

INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF NIGERIAN SOLDIERS DEPLOYED IN KADUNA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The psychological well-being of military personnel is crucial for their operational effectiveness, mission readiness, and overall quality of life, particularly in challenging environments like Kaduna State, Nigeria. Using cross-sectional design this study investigates the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on the psychological well-being of Nigerian soldiers deployed in Kaduna State, where unique stressors and demands exist. Drawing on a mixed-method design, data were collected from 200 soldiers using snowballing technique. Results indicate a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence ($F(1,198) = 113.65$; $p < 0.001$) with $R = 0.604$, $R^2 = 0.365$ and psychological well-being among soldiers. Furthermore, demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and deployment did not predict psychological well-being, emphasizing the central role of emotional intelligence in soldiers' mental health. Findings underscore the importance of promoting emotional intelligence training and support programs within military organizations to enhance soldiers' resilience and well-being. Recommendations for military leadership and future research directions are discussed to optimize soldiers' mental health in challenging operational environments.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Psychological well-being, Military personnel, Resilience

INTRODUCTION

The importance of psychological well-being in military personnel cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts their operational effectiveness, mission readiness, and overall quality of life (Turliuc and Balcan, 2023). Military operations often entail exposure to traumatic events, combat stressors, and prolonged periods of separation from loved ones, which can significantly strain soldiers' mental health (Bergman, Christopher, & Bowen, 2016). Maintaining optimal psychological well-being is crucial for ensuring soldiers' resilience in the face of adversity, as it enhances their ability to cope with stressors, make sound decisions under pressure, and maintain cohesive team dynamics (Jones & Fear, 2019). Furthermore, psychological well-being influences soldiers' post-deployment adjustment and long-term outcomes, including their risk of developing mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Hoge et al., 2004). Prioritizing the psychological well-being of military personnel is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for sustaining operational effectiveness and safeguarding the health and readiness of the force (Flood, & Keegan, 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI), given the unique challenges and stressors inherent in military deployments in present day Kaduna State, it is important to understudy the psychological wellbeing of the soldiers and see the role emotional intelligence plays in maintaining it. The ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively, is increasingly recognized as a key factor in determining individuals' psychological resilience and adaptive functioning in high-pressure environments (Brackett & Salovey, 2021). In the context of military service, where soldiers are routinely exposed to physical danger, separation from family, and demanding operational conditions, the role of EI in mitigating stress, fostering coping strategies, and promoting overall well-being becomes particularly salient (Gyawali & Dixit, 2020). However, while the importance of emotional intelligence in military settings has been acknowledged, its specific impact on the psychological well-being of Nigerian soldiers deployed in Kaduna State remains underexplored. Understanding how emotional intelligence influences soldiers' mental health



outcomes in this context is not only essential for optimizing their psychological resilience and performance but also for informing targeted interventions and support programs tailored to the unique needs of this population.

Emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively, both in oneself and others, and has garnered significant attention in psychological research due to its implications for individual well-being and interpersonal functioning (Brackett & Salovey, 2021). EI is often conceptualized as consisting of four main components: emotional perception, the capacity to accurately recognize and interpret emotions in oneself and others; emotional understanding, the ability to comprehend the causes and consequences of emotions; emotional regulation, the skill to manage and modulate one's own emotions adaptively; and emotional expression, the aptitude to express emotions in ways that are appropriate and constructive (Mayer et al., 2016). Recent literature highlights the multifaceted nature of EI and its relevance across various domains, including work, education, and interpersonal relationships, underscoring its role in promoting mental health, resilience, and overall psychological well-being (Kotsou et al., 2019). As such, understanding the components and implications of EI is crucial for fostering personal growth and enhancing psychological functioning in diverse populations, including military personnel deployed in challenging environments like Kaduna State.

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Wellbeing

Military environments present unique challenges to emotional regulation and well-being due to the demands of combat operations, prolonged separation from loved ones, and exposure to traumatic events (Bergman, et al., 2016). Service members must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, make split-second decisions under pressure, and cope with the psychological toll of their experiences. EI plays a crucial role in helping soldiers adapt to these challenges and maintain their mental health and performance in demanding operational contexts. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a psychological construct that encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and manage emotions effectively, both in oneself and others (Mayer et al., 2016). In civilian populations, research has consistently demonstrated the importance of EI in various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, work performance, to stress, better coping mechanisms, and mental health outcomes (Brackett & Salovey, 2021).

Studies have shown that high levels of EI are associated with better mental health outcomes in civilian populations. For example, individuals with higher EI scores report lower levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Schutte et al., 2007). Furthermore, EI has been linked to greater life satisfaction, subjective well-being, and overall quality of life (Brackett & Salovey, 2021). These findings highlight the significant role of EI in promoting psychological well-being and adaptive functioning in non-military contexts. EI has been linked to higher level of happiness (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016) and healthy relationship (Guerra-Bustamante et al., 2019). In recent years, there has been growing interest in understanding the role of EI in military settings and its impact on the psychological well-being of service members. Military personnel are often exposed to high levels of stress, trauma, and adversity, which can take a toll on their mental health (Bergman, Christopher, & Bowen, 2016). Research suggests that EI may serve as a protective factor against the development of mental health problems among military personnel, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Gyawali & Dixit, 2020). One key mechanism through which EI influences psychological well-being in military populations is by enhancing resilience. Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back from adversity and maintain psychological well-being in the face of challenges (Jones & Fear, 2019). Studies have found that individuals with higher levels of EI exhibit greater resilience to stress and trauma, which can buffer against the negative impact of combat exposure and deployment-related stressors (Gyawali & Dixit, 2020).

More so, training and interventions for emotional intelligence (EI) can help people handle stress and tough experiences better. This is important for Human Resource Development (HRD) in the military, as they play a key role from training soldiers to supporting them in their careers and transitioning to civilian life after deployment (Garcia et al., 2020). The work of Valor-Segura, et al., (2020) demonstrated that emotional intelligence has been linked to higher job satisfaction among military men and has increased Teamwork Communication, and Job Attitudes among Spanish Military Cadets. Further EI often helps to promote trust among military men (Rezvani, et al., 2016).

Recognizing the importance of EI in military settings, there has been increasing interest in developing interventions and training programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence among service members. These programs typically focus on improving emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills to better equip soldiers for the rigors of military life (Jones & Fear, 2019). Preliminary evidence suggests that such interventions can lead to improvements in psychological well-being, resilience, and job satisfaction among military personnel (Gyawali & Dixit, 2020).

In Nigeria Ogbale (2019) demonstrated that training predicts emotional intelligence among Jos adolescents. Among Nigerian construction company leaders, poor emotional intelligence was observed to have led to poor decision making in times of emergency (Mashi, 2023). According to Ekpenyong, et al., (2015) EI predict work performance among bank workers positively, while Oboh, (2023) noted that emotional intelligence is linked to fraud tendencies among young adults. Literature suggests that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in promoting psychological well-being and resilience among military personnel. High levels of EI are associated with better mental health outcomes, greater adaptive functioning, and improved performance in military contexts. However, more research is needed to fully understand the mechanisms underlying the relationship between EI and psychological well-being in diverse military populations. By addressing these gaps in knowledge, researchers can inform the development of targeted interventions and training programs to support the mental health and resilience of service members in challenging operational environments. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have actually investigated this study among Nigerian soldiers, hence this study.

METHOD

Design

The study uses a cross-sectional survey design, where questionnaires were fixed in goggle form and distributed to soldiers, who in turn helped in identifying other soldiers within Kaduna State. To ensure only qualified participants were involved, we asked the participants we identified to only share it within the military group chat and no other places, this helped controlled unqualified participants from participating in the study. Qualitative studies were reviewed and current information on the subject matter was well analyzed in the literature review section.

Participants

This study included 200 participants, with 122 (61%) male and 78 (39%) female soldiers, selected through snowballing. Their ages ranged from 17 to 55 years ($M = 32.44$, $SD = 0.65$). Most participants fell within the age range of 17-40. In terms of ethnicity, the distribution showed 73 (36.5%) participants were Yoruba, 53 (26.5%) were Igbos, 58 (29.0%) were Hausas and the other 16 (8.0%) represented other minority tribes. Regarding religion, 89 (44.5%) were Christian, 76 (38.0%) were Muslim and 35 (17.5%) was from other religions.

Instrument

A Google forms comprising of two instruments were used for this study, they are:

The Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10)

The Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) is a concise measure designed to assess emotional intelligence across four dimensions: perception, understanding, regulation, and utilization of emotions. The scale comprises 10 items, with two items representing each dimension. Respondents rate each item on a Likert scale, typically ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), indicating the extent to which they agree with statements reflecting different aspects of emotional intelligence. Administration of the BEIS-10 is relatively straightforward and can be completed in a short amount of time, making it suitable for both research and applied settings. Studies examining the reliability and validity of the BEIS-10 have generally reported satisfactory psychometric properties. Internal consistency reliability, typically assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=.73$) (Tapia, & Marsh, 2006) has been found to be acceptable, indicating that the items within the scale consistently measure the intended constructs (Extremera, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2006). Additionally, evidence supports the validity of the BEIS-10 through its correlations with other measures of emotional intelligence, as well as its ability to discriminate between individuals with varying levels of emotional intelligence (Pishghadam, et al., 2012). Overall, the BEIS-10 represents a useful tool for assessing emotional intelligence in a brief and efficient manner, with demonstrated reliability and validity.

Brief Psychological Wellbeing Scale

The Brief Psychological Wellbeing Scale (BPWS) is a concise instrument developed to assess psychological well-being across multiple domains. Typically comprising six items representing various aspects of emotional, social, and psychological functioning, the BPWS aims to provide a brief yet comprehensive measure of an individual's overall psychological well-being. Administration of the BPWS involves presenting respondents with a series of statements or questions related to their subjective experiences and feelings in different areas of life, such as mood, relationships, and satisfaction with life circumstances. Respondents are then asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement, often using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Studies evaluating the reliability and validity of the BPWS have generally yielded favorable results. Internal consistency reliability, was ascertain as Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=.81$) (Mabekoje, 2003), has demonstrated satisfactory levels, indicating that the items within the scale consistently measure the intended constructs (Joseph, et al., 2004). Additionally, evidence supporting the validity of the BPWS has been found through its associations with other established measures of psychological well-being and related constructs, as well as its ability to differentiate between individuals with varying levels of well-being (Tennant, et al., 2007).

Procedure

The researcher obtained a letter informed consent of the participant in the Google form shared. Participants were provided with information about the study's objectives, instructions on completing the Google form, the anticipated time required for completion, and were asked for their consent to participate. Participants completed a questionnaire and their responses analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 23 (SPSS Version 23, 2015).

Ethical issues

Following ethical guidelines is imperative in research conduct, and adherence to these principles is essential. Participants were fully informed about the research objectives to obtain their voluntary consent and cooperation. No deception or coercion was involved in their participation, and all participants were treated with dignity, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality of information provided. Those who consented were given questionnaires to complete, adhering to ethical

principles such as voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and beneficence. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study without adverse consequences. Additionally, the researcher addressed any misconceptions and provided debriefing to clarify the study's true purpose. Risk management was ensured to prevent any physical harm to participants throughout the study.

RESULTS

Table 1: Inter Correlation Among Studied Variables

Sn	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Age	20.35	2.49	-						
2	Gender	-	-	-.009	-					
3	Ethnic group	-	-	.131	.004	-				
4	Religion	-	-	.133	-.027*	.087	-			
5	Deployment	-	-	.149*	.127	-.007	.091	-		
6	Emotional intelligence	28.28	7.63	.133	.024	.040	-.017	.109	-	
7	Psychological Wll-being	41.79	16.22	.092	.053	.109	-.084	.018	.604**	-

Note: **= Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; *= Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; M= mean, SD= Standard deviation

Table 1 shows inter-correlation among study variables. The result shows that age ($r_{(198)}=0.092$; $p>0.05$), gender ($r_{(198)}=0.053$; $p>0.05$), Ethnic group ($r_{(198)}=0.109$; $p>0.05$), religion ($r_{(198)}=-0.084$; $p>0.05$), and deployment ($r_{(198)}=0.018$; $p>0.05$) did not correlate with psychological wellbeing respectively. On the other hand, emotional intelligence positively correlate with psychological wellbeing significantly ($r_{(198)}=0.608$; $p<0.05$).

Table 2: Standard Linear Regression Showing Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Psychological Well-Being

Variable	R	R ²	F	p-value	B	t-test	p-value
Psychological Well-being							
(Constant)						1.56	0.119
Emotion intelligence	0.604	0.365	113.65	0.000	0.604	10.66	0.000

Standard linear regression was conducted to test the influence of emotional intelligence on psychological Well-being. The result shows that emotional intelligence influence psychological well-being significantly ($F_{(1,198)}=113.65$; $p<0.001$) with $R=0.604$, $R^2=0.365$. Thus, emotional intelligence accounted for 36.5% of the variance in psychological well-being.

Table 3: Standard multiple regression showing the independent and Joint influence of Demographic characteristics on psychological well-being

Variable	R	R ²	F	p-value	B	t-test	p-value
Psychological well-being							
(Constant)	0.160	0.026	1.01	0.409		2.359	0.019
Age					0.072	0.989	0.324
Gender					0.056	0.784	0.434
Ethnic group					0.094	1.305	0.194
Religion					0.069	0.956	0.340
Deployment					-0.06	-0.077	0.939

Standard multiple regression was conducted to test the joint and independent influence of demographic characteristics on adjustment to training. The results shows that demographic characteristics jointly did not predicted psychological wellbeing ($F_{(5,194)}=1.01$; $P>0.05$) with $R=0.160$ and $R^2=0.026$. Thus, the five predictor variables jointly accounted for 2.6% of the variance in psychological wellbeing. Independently, Age ($\beta=0.072$, $t=0.989$, $P>0.01$), gender ($\beta=0.056$, $t=0.784$, $P>0.05$), ethnic group ($\beta=0.094$, $t=1.305$, $P>0.05$), religion ($\beta=0.069$, $t=0.956$, $P>0.05$) and deployment ($\beta=-0.006$, $t=-0.077$, $P>0.05$), predict psychological wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

This research delved into examining the impact of emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being of soldiers in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Standard linear regression analysis was employed in this study, revealing a notable influence of emotional intelligence on psychological well-being. This suggests that soldiers exhibiting higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to report enhanced psychological well-being. This finding shows that soldiers are more Self-aware are more likely to experience improved mental health, this is because they tend to know when they need to relax and check themselves for possible mental health cases. Soldiers who are self regulatory, are more likely to regulate where they will be, what they will drink/eat that might affect their mental health negatively. Also, soldiers who are have high intrinsic motivation, are likely to motivate themselves through the thick and thins of the military job. This will help them be tougher and mentally stable to do the job better. Empathy which is another key aspect of EI, helps the emotionally intelligent soldiers to see from other people's view point and not get unnecessarily angry, experience outburst to mention but few. All this helps in protecting the mental health of the individuals. This finding aligns with previous research by Brackett & Salovey, (2021) and Năstasă (2015), which indicated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing, such as lower levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout. The result shows that soldiers who have the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and express their emotions effectively, both in oneself and others are more likely to have healthier mental health than soldiers who do not.

Furthermore, the result shows that age, gender, ethnic group, religion, and deployment were not predictors of psychological wellbeing among Nigerian soldiers. So no matter the age, of the soldier or the number of deployment, as well as their ethnic or religious background, their psychological wellbeing was more dependent on their emotional intelligence than this entire factor. Therefore, promoting better emotional intelligence skill among the soldiers is more likely to give birth to improved mental health among Nigerian soldiers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the influence of emotional intelligence on the psychological well-being of soldiers deployed in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The findings revealed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being, indicating that soldiers with higher levels of emotional intelligence reported enhanced psychological well-being. This aligns with prior research emphasizing the positive correlation between emotional intelligence and mental health outcomes, including reduced levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout. Soldiers who possess the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively are more likely to maintain healthier mental states, highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in military contexts. Moreover, demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic group, religion, and deployment did not emerge as predictors of psychological well-being among Nigerian soldiers. This suggests that regardless of these demographic factors, soldiers' psychological well-being is more dependent on their emotional intelligence than other external factors. Thus, interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence skills among soldiers may contribute

significantly to improving their mental health and overall well-being. By prioritizing emotional intelligence training and support programs, military organizations can better equip soldiers with the necessary skills to navigate the challenges of military life and promote resilience in demanding operational environments. Further research should continue to explore the mechanisms underlying the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being in diverse military populations to inform targeted interventions and enhance the overall mental health of service members.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Military organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of training programs focused on enhancing emotional intelligence skills among soldiers. These programs should provide comprehensive training on emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal skills to equip soldiers with the tools needed to effectively manage stress, navigate challenging situations, and promote psychological resilience.
2. Military leaders and commanders should promote a culture that encourages open communication, empathy, and support among soldiers. By fostering an environment where soldiers feel comfortable expressing their emotions and seeking help when needed, military units can strengthen camaraderie, enhance unit cohesion, and mitigate the stigma associated with mental health issues.
3. Military organizations should ensure that soldiers have access to a range of mental health resources and support services, including counseling, therapy, and peer support programs. These resources should be readily available, confidential, and tailored to the unique needs of military personnel deployed in challenging environments like Kaduna State.
4. Leadership training programs for military officers should include components focused on emotional intelligence development. By equipping leaders with the skills to effectively understand and manage their own emotions, as well as those of their subordinates, military organizations can promote positive leadership practices and create supportive environments conducive to psychological well-being.
5. Military organizations should implement regular mental health assessments and screenings to monitor soldiers' psychological well-being and identify individuals at risk of developing mental health issues. These assessments should include measures of emotional intelligence to provide insights into soldiers' adaptive coping strategies and resilience levels.
6. Continued research into the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being in military populations is essential. Military organizations should support interdisciplinary research collaborations between psychologists, military personnel, and other relevant stakeholders to further understand the mechanisms underlying the influence of emotional intelligence on soldiers' mental health outcomes. By investing in research initiatives, military organizations can inform evidence-based practices and interventions aimed at optimizing soldiers' psychological resilience and well-being.

Implementing these recommendations can contribute to fostering a supportive and resilient military culture that prioritizes the psychological well-being of Nigerian soldiers deployed in Kaduna State and beyond.

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