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Positive emotions, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and social support as mediators between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction[☆]

Emociones positivas, autoestima, relaciones interpersonales y apoyo social como mediadores entre la inteligencia emocional y la satisfacción con la vida

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the mediation function of the variables of positive emotions, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and social support between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. This is the first study that analyzed, with Latin-American population, the mediating effect of these variables in a simultaneous manner. The sample was comprised by 417 Mexican youth, ages between 18 and 21 years old, that completed the TMMS-24 scale and some subtests of the WHOQOL100. The results of the structural equation modeling showed that emotional clarity plays a predictive role over positive emotions and self-esteem, while emotional repair influences positive emotions and a greater satisfaction with interpersonal relationships. In the same manner, positive emotions, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships together are those that contribute with 50% of the variance for life satisfaction.

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Keywords: Emotional intelligence; Life satisfaction; Positive emotions; Self-esteem; Interpersonal relationships

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo el identificar la función mediadora de las variables de emociones positivas, autoestima, relaciones interpersonales, y apoyo social entre la inteligencia emocional y la satisfacción con la vida. Este es el primer estudio que analiza, en población latinoamericana, los efectos mediadores de estas variables de manera simultánea. La muestra fue constituida por 417 adolescentes mexicanos, de entre 18 y 21 años de edad, los cuales contestaron la escala del TMMS-24m y algunas subescalas del WHOQOL100. Los resultados del análisis de modelos de ecuaciones estructurales mostraron que la claridad emocional juega un rol predictivo sobre las emociones positivas y la autoestima, mientras que la reparación emocional tiene influencia sobre las emociones positivas y una mayor satisfacción en las relaciones interpersonales. De la misma manera, las emociones positivas, la autoestima, y las relaciones interpersonales contribuyen juntas a un 50% de la varianza sobre la satisfacción con la vida.

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Palabras clave: Inteligencia emocional; Satisfacción con la vida; Emociones positivas; Autoestima; Relaciones interpersonales

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Introduction

New paradigms and models of psychology consider that is necessary to address not only those factors associated to deficits or disorders in individuals, but to emphasize as well those elements that provide people with well-being.

It is precisely in this frame of Positive Psychology, that emotional intelligence (EI) explains that proper management of emotions is related to a better perception of life. The study of EI has reframed and its consolidation is based on numerous empiric studies that support models whose purpose is to explain it (Mayers, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). There are three major models of EI: the Mayer–Salovey (1997) which defines this construct as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking; the Goleman (2006) model which views EI as an assortment of emotional and social competencies that contribute to managerial performance and leadership, and the Bar-On model which describes it as an array of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and behaviors that impact intelligent behavior (Bar-On, 2004).

In this study we address the construct of EI as an ability, therefore using the model of Mayer and Salovey (1997), who define it as the ability to perceive and value emotions with precision; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when these facilitate thinking; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, as well as emotional regulation, which is the ability to regulate emotions that promote emotional and intellectual growth. Emotional regulation is one of the four components of emotional intelligence (Bisquerra, 2007; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Life satisfaction (LS) is defined as one’s evaluation of life as a whole, rather than the feelings and emotions that are experienced in the moment (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). There are multiple studies that have addressed, and classified as positive, the direct relationship between emotional abilities and LS; this being evaluated with different instruments and among distinct populations (Ferragut & Fierro, 2012; Ignat, 2010; Schutte, Manes, & Malouff, 2009; Singh & Woods, 2008). However, evidence with respect to the predictive validity of LS has been inconsistent depending on the type of EI models that have been considered and the variables that are controlled by regression analyses.

Research like the one conducted by Salami (2011) or Koydemir and Schutz (2012) showed that EI has a predictive validity over LS, even when different variables such as personality are considered. Yet, there are studies that have shown that only the comprehension of emotions (emotional clarity) or the regulation of them (emotional repair) keep their significance and low predictive value, once other type of variables are controlled such as positive and negative affects (Augusto, López-Zafra, Martínez, & Pulido, 2006) or optimism–pessimism (Extremera, Durán, & Rey, 2007). Whereas studies as the one conducted by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2005) concluded that, once the variables of personality and negative emotions were included, only the emotional clarity variable explained a small significant variance over LS on a sample of college students. The study of Augusto, Pulido, and López-Zafra (2011) found similar

results but including the variable of willingness to optimism, as well as the study of Palmer, Donaldson, and Stough (2002) who also considered positive emotions.

Management of emotions, the ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions such as stress, impulses and motivation, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). In the same way that with LS, there are studies that have found that the management of emotions, maintains its significance, but at a low predictive level, when variables like personality and some socio demographic aspects such as income and marital status are included (Gannon & Ranzjin, 2005). The study of Kong and Zhao (2013) evaluated the mediating effect of positive and negative emotions over EI. The instrument used to evaluate EI included factors related to emotional self-conscious, the use of emotions for self-motivation, the evaluation of their emotions and the emotions of others, and the emotional regulation. They found that positive emotions had a stronger effect than the one reported by negative emotions.

It should be noted that in multicultural studies, like the one by Koydemir, Sismsek, Schutz, and Tipandjan (2013), differences were found regarding the predictive value of mediating aspects between EI and LS. For example, it was reported that Germans dwelled more on the balance in affects, while Hindus stated that social support was stronger in predicting LS. The influence between these cultural factors has also been discussed, because there are differences between individualistic and collective cultures. In collective cultures for example, the predictive value of EI over LS is lost, once the personality and affective variables are controlled (Thingujam, 2011).

The present study

In general, the evidence of international studies suggests that EI can benefit dispositional influences on psychological well-being (Singh & Woods, 2008), instead of predicting directly LS. A previous analysis (Ruvalcaba, Fernández-Berrocal, & Salazar, 2014) stated that the effect of EI over LS is not direct. Given that EI loses its significance when controlling the individuals’ psychological aspects such as self-esteem and positive emotions, as well as factors associated to social environment such as the satisfaction with the quality of interpersonal relationships and the perceived social support. For this reason, the present study stems from the hypothesis that an improvement of emotional abilities would have an indirect effect upon LS by favoring self-esteem, positive emotions, interpersonal relationships and social support. The current study is the first-ever to analyze the mediating effect of these variables in Latin-American population (Fig. 1).

Also, while previous studies had only considered one of these variables and not the effect of all of them, to date there are no studies published in peer-reviewed journals that explored this relationship in a simultaneous manner. It is also important to emphasize that the present study does not consider a global punctuation of EI but an instrument that evaluates three factors; emphasizing on those factors of major influence that have been identified by previous literature.

The analyses were performed under the assumption that better emotional abilities promote the experience of positive

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