

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' JOB STRESS AND WILLINGNESS TO DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY AND PERFORMANT PUBLIC SERVICES*

Oana-Matilda SABIE

Corina-Cristina NASTACĂ

Maria-Roxana BRIȘCARIU

Oana-Matilda SABIE

Associated Professor, Department of Administration and Public Management, Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: oana.sabie@amp.ase.ro

Corina-Cristina NASTACĂ

Lecturer, Department of Administration and Public Management, Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: corina.nastaca@amp.ase.ro

Maria-Roxana BRIȘCARIU

Lecturer, Department of Administration and Public Management, Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: roxana.briscariu@man.ase.ro

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Abstract

Too little has been published on emotional intelligence in the public sector, despite the scientific literature's increased interest in the concept in recent years. The present research aim is to analyze whether and how public employees' emotional intelligence (EI) has an influence on their job stress (JS) level and willingness to deliver quality and performant public services (WDQS). In order to investigate the hypotheses, the study used a quantitative methodology and a conceptual deductive research technique based on a conceptual framework. For statistical analysis, we used the SPSS Statistics 22.0 program. This made it possible for us to build descriptive analyses and run several parametric tests to achieve the primary goal of our study. The findings showed that the employees of the National Agency for Public Procurement from Romania (ANAP) registered an average to above average EI level ($M = 4.99$), with no relevant significant influence on their stress level, and with a weak influence on their willingness to deliver quality public services. The study's respondents, although they register a high level of job stress ($M = 5.44$), demonstrated an average desire to deliver qualitative services to different stakeholders ($M = 4.89$), with low to average impact on the provided public services' performance ($M = 3.19$). From all the main sample characteristics, only the occupied position in the organization (independent variable) had a positive significant influence on employees' EI and JS level. In order to allow for comparisons of the results with those of the current study, future research should combine various methods of measuring emotional intelligence, job stress and public employees' willingness to provide quality and performant public services.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, job stress, public services, public employees, quality and performant services.

1. Introduction

In the present fast-paced and challenging environment, proficient and capable public employees are crucial in attaining success in organizations, as they should provide high-quality and efficient public services.

Over the past three decades, many researchers (Shmueli *et al.*, 2019; Supramaniam and Singaravelloo, 2021) have conducted analyses and developed predictive models of willingness to deliver quality and performant public services, with emotional intelligence and job or occupational stress among the most frequent antecedents (Aghdasi, Kiamanesh and Ebrahim, 2011). Emotional intelligence and job stress have been recognized as direct antecedents of public employees' intent to deliver quality public services (Brackett *et al.*, 2010), suggesting that public employees with higher level of emotional intelligence and lower stress level would have a higher level of willingness to deliver quality and performant public services (Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler, 2010). Furthermore, emotional intelligence tends to be negatively related to the stress level of employees (Wu, 2011), indicating that employees with higher EI will exhibit a lower level of job stress. Besides, emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between job stress and employees' willingness to deliver quality public services (Chan and Wan, 2012; Guy and Lee, 2015; Lee, 2017).

According to Singh (2000), managers and scholars agree that frontline employees are essential in terms of their ability to provide quality services. The attitudes and behaviors of frontline employees have a big impact on how different stakeholders and especially customers perceive the service, thus organizations providing services need to figure out how to manage their human resources well so that their behaviors and attitudes enable them to deliver high-quality services.

Employees working in public service positions require increased level of emotional intelligence due to frequent interactions with citizens and other stakeholders, who actively seek out public administration institutions that provide quality and performant public services (Guy and Lee, 2015; Sabie *et al.*, 2020). Work that is so emotionally demanding might increase the risk of job stress and dissatisfaction. Significantly, organizational outcomes such as job performance, quality of services and absenteeism are closely correlated with job stress, burnout, job satisfaction, leadership and emotional intelligence (Corboş *et al.*, 2021; Mina-Raiu, Bucura and Raiu, 2021; Daniel *et al.*, 2023; Davidov, 2023).

Starting from the previously presented research results and investigation of literature review on the mentioned subjects, our study aims at addressing a research knowledge gap, by analyzing the relationship between public employees' emotional intelligence, job stress and their willingness to deliver quality public services. The research continues with a short literature review and conceptual framework development, followed by methodology description, results and discussion, conclusion, research limits and future directions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Emotional intelligence

The origins of emotional intelligence (EI) may be traced back to the early 19th century, when Thorndike (1920) analyzed several forms of intelligence, with particular emphasis on social intelligence. Social intelligence can be seen as a forerunner of EI, being initially proposed and introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1993), and in our days is considered a component of EI. Goleman (2001) is among the writers who popularized the concept of emotional intelligence by talking about own feelings, identifying others' emotions, and establishing a connection with them. In recent times, Bar-On (2000) and Mayer (2004) have introduced the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) to new contexts and reinforced its significance from many life angles.

Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to accurately perceive and understand their own emotional boundaries, as well as the emotions of others. This skill distinguishes us from others in terms of our behavior. This form of intelligence is not inherent, like cognitive intelligence (IQ), but rather adaptable and optimal based on the specific situation we encounter (Nica and Sabie, 2023). The models developed by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Bar-On (1997), Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2000), Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000), Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), Wong and Law (2002) were the most significant and widely used models for measuring EI.

Recent research has focused on emotional intelligence (EI) as an important concept for employees to effectively regulate their own emotions while doing their job duties. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) plays an important role because public sector employees, particularly public managers, frequently handle stressful tasks and responsibilities (Lee, 2017). The majority of job duties in the public service occupations are emotionally draining (Guy and Lee, 2015). Employees with high emotional intelligence have a positive attitude, demonstrating more satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty to their job and organization. This, in turn, fosters a favorable climate that promotes enhanced work performance and the delivery of high-quality services (Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2017).

2.2. Job stress

Stress is defined as the body's and mind's responses to excessive demands and pressures, particularly when people take on undertakings that are above their capabilities (Baker, 1985). According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (1999), job stress (JS) is described as the detrimental physical and emotional reactions that arise when an employee's talents, resources, and needs do not align with the requirements of their role or job. As stated by Frone (1990), the concepts of 'occupational role stress' and JS are basically similar.

It has been challenging to summarize or statistically consolidate the research results as well as to rely on a cumulative corpus of validated theory in order to establish new areas for investigation due to the variety of theories and models of job stress. The theoretical

foundation, completeness in representing the domain of organizational concerns, and applicability to various jobs are all factors that contribute to the diversity of available measures.

In Wu's (2011) study, the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on professional stress and employee performance is examined. The findings suggest that individuals with high levels of EI tend to exhibit higher levels of workplace performance and that are more likely to be able to mitigate the possible adverse effects of work-related stress on performance. Also, Cherniss (2000) points out that EI is not a reliable indicator of work performance in and of itself. However, dispositions like optimism and stress management skills might affect performance at work.

Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) and Sy, Tram and O'Hara (2006) claim in their studies that employees with high EI experience low JS. In contrast, employees with low EI have less self-emotion appraisal, which results in their inability to manage their emotions (Brişcariu, 2020), this conducting to high JS in the presence of challenging circumstances. This, in turn, negatively impacts their job satisfaction and performance. Bar-On *et al.* (2000) and Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) conducted a study to examine the relation between EI and JS. Their research focused on studying the relationships between these variables in various fields of work. A statistically significant inverse relation was found between EI and JS, as demonstrated by the research results. Bar-On *et al.* (2000) examined EI in three professional categories: police officers, child care professionals, and mental health care instructors; the study findings revealed that police officers had superior levels of EI compared to the other categories.

2.3. Employees' willingness to deliver quality and performant public services (WDQS)

In the context of emotional intelligence and customer service, WDQS is underscored by proactive availability, personal commitment (Daniel *et al.*, 2023), empathetic attitudes (Brackett *et al.*, 2010), and the ability to be flexible and adaptable (Chan and Wan, 2012).

Danquah and Wireko's study (2014) contend that employees who possess elevated levels of emotional intelligence are more adept at anticipating and fulfilling customer expectations, thereby enhancing loyalty and satisfaction. Therefore, the article underscores the critical importance of cultivating emotional intelligence in employees as a means of augmenting service delivery and strengthening customer satisfaction.

The construct of WDQS can be effectively understood through the lenses of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. From a social exchange perspective, adverse employee responses, such as job stress, often stem from situations that generate a strong sense of inequity or unfairness. Social exchange (Noblet and Rodwell, 2009) suggests that individuals constantly strive to balance what they invest in a relationship (e.g., time, skills, effort) with what they receive in return (appreciation, pay, recognition). In the context of public service, employees' willingness to deliver quality services is seen as part of a reciprocal relationship between the employees and the organization.

The JD-R Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors that influence employee well-being and performance (Daniel *et al.*, 2023). According to the JD-R model, job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, support from supervisors) play crucial roles in determining employees' ability to cope with their job requirements (Levitats, Vigoda-Gadot and Vashdi, 2019; Profiroiu *et al.*, 2022). In the context of public service, the WDQS is influenced by the balance between these demands and resources.

In conclusion, integrating the principles of SET and the JD-R Model offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive employees' willingness to deliver quality and performant public services. These frameworks highlight the importance of reciprocal relationships and the balance between job demands and resources in fostering an engaged workforce and performance.

2.4. Hypothesis development

Employees with high EI level, which encompasses adaptive emotional characteristics, aptitudes, and proficiencies, tend to experience more favorable results in several aspects of life, including psychological well-being, academic performance and professional success. While the specific processes connecting EI with these outcomes are not well understood, there is a suggestion that EI may function as a protective barrier against job stress. In theory, those with high emotional intelligence should have a more adaptive reaction when confronted with a stressful scenario compared to those with low emotional intelligence, such as a decrease in reaction (Mikolajczak *et al.*, 2007). An increasing number of research have begun investigating the concept with regard to EI, however, the findings remain inconclusive (Lea *et al.*, 2019), although there are also studies (Higgs, 2004; Varca, 2004) that demonstrated that employees with higher levels of EI have a lower probability of encountering burnout or job stress and a higher probability of enhancing work performance due to their superior interpersonal skills and capacity to withstand emotional stress. Nevertheless, there is limited knowledge regarding the relationship between the emotional intelligence of public employees and the decrease of job-related stress levels in the public administration sector.

Considering the previous debate, we suggest hypothesis 1: 'Public employees with higher level of emotional intelligence have lower levels of job stress'.

2.4.1. Willingness to deliver quality and performant public services

Public services sector in Balkan countries is one of the biggest employers, where public services employees are expected to act and behave in order to respond to citizens' needs or to serve the general interest of the community (Profiroiu and Negoită, 2022). To determine how performant are these services, there is a constant need for public administration to apply performance management systems that require the redesign of management, decision-making, data and organizational system by creating strategies that would lead to performance and operationalize the activity, regardless of the size, organizational structure,

or tutelary control of the public sector (Vrabie, Cristache and Năstase, 2022). But in order to provide quality and performant public services, public employees must cultivate the capacity to overcome challenges, bounce back, and emerge stronger and more successful. They need to develop social and vocational skills, even when faced with significant psychological and social stress. This includes the ability to adapt to changes and develop favorable competencies to navigate through stressful situations (Profiroiu and Negoită, 2022) in order to have the continuous desire to provide quality and performant public services.

2.4.2. Emotional intelligence and public employees' willingness to deliver quality and performant public services

Results of Danquah and Wireko's study (2014) demonstrated that EI has a significant and direct influence on employees' willingness to deliver quality services. Similarly, Komlósi (2013), Kurian (2013) and Kim (2007) assert that EI serves as the foundation for quality service delivery via customer relationship management. Emotional intelligence was also investigated by Bar-On *et al.* (2000) in three different occupational categories: police officers, professionals working with children, and instructors working in mental health care. When compared to the other groups, the outcomes of the study showed that police officers had much higher levels of emotional intelligence. After the tasks assigned to police officers were successfully completed, and the officers' emotional responses were seen as positive, they were seen as employees able to provide quality services to the community, and they were more effective at managing stressful circumstances that arose on the job.

Therefore, we propose hypothesis 2: 'Public employees' emotional intelligence level is positively related with their willingness to deliver quality and performant public services'.

2.4.3. Job stress level and public employees' willingness to deliver quality and performant public services

According to Cozma *et al.* (2022), in Romanian public administration institutions that are delivering public services, job stress is an important issue because of the demanding schedules as well as high levels of stress that employees experience due to political interference and lack of consistency in policy implementation. Service quality pertains to the manner in which the service is provided. Citizens assess the quality of public services based on their preconceived assumptions of how public service employees are expected to act when they engage with service providers. The poor evaluation of service quality will occur when citizens' expectations are not fulfilled, resulting in the emergence of a service performance gap (Nawafleh, 2020; Idayati *et al.*, 2020). Public employees often feel they have to reduce service quality in order to meet the demands of a large number of customers (different stakeholders) in a short amount of time due to heavy workloads (Tummers *et al.*, 2015). According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), the quality of service is negatively impacted when individuals in the service sector are either unable or unwilling to provide service at a satisfactory level. As a result, the organization's efforts to meet customers' expectations are greatly influenced by the service employees' determination to provide

high-quality service. Public employees are required to commit to specific behavioral standards in order to satisfy customers. Those who struggle to fulfil these standards and also fulfil the service demands of their leaders are at danger of experiencing job stress and even burnout (Humborstad, Humborstad and Whitfield, 2007).

Starting from the literature, the next hypothesis (3) was formulated: ‘Public employees’ job stress level is negatively related with their willingness to deliver quality and performant public services’.

The proposed theoretical framework of the relationship between emotional intelligence, job stress and employees’ willingness to deliver quality and performant public services is displayed in Figure 1.

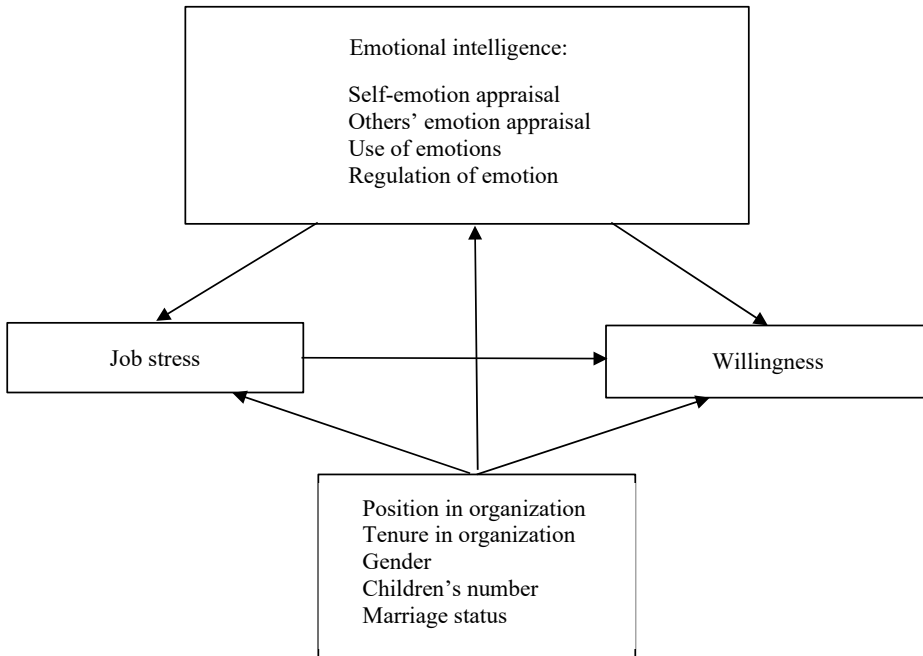


Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the relationship between emotional intelligence, job stress, and employees’ willingness to deliver quality and performant public services

Source: Authors, own illustration based on literature review

3. Methodology

The research aim is to determine if and how public employees’ emotional intelligence affects their stress level and willingness to deliver quality public services.

Given the aim of the present study, we decided to realize a pilot study and to distribute the research questionnaire among public employees from the National Agency for Public Procurement from Romania (ANAP). The whole statistical population was 198

employees, but we received only 119 valid responses, resulting in a sample size of 119 respondents, being a non-probability, convenience sample. Additional facts about the sample worth mentioning are that all respondents: are public employees working full time, being the respective holders of their position; have at least 1 year seniority in their current job and are graduates of higher education institutions. The survey was applied during October 22 – November 30, 2023, online, and had 119 valid anonymous responses.

In order to validate our hypotheses, we used SPSS software for both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. We looked at indicators of the central tendency for our key variables, and also at correlations and regressions between them. The questionnaire included 36 items, as follows: 16 items for measuring the emotional intelligence level, 9 items for measuring the job stress level, 1 item for measuring public employees’ willingness to deliver quality services, 9 items for identifying the respondent profile (socio-demographic data), and 1 item to measure public employee perception regarding whether his/ her stress levels influence the performance of the delivered services.

The sample method used was the exhaustive approach, which is why it is important to examine the key features of the employees who took part in the study. All the respondents are ANAP’s employees. The research respondents’ distribution according to socio-demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Main characteristics of the sample

Item	Categories	Percent	Mean	SD
Gender	Feminine	83.19%		
	Masculine	16.81%		
Education (<i>range 1-10</i>)	High school and professional	-		
	Bachelor’s degree	64.98%		
	Master’s degree	34.13%		
	PhD and post-university	0.89%		
Marriage status	Not married	33.61%		
	Married	66.39%		
Number of children	0 children	31.9%		
	1 child	28.6%		
	2 children	26.9%		
	3 children	8.4%		
	≥ 4 children	4.2%		
Tenure in organization (years)	<i>Minimum 1 year – Maximum 39 years</i>		19.82	11.11
Position in organization	Management level	16.81%		
	Non-management level	83.19%		

Source: Authors, own data processing

Next, we present how we developed the tool with which we measured the three concepts used in the framework proposed in Figure 1.

3.1. Emotional intelligence

In 2002, Wong and Law created a self-reported EI measurement tool called the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence measure (WLEIS). They built this scale by using various samples and basing it on the concept of emotional intelligence, using the four EI dimensions suggested by Davies, Stankov and Roberts (1998):

- ‘Appraisal and expression of emotion in one’s self’ refers to an individual’s capacity to comprehend their own feelings and to naturally communicate those emotions;
- ‘Appraisal and recognition of emotion in others’ refers to an individual’s capacity to recognize and comprehend the emotions of those people with whom they interact or are in their surrounding area;
- ‘Regulation of emotion in one’s self’ refers to an individual’s capacity to effectively manage and control their emotions, facilitating a quicker resolution of psychological suffering;
- ‘Use of emotion to facilitate performance’ refers to the capacity of an individual to effectively channel their emotions into productive activities and personal achievement.

Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010) and Lee (2017) used the scale developed by Wong and Law (2002), demonstrating the validity and reliability of the scales.

3.2. Job stress

For measuring the public employees’ job stress level, we combined and used a new scale comprising nine items, adapted from Alves *et al.* (2004) and Shukla and Srivastava (2016), since the existing job or occupational stress measurement tools include a large number of items or questions, varying from 27 to 96 items. We decided to adapt and use a shorter scale, since public employees have time constraints and we needed them to better focus and reduce subjectivity when completing the questionnaire.

3.3. Employees’ willingness to deliver quality and performant public services

Public employees’ willingness to provide performant and quality public service was measured using a single question, as Humborstad, Humborstad and Whitfield (2007) did in their research.

4. Results and discussions

The section presents the results of the study as well as hypotheses validation, followed by discussions. The data was processed in SPSS Software.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all items and dimensions of the Emotional Intelligence Scale designed by Wong and Law (2002) used in the present study. ANAP public employees’ perception was measured using a Likert scale on 7 points (1– Strongly Disagree and 7– Strongly Agree). The computed scores are interpreted as follows: 1–3 low level of EI, 3–5 average level of EI, 5–6 above average, and 6–7 high level of EI.

For the sample of 119 participants, the average score for Emotional Intelligence was 4.99, meaning that the majority of the respondents have an average capacity of expressing, understanding and managing own emotions as well as of others. The mean level of each dimension of the EI is between 4.6 and 5.32. Public employees participants in the study achieved the highest scores in the Others' Emotion Appraisal ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 0.56$) and Use of Emotions ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 0.51$), revealing an above average capacity of awareness and understanding others' emotions and feelings and of using personal emotions in a constructive manner in order to achieve performance and provide quality work. On the other

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for Emotional Intelligence scale items and dimensions

Items and dimensions for EI Scale: 1–Strongly Disagree, 7–Strongly Agree	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
I have a good sense of why I feel certain feelings most of the time (SEA1).	119	4.66	1.195	1.428	-1.351	2.405
I have a good understanding of my own emotions (SEA2).	119	4.68	.956	.914	-2.809	7.305
I really understand what I feel (SEA3).	119	4.25	.856	.733	-.678	1.546
I always know whether I am happy or not (SEA4).	119	5.21	.801	.642	-1.103	2.289
Total Self-emotions appraisal (SEA)	119	4.7	.858	.737	-1.726	3.594
I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior (RE1).	119	4.23	.682	.465	.659	.786
I am a good observer of others' emotions (RE2).	119	4.21	1.007	1.015	-.081	.603
I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others (RE3).	119	5.13	.700	.490	-.794	2.216
I have a good understanding of the emotions of people around me (RE4).	119	4.82	.747	.559	-.427	.151
Total Regulation of emotions (RE)	119	4.6	.731	.535	-.258	.462
I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them (UE1).	118	5.27	.517	.268	1.015	.939
I always tell myself I am a competent person (UE2).	119	5.51	.746	.557	-.915	1.164
I am a self-motivating person (UE3).	119	5.06	.705	.497	.213	-.193
I would always encourage myself to try my best (UE4).	119	5.45	.564	.318	.185	-.635
Total Use of emotions (UE)	119	5.32	.514	.265	.075	.407
I am able to control my temper so that I can handle difficulties rationally (OEA1).	119	5.18	.988	.977	-.952	-.232
I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions (OEA2).	119	5.12	.794	.630	-.111	-.634
I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry (OEA3).	119	5.13	.561	.314	.036	.084
I have good control of my emotions (OEA4).	119	5.87	.333	.111	-2.282	3.263
Total Others emotion appraisal (OEA)	119	5.32	.564	.318	-.851	.184

Source: Authors, own data processing

dimensions—Regulation of emotions (M = 4.6, SD = 0.73) and Self-emotions appraisal (M = 4.7, SD = 0.85)—participants in the study scored less compared with the other dimensions revealing an average capacity of expressing, understanding and managing own emotions. Looking at each item of the scale, the lowest score was registered on RE2 (‘I am a good observer of others’ emotions’) (M = 4.21, SD = 1.007) and the highest on OEA4 (‘I have good control of my emotions’) (M = 5.87, SD = 0.33). Regarding standard deviation values, it can be observed they are lower to 1 or close to 1, indicating low variance and the dispersion of data close to the mean.

Table 3 presents the correlations among the items used for measuring EI. Most of the items are highly correlated with values higher than 0.50. Some items are moderately correlated (< 0.50), but they are not predominant. In addition, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.96, meaning a high reliability of the scale (Balducci, Fraccaroli and Schaufeli, 2010), the items measuring the same concept consistently.

Table 3: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix on EI items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
SEA1	1.000															
SEA2	.739	1.000														
SEA3	.730	.764	1.000													
SEA4	.711	.687	.898	1.000												
RE1	.791	.595	.801	.765	1.000											
RE2	.805	.678	.823	.816	.880	1.000										
RE3	.835	.711	.848	.795	.912	.933	1.000									
RE4	.681	.569	.631	.576	.749	.717	.761	1.000								
UE1	.532	.367	.574	.538	.740	.641	.626	.550	1.000							
UE2	.659	.662	.592	.612	.635	.656	.646	.569	.496	1.000						
UE3	.658	.494	.706	.653	.836	.782	.791	.713	.703	.539	1.000					
UE4	.503	.322	.481	.425	.611	.562	.574	.486	.479	.487	.573	1.000				
OEA1	.711	.725	.588	.595	.694	.745	.749	.676	.504	.704	.630	.509	1.000			
OEA2	.614	.508	.542	.574	.702	.742	.703	.566	.564	.584	.609	.467	.773	1.000		
OEA3	.582	.488	.622	.601	.656	.598	.647	.582	.497	.472	.539	.380	.510	.480	1.000	
OEA4	.683	.777	.678	.673	.539	.636	.655	.518	.300	.572	.429	.220	.635	.410	.586	1.000

Source: Authors, own data processing

In order to measure job stress level, a 9 items scale was used (see Table 4), adapted after Shukla and Srivastava (2016) and Alves *et al.* (2004). The items were measured on a 7 points Likert scale (1– Strongly Disagree and 7– Strongly Agree) and the scores are interpreted as it follows: 1–3 low level of job stress, 3–5 normal level of stress, 5–6 high level and 6–7 very high level of stress. The general score achieved by the 119 participants after computing the scores for each item was 5.44 meaning a high level of job stress. It should be noted that the average level on every item is high, ANAP employees scoring above five

on each item. The highest mean was registered on item ‘Many people at my office are tired of the organizations’ demands’ ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.14$) and the lowest on ‘I feel bad when I take a day off’ ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.14$). The standard deviation values are close to 1, though the dispersion of data is close to the mean and the variance is low.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for Job Stress scale items

Items for Job Stress Scale: 1–Strongly Disagree, 7–Strongly Agree	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
I have a lot of work and very little time to do it (JS1).	119	5.45	1.133	1.283	-1.375	3.396
I feel so burdened because my work demands too much effort (JS2).	119	5.51	1.134	1.286	-1.858	5.163
I feel that I never have time to do anything else (JS3).	119	5.39	1.194	1.426	-1.489	2.903
Many people at my office are tired of the organizations’ demands (JS4).	119	5.71	1.143	1.308	-2.150	4.607
My job makes me nervous (JS5).	119	5.52	1.072	1.150	-1.502	3.571
My job demands have a high negative impact on me (JS6).	119	5.30	1.101	1.213	-1.247	3.446
I don’t have a good relation with my supervisors (JS7).	119	5.39	1.067	1.139	-1.316	3.473
Sometimes when I think about my job, I get a tight feeling in my chest (JS8).	119	5.42	1.204	1.449	-1.899	4.537
I feel bad when I take a day off (JS9).	119	5.24	1.148	1.317	-1.399	3.794
Total		5.44				

Source: Authors, own data processing

Correlations were also computed among items used for measuring the job stress level (see Table 5). In this case, all items are highly correlated and some of them can be considered repetitive (all values are above 0.50 and close to 1). Furthermore, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.97, showing a high reliability of the scale (Balducci, Fraccaroli and Schaufeli, 2010), the items measuring the same concept.

Table 5: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix on Stress items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
S1	1.000								
S2	.804	1.000							
S3	.755	.710	1.000						
S4	.786	.826	.789	1.000					
S5	.742	.726	.781	.772	1.000				
S6	.781	.771	.793	.762	.770	1.000			
S7	.814	.812	.730	.788	.715	.748	1.000		
S8	.794	.822	.818	.858	.774	.779	.760	1.000	
S9	.786	.753	.830	.807	.788	.801	.781	.811	1.000

Source: Authors, own data processing

At the end of the questionnaire, two more issues were addressed: public employees' willingness to deliver quality public services for citizens and their perception about the influence of stress level on the performance of the delivered services. These questions were addressed because of their potential relation with emotional intelligence. According to different research studies (Dimitriadis, 2007; Roland and Olalekan, 2020; Supramaniam and Singaravelloo, 2021) public employees with higher emotional intelligence could deliver more qualitative services and human resources from public administration institutions with higher level of stress could lead to negative job outcomes such as low performance (Yusoff, Khan and Azam, 2013; Gould-Williams *et al.*, 2014; Desa, Khoon and Asaari, 2018). The answers were also measured on the same 7 points Likert scale used for measuring EI and job stress level. On the one hand, it is observed that the public employees have an average towards above average desire to deliver qualitative services to citizens ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 0.83$). On the other hand, even if the results show a high level of job stress, the participants considered that stress does not impact the performance of services they deliver to a high extent ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.38$).

Table 6: Descriptive statistics for other items

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Willingness to deliver qualitative services	119	4.89	.831	.691	.028	-.280
The impact of stress on job performance	119	3.19	1.386	1.920	.813	.372

Source: Authors, own data processing

To test the first hypothesis of the study (H1. Public employees with higher level of emotional intelligence have lower levels of job stress) a regression model between job stress (dependent variable) and emotional intelligence (independent variable) was computed (see Table 7). As it can be observed, the model is valid and statistically significant (Sig. < .05). It shows a weak relationship between variables, namely 22.7% of job stress is explained by the level of emotional intelligence. Also, considering the four dimensions of the EI, the model shows the existence of a direct negative relationship between stress and the third EI dimension—UE (Use of emotions) showing that the lower the level of emotional involvement on the part of the employee, the higher the level of stress. The results validate the hypothesis, but it should be taken into consideration the low impact of EI on job stress and the need to search for other factors with more impact on the level of stress, like co-worker support, job expectation conflict, or work-life balance. In accordance with our findings, Aghdasi, Kiamanesh and Ebrahim (2011) also demonstrated in their research that there is weak (direct or indirect) relationship between emotional intelligence and job stress.

The second and third hypotheses (H2. Public employees' emotional intelligence level is positively related with their willingness to deliver quality and performant public services, and H3. Public employees' job stress level is negatively related with their willingness to

Table 7: Regression model between EI and Job Stress

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.477 ^a	.227	.200	.90992

a. Predictors: (Constant), OEATotal, UETotal, SEATotal, RETotal

b. Dependent Variable: StressTotal

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.780	4	6.945	8.388	.000 ^b
	Residual	94.387	114	.828		
	Total	122.166	118			

a. Dependent Variable: StressTotal

b. Predictors: (Constant), OEATotal, UETotal, SEATotal, RETotal

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	9.704	1.120		8.663	.000
	SEATotal	.142	.210	.119	.676	.501
	RETTotal	-.238	.322	-.171	-.738	.462
	UETotal	-1.139	.328	-.576	-3.473	.001
	OEATotal	.417	.299	.231	1.394	.166

a. Dependent Variable: StressTotal

Source: Authors, own data processing

deliver quality and performant public services) were also tested using a regression model in which all three variables were included (see Table 8). The model is valid and statistically significant (Sig. = .000). The results show that 61.2% ($R^2 = .612$) of the willingness to deliver qualitative and performant public services depends on employee's level of EI. Stress has no influence on this willingness. The relation between variables (EI and willingness) is positive and strong (as shown by the Beta standardized coefficients). Consequently, with higher level of EI, the willingness to deliver qualitative and performant public services increases. The results of the model lead to the validation of the second hypothesis and the invalidation of the third hypothesis.

Table 8: Regression model between EI, Job Stress and willingness to deliver qualitative services

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.782 ^a	.612	.605	.523

a. Predictors: (Constant), IETotal, StressTotal

b. Dependent Variable: I am willing to deliver qualitative services

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	49.893	2	24.947	91.325	.000 ^b
	Residual	31.687	116	.273		
	Total	81.580	118			

a. Dependent Variable: I am willing to deliver qualitative services

b. Predictors: (Constant), IETotal, StressTotal

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.055	.574		-.097	.923
	StressTotal	-.030	.051	-.036	-.582	.561
	IETotal	1.024	.083	.768	12.396	.000

a. Dependent Variable: I am willing to deliver qualitative services

Source: Authors, own data processing

5. Conclusions

The research's results are in line with other scholar studies (Danquah and Wireko, 2014; Lee, 2017). The study's participants who were public employees scored highest on the Others' Emotion Appraisal and Use of Emotions assessment, demonstrating an above average ability to recognize and comprehend the emotions and feelings of others as well as to constructively use one's own emotions in order to perform well and produce high-quality work. One observation is that public employees generally have a strong inclination to provide high-quality public services to citizens. Despite experiencing high levels of job stress, the participants believe that this stress does not significantly affect their performance in delivering public services.

The work environment of the National Agency for Public Procurement (ANAP) is marked by rigidity, as it operates within a strictly regulated legal framework. Employees are required to possess a high level of specialized knowledge and maintain meticulous attention to legislative details. Any interpretation or deviation from these specific rules can result in severe consequences and stringent sanctions. Therefore, the ability of employees

to manage the unique challenges of their roles, despite experiencing high levels of stress, as indicated by the data, besides mediation by EI, is likely influenced also by other contextual factors inherent to procurement roles, such as organizational culture, bureaucratic structure or specific job demands. These contextual factors may be the purpose of further study, building upon the data and insights presented in this research.

The results do, however, also demonstrate that emotional intelligence is not entirely correlated with job stress and the desire to provide high-quality public services. Also, only the employees' occupied position in the organization had an influence on EI and JS level.

5.1. Practical implications

The findings of our study are relevant to executives and human resources managers in public sector organizations, as well as worldwide practitioners and the scientific community. Therefore, public managers could pay more attention to employees' EI development in order to help them better cope within different stressful contexts and maintain their willingness to provide quality and performant public services at high levels. Additionally, investing in resources such as EI training, supportive leadership, and fostering a positive organizational culture can significantly enhance employees' resilience and proactive behavior, ultimately leading to superior service delivery.

5.2. Limitations and future research directions

The findings of this study should be taken into account with regard to its limitations. The survey's answers may have been dishonest owing to suspicion or influenced by bias resulting from negative experiences with different polls, or pressures and changes to the job environment. These assessment tools (emotional intelligence, job-related stress, willingness to deliver quality services) demonstrate sufficient reliability and validity (Wong and Law, 2002; Humborstad, Humborstad and Whitfield, 2007; Shukla and Srivastava, 2016).

The limits of the present research are starting points and suggestions for future studies. For example, the way job stress and willingness to deliver quality public services were measured, could be subject to further investigation, especially in relation with other stressors and specific quality dimensions.

Future studies, for instance, may address limited constructs that have been researched about how public employees' experiences with stress at job affect their ability to provide quality and performant public services, particularly when activities require varying levels of self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotions or regulation of emotions. Positive evaluations from citizens as well as from other stakeholders are substantially influenced by the quality of public services. It is of strategic significance for public managers to comprehend how public employees and public administration organizations can effectively serve their stakeholders, even in the face of complaints and lawsuits. Further investigation should incorporate alternative measures of EI and JS to provide a comparison of results with the present study.

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