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The Interplay Between Emotional Intelligence, Cognitive Intelligence and Mental Health

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Abstract

This position paper examines the intricate relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), cognitive ability (smartness), and mental health, and argues that mental health support should move beyond narrow, achievement-focused models of human capability. Emotional intelligence, the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions effectively, is considered alongside smartness, which encompasses reasoning, problem-solving, and the practical application of knowledge. Both dimensions shape mental health, itself understood as a dynamic interplay of psychological, emotional, cognitive, social, and environmental factors rather than the mere absence of disorder. Drawing on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and a broad review of psychological, neuroscientific, and educational literature, the paper shows that high emotional intelligence tends to act as a buffer against psychological distress by strengthening resilience and coping, while cognitive smartness, though valuable for problem-solving and achievement, does not reliably predict well-being and can, in some individuals, coincide with heightened sensitivity, overthinking, and vulnerability to anxiety and depression. The paper argues that EI and cognitive ability are complementary rather than competing capacities, and that mental health strategies which treat them in isolation forfeit the benefits of an integrated approach. Practical recommendations are offered for education, workplace practice, and clinical intervention, alongside directions for future empirical research.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Smartness, Cognitive Ability, Mental Health, Resilience, Holistic Development

Full text

Introduction

In a world that increasingly evaluates individuals through multiple indicators of performance and adaptation, the concept of intelligence extends beyond traditional cognitive benchmarks such as IQ

scores and academic achievement. Cognitive intelligence generally refers to mental capacities involved in reasoning, comprehension, planning, problem-solving, abstract thinking, and learning from experience. Evidence suggests that cognitive intelligence is particularly relevant to performance on standardized achievement measures, whereas self-control and related self-regulatory capacities may contribute more strongly to outcomes such as academic grades, classroom behaviour, and aspects of health-related functioning (Duckworth, Quinn & Tsukayama, 2012; Neisser et al., 1996).

Emotional intelligence represents a related but conceptually distinct domain of psychological functioning. It has been defined as the ability to perceive, understand, use and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). However, there is still ongoing debate about the concept and measurement of emotional intelligence (Matthews et al., 2008). So emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence and self-control can't be considered equivalent components of a single construct. This distinction is important because these capacities can be manifested in different ways in human functioning. For instance, research on intelligence and self-control has shown that an individual's IQ may be a better predictor of performance on standardised achievement tests, while self-control may play an important role in academic achievement, homework completion, classroom behaviour, and other aspects of daily functioning (Duckworth et al., 2011). In addition, psychological stress and distress have been shown to potentially affect self-regulatory functioning. For adolescents, stressful life events have been linked to a loss of self-control, though there is evidence that psychological distress plays a role in this link (Duckworth & Kim, 2013). These findings suggest that cognitive function, emotional functioning and self-regulation may be different psychological resources that influence adaptability and wellbeing but are interrelated.

From this point of view, mental health is not just the result of having a cognitive or emotional “intelligence”. Instead, mental health might be affected by the way in which individuals use cognitive abilities, manage their emotions, exert self-control, react to stress, and utilise interpersonal and environmental resources. This larger context offers a more conservative and theoretically sound foundation on which to explore connections between intelligence, emotional functioning, self-regulation, and psychological health.

The Concept of Emotional Quotient

Emotional Quotient (EQ) is a measure of an individual’s emotional intelligence, integrating several interlocking components:

- **Self-Awareness** is an acknowledgement of one's own emotions and understanding how they affect thought and behaviour. It is at the core of emotional intelligence, assisting people to recognise their feelings, understand how these emotions affect their behaviour, and successfully regulate their emotions for more balanced and effective interaction in personal and professional relationships.
- **Self-Regulation** involves managing emotions, thoughts and behaviours effectively in various situations. It helps regulate impulsiveness, manage stress, adjust to changes, and is a key part of staying balanced in emotions, setting and reaching personal goals, and forming healthy relationships. Empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa further illustrates the importance of psychological self-regulation for mental health. Hussein and Oyedele (2025), in a study of 153 people living with HIV/AIDS in Mogadishu, Somalia, found that psychological self-care was

positively associated with mental health (r = .625) and made the strongest relative contribution to mental health (β = .404), compared with physical self-care (β = .370) and professional self-care (β = .302). Collectively, the three self-care dimensions explained 65.7% of the variance in mental health. Although self-care is conceptually distinct from emotional intelligence, these findings suggest that psychological self-regulatory practices may constitute an important behavioural pathway through which emotional competence can be translated into psychological well-being.

- **Self-Understanding** is the mental image a person holds of themselves, encompassing perceptions of physical ability and appearance (Alamu & Ogundokun, 2012). There is a deep connection between self-understanding and EQ, as the former provides the basis for developing a high EQ, which in turn enhances overall emotional intelligence and interpersonal skill. Together, they can improve personal and professional life, mental health, and well-being, and strengthen social interaction by helping individuals navigate social complexity.
- **Motivation** is the drive to pursue goals with energy and persistence, the ability to channel emotion toward personal and professional objectives, typically fueled by intrinsic factors such as passion, curiosity, and a desire for self-improvement rather than external reward. Highly motivated individuals tend to be resilient, optimistic, and able to sustain focus even in the face of obstacles, which is crucial for long-term effort toward long-term goals.
- **Empathy** is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
- **Social Skills** describe the capacity to manage relationships and to influence people in desired directions (Goleman, 1995).

Indeed, several mental health benefits have been consistently correlated with higher levels of EQ, such as lower levels of occupational stress (Mikolajczak, Menil & Luminet, 2007), lower rates of anxiety related to physical health (Keefer, Parker & Saklofske, 2009), and reduced depression, as demonstrated in a meta-analytic review of the association between emotional intelligence and health outcomes (Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar & Rooke, 2007). This is partly because people with high EQ are better able to deal with emotional issues and to maintain positive social relationships (Brown & Schutte, 2006), which serve as a protective barrier to physical illness and help them engage in health-promoting behaviours and health maintenance (Schutte et al., 2007). Emotional quotient is also an application of social skill in managing relationships, inspiring others and resolving conflict effectively, characteristics commonly associated with smart people.

The Concept of Smartness

Smartness, often used interchangeably with “intelligence” or “cognitive ability,” encompasses the attributes that enable a person to navigate and solve problems effectively within their environment (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985). Being smart refers to the capacity to acquire knowledge and skill through learning and study (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). Smart individuals are typically characterized by sound judgment, broad knowledge across fields, a focus on essential points, and skill in lateral thinking, the ability to find creative solutions (de Bono, 1967). They are often proficient in mathematics and science, possess a large vocabulary, have a good sense of humour, and tend to be independent and goal-oriented. Importantly, smartness is not wholly innate; it can be cultivated through deliberate practice and effort (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Traditionally

associated with cognitive intelligence (IQ), the concept has since broadened to include multiple forms of intelligence and capability, including emotional intelligence and creative problem-solving (Goleman, 1995).

Smartness, on the other hand, is not only about having intelligence or knowledge but more about the application of knowledge and skills in various contexts (NeuroLaunch, 2024). A smart person doesn't know just facts; they know how to use the facts in a smart way. As a result, researchers have drawn a line between academic smartness (high performance in school and ability to learn and remember accurately) and street smartness (savvy and common sense in real-world situations).

Smartness has also been described in terms of devices and systems, and a classification matrix based on four dimensions: information processing, internal regulation, action in the world, and knowledge acquisition (Alter, 2020). In turn, smart people gather, store and interpret information to gain understanding of what is going on, regulate themselves and modify their actions to keep their performance in line with their environment, act on the information they have received, and learn, enrich and refine over time.

Components of Smartness

Cognitive Intelligence (IQ) is typically measured through standardised tests assessing logical reasoning, mathematical skill, language comprehension, and spatial visualisation. It is the traditional measure of intelligence, centred on mental acuity, problem-solving, and the capacity to learn and adapt.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and effectively use emotion in oneself and others, encompassing empathy, emotional regulation, and social skill. Popularised by Goleman (1995), EQ is argued to be as crucial as IQ for personal and professional success.

Creative Intelligence involves thinking outside conventional frameworks, generating novel ideas, and solving problems in innovative ways. It is closely linked to divergent thinking, the capacity to generate multiple solutions to a single problem and is a key ingredient of innovation and artistic expression.

Practical Intelligence, or “street smarts,” is the ability to handle everyday tasks and challenges effectively. It draws on common sense, adaptability, and the ability to read social cues and navigate complex social environments. Sternberg’s (1985) triarchic theory of intelligence includes practical intelligence as one of three components, alongside analytical and creative intelligence.

Social Intelligence is the ability to understand and manage social relationships, effective communication, an understanding of social dynamics, and the capacity to build and sustain relationships. This form of intelligence is central to leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal success (Adler, 2022).

Technological or Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be regarded as a contemporary addition to the overall concept of smart systems but does not necessarily have to be perceived as human emotional intelligence. In a critical review of AI in Mental Health Counselling, Oladunmoye et al. (2025) explored the use of AI systems in mental health counselling, such as emotion recognition and mental

health assessment technologies, predictive models, and conversational systems. The advancements reflect the power of intelligent technologies to analyse data and assist in decision-making, but also underscore the ongoing significance of human compassion, understanding of context, ethical thinking, and therapeutic connections in mental health care.

Theoretical Framework: Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences

This paper is anchored on Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), which proposes that intelligence is a complex construct comprised of multiple components instead of a single, general ability. He stated that there were eight types of intelligence: Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Spatial, Musical, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalistic; that people have different combinations of these intelligences; and that those abilities influence their learning, problem-solving, and experience of the world.

The MI framework offers a general theory to inform discussion of the variety of human abilities pertinent to the current discussion. The four conceptually relevant intelligences are interpersonal and intrapersonal, logical-mathematical and linguistic, which can be linked to emotional and social functioning, and to analytical and communication capacities related to cognitive ability. In this paper, the framework described by Gardner is used to present the larger picture of multiple human capacities, while also maintaining distinctions between cognitive ability, emotional intelligence and self-regulation to prevent overlapping the concepts. This holistic and differentiated approach helps to examine psychological capacities and mental health in a more cautious way.

Smartness and Emotional Intelligence

There are two types of intelligence, cognitive and emotional, which are different but complementary constructs that can be measured through IQ. While IQ is mainly focused on logical thinking and problem-solving skills, EQ is more about emotional and social skills. There is evidence that both are important to success in life domains and that EQ may be more important in personal and social areas of success. Adler (2022) found that people who have high EQ are better able to establish better interpersonal relationships and also excel in teamwork and leadership; EQ helps in improving leadership, teamwork and communication. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to manage teams, solve problems and create a good working atmosphere more effectively (Goleman, 1995).

Social intelligence, which is defined as the ability to understand and control social interaction, is closely related to EQ. People with high EQ excel in understanding social signals, understanding others' emotions, and maintaining healthy relationships, which are considered critical with respect to effective communication and collaboration, according to Salovey and Mayer (1990). Emotional intelligence also has direct links to mental health, with high EQ being related to reduced anxiety, depression and stress, as emotionally intelligent people have an improved capacity to deal with emotional risks and maintain mental health (Schutte et al., 2007). Cognitive intelligence will be essential for solving problems or for logical thinking, while EQ will provide the emotional and social intelligence that will make cognitive intelligence effective. EQ and IQ interact in a way that creates a more holistic construct of "smarts," with each construct enhancing the other's effects on performance and wellbeing (Mayer et al., 2008).

The evidence base supports an important role for EQ across several domains of functioning, including

academic performance, workplace functioning, social interaction, and mental health (Brackett et al., 2011; Goleman, 1995). However, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence that EQ and cognitive intelligence are interchangeable or that one is universally superior to the other. Rather, the two capacities can complement one another: cognitive intelligence supports the understanding and analysis of information, while emotional intelligence can support the effective application of knowledge within interpersonal and social contexts. An individual may generate innovative solutions through strong cognitive ability, yet emotional and social competence may influence how effectively those solutions are communicated, negotiated, and implemented.

The Concept of Mental Health

Mental health is a vital part of overall well-being, including emotional, psychological and social aspects. It affects the ways people think, feel and behave and plays a large role in their ability to respond to stress, relate to others and make good decisions (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2022). Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness, but it also involves other positive attributes like having the ability to deal with life's difficulties, maintain good relationships, and bounce back from negative events (WHO, 2024).

Psychological well-being and functioning is comprised of several interlocking components. *Emotional well-being* ranges from positive emotions to successfully managing negative emotions, and coping with life's challenges and setbacks (Keyes, 2002). *Psychological well-being* refers to the dimensions of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships, which symbolise the achievement of potential and the quest for life's significance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023). *Social well-being* refers to the ability to establish meaningful relationships, engage in social networks and contribute to community life, resulting in feelings of belonging and connection (Keyes, 1998; Michalski et al., 2020; Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023). *Cognitive functioning,* the ability to think, learn, and make decisions, is in turn related to mental health, as poorer cognitive functioning has been correlated with depression and anxiety (Kessler et al., 2005; Suddell, Mahedy, Skirrow, Penton-Voak, Munafò & Wootton, 2023).

Physical and mental health are deeply interconnected: physical illness impacts mental health, and mental health has a significant impact on physical health; sufficient sleep, exercise and nutrition are all important factors in maintaining mental health. *Spiritual well-being*, which contributes to a sense of purpose and meaning through faith, values and ethics, has also been found to positively impact coping and resilience during stress (Koenig, 2012; Rogers, Windle, Wu, Taylor & Bale, 2022; Bagereka, Ameli, Sinaii, Vocci & Berger, 2023). *Environmental factors* such as living conditions, access to health care services, and community support can either protect or aggravate mental health problems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Kirkbride et al., 2024). Lastly, *resilience*, defined as the ability to recover rapidly from adversity and maintain mental health in the face of stress is supported by social support, optimism and coping skills (Labrague, 2021; Non, Román, Clausing, Gilman, Loucks, Buka, Appleton & Kubzansky, 2020).

Mental health in total is shaped by a complex mix of biological (Nestler & Carlezon, 2006), psychological (Kessler, 1995), social (Thoits, 2011), and environmental (Evans & Kim, 2013) factors, along with cultural and societal influences such as stigma, access to services, media portrayal (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010), and lifestyle factors including diet, physical activity, and

substance use (Li, Lv, Wei, Sun, Zhang, Zhang & Li, 2017; Firth et al., 2020; Haslam, Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, & Chang, 2021). Mental health disorders are prevalent worldwide across all age groups, characterized by disturbances in thinking, mood, or behaviour associated with distress or impaired functioning. Depression affects an estimated 280 million people globally (WHO, 2022); anxiety disorders form the most prevalent group of mental disorders, affecting roughly 3.6% of the world's population (Kessler et al., 2005); bipolar disorder affects about 1% of the population (Grande, Berk, Birmaher & Vieta, 2016); schizophrenia affects roughly 1 in 300 people (Owen, Sawa, & Mortensen, 2016); obsessive-compulsive disorder affects 2–3% of the global population (Ruscio, Stein, Chiu, & Kessler, 2010); post-traumatic stress disorder affects approximately 3.5% of adults annually in the United States (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson 1995); eating disorders affect roughly 9% of the global population (Galmiche, Déchelotte, Lambert & Tavolacci, 2019); attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder affects 5–7% of children and 2–5% of adults globally (Sayal, Prasad, Daley, Ford & Coghill, 2018); and substance use disorders, including alcohol use disorder, affect millions worldwide (Rehm, Shield & Weiderpass, 2019).

Promoting mental health requires strategies that foster psychological well-being, prevent disorder, and support those already living with mental illness. The typical elements of effective promotion include building resilience (Herrman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, et al., 2011); improving access to affordable, culturally sensitive services (Patel, Saxena, Lund, et al., 2018); supporting policy at national and local levels (Barry, Clarke, & Jenkins 2013); running public campaigns to destigmatize mental illness (WHO, 2022); enhancing community networks for emotional and social support (Repper & Carter, 2011); expanding access to services via telemedicine and digital platforms (Wind, Rijkeboer, Andersson & Riper, 2020); and providing tailored services for vulnerable groups, including children, adolescents, refugees, and people in marginalized communities (Purgato, Gastaldon, Papola, et al., 2021). To sum up, mental health is an important aspect of a person's overall health and understanding what influences it, identifying signs of disorder, as well as strategies to maintain it, is an important task for both individuals and society.

Smartness and Mental Health

The connection between intelligence and mental health is far from clear-cut; rather, it is multifaceted. Better problem-solving and coping strategies are sometimes related to higher cognitive ability, which positively affects mental health (Gale, Batty, Tynelius, Deary & Rasmussen, 2010). However, other studies indicate that people with higher IQs might be more vulnerable to some mental health issues such as anxiety and depression because they are more likely to be aware of and sensitive to their environment and internal processes (Berg & Sternberg, 2003; Neihart, 1999). The results indicated that increased cognitive capacity may lead to greater self-awareness and sensitivity to life's complexity, and thus increase psychological vulnerability, overthinking, and worry in some people.

Gale and colleagues (2010) also reported that higher intelligence in early adulthood was associated with lower overall hazard of mental disorder hospitalisation, indicating that cognitive ability has a protective effect on mental health generally, but not in all mental disorders; the study further indicated that there was a different association between cognitive ability and anxiety disorder hospitalisation. Further studies have found that mental engagement, the desire to learn and to engage in cognitively demanding activity, is associated with positive mental health outcomes; mentally

engaging activities can serve to bolster mental resilience, decrease the likelihood of cognitive decline, and protect against some mental health issues such as depression (von Stumm & Deary, 2012).

Creativity, which is linked with intelligence and specific personality characteristics, is also a complicated link to mental health. Some conditions, like bipolar disorder and depression, are more prevalent among creative persons, particularly those in the arts, while creativity also provides a means of resilience and coping, a vehicle for emotional expression and problem-solving (Kaufman & Baer, 2002). The paradox of creativity as a risk factor and creativity as a therapeutic resource is but one example of why the correlation of intelligence and mental health does not always apply. Understanding the subtleties, which are influenced by cognitive ability, emotional sensitivity, intellectual engagement and creativity, is critical in creating interventions and support systems that are appropriate for people with a wide range of cognitive ability.

The Interconnectedness of EQ, Smartness, and Mental Health

Some studies have shown that people with high emotional intelligence are better at managing stress around them and avoiding burnout; they are better at controlling their emotions and keeping their resilience when challenged (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020; Liu & Boyatzis, 2021; Hashmi et al., 2024; Gilar-Corbí et al., 2025; Xue & Nor, 2026; Balázs, 2026). High EQ also has beneficial effects on mental health (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2020), social problem-solving (MacCann, Jiang, Brown, Double, Bucich & Minbashian, 2020), relationship quality (Lopes, Salovey & Straus, 2016), academic and job performance (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017), and the reduction of stress (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2021). People with high EQ are also likely to have more social network contacts and enjoy increased emotional and social support from others at times of stress, and reduced depression and anxiety (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021). They understand their emotions and how to manage them, which helps them to have a more positive outlook and higher self-esteem, thus promoting overall well-being (Schutte et al., 2020).

Complementary evidence on the relevance of psychological self-regulation for occupational well-being comes from empirical data obtained in Nigeria. In a study of 137 professional women working in high-stress environments, Oyedele et al. (2025) discovered significant negative relationships between physical self-care and burnout ($r = -.43$), psychological self-care and burnout ($r = -.54$), and spiritual self-care and burnout ($r = -.42$). The highest association with burnout was with psychological self-care ($\beta = -.419$) and there was an independent relationship between psychological self-care and burnout, with the three self-care dimensions accounting for 30.0% of the variance in burnout. The results align with the emotional-intelligence literature, as they suggest that psychological self-care and psychological self-regulatory behaviours or processes may represent one pathway for emotional resources to translate into occupational well-being.

The literature indicates that there are several, likely interacting connections between emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence and mental health. People with higher emotional intelligence may be able to manage emotions, maintain emotional resilience, and build positive social connections, which can help them stay out of stress, anxiety, and depression (Robert et al., 2020). These abilities can also assist with problem-solving, relationship quality, and academic and occupational functioning (Barbey et al., 2014; Libbrecht, Lievens & Schollaert, 2014). These processes can be complemented by cognitive intelligence, which can facilitate reasoning, problem-solving, and understanding complex

situations. The link between cognitive ability and mental health is not always protective, however, and at present there is no evidence to support the assumption that either cognitive or emotional intelligence are exclusively determining factors of mental health. Instead, mental health seems to be a result of the interaction between these psychological capacities and self-control, stress, interpersonal relations and environmental context.

The Case for Integrative Approaches

Emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence, and mental health are related domains that can interact in shaping individual well-being, productivity, relationships, and adaptation. Understanding their interplay supports a holistic approach to mental health and human development. EQ, through self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skill, may strengthen resilience and social functioning, while cognitive ability supports problem-solving and decision-making. Addressing these domains together, while maintaining their conceptual distinctions, can therefore support more comprehensive approaches to well-being.

Education and training. Developing both cognitive and emotional intelligence should be a central aim of education and professional training. Schools and organisations can build EQ training into their curricula and professional development programmes, teaching skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, and effective communication (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Holistic mental health strategies. Mental health interventions should account for the role of EQ. Incorporating EQ training into psychotherapy and counselling can help individuals better understand and manage their emotions, enhancing the effectiveness of traditional cognitive-behavioural approaches (Cherniss, 2000).

Holistic development. Combining EQ training with cognitive skill development produces well-rounded individuals better equipped to navigate life's challenges (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Workplace and academic success. Employees and students with both high EQ and strong cognitive ability tend to be more adaptive, collaborative, and resilient, reducing burnout and improving productivity (Barbey et al., 2014; Libbrecht et al., 2014).

Resilience against mental health difficulties. Building EQ skills such as self-awareness and stress management strengthens protective factors against anxiety, depression, and burnout (Schutte et al., 2007).

Programmes that combine EQ training with cognitive-behavioural strategies have shown better outcomes for both mental health resilience and workplace productivity (Cherniss, 2000). Holistic development equips individuals with tools to manage complexity and sustain adaptive growth; schools, counselling systems, and organisations need to revisit their curricula to reflect this balance and make mental health promotion proactive rather than reactive. High EQ also encourages adherence to treatment and better health-seeking behaviour, since emotionally intelligent, cognitively able individuals are more likely to understand and follow through on therapeutic guidance (Brackett et al., 2011).

Challenges to Integration

Siloed interventions: Considering emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence and mental health

as discrete problems prevents any single intervention from being effective. Each part of these is dealt with separately, overlooking the synergy of an integrated approach. Understanding that all these interrelate is critical in developing strategies that seek to promote holistic well-being, resilience and human development (Henderson & Gronholm, 2018). Integrative approaches can be used most effectively by individuals to improve their mental health and satisfaction in this way, as is suggested by Cherniss (2000).

An IQ-centric culture: Excessive emphasis on cognitive intelligence may dampen other important aspects of human development. This focus often ignores the importance of emotional intelligence, which is key to emotional management, relationships, and mental health (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This can lead to underappreciation of creative and practical intelligence, which matter for both innovation and everyday functioning (Sternberg, 1985). While IQ, EQ and other kinds of intelligence are equally important for a balanced approach, society has yet to drop the preference for IQ over EQ, which is the better predictor of success in life (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional suppression and stigma. Mental health stigma is a consequence of negative attitudes and beliefs, which can result in stigmatisation, discrimination, social exclusion and the avoidance of treatment-seeking by individuals with mental health issues (Clement et al., 2015). This stigma continues to perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes and poses a barrier to support and treatment for those affected, especially in collectivist cultures in which emotional vulnerability is not encouraged (Zeidner et al., 2021). Education, open discussion, and developing empathy to create a more inclusive community are necessary to counteract stigma, which otherwise makes it difficult for many to get help and makes it hard to grow emotional and mental skills (Clement et al., 2015).

Simply, integration takes place when cultures shift to a compassionate, inclusive, individualised model of support.

Conclusion

The connections between emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence, and mental health highlight the importance of a comprehensive strategy for personal and professional growth. Combined with emotional awareness, intelligence is not just a measure of achievement but a force for resilience and meaningful engagement in life, facilitated by high EQ. Performance-driven models of human capability need to be replaced in mental health systems, education, and the workplace with structures that foster flourishing, balanced people, in which emotional skill is developed in parallel with cognitive ability.

Evidence from African settings further strengthens this integrative perspective. Studies in Somalia and Nigeria indicate that psychological self-care is associated with mental health among people living with HIV/AIDS and with lower burnout among professional women in high-stress environments, respectively. These findings do not establish that self-care and emotional intelligence are identical constructs; rather, they support the broader proposition that self-regulatory psychological resources are relevant to well-being across health and occupational contexts.

Recommendations

- Smartness is cultivated through continuous learning, reflection, and experience rather than

being a fixed, innate trait; individuals should be intentional about training themselves to become smarter.

- Maintaining physical health significantly supports cognitive function. Regular exercise, a healthy diet, adequate sleep, and effective stress management all contribute to optimal brain health and performance, and individuals should adopt these habits for their own benefit.
- Individuals must be proactive in protecting their mental health and cognitive capacity, since overthinking can lead to anxiety and depression; this is a personal responsibility requiring sustained attention.
- Individuals should be intentional about developing emotional intelligence as a transformative practice that benefits both well-being and relationships.
- Unrealistically high personal standards should be avoided, since failing to meet them can lead to chronic stress and feelings of inadequacy.
- Educational and workplace settings should integrate emotional intelligence training to build self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills, helping individuals manage stress, build resilience, and improve mental health.
- Given the link between cognitive ability and mental health, programmes such as cognitive-behavioural strategies that leverage cognitive skills for better coping and problem-solving should be introduced in educational and workplace settings.
- Particular attention should be given to groups identified as more susceptible to mental health difficulties, such as highly creative individuals or those with heightened sensitivity, with tailored interventions to mitigate associated risk.
- Practitioners should continuously incorporate emerging research into clinical practice, education, and workplace wellness programmes to keep strategies effective and evidence-based.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- Empirical testing of this framework is needed to confirm the interplay of these variables and their practical application.
- Research should examine whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between cognitive ability and mental health, for example, whether individuals with high cognitive ability but low emotional intelligence are more vulnerable to mental health difficulties than those with balanced levels of both.
- Disorder-specific studies are needed to examine how emotional intelligence interacts with cognitive ability in the context of particular mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder.

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