

The psychologist's view of the Emotional Intelligence in Nurses

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Summary

The framework for emotional intelligence and its skills have evolved over time. In fact, this evolution comes a long way toward simplifying, as the various recent studies on the brain and emotions attest, which shed a large account of the neurological basis of skills (Silva, 2010).

Over the past few years, it is notorious the interest and search for a definition of Emotional Intelligence (EI). It is important to emphasize that each concept emerges from the theoretical approach that sustains it, whose origins date back to social psychology and personal intelligence (Costa, 2009).

We can, however, find the roots of the Construct of EI in the concept of "social intelligence", identified by Thorndike (1920), cited in Rego & Fernandes, (2005), based on the ability to understand and manage, acting wisely on human relations.

Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2000), quoted in Angelo, (2007), group the models for emotional intelligence into two major groups: those of aptitudes, in the line of Mayer and Salovey, which focus on mental aptitudes, emotions and their interaction with intelligence, and mixed models, in the line of Bar-On and in the Goleman line, which consider mental aptitudes and a variety of other characteristics such as motivation, social activity and certain personal qualities (self-esteem, happiness, empathy, among others) as a single entity.

This study seeks to identify how Emotional Intelligence relates to professional success in nursing professionals.

Keyword: Emotional intelligence; Nursing; Mental health

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I. Introduction

Based on the construct of Emotional Intelligence, their skills and abilities, the objective of this investigation is to understand how nursing professionals are able to channel their emotions and feelings to support debilitated people, as well as to understand how Emotional Intelligence can contribute to a better nursing practice.

Nurses are the health professionals who spend the most time with patients and are often people's first contact with health services. Currently, we begin to encourage the humanization of care, in which reception is valued, respect in the professional-patient relationship, not reducing the practice of nursing solely and exclusively to simple clinical treatment (Carvalho, 2013). However, for this, the humanized procedure is not simple, since nursing professionals are daily subject to pressures, responsibilities and are obviously surrounded by emotions and feelings sometimes difficult to classify and identify that they can originate both by the patient and by the professional himself, affecting the quality of the services provided as well as the personal life of these professionals (Carmona-Navarro, 2012).

In addition to the nurse-patient relationship, it is also intended to understand whether emotionally intelligent nursing professionals are able to create social links within their work team, since nowadays there is a greater sensitivity to look at Emotional Intelligence as a way to promote and develop the team (Goleman, 1995).

To respond to the previously presented objectives, an interview was developed after the reflexive analysis of several articles, which were later applied to ten psychologists. The basic idea was to contrast the answers given by the interviewees with the main results of the state of the art.

Brief historical review

From the 19th century on, there was a growing interest in human intelligence, especially when Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton suggested a general and superior human capacity. Galton understood intelligence as

the reflection of genetically transmitted sensory and sensory abilities. Like this one, Raymond Cattell also believed that tests based on simple mental abilities (such as reaction times, sensory discrimination, and word association) could be important predictors of academic performance.

However, later studies demonstrated that scales based on simple skills were not predictors of academic success, and were not adequate to measure intelligence (Carroll, 1982). After investigating the mental tests drawn up by these and other researchers, Alfred Binet concluded that scales that included more complex capabilities and day-to-day activities would be better suited to measuring intelligence. In 1905, he and Théophile Simon created the first satisfactory intelligence test, through a request from the French Ministry of Education to diagnose children in need of specialized education (Matthews et al., 2002).

The Binet-Simon scale included items that covered language comprehension and the ability to reason verbally and nonverbally. This test was the basis for future research and was used in several countries and languages. After a few years, research on adult mental evaluation began, especially when in 1939, David Wechsler created the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), also revised later. With regard to its definition, it is possible to perceive two theoretical currents.

There are authors who defined it as a general capacity for understanding and reasoning, while others have described it as involving several mental capacities relatively independent of each other. Binet and Wechsler were adherents of the first assumption. Likewise, in 1904, Charles Spearman suggested the existence of a general intelligence factor (g), which would permeate performance in all intellectual tasks. According to him, people would be more or less intelligent, depending on the amount of g they possessed.

Spearman was especially interested in the psychological nature and interpretation of the mental component that tends to produce positive correlations between the various tests. Through several studies, he suggested that g was a central and supreme factor in all intelligence measures, which represented the ability to reason or the genesis of abstract thinking. (Carroll, 1982; Sternberg, 1992).

However, in 1938, Thurstone criticized Spearman's overall intelligence, and postulated that intelligence could be decomposed into several basic capabilities through factor analysis. Thurstone identified seven factors (verbal comprehension, verbal fluency, numerical aptitude, spatial visualization, memory, reasoning, and receptive speed) and created the Basic Mental Abilities Test (Butcher, 1968/1974).

Similarly, Guilford (1967) proposed that intelligence would comprise 150 factors. Gardner (1995) created the theory of Multiple Intelligences, independent of each other, which would operate in separate blocks in the brain, obeying their own rules: logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, body-kinesthesia, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence.

Neisser et al. (1996) they proposed that people differentiate themselves in the skills of understanding complex ideas, adapting to the environment, learning from experience, in the way they conduct their reasoning and solve problems through thought. However, even if these individual differences are substantial, they are rarely consistent, since the intellectual performance of a given person varies on different occasions and domains.

Thus, many current theorists (Campione, Brown, & Ferrara, 1982; Gardner, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) suggested the existence of many intelligences, which would constitute systems of skills. In a document issued by the American Psychological Association (APA), it was emphasized that little is known about the possible forms of intelligence, and that current tests would be able to capture only some of these intelligences, suggesting the existence of others, which would have been much less studied and understood (APA, 1997).

According to Campione et al. (1982), academic intelligence would constitute one of the possible forms of intelligence (not the only one).

In 1997, Sternberg stressed that one of the most important characteristics of intelligence would be the ability to think abstractly. Following this premise, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso and Sitarenios (2001) emphasized that abstract reasoning would only be possible through an input or input of a stimulus (information) into the system, so that different intelligences would be defined according to what enters and is processed in the system.

The authors argued that the incoming information could be verbal, spatial, social and emotional, among others. One of the first attempts to expand the concept of intelligence beyond general intellectual capacities (usually related to academic skills) was conducted at Thorndike's initiative (1936).

He proposed Social Intelligence (IS), such as the ability to perceive the emotional states of others and others, motives and behaviors, as well as the ability to act based on this information optimally. Above all, IS would reflect the ability to decode information from the social context and develop effective behavioral strategies for social objectives (Siqueira et al., 1999).

Sternberg and Salter (1982) had already mentioned that much of intelligence consists of solving a variety of problems presented in different social contexts. Sternberg (1997) argued that humans are essentially social; and the absence of social skills could mean an important limitation in the ability to adapt successfully. Thus, recognizing the importance of these skills, it is worth highlighting the role of emotions in social

adaptation and intelligent behavior.

Emotion

As Matthews et al. pointed out (2002), in order for us to understand EI, it is necessary to be clear about the design of emotion. Moreover, the multidimensional aspect of emotions itself would lead to a complex design of EI. According to Fortes D'Andrea (1996), few psychological facts are compared to emotions, because they demarcate important facts in our lives, but more than that, they influence how we react to these experiences. Smith and Lazarus (1990) argued that they can have important impacts on people's subjective well-being, physical and mental health, social interactions, and influence problem-solving capacity.

Campos, Campos and Barret (1989, cited in Garber & Dodge, 1991) suggested that emotions would be responsible for the person's relations with the external environment, as well as for their maintenance or interruption. For these authors, the coordination of multiple processes is a major feature of emotion. Thus, emotion would correspond to a complex psychobiological reaction, which would involve intelligence and motivation, impulse to action, in addition to social and personality aspects, which, accompanied by physiological changes, would express a significant event for the subjective well-being of the subject in his encounter with the environment. From this perspective, emotion would be partially biologically determined, and partly the product of human experience and development in the sociocultural context (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schütz e Salovey (2004) emphasized that emotional skills are essential in social interactions because emotions feed communicative and social functions, besides containing information about people's thoughts and intentions. According to the authors, the occurrence of a positive and satisfactory social interaction would require individuals to perceive, process and handle emotional information intelligently. The view that emotional skills are crucial for adaptation has aroused interest in the theme of emotional intelligence and inspired many social and emotional learning programs in schools and work environments.

The Construct of Emotional Intelligence

In a short period, the term Emotional Intelligence entered the vocabulary of various segments of society. The concept of Emotional Intelligence dates back to 1980, when Howard Gardner developed his theory on multiple intelligences. This concept derives from the broad Construct of Social Intelligence decreed by Thorndike, as the result of an adaptive interaction between emotion and cognition, which includes the ability to perceive, assimilate, understand and manage the emotions of others, and the ability to detect and interpret the emotions of others (Mayer & Salovey, 2002). The term Emotional Intelligence became known in the 1990s for Goleman's (1995) work titled "Emotional Intelligence". Soon after the release of this book, the term was quickly disseminated in various segments of society. Emotional intelligence characterizes the way people deal with their emotions and becomes an alternative way of being intelligent, not in terms of IQ, but in human qualities of the heart (Goleman, 1995).

Goleman (2001) presents his definition of Emotional Intelligence as the ability to recognize one's own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves and to manage emotions well in ourselves and in relationships.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been arousing successively greater interest in academic literature (Barros & Sacau-Fontenla, 2021), having broken all records of growth in the field in the social sciences, and academically, has become the focus of study of many of the most prominent psychologists in the world. This is because, for several decades, Cognitive Intelligence has been seen as the fundamental factor for determining individual success.

Emotional intelligence as a professional tool

Nowadays, in an age that is characterized by technology and competitiveness, but with a low level of employment, investment in Emotional Intelligence emerges as a promising alternative to increase the potential of employability. Thus, several educational institutions propose, as an attraction, the education in Emotional Intelligence. To verify the existence of numerous lectures, seminars and workshops that offer indications to increase Emotional Intelligence as a working tool (Robert et al., 2002).

According to the investigations carried out by the authors Rego & Fernandes (2005) successful learning and the highest performances result from the synergistic union of rational and emotional aptitudes. However, the combination of intellectual quotient (IQ) and EI also demonstrates variation in nurses' professional performance when compared to IQ. According to the investigation of Van Der Zee, et al. (2002, cited in Ângelo, 2007), the validity of emotional intelligence in predicting success in nursing is a fact. However, the controversy around their relationship also manifests.

Ângelo (2007) cites the investigations carried out by author Mayer on the importance of emotional intelligence in various areas and where they refer that emotional intelligence is related to a superior academic and professional success. In agreement with these authors, there are studies conducted by Parker et al. (2004), that show a strong correlation between the two variables. Another study by Parker et al. (2006)

add that EI is significantly related to non-abandonment of nursing. On the other hand, the works carried out by Newsome et al. are presented. (2000), cited in Angelo (2007), O'Connor & Little (cited in Angelo, 2007) and by Amelang & Steinmayer (2006) who state the lack or a weak correlation between the two variables. The results of the study conducted by Angelo (2007) corroborate the results of the study by Amelang & Steinmayer (2006).

This investigation demonstrates the lack of a statistically significant, positive correlation between emotional intelligence and success in nursing, which is due to other factors. In these studies emerge, in a global way, as predictor variables of success, cognitive abilities and personality. Also in another study, this time, conducted by Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham (2004) there was a greater correlation between EI and nursing success in students with lower verbal intelligence and in disciplines such as literature and art.

Emotional intelligence as a factor of professional well-being

The literature has demonstrated a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and well-being (Lanciano & Curci, 2015; Sánchez-Álvarez, Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015; Barros & Sacau-Fontenla, 2021). It should be reiterated that both involve a panoply of emotional aptitudes that effectively use the information of emotions, allowing individuals to use adaptive coping strategies in stressful events of life. Thus, a good use of emotional skills, allows to experience high levels of positive states, and reduce levels of negative states, creating a feeling of general well-being (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2012). That is, in a concrete way, this means that individuals' perception of their ability to process emotional information is associated with their subjective well-being.

Given this relationship, it is possible that the link between Emotional Intelligence and general well-being levels is explained by engagement. Thus, the state of involvement with nursing can prevent the individual from focusing on negative events, creating a state of positive affection. This effect is known as the Spillover, which emphasizes that positive and negative experiences lived in one domain can be transferred to another domain (Edwards & Rothbard 2000). That is, experiences in the professional/academic field can affect the quality or lack of fit in other areas of life.

II. Methodology

This study has as general objective to analyze the emotional intelligence in nursing professionals, and the specific objective of this investigation is to verify whether emotional intelligence exists effectively as an advantage in the professional sphere. In view of the intention of approaching the phenomenon, with the ultimate objective of knowing its different characteristics, it was considered that the most appropriate methodological approach to use in this research would be qualitative (Cunha e Santos, 2019).

This study was based on the application of an interview, with open questions, which was applied in accordance with the general rules of qualitative analysis. Informed consent was requested, through the preparation of a brief introduction, stating that the sample should consist only of psychologists, professionals from public hospitals, who usually perform functions close to nursing professionals. In this brief introduction it was also clear what kind of data was intended to be collected, that all responses would be mandatory in nature and full confidentiality was safeguarded. The sample collected consists of 21 psychologists, mostly women, in a ratio of 61% to 39%, with an average age between 41 and 50 years.

III. Discussion Of Results

With regard to age, it is possible to verify that the sample is mostly composed of females up to 50 years of age (13 respondents, which corresponds to 61% of respondents). Therefore, there is a balance relationship between the two sexes. However, the existence of a number of women higher (61%) than the number of men (39%) does not claim to be statistically proportional, respecting, however, the trend indicated by the National Institute of Statistics (INE 2022). Regarding the sociodemographic characterization of the sample, it seems important to understand its origin at the level of marital status. Thus, it is possible to verify that 70% of the sample is composed of married individuals, 15% live in a union in fact, 10% are divorced and the remaining singles. With regard to the area of residence it is possible to verify that most of the psychologists interviewed live in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (55%).

Perception of the real notion of the meaning of the construct of Emotional Intelligence

With regard to the questions of the interview, the first was about the possibility of the generality of people having a notion of the construct of Emotional Intelligence, of what it effectively means. The sample answered mostly that no. The sample considers that the most valued is still the work of realization and, despite verifying that nowadays the media

disclose works and works within the scope of Emotional Intelligence, it states that they are not contextualized and, therefore, the information about what really is this concept is not passed on to the population.

Dimensions and abilities of the Emotional Intelligence construct

Some of the dimensions identified and studied in the literature consulted are coping strategies, self-efficacy and empathy in nurses. The interviewees were asked if they felt it was important to have training and workshops related to the variables described above and what is the importance of these in the work context, more specifically in nursing, and the idea highlighted by psychologists was that it is quite important to work on this type of competencies, highlighting empathy. According to the literature consulted, empathy is a very important prerequisite in the act of nursing, that is, the ability to read the emotions of others, put one's place in the place of others in order to understand their thoughts, emotions and feelings allows to develop skills and strategies that improve the relationship of support that nurses establish with their users (Giménez-Espert, 2017).

Intervention in the field of Emotional Intelligence: Relationship with other dimensions of life

When confronted about whether training in Emotional Intelligence is performed adequately in health professionals, more specifically in nursing professionals, psychologists reported that health technicians are already beginning to pay more attention to treatment issues than users. However, in his opinion, there are differences in interpersonal relationships between the National Health Service and the provision of healthcare in the private sector. It considers that in the latter, precisely because it is private, there is greater awareness in the approach to others.

Within this category of analysis, psychologists were asked whether, analyzing their professional experience, Emotional Intelligence is seen as less important than other aspects related to professional life. In general, the sample states that currently EI is seen as less important because according to its experience what is valued is the achievement and results to be achieved, citing one of the psychologists "... they don't want to know what the professional is feeling, what one thinks, how one cares, what they want to know is the results, they want to achieve the goals ...".

The reality is that currently having a high IQ and technical skills is not enough for success, in addition the 21st century approach seeks competent people in emotional terms, since they are more efficient and effective when dealing with problems. Since the 1990s Mayer and his co-authors have published studies on the field of emotional competencies and their dynamic relationship with reason, but these types of studies are not considered as relevant as others (Celik, 2017). Thus, the interviewees' response is in line with the data evidenced in the literature review.

Emotional Intelligence and Gender Differences

In terms of gender differences, the analyzed bibliography reveals gender differences regarding Emotional Intelligence and its competencies (Giménez-Espert, 2017), which goes against the response of the psychologists interviewed who consider that women have more empathy and that they are better able to deal with situations.

Intervention in the field of Emotional Intelligence and its skills: Training and workshops

In the literary review it was found that scores in Emotional Intelligence and coping strategies develop and increase with training (Sarabia-Cobo, 2017). Also according to this author, it is concluded that nursing professionals subject to interventions/workshops in these domains improve interpersonal relationships with their patients. According to the sample, health professionals, specifically nurses, are increasingly subject to training in the area of EI, as mentioned in Sarabia-Cobo (2017).

One of the subjects also addressed during the interview was the importance of these trainings. To which the sample agreed in unison that you are training develops skills and skills necessary to deal with stressful situations. Psychologists agree that these types of training should be included in the degree, but that they are still important in the course of professional activity, raising awareness of the stress to which these professionals are subjected in their daily lives. By analyzing the literature, it was found that the psychological burden with which nurses are confronted in daily life affects quality of life and their performance, that is, it affects the intra- and interpersonal relationship (Carmona-Navarro, 2012).

Emotional Intelligence and its relationship with leadership and performance

A very important aspect within the theme Emotional Intelligence is its impact on leadership areas and the development of relationships between employees. After the interview with the sample of psychologists, it can be verified that the general opinion is that the existence of a cohesive team, motivated and in tune, reflecting a greater agility in problem solving is fundamental. The literature review demonstrates exactly that social and emotional learning programs can help improve self-awareness, confidence, control emotions, disruptive impulses and increase empathy, in addition to improving your cognitive and psychosocial development. A high Emotional Intelligence is reflected in better social tools and professional cooperation (Celik, 2017).

Burnout concept and its relationship with emotional abilities

The concept of Burnout has become a cross-cutting phenomenon for countless professions. According to the author Zhu (2016) we tried to understand the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and some of its skills and competencies with satisfaction related to the workplace, also relating the possibility of Burnout. The research carried out by this author showed that most nurses are not effectively satisfied with their work and that many felt even close to emotional exhaustion, which can lead to Burnout syndrome. In fact, nurses as first-line support professionals for sick people are increasingly suffering from stress, pressure and other problems that often lead to exhaustion and even depression (Sarabia-Cobo, 2017). When confronted with this current theme, the interviewees agree that the existence and offer of training in skills and emotional skills would be an added value in reducing this syndrome.

IV. Conclusion

Reflexively analyzing the answers given by the interviewees and comparing them with the literature studied, it was found that, although the construct of Emotional Intelligence was defined in the 1990s, there is still a long way to go with regard to its conceptual and analytical understanding. This is verified both in the literature, where many articles refer to the importance of the need for more studies, as well as in the answers given by the interviewees.

It was found that there is an ignorance on the part of psychologists, to whom the interview was conducted, about how these trainings linked to emotional intelligence and their competencies are developed among health professionals, especially nurses.

However, the sample demonstrates, in general, curiosity about the subject and hopes that nursing professionals are being sensitized to aspects related to their emotions, as well as to the emotions of their patients, in order to make the nursing exercise more humanized and, consequently, more efficient.

The great conclusion to be learned from this research is that, although there are many studies in the field of Emotional Intelligence, its skills and abilities, it is still necessary to invest in more scientific knowledge on the subject, which allows the development of more training, more interventions to strengthen the emotional dimensions that are extremely important in nursing practice, making it more humanized and effective.

At the end of this investigation, it is intended to outline some limitations found throughout this study. In particular, the difficulty in finding professionals with availability to participate in the interview. Thus, in future investigations it would be interesting to present larger samples, representative of Portugal, as well as to deepen the phenomenon studied here.

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