

# **The Effect of Application-Based Training on the Emotional Intelligence of Criminal Justice Students**

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*This study assessed whether undergraduate students in an application based criminal justice program would exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence as a result of their training in comparison to non-criminal justice students. Participants were 192 undergraduate students: 43 Criminal justice majors, 46 human service majors, 57 nursing majors, and 46 general education majors. These participants were given the 33 item Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim (1998) Emotional Intelligence Scale to measure levels of emotional intelligence. The findings indicate that there was a significant difference in emotional intelligence only among criminal justice students and general education students.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The field of law enforcement can be filled with professional and personal challenges along with a variety of specific occupational stressors (Ellison, 2004; Deschamps, Paganon-Badinier, Marchand & Merele, 2003; Greene & del Carmen, 2002; He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002). Law enforcement personnel are frequently involved in situations that can be extremely stressful and dangerous. In addition, changes in the economic and technological landscape have increased the work related demands imposed upon law enforcement related professionals (Deschamps, et. al., 2003). In order to perform well in the field, law enforcement personnel must have a skill set that is not limited to tactical interventions but also includes the ability to successfully handle confrontation, exhibit good judgment and create healthy relationships (Prazno & Prazno, 1999; Turner, 2006).

Over the past few years, interest in the role of emotional intelligence has grown across a variety of settings. Emotional intelligence (EI) was initially introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) who defined it as having the capacity to observe one's own, as well as others', emotions and to use this information to direct one's thoughts and behavior. The role of observing emotion and processing the observed information has been shown to be an important component in the ability to self-regulate emotion (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). Mayer and Salovey (1997) further state that EI is the ability to perceive and appraise emotion, to utilize emotion in assisting one's thinking, to understand emotions along with the information that derives from them and to manage emotions in a manner that fosters

personal growth. Goleman (1995) defines EI as the ability to manage one's emotions in the areas of self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills.

After the appearance of the bestselling book on EI by Goleman (1995), the popularity of EI has increased to the point where further research has linked the role of EI to such areas as job performance (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollock, Hawver & Story, 2011), job related stress (Nikolaou & Tsousis, 2002), and to adaptive leadership qualities (Brown, Bryant, & Reilly, 2006) (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Many proponents of EI assert that success in the work place is often linked to the ability to effectively manage interpersonal relationships and that EI is fundamental to the capacity to succeed in interpersonal behavior, communication, negotiation, networking, and leadership (Goleman, 1998; Weisinger, 1998).

Research suggests the emotions of law enforcement personnel may affect the quality of their work, particularly in the areas of communication and interaction with the general public. Law enforcement personnel's expected professional conduct often includes the limitation of emotional expressions and appearing calm and in control in even the most distressing situations (Pogrebin & Polle, 1991). Some have argued that what will assist the selection and development of future leaders within the law enforcement community will be the recognition of those who display effective skills in the area of emotional intelligence (Turner, 2006). Bar-On, Brown, Kirkcaldy and Thome' (2000) found that in comparison to other helping profession groups, "police officers were more aware of themselves and of others, were more adaptable in general, coped better and positively enjoyed their work more" (p.1114). It comes as no surprise then that having higher levels of EI is extremely important for success in the realm of law enforcement where daily stressors can take their toll on officers' mental well-being. In addition to mental and emotional aspects, Al Ali, Garner and Magadley (2012) found significant correlations between higher EI levels and police officer job performance. Aremu, Pakes and Johnston (2011) found that emotional intelligence even had an effect on the attitudes of police officers toward police corruption.

Further research suggests a person's level of EI can influence his or her career decisions (Brown, George-Curran, and Smith, 2003). Some researchers propose people may be intrinsically more drawn to a specific type of career or work climates in which EI is actively cultivated (Morehouse, 2007). Gertis, Derksen and Verbruggen (2004) report employees in human services related positions who showed higher levels of EI reported less occasions of experiencing burnout. In addition, it has been shown that having an EI component in employee training programs can yield increases in employee levels of EI from a variety of professions (Zijlmans, Embregts, Gertis, Bosman & Derksen, 2011). Since emotional intelligence is associated to the ability to regulate one's own emotions while also being aware of the emotions of others, it is not unreasonable to propose that this ability would be helpful to those working in the criminal justice field.

In this study we examined if students who had chosen to major in an applied undergraduate degree criminal justice program would exhibit higher levels of EI in comparison to students in other degree programs. Due to the nature of the training and education needed for working in the law enforcement field in which one has to be able to effectively identify and control emotions, we expected criminal justice students in an application based program would exhibit higher levels of EI when compared with non-criminal justice general education. In addition, this study explored if there are differences in EI between age, gender or ethnicity groups.

## **METHODS**

Participants in this study included 192 undergraduate students enrolled in criminal justice, human services, nursing, and general education programs at a small, rural community college. Data was collected from students who were readily available and who voluntarily agreed to take the survey. The students self-identified their age (range = 17 – 65 years), sex (129 females, 63 males), ethnicity (114 Caucasian, 61 African-American, 10 Hispanic, 2 Asian and 5 other), and their chosen college degree program (43 Criminal justice, 46 human service, 57 nursing, 46 general education).

Participants were presented with a 33 question survey to measure emotional intelligence in order to determine whether or not there was a significant correlation between the levels of EI among participants

and their chosen college degree program. In addition to the 33 questions, demographic information was collected on which degree program the participant was enrolled, age, sex, and ethnicity. Linear regression was used to assess the relationship between age and EI and that one-way ANOVA would be used to assess the difference in EI among each categorical variable.

### **Instrument**

For this study, participants completed the Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim (1998) Emotional Intelligence Scale (See Table 1). The scale has 33 questions, and contains

**TABLE 1**  
**THE 33-ITEM EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SCALE (SCHUTTE, ET. AL., 1998)**

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1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others
  2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them
  3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try
  4. Other people find it easy to confide in me
  5. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people\*
  6. Some of the major events in my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important
  7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities
  8. Emotions are one of the things that make life worth living
  9. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them
  10. I expect good things to happen
  11. I like to share my emotions as I experience them
  12. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last
  13. I arrange events others enjoy
  14. I seek out activities that make me happy
  15. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others
  16. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others
  17. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me
  18. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing
  19. I know why my emotions change
  20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas
  21. I have control over my emotions
  22. I easily recognize my emotion as I experience them
  23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on
  24. I compliment others when they have done something well
  25. I am aware of the non-verbal signals other people send
  26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself
  27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas
  28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail\*
  29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them
  30. I help other people feel better when they are down
  31. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles
  32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice
  33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do\*

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\*These items were reversed scored.

three subscales: appraisal and expression of emotion in self and others (e.g., I am aware of the nonverbal messages I send to others), regulation of emotion in self and others (e.g., I have control over my emotions.), and utilization of emotions in solving problems (e.g., I compliment others when they have done something well). For each item on the measure, a rating of one 1 indicated “strongly disagree” and a rating of 5 indicated “strongly agree” (1988). After three responses on the survey were reverse-scored, the total score was calculated by summing the total points on the 33 items. The higher the participant’s total score, the greater is the individual’s emotional intelligence. The instrument has shown an average score of 131 for females and 125 for males (maximum score =  $33 \times 5 = 165$ ). The scale has an internal consistency analysis of Cronbach’s alpha of .90 and .87; a test-retest reliability score of .78 and the instrument demonstrated discriminant and convergent validity when compared to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) and convergent validity when compared to the Trait Meta-Mood Scale. The Emotional Intelligence Scale has also shown predictive validity by showing a significant relationship to first year college student’s grade point average (Schutte, et.al, 1998).

## Results

The emotional intelligence scores were measured for all 192 participants. The total sample mean was 129.4 (SD = 13.9) with a mean of 130.4 for females (SD = 13.7) and 127.4 for males (SD = 14.1). Multiple analyses were conducted to determine what factors, if any, influence emotional intelligence. The relationship between age and EI was examined using linear regression analysis, and one-way ANOVA was used to examine any difference in EI among the different categorical variables. Linear regression analyses indicate that the residual error terms in this sample are normally distributed and the ANOVA analyses indicate that the samples representing each group are derived from populations of equal variances. A simple linear regression was conducted to determine if the age of a student could predict EI,  $F(1, 190) = .032, p = .859$ . The null hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between age and EI. The regression equation used to predict EI based on age was determined to be as follows: emotional intelligence =  $128.946 + .017(\text{age})$ ,  $R^2 = .000$ . The results of simple linear regression suggest that there was no significant relationship between student age and EI and that age is a poor predictor to describe the levels of EI.

One-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there was a difference in emotional intelligence between males and females, between different ethnicity groups, and between different college degree programs. The one-way analysis of variance showed that neither gender nor ethnicity provided a reliable effect on EI, gender:  $F(1, 190) = 1.968, p = .162, MS_{error} = 191.376, \alpha = .05$ , ethnicity:  $F(4, 187) = .362, p = .836, MS_{error} = 194.952, \alpha = .05$ . However, there was a significant difference between EI and participant’s choice of college degree programs,  $F(3, 188) = 3.426, p = .018, MS_{error} = 185.285, \alpha = .05$ . A follow-up Bonferroni Post-hoc analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in emotional intelligence only among criminal justice students ( $M = 134.37, SD = 10.599$ ) and general education students ( $M = 125.13, SD = 15.235$ ). There was no significant difference between participants in any other programs (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
**BONFERRONI POST-HOC ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND**  
**COLLEGE DEGREE PROGRAM**

Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

College Degree Interval Program (I)	College Degree Program (II)	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p	95% Confidence Lower Bound
Criminal Justice 12.83 12.48 16.94	Human Services	5.133	2.887	.462	-2.57
	Nursing	5.144	2.749	.377	-2.19
	General Education	9.242*	2.887	.010	1.54
Human Services 2.57 7.20 11.68	Criminal Justice	-5.133	2.887	.462	-12.83
	Nursing	.011	2.698	1.000	-7.18
	General Education	4.109	2.838	.896	-3.46
Nursing 2.19 7.18 11.29	Criminal Justice	-5.144	2.749	.377	-12.48
	Human Services	-.011	2.698	1.000	-7.20
	General Education	4.098	2.698	.783	-3.10
General Education -1.54 3.46 3.10	Criminal Justice	-9.242*	2.887	.010	-16.94
	Human Services	-4.109	2.838	.896	-11.68
	Nursing	-4.098	2.698	.783	-11.29

\*significant at  $p < .05$

### Discussion

The findings indicate that, in this sample, age, sex nor are ethnicity related to EI. Although Schutte, et.al. (1998) has shown that the average score for females (131) is higher than males (125), and the current study also the average score for females (130.4) is higher than males (127.4), this difference does not register as significant. However, it does indicate that the instrument performed as expected. The findings of this study did suggest that there is a significant difference between EI and participants' chosen college degree programs.

Although criminal justice students, nursing students, and human services students are considered a part of the greater public service fields, the students in criminal justice have more classes that specifically train students to read body language, to communicate verbally, to perform their job objectively (e.g., to

control their emotions), to perform their jobs professionally (e.g., making a good impressions to others), and to methodology investigate problems (e.g., to overcome barriers and contradicting information). Each of these factors was assessed on the Emotional Intelligence Scale and may explain the study's test results. In short, it may be that the training criminal justice students have is enough to distinguish their level of EI from the general education students. Thus, a practical implication is that emotional intelligence can be purposively reinforced via training.

## LIMITATIONS

There are also several limitations in the study. First, because the sample was convenient, purposive, and non-random, there was a possibility that the participants who chose to participate may be different in meaningful ways from those individuals who chose not to participate. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to other population groups that do not match the sample's characteristics. Second, Likert-type scales were used and there is the possibility that a) the participants engaged in central tendency bias by simply selecting the middle option rather than the best option, b) the participants engaged in acquiescence bias by simply selecting positive responses over negative responses, and c) due to limited options, the participants were forced to select options that did not accurately represent their perspectives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As this was a preliminary study, further studies should be conducted to conclude whether or not higher levels of EI are developed during the completion of criminal justice coursework or if it is an inherent difference in individuals that chose criminal justice as a major. If coursework taken while preparing for a career in criminal justice develops higher levels of EI as compared to individuals enrolled in other degree programs, then the EI of criminal justice students who are entering the program should be compared to the EI of criminal justice students who are graduating from the degree program. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to assess the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance. If relationships do exist, then perhaps an emotional intelligence assessment tool can be used by police departments as a pre-hire screen.

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