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Emotional intelligence and academic performance of medical undergraduates: evidence from a descriptive study in a selected university in Sri Lanka

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OBJECTIVES

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been linked with academic/professional success. Such data are scarce in Sri Lanka. This study was conducted to assess the level of EI and its effect on academic performance of medical undergraduates recently completed education in a Sri Lankan university.

METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study in a selected university, involving those who did final MBBS examination in 2016. Consecutive sampling was done. EI was assessed with self-administered Genos Emotional Intelligence Full Version (7 dimensions; 70 questions equally weighted; total score 350). Demographic data were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire. Academic performance was assessed with final MBBS results in the first attempt. Data were analysed with SPSS, version-23.

RESULTS

Of 148 eligible students 130 responded (response rate-88%); 61.5% were females; mean age was 26.3±1 years. Mean total EI score was 241.5 (females-245.5, males-235.1; $p=0.04$)

Among different dimensions, mean score was highest for Emotional Self-Awareness (36.8/50) and lowest for Emotional Expression (32.6/50). Final MBBS results were as follows: 8.5%-second-class(upper), 43.1%-second-class(lower), 31.5%-pass, 16.9%-repeat. Academic performance was better in females than in males ($p=0.009$). Mean EI of second-class(upper), second-class(lower), pass and repeat groups were 249.4, 246.6, 240.2 and 226.9, respectively (with one-way ANOVA $p=0.015$). After adjusting for gender, ordinal regression analysis indicated that, total EI was an independent predictor of final MBBS results (beta coefficient 0.018; $p=0.006$).

CONCLUSION

In the study population, EI was higher among females. Independent of gender, those who were more emotionally intelligent performed better in final MBBS. Emotional skills development might enhance academic performance of medical undergraduates.