per cent of the variance in maladaptive stress coping in this study. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between Stress Coping and Perceived Stress was hypothesis 3 in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that Stress coping and Perceived stress had a relationship ($\beta = -0.5677$, $t = 13.772$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a negative relationship between Coping and Perceived stress because the β value is negative, and the t-value is greater than 1.96. Stress coping explains 32.2 per cent of the variance in perceived stress, according to the R^2 value of 0.322. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between adaptive stress coping and perceived stress was hypothesis 3A in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that Stress coping and Perceived stress had a relationship ($\beta = -0.5369$, $t = 11.279$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a negative relationship between Adaptive stress coping and Perceived stress since the β value is negative and the t-value is greater than 1.96. Adaptive stress coping explains 28.8 per cent of the variance in Perceived stress, according to the R^2 value of 0.288. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The relationship between Maladaptive stress coping and Perceived stress was hypothesis 3B in this study. The path coefficient analysis demonstrated that Stress coping and Perceived stress had a relationship ($\beta = 0.459$, $t = 9.127$, $p 0.05$). The t-statistics accepted value demonstrates a positive relationship between Maladaptive stress coping and Perceived stress because the β value is positive and the t-value is greater than 1.96. The R^2 value of 0.204 suggests that maladaptive stress coping accounts for 20.4 per cent of the variation in perceived stress. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Furthermore, the study also aims to identify the effect, if any, of emotional intelligence, adaptive stress coping, maladaptive stress coping and perceived stress on each other.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis

		SumEI	SumMAC	SumAC	SumPS
SumEI	Pearson Correlation	1	-.639**	.675**	-.639**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	213	213	213	213
SumMAC	Pearson Correlation	-.639**	1	-.538**	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	213	213	213	213
SumAC	Pearson Correlation	.675**	-.538**	1	-.530**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	213	213	213	213
SumPS	Pearson Correlation	-.639**	.459**	-.530**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	213	213	213	213

Source: Author

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: demonstrates that EI is positively correlated with adaptive coping ($r = .675$) and negatively correlated with maladaptive coping ($r = -.639$) and perceived stress ($r = -.639$). It is also evident from the results that perceived stress is negatively correlated with adaptive stress coping ($r = -.530$) and positively correlated with maladaptive stress coping ($r = .459$).

Table 8: Mediation analysis result of stress coping styles between emotional intelligence and perceived stress

Paths	EI > AC > PS	EI > MC > PS
Direct without Mediation	-0.6417	-0.6417

Direct with Mediation	-0.5284	-0.598
Independent Variable to Mediator (Beta)	0.712	-0.6379
Mediator to Dependent Variable (Beta)	-0.1565	0.0636
Independent Variable to Mediator (Standard Error)	0.07	0.0508
Mediator to Dependent Variable (Standard Error)	0.0598	0.0799
Sobel test Statistics	-2.534	-0.7944
Two-tailed Probability	0.011	0.4269

Source: Author

Note: EI = emotional intelligence, AC = adaptive stress coping, MC = maladaptive stress coping and PS = perceived stress

The study's hypothesis 4A sought to determine the role of adaptive stress coping in mediating the link between EI and perceived stress. The results of the Sobel test, which was used to investigate the mediating influence of adaptive stress coping, are shown in Table 8. Gaskin (2012) proposed that emotional intelligence and perceived stress route analysis and bootstrapping be done without mediation and with mediation effect. The direct route coefficient without mediation is -0.6417, but when the mediating variable adaptive stress coping is included, it drops to -0.5284. The absolute value of the Sobel test statistic is more than 1.96, and the two-tailed probability 0.011 is less than 0.05. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This suggests that adaptive stress coping mediates the effect of emotional intelligence on perceived stress.

The study's hypothesis 4B aimed to determine the role of maladaptive stress coping in mediating the connection between EI and perceived stress. The results of the Sobel test, which was used to investigate the mediating influence of maladaptive stress coping, are shown in Table 8. Path analysis and bootstrapping of emotional intelligence and perceived stress are carried out without mediation and with mediation effect. The direct route coefficient without mediation is -0.6417, but when the mediating variable maladaptive stress coping is included, it drops to -0.598. The Sobel test statistics value is -0.7944, which is less than 1.96 and has a two-tailed probability of 0.4269, which is greater than 0.05. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the maladaptive stress coping does not significantly mediates the impact of emotional intelligence on perceived stress.

DISCUSSION

According to the study's findings, emotional intelligence and coping styles both predict perceived stress. However, given the effect size of EI is medium, it may be argued that emotional intelligence is a more meaningful predictor than coping techniques. However, both factors are necessary to explain the variation in perceived stress.

The study's first objective was to explore the relationship between EI and perceived stress. The findings indicated a negative relationship between employee EI and perceived stress ($r = -.639$ at 0.001 significance level and $t = 19.8679$). The study highlights the importance of EI in a person's life by demonstrating how it reduces perceived stress. EI has a large effect on perceived stress during the emergence of this pandemic, explaining 41.2 per cent of the variance in perceived stress. Because emotional intelligence aids in the reduction of perceived stress, special development programs should be designed to help employees enhance their EI levels, which will help them reduce their perceived stress.

The study's second objective was to explore the relationship between EI and stress coping. The findings revealed a link between financial institution employees' EI and adaptive stress coping styles ($r = .675$ at 0.001 significance level and $t = 10.762$). EI has a large effect on perceived stress throughout the pandemic's breakout, explaining 51.4 per cent of the variance in adaptive stress coping style. On the other hand, there is a negative link between employees' EI and maladaptive stress coping style ($r = -.639$ at 0.001 significance level and $t = 14.0252$). EI has a large effect on perceived stress throughout the pandemic's breakout, explaining 37.5 percent of the variance in adaptive stress coping style. The impact of emotional intelligence on stress coping is significant, implying that people with high EI use a better coping approach. The higher level of emotional

intelligence ensures the adaptation of adaptive stress coping which includes active stress coping, positive thinking, social support and support in faith. These adaptive stress coping strategies helps individual cope stress positively and productively. Maladaptive coping, such as alcohol and cigarette consumption, is extremely improbable with a high EI level.

The third objective of the study was to explore the relationship between stress coping style and perceived stress. The findings revealed that adaptive stress coping styles and perceived stress have a negative relationship ($r = -.530$ at 0.001 significance level and $t = 11.278$). Adaptive stress coping style can explain 28.8 per cent of the variance in perceived stress; hence EI has a moderate influence on perceived stress during the pandemic's onset. On the contrary, there is a positive relationship between maladaptive stress coping style and perceived stress ($r = .459$ at 0.001 significance level and $t = 9.1273$). Maladaptive stress coping style has a minor impact on felt stress during the pandemic, accounting for only 20.4 per cent of the variance in perceived stress. The impact of stress coping on perceived stress is moderate. This means that to manage stress, an individual needs to concentrate on the source of the stress. The adaptive coping mechanisms will lower perceived stress.

The study's fourth objective was to identify the mediation influence of stress coping style on EI and perceived stress. According to the findings, Adaptive stress coping style is a partial mediator between emotional intelligence and perceived stress. Maladaptive stress coping style does not serve as a mediator between emotional intelligence and stress perceived. This implies that an employee's emotional intelligence aids in adapting adaptive stress coping style, which facilitates in reducing the perceived stress level.

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to bridge research gap in the areas of EI and adaptive, maladaptive, and perceived stress coping. The majority of studies look at the relationship between EI and perceived stress, EI and stress coping styles, and stress coping styles and perceived stress. As a result, the current research explored the relationship between EI and perceived stress and stress coping styles among Indian financial institution employees. All three factors – EI, stress coping styles, and perceived stress – were found to have a substantial association. EI and perceived stress are partially mediated by adaptive stress coping styles. Maladaptive stress coping style, on the other hand, does not fit as a mediator between EI and perceived stress. This means that to minimize employees' perceived stress levels, the organization must uncover ways to improve their EI levels and counsel them on various coping strategies.

Implication and future scope of the study

The result of the study has identified that adaptive coping style reduces the perceived stress level of the employees working in the organization. Also, it has proved the relevance of emotional intelligence in selecting the appropriate coping style and managing the stress level. In addition, the industries should check the EI level of the employees at the time of recruitment, so that appropriate roles and responsibilities can be delegated to the individual as per their skill set. Focused training and development programs should be designed to improve the emotional intelligence level and stress management of the employees. Such programs will aid institutions in better understanding their employees' perceptions of stress and how they cope with it. The findings of this study will aid the organizations in implementing the required actions to minimize their employees' perceived stress levels.

Further studies can be conducted on identifying the role of demographic variables in the relationship between EI, stress coping and perceived stress. In addition, investigations on other institutions, such as education, medicine, and the military, might be done for a more universal outcome.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

- The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.
- The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.
- All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.
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