Everyday stress and emotional intelligence in times of coronavirus

Estrés cotidiano e inteligencia emocional en tiempos de coronavirus

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ABSTRACT

2020 was a different year, complicated and of constant uncertainty. This has also affected the child population. Therefore, the aim of the study was to determine the relationship between daily stress and emotional intelligence of elementary school students. The type of study used was descriptive correlational and the design was non-experimental - transversal. The sample consisted of 166 students of both sexes, from 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade of elementary school in a public school, for which a non-probabilistic sampling was used. The instruments used for data collection were: the Daily Stress Inventory for the first variable and the Bar ON ICE - NA Emotional Intelligence Inventory for the second variable. The results indicated that there is a negative relationship of 0.412 (rs = 0.412, p < 0.05) between both variables, validating the proposed hypothesis. It was concluded that daily stress is inversely related to the development of emotional intelligence, and that the dimensions of emotional intelligence should be worked on to reduce stress levels.

Keywords: Stress, Emotional Intelligence, pandemic, COVID 19

RESUMEN

El 2020 fue un año diferente, complicado y de constante incertidumbre. Esto ha afectado también a la población infantil. Por ello, el objetivo del estudio fue determinar la relación entre estrés cotidiano y la inteligencia emocional de los estudiantes de educación primaria. El tipo de estudio que se utilizó fue el descriptivo correlacional y el diseño No experimental – Transversal. La muestra estuvo conformada por 166 estudiantes de ambos sexos, de 3°, 4°, 5° y 6° de primaria de un colegio público, para lo cual se utilizó un muestreo de tipo No Probabilístico. Los instrumentos para la recolección de los datos fueron: el Inventario de Estrés Cotidiano para la primera variable y el Inventario de Inteligencia Emocional de Bar ON ICE – NA, para la segunda variable. Los resultados indicaron que existe relación negativa de 0,412 (rs = 0,412, p < 0.05) entre ambas variables, validando la hipótesis propuesta. Se llegó a la conclusión que el estrés cotidiano se relaciona de manera inversa al desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional, debiéndose trabajar las dimensiones de ésta para un menor alcance en los niveles de estrés.

Palabras clave: Estrés, Inteligencia Emocional, pandemia, COVID 19

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 2020, the planet has been suffering from a pandemic that has reached all continents, the world's attention is focused on how to avoid, counteract and find a cure against COVID 19, as well as to face the economic situation caused by social isolation. However, according to Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, there are hidden consequences that are not being taken into account, i.e., many children and adolescents are being silent victims of the mandatory quarantine that prevents their normal social development; thousands of families are being affected by human losses or illness due to the spread of the Coronavirus (UNICEF, 2020).

All this, can directly or indirectly affect children and adolescents, leading them unconsciously to a state of stress, health emergency measures such as distance education and social isolation, have changed the daily routine of families, which may represent cause of stress in children. In relation to this, (Martínez et al., 2019), argue that the application of self-regulation strategies is necessary for the prevention of stress in the educational environment, as well as the development of coping strategies in the face of stressful situations. Likewise, (Oria, 2019; Gómez & Monjarás, 2019) highlight that elementary level students present higher levels of stress in the academic and social environment, areas of daily stress and

types of emotional coping are related to each other. For their part, (Puigbó et al., 2019; López, 2019) argue that stress coping generates difficulty to emotional intelligence, finding a relationship between stress and emotional intelligence in reference to intrapersonal intelligence, while (Trianes et al., 2014) found the relationship between daily stress and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, (Chavarriaga et al., 2018), argue that academic stress can be avoidable by identifying the factors in childhood and taking interim measures.

When we refer to stress, it is necessary to remember Hans Selye, who identified it as a general adaptation syndrome, defining it as an adaptive response to various stressors (Pérez, 2018). Likewise, for (Kanner et al., 1981; Suarez & Rosales, 2019), daily stress is defined as the frustrations that arise in daily chores and that, due to their accumulation, can lead to have an impact on the person's life, triggering variations in the subject's mood such as depression, difficulty in socializing, low performance and even health problems. Similarly, (Trianes, 2012), cited by (Noriega, 2019), refers to children's daily stress as the difficulties and concerns that occur daily in the environment of students, stressors of a daily nature that can affect children are classified into three aspects: health problems; stress in the school environment; and stress in the family environment.

Research on daily stress in students is important because it is associated with socio-affective balance, interpersonal relationships, aggressive attitudes with peers and negative attitudes in the academic context (Trianes et al., 2014; Chiquillo et al., 2016). In other words, these aspects have been affected by school closures and the abrupt interruption of school work, assumed in Peru and worldwide since the beginning of 2020 (Alania et al., 2020; Lesmes et al., 2020; Vargas et al., 2020). In the health field, there have been events such as the illness of close relatives, medical procedures and concern about contagion when visiting grandparents and the elderly (Götz, 2020). In the school environment, the closure of schools limits social relationships, with teachers and peers, since distance education has been chosen; as well as the scarce possibility of physical activities and stress due to having to perform numerous tasks (Götz, 2020; Paricio & Pando, 2020). Regarding the stressors of the family aspect, problems in the economy, family treatment, learning demands, academic performance, as well as fights between parents and siblings are taken into account, which, given the context, are increased by social isolation. We should not leave aside the aspect referring to the management of emotions in our students, given the climate of uncertainty that social isolation brings us (Suárez et al., 2020).

Taking into account the daily stress and its relationship with emotional intelligence we refer to (Goleman, 1995), who argues that emotional intelligence

is made up of a group of skills that lead us to success, and that is different from IQ, dividing it into intrapersonal intelligence and interpersonal intelligence, which allows us to recognize individual emotions and those of others, as well as their processing, adjustment and control, managing and regulating our relationships properly (Roca, 2013; Pulido & Herrera, 2017; Amasifuen et al., 2016). Therefore, in these times of pandemic, this capacity acquires a primordial role to cope with family, school and social coexistence. In this sense, for (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), emotional intelligence is a capacity that allows us to observe our own feelings and emotions, discriminating them in order to use this information in the orientation of our actions and thoughts. Emotional intelligence allows social adaptation, adequate communication, self-motivation, fulfillment of goals and objectives, conflict resolution, empathy, which implies a lower risk of conflict behaviors, violence, stress, depression and drug use (Fierro et al., 2019; Fernández & Montero, 2016).

For (Bar-On & Parker, 2018) emotional intelligence is formed by the emotional, personal and interpersonal skills that help every individual to cope with the demands and pressures of everyday life. They, consider four aspects to take into account: intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, adaptability and stress management.

Given the pandemic situation, the need arises to go beyond pedagogical progress and compliance with learning standards. It is of utmost importance to know how children are in terms of their levels of daily stress and emotional intelligence, taking into account that daily stress and emotional intelligence are relevant in the integral development of students because they contribute to their personal and social well-being. It is worth mentioning that it is necessary to detect in time the emotional deficiencies that may be manifested in the classroom, for an adequate follow-up of the students. This will allow an educational process that considers the emotional aspect for the balanced development of the personality, with primary values such as responsibility, tolerance, respect among others that will lead to effective citizen participation (Iglesias, 2018; Valero, 2017; Dueñas, 2002).

Regarding daily stress, (González et al., 2014) consider it as a risk factor that can lead to social and school maladjustment. Stress is the result of emotions and, in turn, these emotions could be affected in their dimensions as a result of stress (Aguilar et al., 2014).

Considering the previous approaches, according to the changes that have occurred in this stage of pandemic and taking into account that the child population is vulnerable to this context of health emergency, it is worth asking

the question: What is the relationship between daily stress and emotional intelligence? Thus, this quantitative research seeks to determine the relationship between daily stress and emotional intelligence. This study will provide important information since, from the results obtained, it will be possible to decide the pertinent actions to provide the appropriate support from the pedagogical and tutorial action. Likewise, this study will have greater transcendence by serving as a basis for other research relating emotional intelligence and daily stress with other dimensions. Likewise, the results will be the basis for the planning of workshops or programs according to the conclusions obtained from the study.

2. Materials and Methods

The research was carried out under the quantitative approach, with the hypothetical deductive method, by means of hypothesis formulation, data collection, and the use of statistics to obtain the results. Likewise, the design was non-experimental and the type of study was descriptive-correlational, using Spearman's Rho to find the correlation between the variables.

The population selected for the study consisted of elementary school students from a public school in Lima. The sample consisted of 166 students of 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade of both sexes (Table 1). The grade and age of the participants were taken into account, from third to sixth grade and from 8 to 12 years old. Due to the remote education situation, students who did not complete the questionnaires and those who were out of age were excluded.

Table 1 *Sample distribution*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Third grade	26	15,7	15,7	15,7
	Fourth grade	29	17,5	17,5	33,1
	Fifth grade	45	27,1	27,1	60,2
	Sixth grade	66	39,8	39,8	100,0
	Total	166	100,0	100,0	

Note: n=166

The variables measured in the study were daily stress and emotional intelligence. The dimensions of the first variable are: health environment, school environment and family environment. As for the second variable, its dimensions are: Intrapersonal Intelligence, Interpersonal Intelligence, Adaptability and Stress Management.

To measure the variable daily stress, the Children's Daily Stress Inventory - IECI by Ma. V. Trianes, applicable to children from 1st to 6th grade, was used. It takes into account three important areas of child stress: health, consisting of 8 items; school, consisting of 7 items; and family, consisting of 7 items. With respect to test-retest reliability, correlations of 0.61, 0.66, 0.67, in the IECI factors, and 0.80 in the total stress score, were achieved over a three-month period. As for the internal consistency, in the sample, it ranged from 0.62 for health and psychosomatic problems to 0.81 for the overall stress score.

With respect to the emotional intelligence variable, the Ba-ron Emotional Intelligence Inventory ICE: NA, adapted by Nelly Ugarriza for our country, was used, which is applicable to children and adolescents between 7 and 18 years of age. It consists of two forms, complete and abbreviated. For this study, the abbreviated form was used, which has 30 items distributed in the four dimensions intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal, adaptability and stress management. For the validity of the internal structure of the BarOn I-CE:NA abbreviated form inventory, a principal components analysis with Varimax rotation was performed, yielding 4 factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management and adaptability. In the intrapersonal factor, the items have a factor loading between .46 and .47. In the interpersonal factor, the items have a factor load between .52 and .70. In adaptability, the items have a factor load between .62 and .73 and in stress management, the items have a factor load between .38 and .67. The reliability of the scores was estimated by means of Cron Bach's alpha, obtaining coefficients according to sex and age.

3. Results

Table 2 shows the levels reached by the sample in the daily stress variable. Of the total number of respondents 94 of them, representing 56.6%, do not present stress, while 43.4%, corresponding to 72 students, are in levels of mild and high stress.

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Table 2. *Daily stress level*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Stress-free	94	56,6
	Mild stress	60	36,2
	High stress	12	7,2
	Total	166	100,0

Note: n=166

Table 3 shows that only 17 students, 10.2%, present an adequate level of emotional intelligence, while 70.5%, 117 students, are at a low level and 19.3%, 32 students, at a very low level.

Table 3. *Level of Emotional Intelligence*

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Adequate	17	10,2
	Download	117	70,5
	Very low	32	19,3
	Total	166	100,0

Note: n=166

Taking into account the general hypothesis stated for the study "There is a relationship between daily stress and the emotional intelligence of elementary school students in a public institution" and according to the objective "To determine the relationship between daily stress and the emotional intelligence of elementary school students in a public institution", Table 5 shows that Spearman's Rho coefficient was -0.412, which indicates that there is an average negative correlation between the variables studied (rs = -0.412, p < 0.05).

Table 4. *Correlation between variables*

			INTELLIGENCE EMOTIONAL	DAILY STRESS
Spearman's Rho	DAILY STRESS	Correlation coefficient	-,412**	1,000
		Sig. (bilateral)	,000	.
		N	166	166
	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE	Correlation coefficient	1,000	-,412**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	,000
		N	166	166

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Table 5 shows the correlation of the variable Daily Stress with the dimensions of the variable Emotional Intelligence. With respect to the dimension Intrapersonal Intelligence, a negative average correlation is observed (rs. = -0.341, p > 0.05). A similar result is found in relation to the second dimension Interpersonal Intelligence (rs. = -0.224, p >0.05). As for the Adaptability dimension, it also reached a medium level of negative correlation, being the least significant (rs. = -0.149, p >0.05). When correlating Daily stress with the Stress management dimension, a negative correlation was also reached (rs. = -0.224, p >0.05).

Table 5 *Correlation between Daily Stress and Emotional Intelligence Dimensions*

		INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE	INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE	ADAPTABILITY	STRESS MANAGEMENT	DAILY STRESS
DAILY STRESS	Correlation coefficient	-,341**	-,224**	-,149	-,224**	1,000
Spearman 's Rho	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	,004	,055	,004	.
	N	166	166	166	166	166

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether there is a relationship between daily stress and emotional intelligence of elementary school students in a public institution, as well as the relationship of the first variable with the dimensions of the second, intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, adaptability and stress tolerance.

The statistical results confirm the negative correlation, since both variables are inversely correlated. These results coincide with those found by (Del Rosario & Mora, 2014), who, according to their research with elementary school students, sustain the relationship between emotional intelligence, stress and school adaptation. Likewise, coincidences are found with (Gómez & Monjarás, 2019) who found that the areas of daily stress and types of emotional coping are related to each other. Likewise, (Puigbó et al., 2019) found that emotional intelligence can generate coping in the face of stress. That is, the daily stress present in a subject can be adequately managed or not depending on the emotional capacity developed. Therefore, the inverse relationship found in the present research, the lower the level of daily stress, the better the development of emotional intelligence, and the better the level of emotional intelligence, the better the control of daily stress.

Regarding the relationship between daily stress and the intrapersonal intelligence dimension, a significant negative correlation was found, as well as (López, 2019) who found a relationship between work stress and intrapersonal intelligence. This similarity should be taken into account, since it leads us to the importance of this dimension and its components self-understanding, assertiveness and self-esteem, which allow the recognition of one's own emotions and, therefore, the proper management of these in the face of the various stressors that may arise in everyday life.

As for daily stress and interpersonal intelligence, a negative correlation was found, i.e., the better the development of interpersonal intelligence, the lower the levels of daily stress and vice versa. These results agree with (Trianes, 2014) who has found the relationship of daily stress in schoolchildren with difficulties in interpersonal relationships, aggressive behavior, irritability, negative attitude towards studies. According to (Ugarriza & Pajares, 2005), this dimension covers three aspects: empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationship. If students reach an adequate level of development in these components of interpersonal intelligence, they will be less affected by the difficulties or frustrations that cause daily stress. A negative correlation is also found between

daily stress and Adaptability, which includes the ability to solve problems, to be flexible, realistic and effective in handling changes, as well as to be effective in facing daily problems. This is consistent with the results found by (Del Rosario & Mora, 2014), who obtained high correlation values, indicating that, according to their study, the higher score means greater general maladaptation.

This concordance of results leads us to affirm that children with a better level of adaptability, capable of accepting reality and managing changes, as well as flexibility, can lessen the effects of family, health or academic stressors that may arise. On the other hand, those who do not develop these skills are more likely to be affected by daily stress in the three areas of family, health and school.

With respect to the negative correlation between daily stress and stress management, it is clear to say that the student who has an adequate development of the components of this dimension, such as stress tolerance and impulse control, will be able to overcome problems and daily stressful situations. Thus, as mentioned by (Ugarriza & Pajares, 2005) this scale allows the person to be able to cope with complex and emotionally difficult situations, facing them in a positive way. At the same time, impulse control allows regulating emotions, postponing impulses or temptations.

In view of the above, it can be said that, given the pandemic situation we are currently facing, the children in the sample studied have a high percentage of daily stress and most of them have low levels of emotional intelligence. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the negative correlation between both variables that leads to consider the need to develop emotional intelligence to reduce stress levels and, in turn, it is necessary to avoid stressful situations in children, for a better development of their emotional intelligence.

5. Conclusions

It was concluded that daily stress is inversely related to the development of emotional intelligence, and that it is necessary to work on the dimensions of emotional intelligence in order to reduce stress levels.
In daily stress, a good percentage of students are between high and low levels, due to sudden changes such as social isolation and non-face-to-face education, due to the pandemic context.
The levels of emotional intelligence achieved are worrisome since most of the students are at low and very low levels, so it is essential to work together in the development of skills that contribute to the improvement of this aspect.

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Based on the results, there is a need to develop experimental research, with the application of programs that allow the improvement in the levels of emotional intelligence. It is also advisable to develop programs with strategies that reinforce and improve the different areas of emotional intelligence and coping with stressful situations in elementary school students.

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