Original Article

Predicting of borderline personality according to components of emotional intelligence

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Abstract

Introduction: Past studies revealed that emotion is dysregulation in borderline personality. The Aim in This study was explored the relationship between borderline traits and emotional intelligence components, according to what discussed Bar-On theory.

Materials and Methods: The current study was conducted in cross sectional descriptive research context. A group of 274 normal participants from students of Payam-e-Noor University of Tabriz and Sarab cities (north-western part of Iran) in the academic year 2010-11 using stratified random sampling method took part in this research, and answered to borderline personality and Bar-On emotional intelligence questionnaires. Data analyzed with using of the stepwise multivariate regression analysis method by SPSS-16 software.

Results: Emotional intelligence was suitable predictor towards borderline traits and can change the values of attributes that define the borderline traits ($r^2=0.13$, $P<0.001$), especially four of fifteen components of emotional intelligence (self actualization, impulse control, problem solving and independency) are more contribution in predicting borderline traits ($F=32.58$, $P<0.001$).

Conclusion: Borderline traits and emotional intelligence are inversely related together, and this relationship can be explained in line of emotional disturbances of borderline personality.

Keywords: Borderline personality disorder, Dysregulation, Emotional intelligence, Traits

Introduction

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is the general pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image, emotions, impulsivity, suicidal behavior, chronic absurdity feelings, transient stress related dissociative and paranoid symptoms, usually starting at the beginning of adulthood, manifesting itself in different forms (1). Although the prevalence of borderline personality disorder is reported to be 2 to 4 per cent of the population (2), the distribution of such borderline traits is much more extensive, with borderline personality disorder being the most prevalent of all personality disorders(3). According to Linehan's bio-

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social theory (4), borderline personality disorder is a type of dysregulation in emotional featuring such as; a) high emotional sensitivity, b) inability in adjusting the severity of emotional responses, and c) and slow return to emotional baseline. Research indicates emotional deficiencies in borderline personality disorder. Trull et al. found out in a research that borderline personality disorder is associated with problematic mood patterns including uncontrollable anger and emotional instability (5). Berg also stated that people suffering from this severe anger disorder, experience an absence of emotional control as well as emotional instability (6). Similarly, Benjamin and Wonderlich reported lower levels of emotional baseline and higher aggression levels in people with BPD's patterns, and has 24 Yes/No items. Yes is considered as 1, and No is given 0. The scale has 3 factors: relationships (7). High level of solitude and feelings of abandonment have also been reported in people

suffering from this disorder (7).Levine, Marziali, and Hood also found out that people with BPD not only have problem in recognizing emotions, but also in managing them (8).

On the other hand, emotional intelligence is now defined as the expression, assessment, and adjustment of one's and others' emotions, and benefiting them for motivational purposes and on this basis, Bar-On has introduced an emotional competence model including five areas or spheres of skills or capabilities: intra-personal skills (emotional self-awareness, assertion, self-regulation, self-actualization, and independency), interpersonal skills (interpersonal relationships, social commitment, and empathy), adaptability (problem-solving), reality testing, and flexibility), stress control (stress tolerance ability, impulse control), and general mood (happiness, and optimism) (9).

Research shows the relationship between many psychological phenomena with emotional intelligence, but research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and borderline personality disorder is quite (unstudied). In their study, Leible and Snell investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and BPD in undergraduate B.S students (10). The findings showed that the symptoms of this disorder were negatively related with different aspects of emotional intelligence such as emotional clarity, emotional regulation, and a general emotional intelligence level. Petrides, Pérez-Gonzlez, and Furnham showed that the general emotional intelligence negatively predicts BPD (11). In the same vein, Gardner and Qualter studied the relation between emotional intelligence and BPD in a group of adults (12). Results, like findings from previously mentioned researches, indicated that, there was negative relation between different aspects of emotional intelligence and BPD. In Iran, Mashhadi, Soltani, and Razmjuee have studied the relation between emotional intelligence and BPD (13). According to the findings from their research, there was an inverse relation between the total scores of emotional intelligence and the total scores of borderline personality scale. Similarly, there was seen to be an inverse relation between emotional intelligence factors (attention, clarity, and correction) and BPD symptoms. In that study, the 'clarity of feelings' was the only emotional intelligence factor capable of predicting BPD symptoms.

Given the borderline symptoms, at both levels of disorder and trait (which have an emotional feature), and some etiologic theories on the one hand, and the definition of emotional intelligence on the other hand, it seems true that the borderline traits are positively related to emotional intelligence. Looking at the related literature, shows the relation between emotional intelligence and its factors and borderline traits has been understudied. On this basis, the object of the present research is to study emotional intelligence factors of borderline traits in the framework of dimensional approach to borderline semi-dissociative characteristics in the non-clinical population. The dimensional model supposes the patients' clinical symptoms as an exaggerated form of the symptoms related to the traits usually found in normal adult population (14,15). The research question was drawn up as follows: Which of the emotional intelligence factors are most explanatory/expressive of the borderline traits?

Materials and Methods

This research is a descriptive-correlative study. The sample of the research comprised of undergraduate students from both sex in Payam-e-Noor University in Tabriz and Sarab cities in the academic year 2010-2011. Two hundred and seventy four people out of this statistical population were selected using multi-stage random sampling method and the Morgan Sampling Table, and then tested.

After choosing the right classes, the researcher first introduced himself to the students and told them about the research goals. The subjects were then given the questionnaires and were told that there was no time limitation. They were asked to answer the borderline scale's questions choosing Yes/No items.

To observe the research ethics and the rights of subjects, it was stated that taking the exam was all voluntary, and it was noted both verbally (before the exam), and written (a sentence placed above the question sheets) that: (The information asked for is only for research purposes).

To ascertain security, you don't need to write down your names or other private information. Only the 'sex' box has to be checked. As far as the execution of the two questionnaires was concerned, it was decided that half the subjects took the Borderline Personality Scale first, for the other half to begin with the Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. This was to neutralize the probable impacts of the order in which the questionnaires were completed.

Instruments

A- Borderline personality Scale (STB): This scale has been designed to assess the borderline personality hopelessness factor, impulsivity factor, and stress related paranoid/dissociative symptoms. Jackson and Claridge have reported the test-retest reliability for Borderline Personality Scale as 0.061 (16). Also, Rawlings, Freeman, and Claridge have reported the

alpha coefficient as 0.80 (17). Shankar's research has approved differential and constructional reliability on borderline personality disorder (18). In Iran, Mohammadzadeh, Goodarzi, Taghavi, and Mollazadeh have calculated the test-retest reliability for the whole Scale in a period of four weeks as 0.084. The test-retest reliability for sub-scales such as hopelessness, impulsivity, and stress related paranoid/dissociative symptoms as 0.53, 0.72, and 0.50 respectively (14).

The alpha coefficient was also calculated 0.77 for the whole scale, and for the sub-scales hopelessness, impulsivity, and stress related paranoid-dissociative symptoms, 0.64, 0.58, and 0.57 respectively. The Borderline Personality Scale was known to have appropriate factor and differential reliability in Iran (14).

B- The Bar-on Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EQ-I): This questionnaire assesses a set of non-cognitive capabilities, qualifications, and skills affecting the person's success in coping with environmental requests and pressure. In this questionnaire there are 15 factors considered as emotional intelligence factors by Bar-On: Emotional self-awareness, Self-respect, Assertiveness, Self-actualization, Independence, Empathy, Emotional self-awareness, Stress tolerance, Problem-solving, Reality testing, Social responsibility, Impulse control, Happiness, Optimism and Inter-personal relationship. In Bar-On research, the test-retest reliability was reported 0.85 and the average internal consistency was known 0.76 (9). This questionnaire is normalized on Iranian university students and internal consistency validities of 0.74 and 0.68 were calculated for male and female students respectively (19). The Bar-On Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire has acceptable factor reliability (19). Data was analyzed using multivariate regression and SPSS-16 software.

Results

Subjects included 144 men with an age average of 22.92, and deviation of 3.02, and 130 women with an age average of 22.24, and deviation of 3.19. The range of subjects' age was 17-34. The average scores of research variables and the correlation figures between borderline traits and the 15 emotional intelligence factors are summarized in Table 1. According to this table information, borderline traits are related to emotional intelligence.

In order to identify the relations more exactly, and determine the weight of predictor variables in determining the criterion variable, stepwise multivariate regression analysis was used. The rest of the analysis was done in two stages. In the first stage, 'emotional intelligence' was considered as

predictor variable, and 'borderline traits' was regarded as criterion variable, and put into the regression equation.

Table 1. The average scores and correlation figures of research variables in college students

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	R
Borderline traits	8.79	4.08	1
Total emotional intelligence	313.18	23.54	-0.36
Problem solving	23.11	3.59	-0.27
Happiness	18.62	2.50	-0.28
Independency	17.21	4.75	-0.35
Stress tolerance	19.41	3.05	-0.30
Self-actualization	18.72	3.23	-0.46
Emotional self-awareness	18.80	3.09	-0.14
Reality testing	19.23	4.47	-0.29
Inter personal elation relationship	24.24	3.35	(NS)0
Optimism	21.90	3.09	-0.16
Self respect	12.79	3.86	-0.13
Impulse control	19.41	5.49	-0.41
Flexibility	19.70	3.33	-0.23
Social responsibility	24.93	2.66	(NS) – 0.02
Empathy	25.11	3.31	(NS) – 0.02
Self expression	18.92	3.14	-0.31

In the second stage, the 'emotional intelligence' factors were regarded as predictor variable, and 'borderline traits' as criterion variable, and again put in the regression equation. In this stage, due to the numerousness of predictor variables, the multiple collinear assumptions were examined in order to assess the independence of predictor variables. The software calculated tolerance index and variance inflation factor index. The average variables tolerance index and the variance inflation factor index were 0.90 and 1.0 respectively. Therefore, it can be accepted that predictor variables are independent and there has been no multiple co-linearity. The significant amount of F, indicates a significant relation between predictor and criterion variables ($P<0.001$, F=39.65). 'Emotional intelligence' is capable of determining 'borderline traits' and can predict 13% of the changes in borderline traits. Table 2 shows the results from the second stage of the analysis. The statistically significant F figure, indicates a significant relation between the predictor and criterion variables.

According to the information in the Table above, from among the 15 emotional intelligence factors, self-actualization, impulse control, problem solving, and independency are capable of being put in regression equation in order to determine borderline traits. The coefficients from the regression analysis imply that in the first step, the insertion of the "self-actualization" factor, can solely predict 21 per cent of changes in "borderline traits". In the second step,

the insertion of "impulse control" factor can boost the figure to 29 per cent. In the third and fourth steps, the insertion of "problem solving" and "independence" factors can increase the variance amounts to 31 and 33 per cent respectively ($P<0.001$, F =32.58).

Table 2. Multivariate regression analysis of borderline traits on emotional intelligence

	Predictor variable	R	R^2	F	Significance	B	β	T	P
1	Self actualization	0.46	0.21	70.63	0.001	0.58	0.46	8.40	0.001
2	Self actualization	0.54	0.29	55.40	0.001	0.46	0.37	6.88	0.001
	Impulse control					0.22	0.30	5.64	0.001
3	Self actualization	0.56	0.31	40.25	0.001	0.43	0.34	6.32	0.001
	Impulse control					0.21	0.28	5.30	0.001
	Problem solving					-0.16	-0.14	--2.70	0.001
4	Self actualization	0.57	0.33	32.58	0.001	0.36	0.29	5.07	0.001
	Impulse control					0.19	0.26	4/87	0.001
	Problem solving					-0.15	-0.14	-2.65	0.001
	Independency					0.12	0.14	2.61	0.001

Discussion

The present research was carried out with the objective of determining borderline traits according to emotional intelligence factors using the Bar-On theory. In his emotional intelligence theory, Bar-On not only considers the person's intra-personal and inter-personal relationships, but also enumerates reconciliation, stress tolerance, and general mood as other factors influencing emotional intelligence (20).

The findings of the present research showed that emotional intelligence is well capable of predicting borderline traits, and can also indicate some of the changes in borderline traits. The findings of this research are in line with those of the previous studies (8,10-13) approving that the existence of emotional deficiencies in people with high borderline traits. Therefore, the findings can be discussed aligned with Linehan's bio-social theory. As it was stated in the introduction, according to this theory, borderline personality is a type of instability or confusion in emotion featuring such as: high emotional sensitivity, b) inability in adjusting the severity of emotional responses, and c) and slow return to emotional baseline (4). In this theory, the interaction of individual vulnerability and biological vulnerability, and special environmental impacts bring about borderline personality. According to this theory, the structure of emotion (and thus, the structure of emotional dysregulation) is extensive,

and does include cognitive processes related to emotion, biochemistry, physiology, facial and muscular reactions, movement and emotional related acts. Borderline personality also grows in the evolutional invalidating context (4). From among an invalidating environment is a lack of tolerance for the expression of the primary emotional experiences, particularly those emotions that are not supported by visible incidents (There is no clear reason for the emotion). Although the invalidating environment strengthens an exaggerated expression of emotions, it simultaneously gives the child the message that his/her expression of the emotions is in vain, and has to deal with the situation alone and with no parent support. The consequence of such process is a state in which the child cannot recognize how to understand, distinguish, adjust, and tolerate the emotional responses, and therefore, oscillates between excessive inhibitions on the one hand, and exaggerated expression of emotions on the other hand. On this account, environmental factors play a role in the creation of this disorder. In brief, the borderline personality disorder is a result of the interactive impacts of invalidating environment, emotional vulnerability, and emotional dysregulation.

The research also suggested that from among the 15 emotional intelligence components, self-actualization, impulse control, problem solving, and independence play the most important roles in

determining borderline traits. Since no one of the previous studies has investigated borderline traits according to the Bar-On theory, there is no possibility of comparing or contrasting the findings here with those of the previous studies. The emotional self-awareness though (one of the 15 Bar-on components) was not capable of determining emotional intelligence, while in one of the previous studies , the clarity of feelings was the only emotional intelligence component that could predict the borderline personality disorder symptoms (13). This part of the findings requires more investigations. According to the results of the present research, emotional self-actualization plays no significant role in determining borderline traits. It seems true that the main problem with these people is experiencing intense negative emotions rather than distinguishing between and among the types of emotions.

The study also indicated that in people with borderline traits, the ability of understanding the self's potential capacities, and savoring (self-actualization) is so much weak, and considering intense dysregulations, and chronic feelings of absurdity, this finding is justifiable (1). The research also showed that deficiency in impulse control, problem solving, and independence are most related to borderline traits. Impulsivity is the index variable in borderline personality disorder (17). In this disorder, the person's mood and emotion are subject to instability and inconsistency: the acute periods of depression, anxiety, or recurrent anger happen with no clear result. The person's self-concept is also exposed to instability, and varies between acute self-doubt and megalomania. The person's inter-personal relationships are subject to severe instability, and he/she oscillates between seeing others as superiors, and illogical blaming of them. In line with instability of mood, self-concept, and inter-personal relationships, these people are inclined to impulsive behaviors of self-damage, such as self-injury, and suicidal behavior. Similarly, a deficiency in problem solving can be determined according to the impulsive characteristics of borderline personality. In general, problem solving entails reflection and thought (away from impulsivity) about the essence of the problem to be solved, and due to an intense impulsivity in these people, a deficiency in problem solving is also predictable. A deficiency in independence and a kind of depending on others is from other features of borderline personality, which proved to be able of predicting borderline traits in this research. Some theories have suggested that parents with borderline personality have probably relished the child's dependence on them. These parents not only have not encouraged or inspired children to boost their individuality or independency, but might have punished the child at seeing any effort at being independent (3). That is why these people never learn to completely separate their self-attitude from others. This, in turn, brings about their hyper-sensitivity to other people's view of them, and thus makes them prone to submission (3). On this basis, when these people feel they are rejected or excluded by others, they start to reject, punish and damage themselves. The research had two delimitations:
1) The measure for assessing emotional intelligence was a bit too long, and this might have impinged the research findings through it tiring effect on the participants.
2) Access to patients suffering from borderline personality could not be made in this research, and due to this limitation, it is recommended that the findings from this research be reviewed with groups of people with borderline personality, so that complementary information could be gathered and added to the present findings.

Conclusion

Altogether, results indicated that emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with borderline traits. It was explicated in the course of emotional dysregulation in borderline personalities.

Acknowledgement

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