



Understanding the Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder

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ABSTRACT: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is an important psychological construct that influences emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, stress management, and decision-making. Substance Use Disorder (SUD), on the other hand, is a chronic psychological and behavioural condition characterized by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences. In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on understanding the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder. Individuals with low emotional intelligence often struggle to identify, understand, and regulate emotions effectively, making them more vulnerable to substance use as a maladaptive coping strategy.

This theoretical article explores the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder from psychological, social, emotional, and neurobiological perspectives. The article discusses major theories such as Self-Medication Theory, Emotional Regulation Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Social Learning Theory to explain how emotional deficits contribute to addiction. It also highlights the role of family environment, trauma, peer pressure, mental health conditions, and social factors in shaping emotional functioning and substance use behaviours.

The article further explains how higher Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective factor by improving emotional awareness, resilience, impulse control, empathy, and coping skills. Emotional Intelligence-based interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness training, emotional skills training, and family therapy can significantly improve addiction prevention and recovery outcomes.

The study concludes that Emotional Intelligence plays a significant role in understanding addiction vulnerability, relapse prevention, and psychological well-being. Strengthening emotional competencies may reduce substance dependence and promote healthier coping mechanisms and social adjustment.

KEYWORDS: Addiction, Coping Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Regulation, Mental Health, Recovery, Substance Use Disorder, Self-Control.

INTRODUCTION

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) has become one of the major public health and psychological concerns worldwide. The misuse of alcohol, tobacco, opioids, cannabis, stimulants, and prescription drugs affects millions of individuals and families across societies. Addiction not only damages physical health but also disrupts emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, occupational functioning, and social well-being. Researchers have increasingly attempted to identify psychological factors that contribute to substance use and addiction. One such important factor is Emotional Intelligence (EI).

Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to identify, understand, manage, and express emotions effectively. Individuals with high Emotional Intelligence are generally better able to cope with stress, maintain healthy relationships, and regulate emotional responses. In contrast, individuals with poor emotional regulation often experience emotional distress, impulsivity, anxiety, depression, and social difficulties, increasing their vulnerability to substance use.

Many individuals use substances as a means of escaping emotional pain, stress, loneliness, trauma, or frustration. Although substances may provide temporary emotional relief, repeated use weakens emotional regulation and increases psychological dependence. Therefore, understanding the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder is essential for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.

This theoretical article aims to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder through major psychological theories, emotional processes, and social influences. The paper also discusses the role of Emotional Intelligence in addiction prevention and recovery.



CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in daily life. The concept was introduced by Salovey and Mayer and later popularized by Daniel Goleman. Emotional Intelligence influences emotional adjustment, social interaction, stress management, and psychological well-being.

Components of Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness refers to understanding one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and emotional triggers.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation involves controlling impulsive reactions and managing emotions effectively.

Motivation

Motivation refers to internal drive, optimism, and persistence toward goals.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and respond to the emotions of others.

Social Skills

Social skills include communication, cooperation, and conflict management abilities.

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Substance Use Disorder is a chronic condition characterized by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences. It affects physical health, mental health, social relationships, and occupational functioning.

Characteristics of Substance Use Disorder

1. Strong cravings for substances
2. Loss of control over substance use
3. Withdrawal symptoms
4. Increased tolerance
5. Continued use despite negative outcomes
6. Social and occupational impairment

Causes of Substance Use Disorder

Biological Factors

Genetic vulnerability and neurochemical changes contribute to addiction risk.

Psychological Factors

Stress, depression, anxiety, trauma, and low self-esteem often increase substance use vulnerability.

Social Factors

Peer pressure, family conflict, social isolation, and unemployment influence substance abuse behaviour.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ADDICTION: CONCEPTUAL RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between Emotional Intelligence and addiction is closely associated with emotional regulation and coping mechanisms. Individuals with low Emotional Intelligence may struggle to identify emotions, manage stress, and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. As a result, they may use substances to escape emotional discomfort.

Substances temporarily alter emotional states and provide short-term relief from stress, sadness, anxiety, or loneliness. However, repeated substance use weakens natural coping abilities and increases emotional instability. In contrast, emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to use healthy coping strategies such as problem-solving, emotional expression, and seeking social support.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES EXPLAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

Self-Medication Theory

The Self-Medication Theory suggests that individuals use substances to reduce emotional pain and psychological distress. People experiencing anxiety, trauma, depression, or loneliness may use alcohol or drugs to achieve temporary emotional relief.



Emotional Regulation Theory

Poor emotional regulation is strongly associated with impulsive behaviour and addiction. Individuals who cannot regulate negative emotions effectively often engage in substance use as a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Stress and Coping Theory

According to Stress and Coping Theory, individuals respond to stressful situations using different coping strategies. Emotionally intelligent individuals generally use healthy coping methods, while emotionally vulnerable individuals may rely on substance use.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that substance use behaviours are learned through observation and imitation. Adolescents exposed to substance-using peers or family members may imitate such behaviours.

ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SUBSTANCE USE INITIATION

Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in determining whether individuals engage in substance use behaviors. Adolescents and young adults with poor emotional regulation are more likely to experiment with substances due to peer pressure, stress, loneliness, or emotional instability.

Emotionally intelligent individuals are generally better able to resist peer influence, communicate emotions effectively, and seek healthy support systems. Therefore, Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective factor against addiction.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND RELAPSE PREVENTION

Relapse is a common challenge during addiction recovery. Emotional triggers such as stress, anger, loneliness, anxiety, and depression often increase relapse risk.

Individuals with high Emotional Intelligence are more capable of identifying emotional triggers and managing cravings effectively. Emotional awareness, stress management, impulse control, and healthy communication skills contribute significantly to relapse prevention.

MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND SUBSTANCE USE

Mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, trauma-related disorders, and personality disorders are closely associated with addiction. Individuals with poor Emotional Intelligence often experience greater emotional distress and weaker coping abilities.

Higher Emotional Intelligence supports psychological well-being through emotional resilience, self-confidence, stress tolerance, and social adjustment. Therefore, Emotional Intelligence may reduce vulnerability to both mental illness and substance abuse.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Family environment plays a crucial role in emotional development and substance use behaviour. Supportive parenting encourages emotional security and healthy emotional expression, while neglectful or abusive environments increase emotional instability.

Children exposed to parental addiction, domestic violence, or emotional neglect often develop poor emotional regulation skills, increasing addiction vulnerability later in life.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Social and cultural factors strongly influence emotional functioning and substance use patterns. Peer pressure, unemployment, poverty, social isolation, and cultural acceptance of substance use contribute to addiction risk.

Emotionally intelligent individuals are generally more capable of maintaining healthy relationships, resisting negative influences, and adapting to stressful social conditions.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Emotional Skills Training

Training programs focused on emotional awareness and emotional regulation help individuals develop healthy coping strategies.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT helps individuals recognize negative thoughts and replace maladaptive behaviours with healthier alternatives.



Mindfulness-Based Interventions

Mindfulness improves emotional awareness, stress management, and impulse control.

Family Therapy

Family therapy strengthens emotional communication and social support systems during recovery.

School-Based Prevention Programs

Teaching Emotional Intelligence in schools may reduce adolescent substance use by improving emotional resilience and peer resistance skills.

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SUBSTANCE USE

Research findings consistently suggest a negative relationship between Emotional Intelligence and substance abuse. Individuals with higher Emotional Intelligence generally report lower substance use and better psychological adjustment.

Studies indicate that emotional deficits contribute to impulsivity, poor coping, and relapse vulnerability. Emotional Intelligence training has also been found effective in improving self-control, emotional awareness, and recovery outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Emotional Intelligence and Substance Use Disorder are closely interconnected through emotional regulation, stress management, coping mechanisms, and interpersonal functioning. Individuals with low Emotional Intelligence often struggle with emotional instability, impulsivity, and poor coping strategies, increasing their vulnerability to addiction.

Substances may provide temporary emotional relief, but long-term use weakens emotional functioning and psychological health. In contrast, higher Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective factor by promoting emotional awareness, resilience, self-control, empathy, and healthy coping skills.

Theoretical perspectives such as Self-Medication Theory, Emotional Regulation Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Social Learning Theory explain how emotional difficulties contribute to addiction development and relapse. Emotional Intelligence-based interventions including mindfulness, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, emotional skills training, and family therapy can improve addiction prevention and recovery outcomes.

Therefore, strengthening Emotional Intelligence should be considered an essential component of mental health promotion, addiction prevention, and rehabilitation programs.

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