

## Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Negative Career Thoughts in Postgraduate Unemployed Adults

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The present research was aimed to study emotional intelligence (EI) as a predictor of negative career thoughts (NCT) among postgraduate unemployed adults. The sample comprised 300 job seeking postgraduate non-student adults (166 men and 134 women). The age of sample ranged from 25 to 35 years ( $M = 28.16$ ,  $SD = 3.61$ ). Multiple regression analysis demonstrated EI as significant predictor of NCT. Self-emotional appraisal and utilization of emotions were components of EI which accounted for most of the variance for NCT sub constructs. Significant gender differences were also found on EI and NCT.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Negative Career Thoughts

In recent years, interest has grown with regard to the impact of individual differences in career decision-making (Austin & Cilliers, 2011; Gati, Landman, Davidovitch, Asulin-Peretz, & Gadassi, 2010). Career thoughts can be defined as outcomes of an individual's thinking about assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, feelings, plans, and/or strategies related to career problem solving and decision-making (Sampson, Jr., Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996). Career indecision has demonstrated an empirical relationship particularly with other emotional factors such as low self-esteem (Chartrand et al., 1994), neuroticism (Lounsbury, Tatum, Owens, & Gibson, 1999). Cognitive information processing theory (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991), often abbreviated as CIP theory, focuses on how individuals conceptualize and make decisions to solve career problems (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002; Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2000).

The construct of negative or dysfunctional career thoughts is also based on CIP theory and is related to a lower sense of coherence (Lustig & Strauser, 2002). This construct is also related to nearly all areas of career development, such as career exploration, (Serling & Betz, 1990), decision making (Luzzo, Hitchings, Retish,

& Shoemaker, 1999), workaholic tendencies (Burke, 2001), and job satisfaction (Judge & Locke, 1993). During the last decade, the role of emotional experience and expression has received inclusive attention in career development literature. Caruso and Wolfe (2001) affirmed that emotions assume an essential role in career selection and development. Therefore, emotional intelligence (EI) has been center of interest for career development researcher around the globe.

For the present purpose, we accept the definition of EI given by Mayer and Salovey (1997): "emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 5).

Research on EI has been found to be associated with a range of outcomes that include positive associations with life satisfaction and social network size and quality, and negative associations with loneliness (Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003), whereas, negative career thoughts usually revolve around issues of self-

worth, perfectionism, and overgeneralization and have a tendency to decrease the likelihood of overall life satisfaction (Sampson et al., 1996). Negative career thoughts includes (1) decision making confusion (DMC) which is an inability to begin the decision-making process because of impairing emotions and/or a lack of knowledge about the process of decision-making, (2) commitment anxiety (CA) that is known as an inability to commit to a specific career choice and the presence of generalized anxiety about the consequence of making a career decision, and finally (3) external conflict (EC) is failure in balancing between one's own perceptions and the perceptions of significant others related to making career choices (Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). The role of EI has been investigated with respect to managerial decision-making (Sayaegh, Anthony, & Perrew, 2004) and worker performance and effectiveness (Bar-On, Handley, & Fund, 2006).

Plausibly, NCT is assumed to be linked negatively with EI. Relationship between EI and NCT, although found negative, has yet been scarcely studied. Dhal, Austin, Wagner and Lukas (2008), measured the factors of EI most related to NCT and findings revealed significant inverse relationship between total EI and NCT scores.

Career indecision has also demonstrated a significant relationship to poor career beliefs (Enright, 1996), and negative career thoughts (Saunders et al., 2000). Career decisiveness has been related with the career development. A variety of research studies have discussed the negative or dysfunctional career thoughts as the outcome of various psychological and mental health constructs (Lustig & Strauser, 2002) such as career indecision (Johnston, 2002; Kleiman et al., 2004), low self-esteem (Chartrand et al., 1994) and depression (Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000).

Most career indecision research has been studied with student populations (McWhirtner, Rasheed & Crothers, 2000), leaving the majority of adults outside of this domain of research. Further, studies from Asian cultures are scarcely found, the present study has been an addition to the existing literature with adult population.

Current study is intended to yield an insight on the relationship pattern among job seeking postgraduate unemployed adults, because most individuals do not make career choices in academic settings, but rather in the midst of life. Prevailing economic and political conditions, particularly in Pakistan, make it even tougher for postgraduates to take timely decision for career selection. For these reasons, in the current study, EI has been examined as predictor of negative career thoughts for postgraduate unemployed individuals. Brown, George-Curran, and Smith (2003) also studied EI and career decision-making in college students and found that the EI factors were negatively related with career indecision.

The current study has been an endeavor to find out the predictive stance of EI and its constructs in relation to negative career thoughts (NCT). There are ample of personal, social and personality aspects that seem to affect EI to a large degree. In the latest field of research on EI, where the emotional competencies i.e. empathy, socialization of emotions, emotional expression etc are closely linked to this construct, gender differences have also been detected in childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Harrod & Scheer, 2005; Young, 2006). There is scarcity of attention paid to gender differences on EI and NCT and the present study was also a modest attempt to find out the gender differences on these constructs.

Based on existing literature, it was hypothesized, for present study, that emotional intelligence will negatively predict negative career thoughts. More specifically, the present study has been aimed to meet three objectives. First, it aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and negative career thoughts. The second objective was intended to study the components of emotional intelligence, defined by Wong and Law (2002), as inverse predictors of negative career thoughts. Finally, research was planned to yield an insight in gender differences on overall EI and NCT.

## Method

### Sample:

Convenient sampling technique was used to draw sample of 300 (166 men and 134 women) job seeking postgraduates. Sample

was approached through examination centers of Punjab and federal public service commissions, and public libraries of Lahore and Islamabad. Only those individuals were included in the current study that had completed their post-graduation from public sector universities and were preparing themselves for upcoming jobs or those who were appearing in the examinations for the executive posts advertised by the public service commissions. The age for both male and female participants ranged between 25 to 35 years ( $M = 28.12$ ,  $SD = 3.61$ ).

### Instruments:

*Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)*. It was developed by Wong and Law (2002) and comprised four subscales i.e. Self-Emotional Appraisal (SEA), Others Emotional Appraisal (OEA), Regulation of Emotion (ROE) and Utilization of Emotions (UOE). The ranges of coefficient alphas for the scales reported in various studies ranged between .86–.92 for SEA, .82–.93 for OEA, .84–.88 for UOE, and .71–.91 for ROE. The items are anchored on six point Likert format (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). The reliability coefficient for full scale, as reported by authors was quite good ( $\alpha = .94$ ). For the current study scores on WLEIS have been operationalized as the indices of EI and its constructs.

*Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI)*. The CTI (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon & Saunders, 1996) is a 48 item questionnaire designed to assess negative career thinking. Responses are anchored on four point rating (0 = strongly disagree, to 4 = strongly agree). The CTI yields a total score which is used as a global indicator of dysfunctional career decision-making and three construct scale scores: Decision Making Confusion (DMC), Commitment Anxiety (CA), and External Conflict (EC).

Alpha coefficients for the construct scales demonstrate .94 (DMC), .91 (CA) and .81 (EC) for the adult group alone (Sampson et al. 1996). Scores on CTI have been operationalized for the current study as the indices of negative career thoughts and its constructs.

### Procedure:

The participants were individually contacted in examination centers of Punjab and federal public service commissions and public libraries. They were briefed about the rationale and objectives of the current study and be provided with the booklet containing the aforementioned scales and instructions. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information that they were going to provide as it would only be used for research purpose. Informed consent was taken through form.

## Results

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliabilities and Correlation Matrix for all Variables used in Current Study (N = 300)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD	$\alpha$
1	--	.72**	.75**	.72**	.78**	-.35**	-.32**	-.30**	-.22**	72.84	10.39	.95
2	--	--	.49**	.35**	.39**	-.33**	-.33**	-.24**	-.21**	19.25	2.96	.66
3	--	--	--	.41**	.37*	-.19**	-.23**	-.22*	-.10	18.27	3.375	.79
4	--	--	--	--	.35**	-.34**	-.30**	-.34**	-.16**	18.27	3.64	.80
5	--	--	--	--	--	-.19**	-.11	-.19**	-.19**	17.06	4.13	.83
6	--	--	--	--	--	--	.93**	.92**	.73**	107.12	20.97	.95
7	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.79**	.57**	27.93	7.40	.86
8	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.65*	22.56	5.03	.83
9	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12.19	2.52	.60

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Note: 1 = emotional intelligence total, 2 = self-emotional appraisal, 3 = others emotional appraisal, 4 = utilization of emotion, 5 = regulation of emotions, 6 = negative career thoughts total, 7 = decision making confusion, 8 = commitment anxiety, 9 = external conflict.

Table 1 showed means, standard deviations and alpha coefficients for all the scales. Results indicated that all the scales and sub-scales achieved satisfactory alpha levels. Table 1 also represented the correlation matrix computed for all pairs of scores for construct scales. Table 1 described that significant inverse relationship exists between all WLEIS and CTI variables except subscale of others emotional appraisal with the commitment anxiety and external conflict.

**Table 2. Regression Analysis for Constructs of Emotional Intelligence Predicting Negative Career Thoughts (N = 300)**

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	F (Model)
Self-emotional appraisal	-.25**	.15	13.34***
Utilization of emotions	-.27***		
Regulation of emotions	-.013		
Others emotional appraisal	.045		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2 also presented multiple regression analysis which was computed in order to view the components of emotional intelligence in predictions of negative career thoughts. The whole model was significant at ( $F = (4, 296) 13.31, p < .001$ ). The model explained 15 % variance in negative career thought which can be explained by the contribution of sub-factors of emotional intelligence. The results suggested

that utilization of emotions is the most significant component of emotional intelligence predicting negative career thoughts showing the beta value ( $\beta = -.27, t = -3.6, p < .001$ ). The results also suggested that self-emotional appraisal is significant predictor of negative career thought showing the beta value ( $\beta = -.25, t = -3.2, p < .01$ ). The other two components of emotional intelligence i.e., regulation of emotions and others' emotional appraisal turned out to be non-significant in predicting negative career thoughts.

Simple linear regression analysis was also separately carried out to predict overall negative career thought from EI's total scores. Results suggested overall emotional intelligence as a strong predictor of negative career thoughts showing the beta value ( $\beta = -.352, t = -5.3, p < .001$ )

To investigate contributions of constructs of emotional intelligence (EI) in negative career thoughts (i.e. decision making confusion, commitment anxiety, & external conflict), multiple regression analysis was carried out. Table 3 suggested that 15% of the variance in decision making confusion can be explained by a model comprising constructs of EI i.e. SEA, UOE, ROE and OEA. Among the predictors, SEA ( $\beta = -.26, t = 3.30, p < .01$ ) and UOE ( $\beta = -.22, t = 2.99, p < .01$ ) were significant negative predictor of decision making confusion.

Table 3 also demonstrated the effect of constructs of emotional intelligence on commitment anxiety and explained that 14% of the variance was resulted by a model comprising constructs of EI i.e. SEA, UOE, ROE and OEA. Among the predictors, SEA ( $\beta = -.17, t = 2.13, p < .01$ ), UOE ( $\beta = -.16, t = 4.04, p < .01$ ) and OEA

**Table 3. Regression Analysis for Predicting Decision-making Confusion, Commitment Anxiety and External Conflict from Constructs of Emotional Intelligence (N = 300)**

Variables	Decision-making Confusion			Commitment Anxiety			External Conflict		
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	F	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	F	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	F
SEA	-.26**			-.17*			-.16**		
UOE	-.22**	.15	8.70***	-.31**	.14	8.03***	-.10*	.10	5.43**
ROE	-.07			-.06			-.12*		
OEA	-.03			-.11*			.07		

Note. SEA = self-emotional appraisal, UOE = utilization of emotion, ROE = regulation of emotions, OEA = others emotional appraisal, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 4. Comparison of Males and Females on Emotional Intelligence and Negative Career Thoughts (N = 300)**

Variables	Males (n = 157)		Females (n = 143)		t(298)	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	
Emotional Intelligence	74.64	9.10	70.96	11.33	2.54*	.34	1.97	.06
SEA	19.82	2.95	18.66	2.87	2.80**	.34	1.96	.40
UOE	18.76	3.70	17.76	3.54	1.95*	-.01	2.01	.28
ROE	17.34	3.74	16.76	4.51	1.03	-.56	1.76	.14
OEA	18.72	2.96	17.79	3.72	1.98*	.04	1.87	.28
Negative Career Thoughts	102.70	21.60	110.20	19.92	2.56**	2.10	7.57	.36
DMC	27.12	7.11	29.77	8.63	3.35**	1.45	5.60	.33
CA	22.24	5.03	23.89	5.98	2.80**	.59	3.42	.30
EC	11.98	2.57	13.41	3.47	1.66	-1.29	.36	.46

Note. SEA = self-emotional appraisal, UOE = utilization of emotion, ROE = regulation of emotions, OEA = others emotional appraisal, DMC = decision making confusion, CA = commitment anxiety, EC = external conflict

df = 298,  $p^* < .05$ .  $p^{**} < .01$

( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t = 1.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were found significant negative predictors of commitment anxiety.

Finally, as showed in Table 3, the model explained the 10% of variance in external conflict. Among the predictors, SEA ( $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t = 1.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ), UOE ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t = 1.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and ROE ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = 1.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were originated as significant negative predictor of decision making confusion. On the whole the model was significant { $F(4, 296) = 5.43$ ,  $p < .01$ }.

Results in Table 4 demonstrated the mean gender differences in emotional intelligence (EI), negative career thoughts (NCT) and their construct scales. The mean differences were found to be significant in EI, self-emotional appraisal, use of emotions, others emotional appraisal, NCT, decision making confusion, and commitment anxiety.

## Discussion

Previously, the findings of Austin, Dahl, and Wagner (2003) showed that individuals with higher overall emotional intelligence scores displayed less negative career thoughts. Despite the difference of age range of sample, the

results of the present study were also similar as it revealed a significant inverse relationship between EI and NCT scores, although the magnitude of their relationship was found to be low (see Table 1).

The second objective of the present study was to identify the contribution of each component of EI into the further constructs of NCT. To meet this objective, multiple regression analysis was computed (see Table 3). Results indicated that component of self emotional appraisal (SEA), and utilization of emotions (UOE) significantly and negatively predicted all the constructs of NCT i.e. decision-making confusion, commitment anxiety and external conflict. SEA relates to the persons' ability to become aware of both of their mood and their thoughts concerning that mood. It reflects an individual's self-regard, self-awareness, independence and self-actualization (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). It seems that a person who lacks the ability of SEA would result in high negative thoughts related to career. As low self-esteem have been studied as significant predictor of career in decisiveness (Chartrand

et al., 1994), the lacking the ability of SEA may trigger low self-esteem and low confidence which in turns results in negative career thoughts. However, SEA helps to get awareness of one's own emotions that may help to better deal and analyze these negative thoughts related to career more rationally. UOE refers to a person's ability to utilize his/her emotions in directing them toward constructive endeavor and performance (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). It is safe to conclude that a deficit in this pertinent aspect of EI would adversely affect career thinking and make harder for individuals to cope with challenges in their developing career. Current results indicated that UOE has significant inverse relationship with overall negative career thoughts. It means that people with high ability of utilization of emotions are more active in analyzing their career related problems, thus have a low level of NCT.

However, the other two components of EI, i.e. others' emotional appraisal (OEA) and regulation of emotions (ROE) were not significant in predicting overall NCT, but were found only significant negative predictors commitment anxiety and external conflict respectively (see Table 3). There might be certain reasons for this non-significant relationship with the rest of NCT scales, including the problematic aspects of EI assessment by questionnaire include questions about the extent to which an individual's self-reported EI relates to their real-world emotional skills, and the large correlations found between trait EI measures and personality. Career decision making is exclusively influenced by individual differences also.

For the present study, individual differences have not been taken into consideration which might turn some results non-significant. Several studies in recent years, have emphasized the significance of individual differences in career decision-making (e.g. Gati, Landman, Davidovitch, Asulin-Peretz, & Gadassi, 2010).

In particular, confusion regarding decision-making pertains to an individual's decision-making impairment and these results in negative career thoughts. General EI reflects a global

emotional domain whereby an individual is not only aware of emotional states but also maintains the ability to manage those emotions toward effective decisions therefore, the direction of influence remains unclear.

Regarding gender, our findings demonstrated significant differences on EI and NCT. Males were found to be higher on EI and its components (see Table 4) except ROE which yielded non-significant results. Existing literature yields contradictory findings on EI e.g. females were found higher (e.g. Katyal & Awasthi, 2005) and males as higher on EI (Chu, 2002). A conceivable explanation for current findings is that the in Pakistani society male members are breadwinner at home so they find much exposure to social competences, expressing and understanding of emotions in society. They certainly need to develop higher EI ability as compare to women who remain most of time at homes.

Despite some non-significant differences in emotional intelligence, (e.g. Brown & Schutte, 2006; Denis, 2009) our findings are consisted with Ahmad, Bangash, and Khan (2009) who found male adults higher on EI.

Finally, present investigations reflected gender difference on NCT and its composite scales. There is dearth of research which investigated gender differences on NCT. One plausible explanation of the significant gender differences in NCT as found in the present study pertains to the high level of anxiety in women as compare to men. Anxiety is one of the most fundamental of all constructs in psychology and is also related with NCT and commitment anxiety. Ahmed, Abdel-khalek and Badar (2004) investigated gender differences in anxiety among undergraduates and found that females had higher mean anxiety scores than did their male counterparts.

The division of social and socioeconomic roles can also result anxiety and career related confusion among women who spend most of time inside the home and have minimal liberty for seeking jobs. On the other hand male members develop career decision making skills because they mainly bear the monetary responsibilities.

Maria, Maria and Maria (2007) revealed significant differences due to both gender and age in participants' perception of the factors that determine their decision processes. Male were found to be higher on decision making which indicated that they are less vulnerable to career decision making confusion.

In conclusion, the findings elucidated that our hypothesis was significantly supported. Significant gender differences were found where males and females demonstrated high scores on EI and NCT respectively.

The study has certain implications in career counseling, educational settings and employment processes because the link between emotional intelligence and different decisional variables e.g. career decision-making difficulties, decisional styles, and indecisiveness has become empirically established fact (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010).

### Limitations and Recommendations

This study has some serious limitations that can be conceived into recommendations. Keeping in view the current issues contaminating the present research, it is recommended that, to overcome the issue of common method variance, future researcher should use multiple sources for data collection along with self-report measures e.g. focus groups composed of university campus career counselors and educationists can be used as useful helping tool in addition. Studying a sample of both employed and unemployed individuals can provide more in depth insight into the relationship pattern and gender differences. Current sample included postgraduates of public sector universities only so inclusion of private sector university graduates is also recommended for further studies.

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