



Emotional Intelligence, Humor Styles and Mental Health Among University Students

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Abstract

The current study was aimed to find out the relationship among emotional intelligence, humor styles and mental health among university students. The sample of this study consisted of 300 university students comprising of 150 males and 150 females with an age varying from 18 to 35 years. The tools used to gather data were Schutte Self Report of Emotional Intelligence, Humor Styles Questionnaire and Mental Health Inventory – 18. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to assess the data. Emotional intelligence and humor styles played a predictive role for mental health. Emotional intelligence and adaptive humor styles positively predicts psychological well-being whereas maladaptive humor style and emotional intelligence tend to negatively predicts psychological distress. Adaptive humor style played a positive role of a moderator between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. And maladaptive humor style negatively moderated the effect between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Humor Styles, Mental Health, University Students



INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), mental health is regarded as the state of well-being where a person works effectively and efficiently contributing to the environment, copes normally with life stressors and is aware of his capabilities. Mental health tends to control one's life, in times, where a person is dependent upon psychological well-being to be a productive member of the society, a great load of emphasis is required to gather knowledge and ways to help individuals deal with mental health problems and to know what factors aid an individual in the process of becoming a psychologically wellentity. Human nature, feelings and psychological processes, tend to shape the consequences of his behavior. This refers to emotional intelligence which is the process of regulating emotions. According to Salovey and Mayor (1990), emotional intelligence is one's ability to understand and regulate their own and others' emotions by changing behavior according to the situation for future interaction. Emotional intelligence is thus said to have four basic components: recognizing, understanding, modulating and utilizing emotions. Emotional intelligence tends to play a role in being conscious of the surroundings that affects one's social and mental well-being. (Molero et al., 2020). The Bar-On Model of emotional intelligence emphasizes on the interconnection of social and emotional skills which influence an individual's performance, it looks deep into one's self-perception and stress management which are both key factors for psychological well-being. According to Mayer, Roberts and Barsade (2008), higher levels of emotional intelligence is proved to have positive relationship with higher self-esteem and psychological well-being.

The mental health model proposed by Veit and Ware (1983) gives an in-depth look into the hierarchical mode of mental health. This model works upon two basic tiers, psychological well-being and psychological distress. Psychological well-being refers to the individual's concept of functionality, where one possesses autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive social relationships, purpose of life and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Psychological well-being is a component of mental health, where is stands by side of general well-being in social and environmental premises. It is backed up with the Psychological Model, where an individual's psychological functioning is based upon active well-being, presence of a positive psychological health and subjective satisfaction with life (Keyes, 2012).

Psychological distress refers to the occurrence of unpleasant emotional states, feelings, thought patterns which influence one's everyday life's functioning. It acts as a predecessor for mental health issues, leading to negative psychological states (Perales, Pozo-Cruz & Pozo-Cruz, 2014). According to Winefield, Gill, Taylor, and Pilkington (2012), distress symptoms refer to lack of interest, feeling blue, trouble sleeping, and self-destructive ideation. Distress is faced by all age groups, students tend to face higher number of complex circumstances which play a role in ideation towards psychological distress. These lead towards negative consequences like anxious and depressive behavior. According to Cairney (2007), distress is a constant psychological state, which can have detrimental effects for one's academic and professional life. Stressors such as academic pressure, economic and social situation for university level students can pose to be a stressful stage.

Mental problems and mental health go hand in and in literature. Unlike many other conceptual frameworks in positive psychology, humor is used as a defense mechanism and has a wide variety of meanings, some of which tend to facilitate psychological health and



some act as harmful thought processors. According to Martin (2019), humor helps individuals deal with stressors, create positive social interaction, and help to achieve better psychological well-being.

In personality psychology, humor styles differ across individuals, and its patterns affect one's psychological state. Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003), classified humor into 4 dimensions, stating affiliative and self-enhancing humor style as a productive measure and grouped them into adaptive humor style and aggressive and self-defeating humor into maladaptive humor style.

In adaptive humor style, affiliative humor refers to the production of spontaneous and non-hostile jokes for the purpose of entertainment to maintain social cohesion and reduce relational conflicts. It can be used to strengthen interpersonal social relationships and elevates self-confidence. According to Riggio (2015), it serves the purpose of association, joy, happiness, and prosperity. Adaptive humor style also accommodates self-enhancing humor where one makes oneself the object of humor, in the attempt to have a humorous outlook on life. It works on the principle of defense mechanism used by the mind to reduce negative cognitive and emotional states. A study conducted on undergraduates supports the findings of how adaptive humor styles affect their well-being (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013).

In maladaptive humor style, self-defeating humor works in contrast to self-enhancing humor, here one uses over criticism and statements to ridicule oneself. Riggio (2015), explained this mechanism, stating one uses this style to allow others to laugh at them to gain acceptance and approval from the social surroundings. It is usually used by individuals with low self-esteem and distress, at the expense of mocking themselves. Maladaptive humor style also includes aggressive humor where, where one uses a humorous tone with words of sarcasm, derogatory expressions and terms, and ridicule. It tends to impact relationships as it is designed to belittle and offend others and it may compromise relationships (Kuiper, 2016).

Having humor is considered to be a socially acceptable and rather desirable trait, but when it comes at the cost of ridiculing oneself or others, it can have negative outcomes on psychological health. Mental health pertains humor as it portrays the regulations of emotions where higher emotional intelligence refers to the positive impact on one's personality.

The present study on the basis of literature, following hypotheses are formulated:

- A likely positive correlation between adaptive humor style, emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing among university students and maladaptive humor style and psychological distress correlates negatively with the rest variables.
- Emotional intelligence and humor styles act as predictors of mental health among university students.
- Adaptive humor style positively moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing and negatively to psychological distress.
- Maladaptive humor style moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing as well as psychological distress.

METHOD

The present study is based upon a correlational research design. Using purposive sampling technique, the data was collected and assessed with psychometrically sound procedures. The study consisted of 300 participants, out of which N=150 males and N=150 females. The age range of the under-study sample was 18-30 years, consisting of university level students.



Assessment Measures

A demographic questionnaire was presented to the participants along with the research tools to gain information from the respondents. The demographic questionnaire included age, gender, consent signature etc.

The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test is a 33 item scale structured on the basis of Salvoy and Mayor's Emotional Intelligence Model. With a Cronbach Alpha reliability of .70-.85, Schutte reported a .90 reliability. The SSEIT measures and evaluates the perception, understanding, expression, regulating and harnessing of emotion in the self and others (Schutte et al., 1998).

Mental Health Inventory

Initially developed in 1983 by Veit and Ware, and translated in Urdu by Khan, Hanif and Tariq (2015), the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) is a 38 item self-report tool with reliability of .98. The short edition of the Mental Health Inventory (MHI) consisting of 18 items has been used to assess the psychological distress and psychological well-being of the individuals.

Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

Martin, Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003), devised the Humor Syle Questionnaire (HSQ) with subscales of affiliative, self-enhancement, aggressive and self-defeating. The affiliative and self-enhancement form the adaptive humor style and the hostile and self-defeating tend to work for maladaptive humor style. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability ranged from .77-.8.

PROCEDURE

The study was approved and permitted by the respective authorities; the sample participants were approached from various universities in Islamabad/Rawalpindi region. A brief description of the research was notified and their consent to be a part of this study was obtained according to research protocol. 300 university students were selected for which the ratio of gender remained 1:1 ($N_{\text{male}}=150$, $N_{\text{female}}=150$). For this Quantitative study, the scales employed were Schutte Self Report of Emotional Intelligence, Humor Styles Questionnaire and Mental Health Inventory – 18 and a basic demographic information questionnaire to explore the pattern association between the under study variables. To assess the data Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

RESULTS

The results were analyzed using SPSS version 20 for correlation, linear regression analysis.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of demographic variable of Study (N=300)

Variables	Category	F	%
Gender	Male	150	50
	Female	150	50

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of understudy sample variables. The male to female ratio was 1:1. with N=150 females (50%) and N=150 males (50%).

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient of Under Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional Intelligence	—				
2. Adaptive Humor Styles	.42**	—			
3. Maladaptive Humor Styles	-.22**	-.07*	—		



4.	Psychological Wellbeing	.29**	.29**	-.07	—
5.	Psychological Distress	-.21**	-.23**	.24**	-.27**

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

Table 2 indicates that Emotional intelligence has significant positive correlations with adaptive humor style ($r = .42$, $p < .01$) and psychological wellbeing ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). There was significant positive correlation between psychological distress and maladaptive humor styles ($r = .24$, $p < .01$). Significant negative correlation is found between emotional intelligence and maladaptive humor style ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$), between emotional intelligence and psychological distress ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$). Psychological distress is also negatively correlated with adaptive humor style ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$) and psychological wellbeing ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$). Significant inverse relationship between adaptive and maladaptive humor style ($r = -.07$) was found. Non-significant negative correlation was found between maladaptive humor styles and psychological wellbeing ($r = -.07$, $p < .05$).

Table 3: Mean comparison of male and female university students on Emotional Intelligence, Humor Styles (Adaptive and Maladaptive) and Mental Health (Psychological well-being, Psychological Distress) (N=300)

Variables	Male (n=150)		Female (n=150)		t(298)	95% CI		P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL		
Emotional Intelligence	120.26	14.25	120.74	12.74	.31	-3.55	2.58	.492	.03
Adaptive Humor Styles	72.29	10.01	73.06	11.14	.62	-1.63	3.17	.060	.07
Maladaptive Humor Styles	60.03	9.11	53.22	10.82	5.88	4.53	9.06	.017	.68
Psychological Wellbeing	37.70	9.14	36.44	9.52	1.17	-.85	3.38	.280	.13
Psychological Distress	26.23	7.21	26.59	6.77	.44	-1.95	1.22	.308	.05

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Table 3 shows dissimilarities among male and female university level students on emotional intelligence, subscales of humor styles and mental health. The results shows that male university students significantly use more maladaptive humor styles ($M = 60.03$, $SD = 9.11$) as compared to female university students ($M = 53.22$, $SD = 10.82$).

Table 4: Regression analysis showing emotional intelligence, adaptive and maladaptive humor styles as a predictor of psychological well-being in university level students (N=300)

Variable	Model		95 % CI	
	Psychological Wellbeing		UL	LL
Constant	B		[-2.26 , 21.51]	
Emotional Intelligence	.14**		[.05 , .22]	
Adaptive Humor Styles	.19**		[.08 , .29]	
Maladaptive Humor Styles	-.04		[-.14 , .05]	



R ²	.12
F	13.97

**p* < .05

Table 4 show a 12% variance brought by emotional intelligence for psychological well-being. Results show that R² .12 emotional intelligence, adaptive and maladaptive humor styles. Results show significant positive prediction of emotional intelligence and adaptive humor style for psychological well-being. On the contrary, maladaptive humor style acted as a non-significant negative predictor for psychological well-being.

Table 5: Regression analysis demonstrating the prediction effect of emotional intelligence, adaptive and maladaptive humor styles on psychological distress in university level students. (N=300)

Model		Psychological Distress		95 % CI	
Variable	B	UL	LL		
Constant	31.40***	[22.51	, 40.31]		
Emotional Intelligence	-.02	[-.09	, .03]		
Adaptive Humor Styles	-.14***	[-.23	, -.07]		
Maladaptive Humor Styles	.16***	[.09	, .23]		
R ²	.12				
F	13.89***				

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

Table 5 show a 12% variance in the psychological distress. the findings show a negative non-significant prediction of emotional intelligence to psychological distress ($\beta = -.02$). a significant prediction is shown by adaptive humor style for psychological distress ($\beta = -.14$). in contrast, maladaptive humor styles significantly positively predicted psychological distress ($\beta = .07$)

Table 6: Regression Analysis showing Moderating effect of Adaptive Humor Styles between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Wellbeing (N=300)

		Psychological Wellbeing					
		Adjusted		B	B	t	P
		R ²	R ²				
1	Constant			12.47		2.69	.008
	Emotional Intelligence	0.08	0.08	.20	.29	5.33	.000
2	Constant			6.49		1.33	.185
	Emotional Intelligence	0.12	0.11	.15	.21	3.51	.001
	Adaptive Humor Style			.18	.21	3.41	.001
3	Constant			37.11		1.42	.015
	Emotional Intelligence			.14	.21	3.26	.001
	Adaptive Humor Style			.18	.21	3.46	.001
	Emotional Intelligence x Adaptive Humor Style	.12	0.11	.29	.04	.65	.041



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EI = Emotional Intelligence, HS = Humor Styles

Table 6 shows the interaction effect of adaptive humor style between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. there exists a significant positive moderation effect, revealing higher levels of adaptive humor style would result in a higher direct relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

Figure 1: Moderating effect of Adaptive humor styles on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological wellbeing

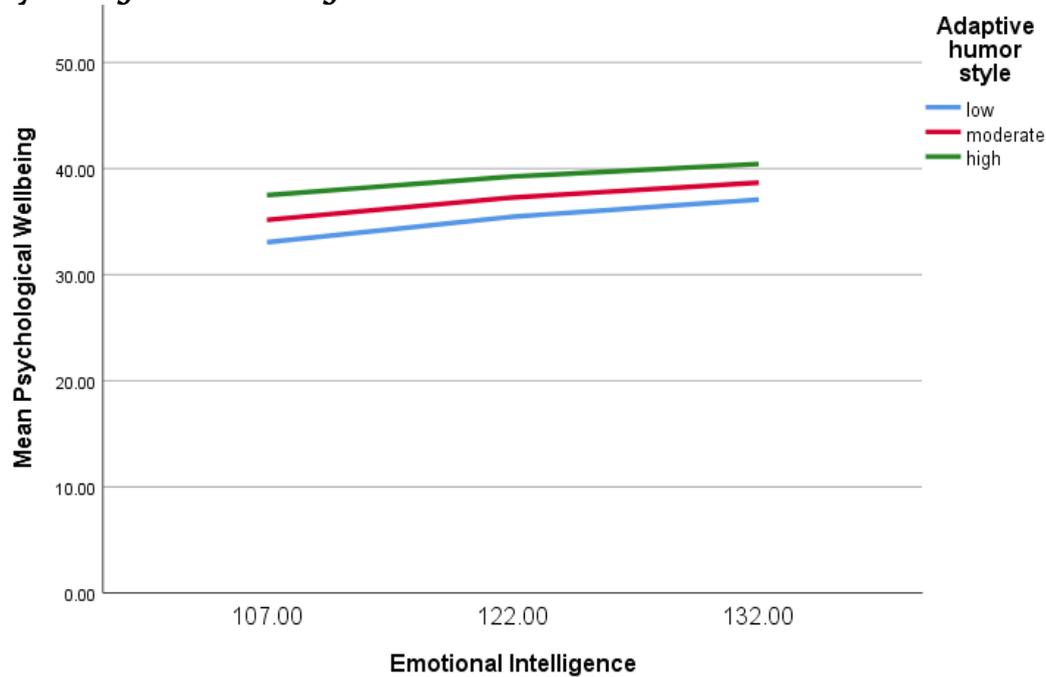


Figure 1 shows the moderation effect of adaptive humor style between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, higher levels of adaptive humor styles would indicate a higher level relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

Table 7: Regression Analysis showing Moderating effect of Adaptive Humor Styles between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Distress (N=300)

		Psychological Distress					
		Adjusted		B	β	t	P
		R ²	R ²				
1	Constant			39.11		10.98	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.04	.03	-.11	-.20	-3.58	.000
2	Constant			42.985		11.40	.000
	Emotional Intelligence			-.06	-.13	-2.10	.036
	Adaptive Humor Style	.06	.06	-.12	-.17	-2.86	.005
3	Constant			45.05		11.87	.000
	Emotional Intelligence			-.09	-.17	-2.73	.007
	Adaptive Humor Style			-.11	-.15	-2.56	.011
	Emotional Intelligence x Adaptive Humor Style	.09	.08	-.99	-.16	-2.87	.004



Table 7 shows the interaction effect of adaptive humor styles in terms of the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress. a significant moderating effect is revealed of adaptive humor style between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

Figure 2: Moderating effect of adaptive humor styles on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Distress (N=300)

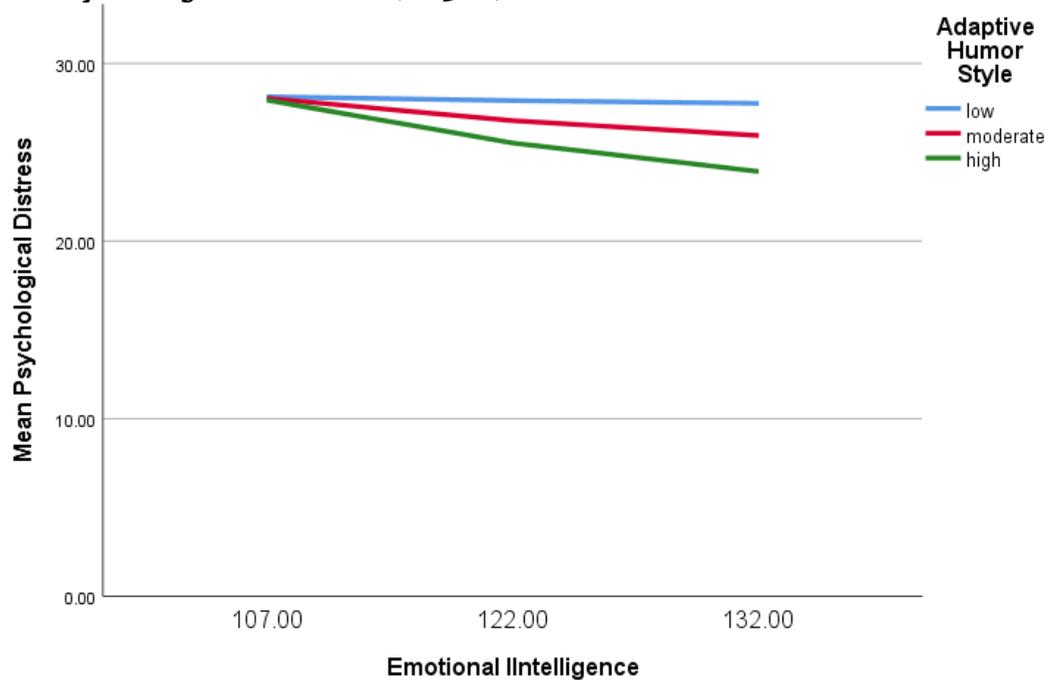


Figure 2 indicates the moderation effect of adaptive humor style, as the value of the adaptive humor style increases, an inverse relationship increases between psychological distress and emotional intelligence.

Table 8: Regression Analysis showing Moderating effect of Maladaptive Humor Styles on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Wellbeing (N=300)

		Psychological wellbeing					
		R ²	Adjusted R ²	B	β	t	P
1	Constant			12.47		2.69	.008
	Emotional Intelligence	.08	.08	.21	.26	5.33	.000
2	Constant			13.35		2.21	.028
	Emotional Intelligence			.21	.29	5.15	.000
	Maladaptive Humor Style	.08	.08	-.01	-.01	-.23	.821
3	Constant			13.32		2.19	.029
	Emotional Intelligence			.21	.29	5.09	.000
	Maladaptive Humor Style			-.009	-.01	-.18	.856
	Emotional Intelligence x Maladaptive Humor Style	.08	.07	-.13	-.01	-.22	.825



Table 8 shows a non-significant moderating effect of maladaptive humor style between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being

Table 9: Regression Analysis showing Moderating effect of Maladaptive Humor Styles on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Distress (N=300)

		Psychological Distress					
		R ²	Adjusted R ²	B	β	t	P
1	Constant			39.11		10.98	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.04	.03	-.11	-.21	3.58	.000
2	Constant			28.45		6.27	.000
	Emotional Intelligence			-.08	-.15	2.76	.006
	Maladaptive Humor Style	.08	.07	.13	.20	3.65	.000
3	Constant			28.52		6.26	.000
	Emotional Intelligence			-.08	-.15	2.67	.008
	Maladaptive Humor Style			.13	.20	3.47	.001
	Emotional Intelligence x Maladaptive Humor Style	.08	.07	.28	.03	.63	.525

EI = Emotional Intelligence, HS = Humor Style

Table 9 reveals a non-significant moderating effect of maladaptive humor style between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

DISCUSSION

The present research paper sought to understand the association concerning emotional intelligence, humor styles and mental health. One of the main characteristics of mental ill-being refers to the deficit of regulating emotions and to understand their emotional information (Schütz & Nizielski, 2012). Thus, this study not only focuses upon the effect of emotional intelligence on mental health rather it also provides evidence for how various types of humor styles can affect one's mental wellbeing.

One of the first hypotheses postulated states that a positive correlation exists between emotional intelligence, adaptive humor style with psychological well-being, which is supported by the results of the study. These results are consistent with a study conducted in Iran which supported our findings, concluding somewhat similar results, stating the positive relationship between emotional intelligence, adaptive humor style as well as psychological health and well-being. (Maas, 2020; Alinia, Dousti, Dehshiri, & Heydari, 2009). The first hypothesis further stated that emotional intelligence, adaptive humor style and psychological well-being correlate negatively with maladaptive humor styles; results of the present study tend to prove these as well. This is further supported by a study which demonstrated the negative correlation of maladaptive humor style with emotional intelligence and adaptive humor mechanism (Greven, Premuzic, Arteché, & Furnham, 2008). Zeidner and Matthews (2016), postulated that emotional intelligence tends to correlate negatively with psychological distress, being in line with our hypothesis. A study



conducted on students found similar results indicating that emotionally intelligent individuals tend to have less psychological distress (Hodzic, Ripoll, Costa & Zenasni, 2016).

The current study's second hypothesis states that emotional intelligence acts as a predictor for psychological well-being. results show a significant prediction of psychological well-being, thus proving our hypothesis. These results are supported by the findings of another research conducted by Guerra-Bustamante, León-del-Barco, Yuste-Tosina, López-Ramos, &Mendo-Lázaro (2019), on adolescents stated the effect of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being, stipulating how the regulation of emotional intelligence tends to predict the psychological well-being. According to the second hypothesis, adaptive humor style has a prediction effect on psychological well-being. Findings of the current study support this hypothesis. Results showed a significant positive prediction of adaptive humor style and psychological well-being. Studies conducted around the globe have supported these results as well. Research revealed having a healthy humor mechanism, an adaptive humor style leads towards higher self-esteem, this not only leads towards regulation of emotions, it also predicts higher psychological well-being and health (Fiyaz, Majeed, & Khan, 2016).

The current study hypothesized that different types of humor styles can moderate the consequences of emotional intelligence on mental and psychological well-being. The results tended to support this hypothesis. Adaptive humor mechanism did act as a moderator between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. it had a significant positive moderation effect. Supporting our results, humor tends to act an individual's character strength to facilitate happiness. According to Cann and Collette (2014), adaptive humor style tends to operate as a contributor to psychological well-being thus providing reliable benefits to individuals. On the contrary, adaptive humor style acts as a negative moderator among emotional intelligence and psychological distress. The results demonstrated an inverse moderation relationship among psychological distress and emotional intelligence. Where adaptive humor tends to facilitate psychological well-being, it also tends to negate psychological distress. It helps to facilitate problem solving and build resilience and stable psychological health (Cann & Collette, 2014).

It was hypothesized that maladaptive humor style negatively moderates emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Results proved these hypotheses, providing evidence that higher levels of maladaptive humor would negate the effect between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. maladaptive humor style acts as a non-significant moderator for emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. This aggressive and self-defeating humor does not tend to lead towards subjective happiness, self-esteem nor psychological health (Yue, Liu, Jiang &Hiranandani, 2014). According to the results, maladaptive humor non-significantly moderated positively between emotional intelligence and psychological distress. somewhat similar findings were found in a study where maladaptive humor style tended to negatively mediate the effects between emotions and psychological well-being (Poncy, 2017).

With regards to gender differences, the findings revealed non-significant differences in terms of emotional intelligence which is supported by a study conducted in Lahore, Pakistan that irrespective of the gender, people tend to face problems similarly (Shehzad& Mahmood, 2019). In terms of humor mechanisms, female students tended to have higher levels of adaptive humor style and male had a higher level of maladaptive humor style, indicating a strong significant difference between the two. These results were similar to the



ones Alinia, Dousti, Dehshiri and Hassan (2009) found in terms of gender differences. This study also focused upon if gender had a role in mental health. The results showed a non-significant difference for males and females in terms of mental health i.e. for psychological well-being and psychological distress. similar results were found by Zeidner and Matthews in 2016, where they reported a non-significant difference in gender in terms of psychological distress and psychological well-being.

LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study illustrated was based upon a cross-sectional design, the sample consisted of 300 individuals which might lessen the generalizability of the study. Purposive sampling technique was employed, which reduces the chance of getting better information from the population than random sampling. A larger and varying population sample must be gathered to generalize further studies' results.

This study postulates the effect of having high emotional intelligence, and adaptive humor style on psychological well-being. Identifying adaptive humor techniques, social media can help to reduce psychological distress and a substantial scale to the targeted audience. Creating methods of enhancing emotional intelligence can prove to be constructive counselling techniques.

CONCLUSION

The present research study proves the existence of relationship and association of humor styles and emotional intelligence and their effect on mental health. Having high emotional intelligence and adaptive humor styles indicates higher levels of psychological well-being and are correlated positively. Maladaptive humor style and emotional intelligence have been evidenced to have a negative correlation with psychological distress. Emotional intelligence and adaptive humor styles positively predict psychological well-being and in conflict, maladaptive humor style and emotional intelligence tend to negatively predict psychological distress. In the current study, regression analysis revealed the positive moderation effect of adaptive humor styles between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. In contrast, maladaptive humor styles inversely moderated the effect between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

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