



EI as an emergent technique for healthcare workers: A comprehensive literature review and future research agenda

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to systematically review the role and significance of emotional intelligence (EI) among healthcare professionals (HCPs), with a focus on its impact on stress management, resilience, empathy, and professional performance in both pandemic and general healthcare settings.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic literature review and scientometric analysis were conducted using the SCOPUS database. A total of 146 articles were initially retrieved, and after applying inclusion–exclusion criteria, 42 relevant publications from 2015 to 2024 were analysed. Manual screening and analysis were performed using R-Studio and MS Excel.

Findings – The results indicate a growing trend of research on EI among HCPs, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Frequently used keywords included “emotional,” “intelligence,” “healthcare,” and “workers,” alongside emerging terms such as “resilience” and “emotional distancing.” The most prominent journals in this field are *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Healthcare (Switzerland)*. The review highlights EI as a predictor of organizational adaptability and identifies its critical role in mitigating burnout, enhancing empathy, and improving patient–provider relationships.

Research limitations/implications – The study is limited to the SCOPUS database and English-language publications, which may affect the comprehensiveness of coverage. Future research should incorporate broader databases, multilingual sources, and cross-cultural perspectives to capture a wider scope of EI studies.

Practical implications – The findings suggest the integration of EI-based training and assessment in healthcare systems to strengthen stress tolerance, resilience, and professional well-being. EI should also be considered in recruitment and professional development processes.

Social implications – By addressing burnout and promoting empathy, EI contributes to improved patient care, enhanced patient satisfaction, and stronger healthcare outcomes, while also highlighting the need for greater societal recognition of emotional competence.

Originality/value – This study provides one of the few systematic and scientometric reviews of EI among healthcare workers, offering a comprehensive overview of research trends, knowledge gaps, and practical strategies. It contributes to theory-building while providing actionable insights for healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and future researchers.

Keywords: Systematic Literature Review, SCOPUS, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Healthcare Workers (HCWs), R-Studio

1. Introduction

Healthcare professionals (HCPs) are a vulnerable group because they are more likely to suffer from a variety of stress-related conditions at work (Selič-Zupančič *et al.*, 2023) [61]. Healthcare workers are prone to a variety of work-related stressors, which frequently result in burnout. This was made very clear during the Covid-19 epidemic. The first sign that an emotional trauma is present is stress reactivity. To cope with the stressors, these reactions are characterized as a collection of conscious and unconscious actions, thoughts, and feelings (Figley CR, 2013) [22]. This is where emotional intelligence (EI), a crucial concept, enters the picture. There are different definitions of emotional intelligence, nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that emotional intelligence (EI) is the capacity to recognize, communicate, and control one's own and other people's feelings (Mayer *et al.*, 2008; Rezvani *et al.*, 2016;

Hajnci, 2020) [42, 60, 27]. The Mayer-Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is part of the first model, known as the ability model (Mayer and Salovey, 1993; Mayer *et al.*, 2002) [41, 43]. The second paradigm (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 1997; Ornstein, 1997; Epstein, 1998) [25, 11, 52, 21] is centered on an individual's trait or self-perception of their personality. Compassion, drive, and empathy are all part of this model. The third model values independence, assertiveness, and self-worth (Nelson and Low 2003) [49]. Better project performance is attributed to positive emotions, particularly in situations with a high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2005; Colman, 2009) [6, 18]. Tensions, frustrations, rage, and impediments resulting in subpar performance are also caused by negative emotions (Hammett, 2007; Hammett, 2008) [29, 30]. Therefore, it is inevitable to work with people, and developing strong interpersonal skills is necessary to promote

positive working relationships (Dainty *et al.*, 2004; Barczak *et al.*, 2010; Jiang *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Kim, 2017) [19, 10, 34, 36].

However, there is a dearth of review research based on systematic literature review and study of the impact & role of emotional intelligence among HCPs. How they benefit and enhance their work performance as well as it also helps to reduce the stress. So, the current study aims to identify to what extent EI is significant for HCWs not only in emergent or pandemic situations in general settings also? how does EI grace their work? The authors analyse the whole perspective based on four questions and the present research is divided into 5 sections 1st The authors introduce the present study then after the research questions and research methodology described by the authors, the analysis part is performed, and last the core of this study conclusion with future research avenues discussed which will be impactful for future researchers as well as HCWs.

2. Research questions

RQ1. How is the year-wise publication trend of documents going?

RQ2. What are the most prominent and frequently used keywords?

RQ3. What are the most relevant and popular journals based on no. of publications?

RQ4. What are the findings, keywords, and future research avenues of the top five highly cited documents?

3. Methodology

The current systematic literature review searched for publications on emotional intelligence among healthcare workers (HCWs) across numerous publishers and repositories. By using the search string (("EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE" OR "EMOTIONAL REGULATION" OR "EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT" AND "HEALTHCARE WORKERS" OR "HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS" OR "HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL")). Initially, 146 articles were found on the SCOPUS database and the study covers the period from 1995 to 19.01.2024, but with further criteria, articles were found only between the period 2015 to 2024 and after applying all the relevant filters and manual reading of titles, abstracts, and full-text reading of papers as depicted in Figure No 1., we have 42 articles at last. So, after a careful screening process, 104 research articles were discarded and authors performed all the relevant work by manually using R-studio and MS-Excel.

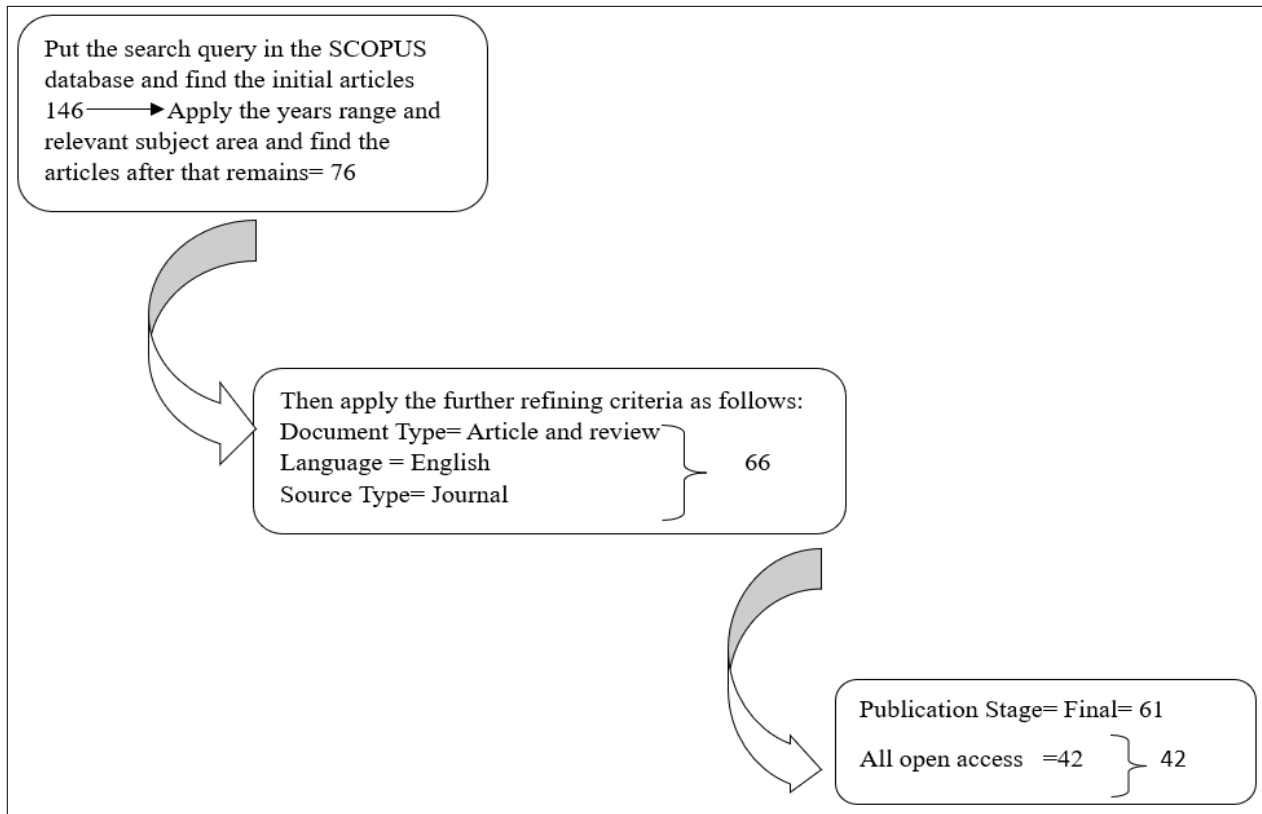
3.1 Inclusion-Exclusion criteria

Table 1: Inclusion-Exclusion criteria- Database – SCOPUS-Date 19-01-2024 ("Emotional Intelligence" or "Emotional Regulation" or "Emotional Quotient" and "Healthcare Workers" or "Healthcare Professionals" or "Healthcare Personnel")

Inclusion	Exclusion
Year-1995 to 2024	In SCOPUS not a single article published before 1995
Subject Area- Healthcare Professions, Psychology, Nursing, Social Science.	Other subject areas like art and humanities, decision science, etc.
Document type Article and Review Paper	Articles excluded conference papers, book chapters, editorials, etc.
Source type= Journal	Excluded conference proceedings, book series books, etc.
Language=English	Non-English language
Publication stage= Final	Articles which are in the proceeding stage or not lying in the final stage
Final articles for study=42	146 initial - 42= 104 exclude not fit in inclusion criteria or relevant to the study.
All open access for full-text reading	Exclude non open access articles

Source: Authors' development

3.2 A Story of document search for analysis in the SCOPUS database with the search query



Source: Authors' development

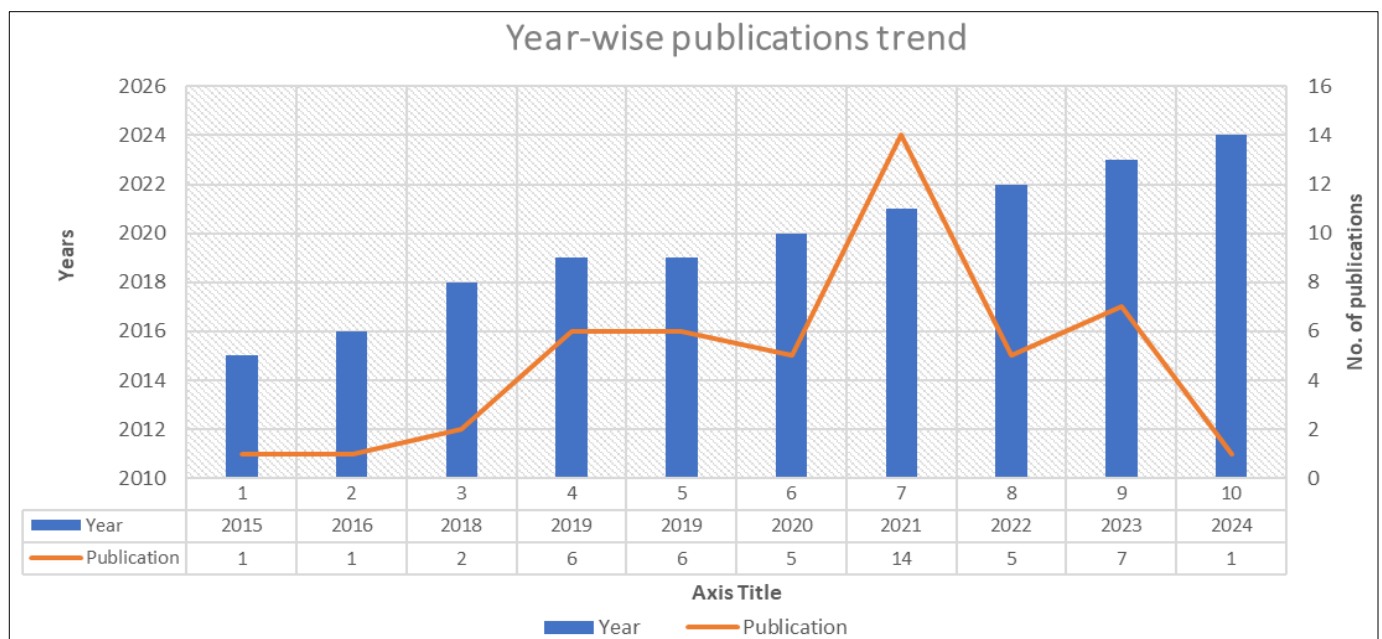
Fig 1: A Story of document search for analysis in the SCOPUS database with the search query

4. Analysis- The systematic analysis of 42 documents is as follows. (According to research questions)

4.1 Year-wise publications trend

As depicted in the below figure in the year 2021 highest no. of papers in the pertinent field was published and the 2024 publication has not had any significant effect on publication trends because now the year has just started. So, above analysis,

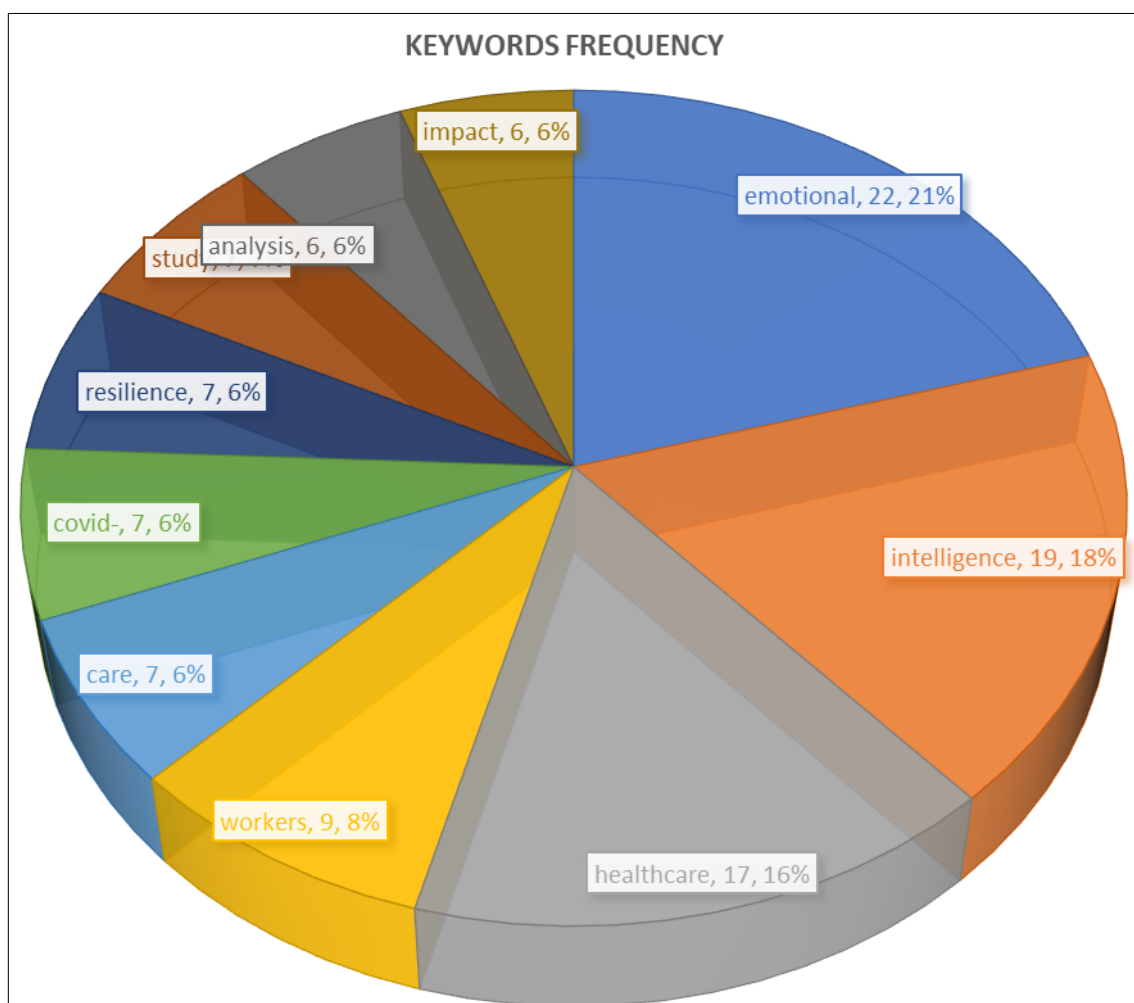
we can conclude that yes, COVID-19 sparked the research related to emotional intelligence among healthcare workers (HCWs). But if we compare the trend before COVID-19, no. of publications in 2018 was 2, in 2019 was 6, in 2020 was 5, and after COVID-19 in 2023 no of publications were 7. That means now the need for emotional intelligence is highly realized among HCWs.



Source: Authors' development

Fig 2: Year-wise publications trend

4.2 Most relevant keywords



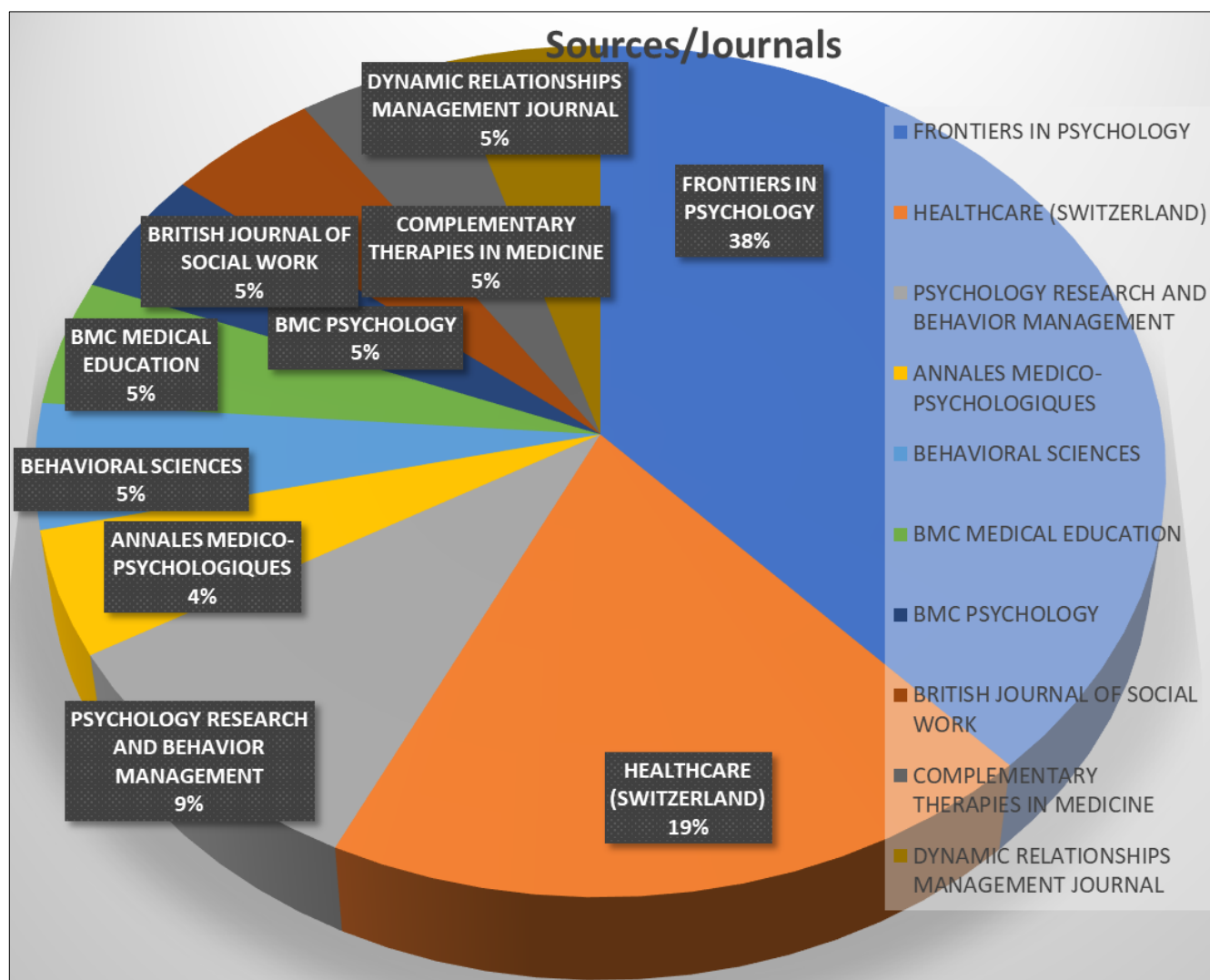
Source: Author's own development

Fig 3: Most frequently used keywords

In the above figure, the analysis of 42 documents shows emotional words repeated at 21%, frequency of intelligence is 18%, healthcare used 17 times with 16% in the title of documents. These three are the most repetitive keywords in the title of documents. Following the above three workers used 8%, the study used 7%, impact, care analysis, and COVID are 6%. It was found that the relevancy of the study is excellent because all four highest-used keywords (emotional, intelligence, healthcare, workers) are directly related to the pertinent topic of the current research. In addition to this, a new keyword resilience is closely associated with emotional intelligence.

4.3 Most relevant and popular journals based on no. of publications

In the below figure after analysis of 42 documents authors find three journals are the most prolific in this field. These are frontiers in psychology, healthcare (Switzerland), and psychology research and behavior management with 38%, 19%, and 9% publication rates. The rest are the Annales Medico-Psychologiques, Behavioral Sciences, BMC Medical Education Psychology, British Journal of Social Work, complementary therapies in medicine, and dynamics relationship management journals, which contain 5% and 4% stake in the total publications in the concerned area.



Source: Authors' development

Fig 4: Most relevant source or journals

4.4 Table 2 - Findings, keywords, and future research avenues of the top five highly cited document

The below table is about findings, future research avenues, and

mostly used keywords that were explored by authors based on five highly cited papers:

Author's Name	Title	Citation TC	Source/Journal	Keywords	Findings	Future research avenues
Lamothe et.al., (2016)	Outcomes of MBSR or MBSR-based interventions in health care providers: A systematic review with a focus on empathy and emotional competencies	160	Complementary Therapies in Medicine	Emotional intelligence; International comparison; Radiographers; Students	There is strong evidence about how MBSR affects the mental health of professionals. Even though it has been determined that a few emotional competencies are crucial for providing high-quality care.	Future research on empathy should specifically assess its cognitive as well as affective components.
Nightingale et.al., (2018)	The impact of emotional intelligence in health care professionals on caring behavior towards patients in clinical and long-term care settings: Findings	74	International Journal of Nursing Studies	Caring; Emotional intelligence; Integrative review; Nurse leaders; Nurses; Physicians	This review offers proof that improving a nurse's emotional intelligence may have a favourable effect on specific acts of kindness.	A more extensive study examining the association between EI among health professionals and validated measures of both emotional and physical care separately would be helpful.

	from an integrative review					
Lomas et.al., (2019)	A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of the Impact of Mindfulness-Based Interventions on the Well-Being of Healthcare Professionals	72	Mindfulness	Healthcare professionals; Meditation; Meta-analysis; Mindfulness	MBIs were typically linked to favourable results on the majority of measures, and it does seem that mindfulness enhances the well-being and emotional intelligence of medical professionals.	More research is required, especially in the form of excellent randomized controlled trials.
Alonazi W.B. (2020)	The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Job Performance During COVID-19 Crisis: A Cross-Sectional Analysis	49	Psychology Research and Behavior Management	COVID-19; Emotional intelligence; Job performance; Nurses	The nurses with the highest EI scores were those in critical care units, then intensive care, neonatal intensive care, and general nursing. The nurses who worked in respiratory therapy had the lowest scores. During the crisis, nurses stated that EI had a substantial impact on JP across all demographics.	A large sample size should be taken in future studies.
Zeb et.al., (2021)	Controlling emotions—nurses' lived experiences caring for patients in forensic psychiatry	21	Psychology Research and Behavior Management	Emotional fatigue; Medical professionals; Purposive sampling; Work-life balance	By applying compassion-based techniques like self-analysis, emotional control, and emotional detachment when required, nurses may be able to attend to patients' needs more skillfully.	This article can provide insight into nurses' firsthand accounts of their interactions with patients suffering from mental illnesses while receiving forensic inpatient care, but it does not offer definitive information or clear evidence. So, clear evidence and proper strategies for this should be given in future studies.

Source: Authors' development

5. Implications of the study

5.1 Theoretical implications

By including newly developing categories, such as emotional distancing and resilience, and reaffirming traditional models in healthcare, the study expands on existing frameworks of emotional intelligence (EI). Additionally, it underscores the part that emotional intelligence plays in forecasting how well someone will be able to adjust to the culture of an organisation, thereby making contributions to the fields of psychology, organisational behaviour, and healthcare theory.

5.2 Social implications

Burnout is a worldwide problem that is connected to inadequate patient care, stressed relationships, and mental health problems among healthcare personnel, according to the research. It also emphasises the importance of empathy in improving the connections between patients and providers, increasing the effectiveness of treatment, and promoting a greater level of society awareness of emotional competence.

5.3 Practical implications

The findings indicate that it is necessary to implement training programs that are based on EI in order to improve stress tolerance, resilience, and empathy among healthcare professionals. In addition, EI should be incorporated into the

processes of recruiting and professional growth. They also offer suggestions to policymakers and researchers in order to encourage worker well-being and to expand studies of EI in the future across a variety of situations and databases.

6. Conclusion

After a comprehensive review of all 42 documents, it was found that nowadays the requirement of emotional competence and intelligence is realized in HCWs. The relativity of keywords is very high in addition to these new keywords like resilience, and emotional distancing have been found, future researchers can perform their research in EI with these variables. Apart from that authors found two prominent journals in this area frontiers in Psychology and Healthcare (Switzerland) which are very closely associated with the pertinent domain. If we talk about the TCM framework major theories or models have traditionally been used for a very long time because these are the essence or basics of the EI concept and the major situation-based contexts are patient care, clinical settings, stress, and burnout. The methodology used in 42 documents is both type quantitative and qualitative (review-based). The findings of the current study depict that healthcare workers' emotional tiredness is an important global concern. Burnout in HCPs has been connected to subpar patient treatment, marital issues, drug misuse, depression, and suicide.

Professionals in fields like haematology-oncology are regularly faced with emotionally taxing circumstances including pain and death. Harmonious connections between healthcare professionals and patients require empathy. Better treatment outcomes, increased patient empowerment, and increased patient satisfaction and adherence have all been associated with clinical empathy. It has been defined as a quality that entails comprehending patients' inner experiences and reacting emotionally to their feelings. HCPs can read patients more effectively when they possess empathy, but this skill is also associated with a higher risk of burnout.

Additionally, two important roles of emotional intelligence (EI) in stress management are that it increases stress tolerance and fosters resilience against stress. This study offers a thorough scientometric evaluation, a systematic literature analysis of EI research, and recommendations for additional investigations based on the gaps in the literature that were found. Therefore, the findings would be very beneficial to academia. A person's ability to adapt to the culture of an organization can be predicted using their EI. It is assumed that the current organizational environment and culture are understood, and that appropriate analysis has been done to ascertain the "right" emotions for the role that is being filled. This study's main drawback is that, unlike if additional databases had been included, the analysis of the data set, which was taken from Scopus search, may have been influenced by Scopus's coverage. Nonetheless, the technique provides evidence supporting the use of Scopus, therefore selecting this data set had no bearing on the outcomes. An additional constraint of this research is that it solely included publications that were published in English.

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