

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Convicted Offenders

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Abstract— Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a significant psychological construct in understanding behavioral outcomes, particularly in the field of criminal psychology. This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and convicted offenders using the Offender Screening Tool (OST). EI was measured through four central dimensions: intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, and interpersonal management. A total of 200 convicted offenders were assessed. Results demonstrated that offenders with low or below-average EI obtained significantly higher OST scores, indicating elevated levels of criminal risk factors, while those with average EI consistently scored lower. This suggests that higher emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor against criminal behavior.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, Convicted offenders, intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal management, criminal risk

I. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage emotions within oneself as well as in social interactions. It also includes using emotional information effectively to guide behavior and decision-making. Salovey and Mayer (1990) first conceptualized emotional intelligence as a unique cluster of emotional skills distinct from cognitive ability. Goleman (1995) later expanded the concept, emphasizing its impact on personal achievement, interpersonal relationships, and adaptability in complex settings. Unlike IQ, which focuses on reasoning and problem-solving, EI highlights how emotions influence thinking, actions, and relationships.

Broadly, EI can be divided into two overarching domains: **awareness** and **management**. Awareness refers to recognizing emotions—both internally and in others—while management involves controlling and guiding emotional responses for positive outcomes. Each of these domains operates at two levels: **intrapersonal** (self-focused) and **interpersonal** (other-focused). When combined, they form four major dimensions of EI: intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, and interpersonal management. These interconnected dimensions explain how emotions shape both individual behavior and social interactions.

Individuals with strong emotional intelligence are able to accurately identify their feelings, regulate impulsive behaviors, empathize with others, and maintain effective communication. Such skills encourage cooperation, resilience, and constructive problem-solving. On the other hand, weak emotional intelligence is commonly associated with heightened aggression, poor stress tolerance, conflict in relationships, and reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms such as

substance misuse. Many of these characteristics are frequently observed among offender populations, making EI a significant factor in criminological and psychological studies.

Intrapersonal awareness is the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, motivations, strengths, and limitations. When people have this capacity, they are able to reflect on emotional triggers and predict how these triggers affect their choices. For instance, a person who realizes that anger makes them act impulsively may take preventive steps to calm themselves before engaging in risky behavior. Among offenders, however, low intrapersonal awareness is widespread. Many struggle to identify their emotions or deny them altogether, which contributes to denial of responsibility, impulsive actions, and reliance on maladaptive coping strategies. These tendencies can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal conduct.

Interpersonal awareness involves the ability to interpret and empathize with the emotions of others. It includes sensitivity to nonverbal signals, perspective-taking, and understanding how one's actions impact others. Empathy is central to this dimension, as it enables individuals to respond with concern and consideration. People who are high in interpersonal awareness

often build stronger social connections and engage in cooperative behavior. By contrast, offenders with deficits in this area frequently misread or dismiss the emotions of others. This lack of empathy may result in aggression, manipulative behaviors, or indifference to victims' suffering, which in turn reinforces antisocial patterns.

Intrapersonal management refers to how individuals regulate and control their emotional states, impulses, and stress. Effective self-regulation allows people to stay calm during challenges, manage frustration, and adapt to unexpected changes. Those with strong self-control can delay gratification and avoid rash decisions. In offender populations, however, this dimension is often underdeveloped. Many individuals display frequent anger outbursts, struggle to cope with stress, or turn to substance use as a way of managing emotions. Poor emotional regulation has been linked to impulsive crimes and repeated offending, making this skill crucial in understanding criminal behavior.

Interpersonal management concerns the ability to manage social relationships productively. This involves conflict resolution, constructive communication, cooperation, and the ability to influence or support others. People with high interpersonal management skills can defuse conflicts and maintain trust within relationships. In contrast, offenders often exhibit hostility, poor communication strategies, and dysfunctional relational patterns. These challenges not only fuel ongoing conflict but also make reintegration into society after imprisonment more difficult. Offenders with limited interpersonal management are more likely to maintain antisocial peer groups and encounter persistent relational difficulties, both of which increase recidivism risk.

Altogether, these four dimensions highlight emotional intelligence as a collection of interrelated skills that influence both personal and social behavior. Strong EI supports empathy, resilience, conflict resolution, and self-control, whereas low EI creates vulnerabilities that contribute to impulsivity, hostility, and criminal activity. For this reason, emotional intelligence is increasingly regarded as an important target for offender rehabilitation programs. By teaching skills in self-awareness, empathy, emotion regulation, and relationship-building, correctional systems can help reduce reoffending and support healthier social reintegration.

Convicted Offend reconvicted offenders represent a specific group within the wider population of individuals who commit crimes. While many people may engage in criminal behaviour during their lifetime, not all are apprehended, prosecuted, or found guilty. A convicted offender, by contrast, is someone who has gone through the legal system and been formally declared guilty of an offense. This legal status is determined through a process that includes investigation, arrest, trial, and judicial evaluation of evidence. Conviction occurs when legal authorities determine, on the basis of sufficient evidence, that an individual is guilty of a criminal act, thereby holding them formally accountable under the law.

The consequences for convicted offenders vary depending on the seriousness of the crime and the laws of the jurisdiction. Minor offenses may result in fines, probation, or community service, while serious crimes can lead to imprisonment, life sentences, or, in certain legal systems, capital punishment. Increasingly, modern judicial frameworks recognize that punishment alone is insufficient to address the root causes of criminality. As a result, many systems now include rehabilitative approaches such as counseling, vocational training, therapy, anger management programs, and substance abuse treatment. These measures aim not only to penalize but also to reduce recidivism and assist offenders in reintegrating into society.

Convicted offenders provide valuable insight for criminological study, as their life histories and psychological profiles often reveal patterns linked to criminality. Many share common risk factors such as exposure to adverse childhood experiences, dysfunctional family environments, poor educational attainment, and histories of substance abuse. These patterns suggest that offending is often rooted in a combination of personal vulnerabilities and structural disadvantages. By analyzing convicted offenders, researchers can better understand the pathways leading to crime and develop targeted interventions.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the overall level of emotional intelligence among convicted offenders.
2. To analyze differences in the domains of EI—interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal management, and intrapersonal management—in convicted offenders.
3. To assess whether low emotional intelligence is associated with criminal behavior patterns.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- **H1:** Convicted offenders will exhibit significantly lower levels of emotional intelligence compared to general

population norms.

- **H2:** Deficits in intrapersonal and interpersonal management will be strongly associated with aggressive and antisocial behaviors.
- **H3:** Higher emotional intelligence will be negatively correlated with the severity and frequency of criminal behavior.

III. METHOD

III.I. PARTICIPANTS

The study sample consisted of **200 convicted offenders** incarcerated in correctional facilities in India. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 years.

III.II. INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Offenders convicted of crimes and serving sentences in correctional institutions.
- Age between 18–45 years.
- Ability to read and understand Hindi.

III.III. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Individuals with diagnosed severe psychiatric disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder).
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities or neurological impairments.
- Offenders unwilling to participate voluntarily.

III.IV. MEASURES

1. **Demographic Data Sheet** – to collect details on age, gender, education, type of crime, and sentence length.
2. **Emotional Intelligence Scale** – a standardized tool measuring four domains of EI: intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, and interpersonal management.
3. **Criminal Behavior Checklist** – self-reported history of criminal activities and severity of offenses.

III.V. PROCEDURE

Permission was obtained from prison authorities. Informed consent was collected from all participants. Measures were administered in one to one and group sessions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout.

IV. RESULTS

The findings of the study indicated a consistent negative relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and Offender Screening Tool (OST) scores. Participants with higher levels of EI generally obtained lower OST scores, suggesting that emotional intelligence plays a protective role in reducing offender-related traits. This inverse association was evident across all domains of EI, including intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, interpersonal management, and overall EI.

Awareness Level	N	M	SD	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Low	22	6.56	2.76	4.78–7.22

Below Average	126	6.07	2.47	5.66–6.88
Average	52	5.06	2.11	4.47–5.64

Table 1. Comparison of OST Scores Across Intrapersonal Awareness Levels

As presented in Table 1, OST scores varied significantly across levels of intrapersonal awareness. Participants with low awareness (N = 22) recorded the highest mean OST score (M = 6.56, SD = 2.76), while those with below-average awareness (N = 126) demonstrated slightly lower scores (M = 6.07, SD = 2.47). The lowest scores were observed among participants with average intrapersonal awareness (N = 52, M = 5.06, SD = 2.11). These results suggest that individuals with stronger self-awareness tend to show reduced tendencies associated with offending.

Awareness Level	N	M	SD	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Low	37	6.41	3.72	5.16–7.65
Below Average	115	6.05	3.22	5.55–6.74
Average	48	5.02	3.11	4.41–5.63

Table 2. Comparison of OST Scores Across Interpersonal Awareness Levels

A similar trend was observed for interpersonal awareness (Table 2). Participants categorized as low in this dimension (N = 37) reported the highest OST scores (M = 6.41, SD = 3.72). Those with below-average interpersonal awareness (N = 115) had slightly lower scores (M = 6.05, SD = 3.22), while participants at the average level (N = 48) recorded the lowest scores (M = 5.02, SD = 3.11). This pattern indicates that individuals who are more capable of recognizing and understanding others' emotions are less likely to display offender-like traits.

Management Level	N	M	SD	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Low	21	6.49	2.44	5.08–7.30
Below Average	132	6.12	2.35	5.54–6.70
Average	47	5.26	2.38	4.47–6.04

Table 3. Comparison of OST Scores Across Intrapersonal Management Levels

Table 3 shows the comparison of OST scores across intrapersonal management levels. Participants with low management skills (N = 21) had the highest scores (M = 6.49, SD = 2.44), followed by those with below-average management (N = 132, M = 6.12, SD = 2.35). In contrast, participants with average intrapersonal management (N = 47) reported the lowest scores (M = 5.26, SD = 2.38). These results highlight the importance of self-regulation and impulse control in mitigating offender-related behaviors.

Management Level	N	M	SD	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
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Below Average	147	6.54	2.28	5.60–6.67
Average	53	5.14	2.39	4.62–6.05

Table 4. Comparison of OST Scores Across Interpersonal Management Levels

As displayed in Table 4, interpersonal management also showed a negative association with OST scores. Participants with below-average skills (N = 147) obtained a higher mean OST score (M = 6.54, SD = 2.28), whereas those with average skills (N = 53) demonstrated substantially lower scores (M = 5.14, SD = 2.39). This suggests that the ability to manage relationships, resolve conflicts, and communicate effectively may protect individuals from engaging in maladaptive or antisocial behavior.

EI Level	N	M	SD	95% CI (Lower–Upper)
Low	21	6.34	2.82	4.86–7.42
Below Average	129	6.02	2.45	5.65–6.85
Average	50	5.00	2.07	4.41–5.59

Table 5. Comparison of OST Scores Across Overall Emotional Intelligence Levels

The analysis of overall EI levels (Table 5) reinforced the same pattern. Individuals with low overall EI (N = 21) recorded the highest mean OST score (M = 6.34, SD = 2.82), while those with below-average EI (N = 129) obtained slightly lower scores (M = 6.02, SD = 2.45). Participants with average EI (N = 50) demonstrated the lowest scores (M = 5.00, SD = 2.07). This finding underscores the role of emotional intelligence as a general protective factor against offender tendencies.

Taken together, the findings show a **negative relationship between overall emotional intelligence and OST scores**. Offenders with low or below-average EI demonstrate higher criminal risk, while those with average EI exhibit significantly lower risk scores. This underscores the role of emotional intelligence as a **protective factor** in moderating criminal behavior.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and offender-related traits, as measured by the Offender Screening Tool (OST). The results consistently demonstrated a negative association between EI and OST scores across all domains of emotional

intelligence, including intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, interpersonal management, and overall EI. These findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence are less likely to exhibit traits commonly associated with criminal or antisocial behavior.

The results align with existing research emphasizing the role of emotional processes in criminal behavior. Earlier studies (Robertson et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2003) emphasize that poor emotional regulation, lack of empathy, and reduced self-awareness increase vulnerability to impulsive and delinquent behavior. In particular, low intrapersonal awareness has been associated with poor recognition of emotional triggers, increasing the likelihood of impulsive and maladaptive responses (Hemphill, 2006). Consistent with this, the current study found that individuals with low intrapersonal awareness reported significantly higher OST scores than those with average levels of awareness.

Similarly, the results concerning interpersonal awareness and management highlight the critical role of empathy and social understanding in prosocial functioning. Offenders often display difficulties in interpreting social cues, understanding others' perspectives, and managing interpersonal conflict, which can contribute to antisocial or aggressive behavior (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). The present findings reinforce this perspective, showing that participants with higher interpersonal

awareness and management skills were less likely to demonstrate offender- like tendencies.

The negative association between intrapersonal management and OST scores underscores the importance of self-regulation in preventing criminal behavior. Individuals with poor impulse control and emotional regulation are more prone to aggressive outbursts, substance misuse, and high-risk behaviors—factors frequently observed among offender populations (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). The current study supports this theoretical framework by showing that participants with stronger intrapersonal management reported lower OST scores, suggesting that the ability to regulate emotions and impulses may protect against offending.

The findings also contribute to the broader understanding of emotional intelligence as a general protective factor. Individuals with higher overall EI scores demonstrated lower OST scores, supporting the view that emotional intelligence enhances resilience, promotes adaptive coping, and reduces the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior (Schutte et al., 2001). This has practical implications for correctional and rehabilitative interventions. Programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence—through training in self-awareness, empathy, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills—may help reduce recidivism and support the reintegration of offenders into society.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that while the results highlight a robust relationship between EI and offender-related tendencies, criminal behavior is influenced by multiple factors beyond emotional functioning. Socioeconomic status, environmental conditions, peer influences, and biological predispositions all play significant roles in shaping criminal trajectories (Agnew, 2005). Emotional intelligence should therefore be considered as one of several protective factors that interact with broader social and psychological variables.

The study also raises questions for future research. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal relationships between EI and offending, as the present findings are correlational in nature. Furthermore, intervention-based research could evaluate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training programs in reducing OST scores and preventing recidivism. Such studies would provide practical evidence for integrating EI development into offender rehabilitation frameworks.

VI. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis across different dimensions of emotional intelligence (intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, intrapersonal management, interpersonal management, and overall EI) consistently revealed a **negative association between EI and OST scores**. Offenders with **low or below average EI** exhibited significantly higher OST scores, reflecting elevated levels of criminal risk factors, while those with **average EI** consistently recorded lower scores, indicating a protective influence of emotional intelligence.

The ANOVA and t-test results confirmed that these differences were **statistically significant**, suggesting that emotional intelligence is not only correlated with but also meaningfully differentiates offender risk profiles. In particular, **self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship management** emerged as crucial factors in lowering criminal tendencies.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening emotional intelligence could be an effective pathway for offender rehabilitation, lowering recidivism risk and fostering prosocial behavioral change.

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