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Emotional Intelligence, Resilience and Happiness Among South African Police Officers

Remaketse Agnes Makateng, Yolande van Zyl, Chengedzai Mafini, Irvine Langton

[1]**Faculty of Management Sciences, Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa**

Abstract: Police officers frequently face extremely stressful and potentially dangerous situations, making their psychological well-being critically important. These individuals are subjected to not only unsafe but also potentially volatile situations. Therefore, it is essential that police officers are emotionally intelligent, resilient and experience happiness in everyday life. This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI), resilience and happiness among police officers in South Africa. A structured questionnaire was distributed among the police officers. The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) were used in the study and displayed acceptable reliability. In the correlation analysis, positive significant associations were found between the dimensions of EI, resilience and happiness. Regression analyses showed positive predictive relationships observed between the regulation of emotion dimension of EI and two resilience dimensions, namely resilience recovery and resilience control. Positive predictive relationships were also found between these two resilience dimensions and happiness. Three EI dimensions, namely self-emotion appraisal, use of emotion and others' emotion appraisal were not statistically significant in predicting the resilience dimensions (resilience recovery and resilience control). Recommendations and limitations for this study are discussed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; happiness; police officers; resilience

CORRESPONDENCE
Email: yolandevz@vut.ac.za

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Introduction

Developments in psychology have highlighted the need for emotional intelligence (EI), resilience and happiness as key psychological resources that enable individuals to cope with adversity and maintain optimal functioning in demanding environments (Alvarado et al., 2017). This focus is particularly relevant within policing, an occupation characterised by chronic exposure to danger, trauma, organisational stressors and high emotional demands. Police officers routinely encounter violent crime, life-threatening situations, long working hours and organisational constraints, which collectively place them at heightened risk for stress, burnout and psychological distress (Gonzales, 2019; Mushwana et al., 2019; Violanti et al.,

2017). In addition to operational stressors, organisational factors such as limited managerial support, inadequate trauma counselling services and poor working conditions further exacerbate psychological strain among police officers, often resulting in emotional fatigue and diminished well-being (Sollie et al., 2017). Despite these challenges, police officers are expected to maintain emotional composure and professional conduct, frequently suppressing their personal distress in order to meet organisational and societal expectations (Romosiou et al., 2019).

The aim of this article is to determine the relationship between EI, resilience and happiness among police officers. The duties of police officers involve providing protection, safety and security for the community. Hence, police officers who lack EI and resilience when exposed to threatening situations tend to experience episodes of stress, depression and other psychological disorders (Balmer et al., 2014). Several researchers have reported that police officers are not only affected psychologically by traumatic events, but also by departmental stressors, such as conflicts, lack of departmental support, workload and insufficient pay (Violanti et al., 2017). The cumulative effects of such stressors may lead to reduced resilience and lower levels of happiness among individuals (Nemati & Maralani, 2016). Despite their daily encounters, police officers are expected to act in accordance with organisational expectations, often requiring them to remain composed in the face of adversity (Romosiou et al., 2019). It is believed that many individuals in law enforcement suffer in silence from the hidden dangers and, at times, undesirable nature of this career (Olugbemi & Bolaji, 2016). Police officers' positive state of mind should be preserved before feeling overwhelmed by negative events (Violanti et al., 2017). Therefore, EI has been identified as an important trait that could aid in facilitating resilience and achieve happiness in the workplace and in an individual's personal life.

Literature review

Emotional intelligence

The concept of EI was introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and became popular in 1995 with Daniel Goleman's best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*. EI can be defined as the ability to change behaviour, shape attitudes and produce positive results (Othman & Tengku Muda, 2018). EI is also defined as 'the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thoughts, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth' (Kumarasamy et al., 2016). According to Kearney et al. (2017), EI is described as having the capacity to screen one's own and others' sentiments and feelings. Therefore, an individual with a high level of EI is aware of their own emotions and has the self-confidence to interpret situations and manage it effectively (Leong et al., 2019).

EI has been conceptualised through competing theoretical models, most notably the ability-based and trait-based approaches (Mayer et al., 2008; Sambol et al., 2022). The ability-based model conceptualises EI as a cognitive capacity involving emotional perception, understanding and regulation, whereas the trait-based model frames EI as a set of emotion-related self-perceptions embedded within personality (Singh et al., 2022). These models differ in both measurement approaches and in their assumptions regarding predictive validity in high-stress occupational contexts (Singh et al., 2022). Ability-based perspectives emphasise emotion regulation as the most critical mechanism for adaptive functioning under stress, as regulatory capacities directly influence behavioural and physiological responses to emotionally demanding situations (Preece et al., 2025). In contrast, trait-based models propose broader associations between EI facets and well-being outcomes due to overlapping with personality traits (Buka et al., 2024).

Wong and Law's (2002) four-factor structure of EI, comprising self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE) and regulation of emotion (ROE), provides a useful framework for examining EI. Given the emotionally demanding nature of police work, enhancing EI has been associated with lower organisational stress and stronger resilience outcomes (Leong et al., 2019; Romosiou et al., 2019). Consequently, developing police officers' EI is increasingly viewed as a critical psychological resource for mitigating negative outcomes such as burnout, depression and stress, while supporting resilience and well-being in policing contexts (Won et al., 2018). Therefore, it is suggested that the extent to which EI predicts outcomes may vary according to the theoretical model applied and the specific work context (Preece et al., 2025). In high-risk occupations such as policing, the capacity to regulate emotions is likely more critical for adaptive functioning than the ability to appraise or utilise emotions, as officers manage intense emotional demands in real time.

Resilience

Resilience refers to 'an individual's ability to cope with difficulties as well as overcome and bounce back from adversity in a quick and effective way' (Geitsidou & Giovazolias, 2016). A resilient police officer tends to respond effectively during adversity (Park et al., 2018). According to Goradel et al. (2016), a resilient individual will adjust to unpleasant events and experience lower levels of anxiety. Resilience also serves as a safeguard for individuals by assisting them to deal with psychological pain and stress (Geitsidou & Giovazolias, 2016). Resilient individuals experience negative feelings, yet they appear to have the ability to overcome the negativity and maintain high levels of happiness (Geitsidou & Giovazolias, 2016). Furthermore, 'the more police officers are exposed to such critical incidents arousing psychological trauma, the more hyper arousal symptoms they experience while struggling to overcome the psychological damages' (Park et al., 2018). Therefore, social support plays a vital role in assisting police officers in coping with traumatic experiences (Li et al., 2015).

Happiness

According to Pradhan et al. (2024), happiness is a form of subjective well-being that reflects an individual's sense of contentment and life satisfaction and plays an important role in overall psychological functioning. Ekşi et al. (2020) found that happiness contributes to and increases individuals' work performance and their well-being. Hence, Akhtar et al. (2017) highlight that individuals with a high level of positive emotions are more satisfied with their lives. More importantly, an individual is deemed happy when he/she experiences positive emotions frequently (Bataineh, 2019). Happiness is further identified as a crucial component of an individual's health, comprising positive affect and satisfaction with life (Bhutoria & Hooja, 2018). Okulicz-Kozaryn (2016) points out that happiness is how people experience and evaluate their activities in their lives. In the policing context, happiness is particularly important, as emotionally healthy officers are better equipped to communicate effectively, build positive workplace relationships and manage occupational stress (Conroy, 2018). This further emphasises that psychological resources such as EI and resilience play a central role in sustaining happiness by facilitating emotional regulation, adaptive coping and positive appraisal processes under demanding conditions (Bhutoria & Hooja, 2018).

Conceptual framework and hypotheses formulation

The conceptual framework is presented in Fig. 1 and consists of the four EI factors SEA, OEA, UOE and ROE, as well as resilience and happiness. EI is widely conceptualised as a multidimensional construct; however, accumulating theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that EI factors do not exert uniform effects on adaptive outcomes, particularly in high-risk and emotionally demanding occupations (Pekaar et al., 2020; Sabie et al., 2025). Specifically, self-focused regulatory capacities are theorised to be more central to resilience, as regulation of emotion directly supports emotional control and recovery under stress, whereas appraisal and expression-based EI factors are more strongly associated with interpersonal effectiveness (Al Ali et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2024). It is noteworthy that the original order of the EI factors was amended following the exploratory factor analysis. Additionally, resilience was adjusted to a multi-dimensional structure comprising recovery and control, supporting the view that resilience is conceptualised as both a reactive ability to rebound after adversity and a proactive ability to maintain emotional and behavioural stability during ongoing stress exposure (Chikobvu & Harunavamwe, 2022). Thus, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationship between EI, resilience and happiness of police officers at the Sedibeng West District in Gauteng, South Africa.

Emotional intelligence and resilience

EI is associated with the outcomes related to police work, such as stress, trauma, coping and psychological resilience to traumatic and stress events (Tong et al., 2022). Studies have shown that higher levels of EI are associated with lower levels of stress in organisations (Ngui & Lay, 2020; Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). An increase in an officer's EI can help officers manage their stress more effectively, which in turn promotes workplace resilience (Grover & Furnham, 2021). This is supported by Chitra and Karunanidhi (2021), who assert that competency in emotion regulation and self-awareness specifically contributes to reduced stress and burnout among police officers, thereby leading to resilience (Janssens et al., 2021). Chitra and Karunanidhi (2021) further explain that EI is positively related to resilience among police officers. Moreover, a study of Ngui and Lay (2020) shows that EI and resilience are significantly related in a way that higher EI has a greater impact on a resilient individual, which makes it easy for individuals to bounce back from adversity. According to Thomas and Zolkoski (2020), EI also affects individuals' reactions to adversity and builds resilience when

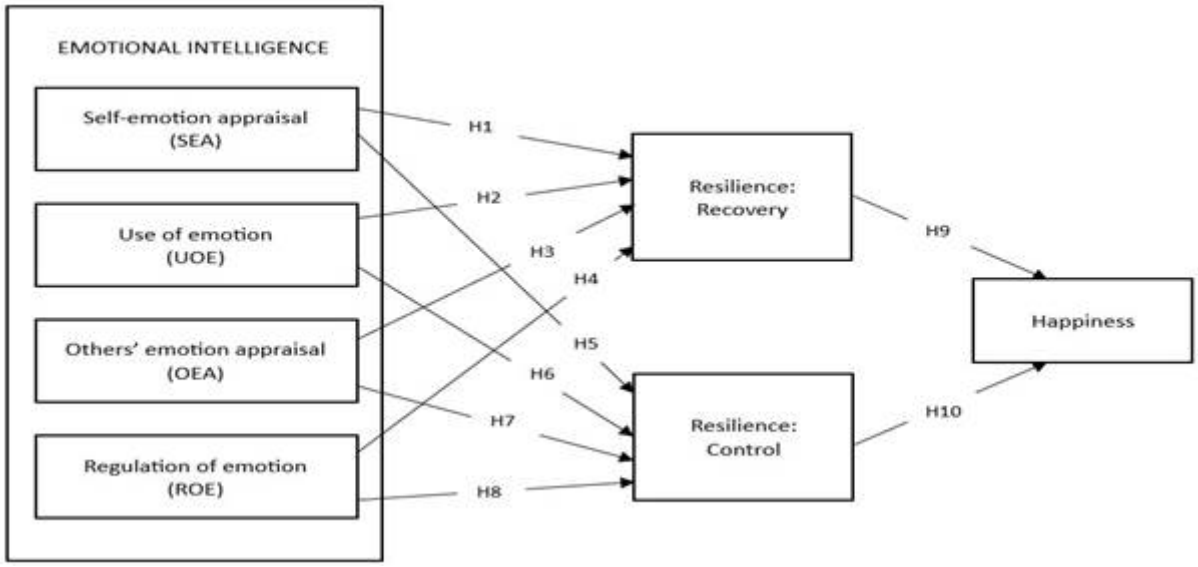

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for EI, resilience and happiness
(Source: Authors' compilation)

faced with challenging circumstances. This relationship is further supported by Tong et al. (2022), who found that individuals with greater psychological resources and openness to new experiences demonstrate higher levels of adaptive functioning and cognitive flexibility, which support creative thought and action. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H_1: SEA has a positive influence on resilience recovery among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_2: UOE has a positive influence on resilience recovery among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_3: OEA has a positive influence on resilience recovery among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_4: ROE has a positive influence on resilience recovery among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_5: SEA has a positive influence on resilience control among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_6: UOE has a positive influence on resilience control among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_7: OEA has a positive influence on resilience control among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

H_8: ROE has a positive influence on resilience control among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

Resilience and happiness

The study by Mei et al. (2021) highlights resilience as a mediator between several factors related to happiness. These aspects include positive affect, positive mental health, life satisfaction and positive subjective well-being of individuals. Therefore, resilient individuals are psychologically healthier, more content, more creative and demonstrate effective time management and the development of rewarding interpersonal and emotional relationships (Gencoglu, 2020). Resilience is also identified as a key component of subjective well-being, as it increases positive emotions while reducing negative emotions (Cho & Ryu, 2021). Pigati et al. (2022)

also suggest that resilience boosts an individual's perception of happiness while decreasing the detrimental physiological effects. This leads to the following hypotheses:

> H_9: Resilience recovery has a positive influence on happiness among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.
>
> H_{10}: Resilience control has a positive influence on happiness among police officers in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa.

Method

Participants

The sample size comprised 400 police officers who participated in the study. The overall response rate was 82.5% (n = 330). Most of the police officers were female (55.8%) and 44.2% were male. The majority (35.2%) of the police officers fell within the age group 34–41 years. Regarding the education of the sample, about 50% of the police officers held a diploma. Table 1 presents to the participants' characteristics.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a self-report questionnaire. The police officers also completed the Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The WLEIS consists of 16 items, the BRS consists of six items and the SHS, originally comprised four items, however, due to low reliability one item was removed, resulting in a three-item instrument and improved internal consistency.

Procedure

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to police officers at 12 police stations in the Sedibeng West District of South Africa. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that each police officer at the 12 stations had an equal probability of selection. A single sampling frame was generated by consolidating updated personnel rosters from each station, reflecting operational deployments and rotating shift patterns. Each police officer was randomly selected from this comprehensive list and assigned an identification number. The required sample was then selected using a lottery method whereby the identification numbers were written on individual slips, placed into a container, thoroughly mixed and drawn at random until the desired sample size was reached. This procedure ensured that selection was based purely on chance and was not influenced by rank, availability, or managerial discretion. Officers who were unavailable at the time of initial contact were not replaced to preserve the integrity of the randomisation process. Furthermore, to accommodate rotating shifts and varying work schedules, the researcher conducted multiple visits across several days and during different shifts to reach the randomly selected officers. Participation was voluntary and a cover letter outlined the purpose of the study, assured respondents of anonymity and confidentiality and indicated that completion of the questionnaire constituted informed consent. Upon completion, respondents sealed their questionnaires in envelopes and submitted them to a designated administrator for collection during a subsequent visit, after which they were stored in a cabinet, accessible only to the researcher. Electronic data were captured on a password-protected computer and securely stored in accordance with institutional data protection policies. To mitigate potential power dynamics inherent in the hierarchical police environment, station commanders and supervisors were explicitly informed that they were not permitted to influence participation or access completed questionnaires. Questionnaires were completed privately and sealed envelopes ensured that responses remained inaccessible to management. Permission to conduct the research at the respective police stations in the Sedibeng West District in South Africa was obtained from the Divisional Commissioner: Research at the South African Police Service (SAPS). The research was ratified by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the applicable university (Ethics Reference Number: FRECMS-10032021–061). This article is based on a master's dissertation.

Data analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the factor structure of EI, resilience and happiness. Correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the associations between EI, resilience and happiness.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants.

Item	Categories	Frequencies	%
Gender	Female	184	55.8
	Male	146	44.2
Age	18–25 years	24	7.3
	26–33 years	37	11.2
	34–41 years	116	35.2
	42–49 years	104	31.5
	50–57 years	45	13.6
	Over 57 years	4	1.2
Marital status	Single	88	26.7
	Married	190	57.6
	Widow	16	4.8
	Widower	2	0.6
	Divorced	32	9.7
	Missing	2	0.6
Qualifications	Diploma	165	50.0
	Bachelor's degree	37	11.2
	Honors	9	2.7
	Masters	2	0.6
	Any other	117	35.5
Income	Up to R10 000	35	10.6
	R10 001 to R20 000	212	64.2
	R20 001 to R30 000	56	17.0
	R30 000 to above	27	8.2
Tenure	Less than 3 years	23	7.0
	3–10 years	80	24.2
	11–20 years	126	38.2
	21–30 years	72	21.8
	More than 30 years	28	8.5
	Missing	1	0.3
(Source: Calculated from survey results)			

Regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive relationships between EI, resilience and happiness.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted iteratively to refine the factor loadings. First, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin test was used to measure the sampling adequacy for EI and yielded a value of 0.865. In the same way, the results of the Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed a significant chi-square of 3436.047 (df = 120) and a significance level of $p < 0.000$. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin test for resilience yielded a sampling adequacy of 0.802. Similarly, the results of the Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed a significant chi-square of 725.020 (df = 15) and a significance level of $p < 0.000$. Lastly, factor analysis was conducted and only one component was extracted. Therefore, happiness resulted in a unidimensional structure.

Originally, EI is a multi-dimensional construct and according to the original scale developed by Wong and Law, the sequence of the factors was as follows: Factor 1, SEA (items 1–4); Factor 2, OEA (items 5–8); Factor 3, UOE (items 9–12) and Factor 4, ROE (items 13–16). However, an analysis of the data revealed a different order for the items on the scale and item loadings for the factors. As a result, the factor structure of the items is now as follows: Factor 1, SEA (items B1.1 – B1.4, B1.13 and B1.14); Factor 2, UOE (items B1.9 – B1.12); Factor 3, OEA (items B1.5 – B1.8) and Factor 4, ROE (items B1.15 – B1.16). These results resonate with the notions that EI measures function differently across cultural and high-stress occupational settings, as the salience and expression of emotional competencies are shaped by job demands, emotional display rules and chronic exposure to stress, such as those present in policing (Pekaar et al., 2020). Furthermore, emotional awareness and emotional use processes are often tightly intertwined due to norms of emotional control and rapid decision-making under

pressure, which may account for differential item loading (Magny & Todak, 2021). Moreover, resilience resulted in a two-factor structure, namely resilience recovery and resilience control. Sample characteristics, as well as cultural, contextual and demographic factors, may explain why the originally uni-dimensional resilience scale resulted in a two-factor structure in this study. Therefore, the two-factor structure for resilience might be specific to the sample used in this study. This analysis indicated significant factor loadings greater than 0.5. To assess the presence of common method bias (CMB), Harman's Single-Factor Test was conducted through unrotated exploratory factor analysis. As indicated, four factors were extracted for EI in the current study. The first factor explained 23.5% of the variance which is below the 50% threshold. Regarding resilience, the first factor explained 42.9% of the variance and is also below the threshold of 50%. Therefore, CMB is not significant. A uni-dimensional factor structure was reported for happiness which explained 58% of the variance. This result is slightly above the 50% threshold and may indicate the possibility of common method variance (CMV). The exploratory factor analysis results are presented in Table 2.

Descriptive statistics

Mean scores reported for the first EI factor (SEA) ranged from 5.85 to 6.15, indicating that most participating police officers agreed that they could identify, express and understand their own emotions when faced with difficult situations. The second EI factor, (UOE), reported mean scores ranging between 6.07 to 6.16. The overall performance of the respondents in terms of the second EI factor (UOE) indicates that the many police officers perceived that they understood how to use their emotions. Thus, it can be concluded that these individuals are goal-oriented, confident in their capabilities and self-motivated. The mean scores recorded for the third EI factor, (OEA), ranged between 5.40 to 5.69. This suggests that the police officers only somewhat agreed that they can understand others' emotions. The mean scores recorded for the fourth EI factor, (ROE), ranged between 5.72 to 5.82. Similarly, this indicates that respondents only somewhat agreed that they can regulate their emotions, more specifically, controlling their emotions and calming down when they are angry. The mean scores for the first resilience factor (recovery) ranged from 5.27 to 5.59. These moderate scores indicate that there is a possibility for the police officers to recover from stressful events. The mean scores recorded for happiness ranged between 5.65 to 5.85. This shows that police officers consider themselves mostly happy (M = 5.84) and perceive their happiness as comparable to that of their peers (M = 5.85). The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Correlations

The study used Pearson correlation analysis to measure the strength of the relationship between the constructs. The associations between the EI factors (SEA, UOE, OEA and ROE) and the resilience factor recovery showed weak relationships ($r = 0.135$; $p < 0.014$; $r = 0.137$; $p < 0.013$; $r = 0.148$; $p < 0.007$; $r = 0.190$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, as the EI of police officers increase, resilience recovery slightly increases. The associations between the EI factors (SEA, UOE and OEA) and the resilience control factor were weak associations ($r = 0.084$; $p < 0.128$; $r = 0.102$; $p < 0.063$; $r = 0.128$; $p < 0.020$). However, it indicates that as the EI of police officers increase, resilience control will slightly increase. The association between the EI factor (ROE) and the resilience control showed a medium correlation of ($r = 0.377$; $p < 0.000$). This indicates that it is possible for the police officers with higher levels of emotional experience to regulate their emotions during adverse situations. The association between resilience recovery and happiness indicated a medium association ($r = 0.421$; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that police officers with higher resilience tend to buffer themselves from adverse outcomes, such as stress, depression and emotional disorders and are more likely to embrace positive emotions as a buffer against these negative factors. Resilience control showed a weak relationship with happiness ($r = 0.169$; $p < 0.002$), indicating that as the resilience control factor increases, happiness will also slightly increase. Furthermore, happiness may enhance resilience, as police officers who are skilled at generating positive emotions are more likely to be resilient (Jaufalaily & Himam, 2017). Table 4 presents the correlations.

Regression analysis

Regression analyses were conducted to determine whether the independent variable EI predicts the dependent variable resilience and whether the independent variable resilience predicts the dependent variable happiness. The findings of the study in regression model 1 show that the EI factors, SEA ($\beta = -0.001$, $t = -0.018$, $p = 0.986$), UOE ($\beta = 0.054$, $t = 0.711$, $p = 0.478$) and OEA ($\beta = 0.098$, $t = 1.482$, $p = 0.139$) did not predict resilience recovery. In contrast, the study of Trigueros et al. (2020) found that EI positively predicted resilience ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$). Nonetheless, the fourth EI factor ROE predicted resilience recovery ($\beta = 0.165$, $t = 2.937$, $p = 0.004$). Regarding regression model 2, the EI factors SEA ($\beta = -0.111$, $t = -1.461$, $p = 0.145$), UOE ($\beta = 0.038$, $t = 0.539$,

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis for EI, resilience and happiness.

Construct	Items	Communalities	Factor loadings	KMO sampling adequacy	Bartlett's test of sphericity	Eigenvalue	Percentage variance explained	
EI Factor 1 SEA	WLEIS 1	0.645	0.772	0.865	X^2 = 3436.047 df = 120 p = 0.000	3.758	23.486	
	WLEIS 2	0.649	0.733					
	WLEIS 3	0.688	0.708					
	WLEIS 4	0.694	0.654					
	WLEIS 13	0.575	0.623					
	WLEIS 14	0.726	0.646					
EI Factor 2 UOE	WLEIS 9	0.708	0.618			3.404	21.273	
	WLEIS 10	0.832	0.836					
	WLEIS 11	0.844	0.878					
	WLEIS 12	0.758	0.777					
EI Factor 3 OEA	WLEIS 5	0.708	0.713			2.435	15.216	
	WLEIS 6	0.733	0.778					
	WLEIS 7	0.654	0.710					
	WLEIS 8	0.611	0.612					
EI Factor 4 ROE	WLEIS 15	0.867	0.922			1.930	12.065	
	WLEIS 16	0.835	0.905					
RES Factor 1 Recovery	BRS 3	0.587	0.674	0.802	X^2 = 725.020 df = 15 p = 0.000	2.574	42.906	
	BRS 4	0.726	0.823					
	BRS 5	0.703	0.826					
	BRS 6	0.690	0.819					
RES Factor 2 Control	BRS 1	0.743	0.822			1.681	28.017	
	BRS 2	0.806	0.886					
HAP	SHS 1	0.724	Only one component was extracted	0.720	X^2 = 435.991 df = 6 p = 0.000	2.320	58.011	
	SHS 2	0.796						
	SHS 3	0.782						
EI = Emotional intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion; RES = Resilience; HAP = Happiness; WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BRS = Brief Resilience Scale; SHS = Subjective Happiness Scale								
(Source: Calculated from survey results)								

p = 0.590) and OEA (β = 0.117, t = 1.858, p = 0.064) also did not predict resilience control. Bohrer (2021) report that EI significantly predicts resilience (β = 0.45, t = 5.36, p < 0.0001). However, the fourth EI factor (ROE) significantly predicted resilience control (β = 0.382, t = 7.193, p = 0.000). In regression model 3, resilience recovery positively predicted happiness (β = 0.421, t = 8.406, p = 0.000). The study resonates with the results of a study conducted by Smith and Hollinger-Smith (2015), who found that there is a predictive relationship between resilience and happiness (β = 0.32, p = 0.001). In regression model 4, resilience control was positively associated with happiness (β = 0.169, t = 3.109, p = 0.002). Similarly, Jaufalaily and Himam (2017) report a positive predictive relationship between resilience and happiness. The regression analysis is presented in Table 5.

Hypotheses outcomes

The results for the hypotheses are indicated in Table 6.

Reliability

Reliability for the dimensions of the WLEIS is as follows: 0.878 (SEA), 0.772 (OEA), 0.911 (UOE) and 0.866 (ROE). The overall scale achieved an internal consistency of 0.904. Reliability for the dimensions of the BRS are as follows: 0.833 (Factor 1: Resilience recovery) and 0.710 (Factor 2: Resilience control). The overall scale achieved an internal consistency of 0.824. Item 4 on the SHS was removed due to low reliability, resulting

Table 3. Means for the EI, resilience and happiness scales.

EI Factor 1: SEA						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
WLEIS 1	330	1	7	5.89	1.030	1.060
WLEIS 2	330	1	7	6.02	1.069	1.143
WLEIS 3	330	1	7	5.97	0.975	0.950
WLEIS 4	330	2	7	6.15	0.975	0.951
WLEIS 13	330	2	7	5.85	1.079	1.164
WLEIS 14	330	1	7	5.92	0.997	0.993
EI Factor 2: UOE						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
WLEIS 9	330	1	7	6.07	1.007	1.013
WLEIS 10	330	2	7	6.11	1.026	1.052
WLEIS 11	330	2	7	6.16	1.040	1.081
WLEIS 12	330	1	7	6.13	0.957	0.986
EI Factor 3: OEA						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
WLEIS 5	330	1	7	5.40	1.288	1.658
WLEIS 6	330	1	7	5.51	1.193	1.424
WLEIS 7	330	1	7	5.68	1.229	1.511
WLEIS 8	330	1	7	5.69	1.112	1.237
EI Factor 4: ROE						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
WLEIS 15	330	1	7	5.75	1.147	1.315
WLEIS 16	330	1	7	5.82	1.065	1.134
RES Factor 1: Resilience recovery						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
BRS 3	330	1	7	5.59	1.257	1.579
BRS 4	330	1	7	5.27	1.367	1.868
BRS 5	330	1	7	5.37	1.393	1.941
BRS 6	330	1	7	5.48	1.330	1.770
RES Factor 2: Resilience control						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
BRS 1	330	1	7	5.72	1.188	1.411
BRS 2	330	1	7	5.33	1.441	2.077
HAP						
Items	**N**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
SHS 1	330	1	7	5.84	1.077	1.161
SHS 2	330	1	7	5.85	1.058	1.120
SHS 3	330	3	7	5.65	1.104	1.220
EI = Emotional intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion; RES = Resilience; HAP = Happiness; WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; BRS = Brief Resilience Scale; SHS = Subjective Happiness Scale						
(Source: Calculated from survey results)						

in an overall internal consistency of 0.850. All reliability coefficients exceeded 0.7, indicating that the scales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (see Table 7).

Discussion

The results indicate small to moderate relationships between the EI dimensions, resilience and happiness. However, the associations indicate statistically significant positive associations between the variables. Furthermore, the EI factor, ROE, predicts both resilience factors, however, the effect sizes are modest. This suggests that EI explains modest variance in resilience. The modest explained variance may be due to the use of self-report measures, potential response bias and other relevant predictors not included in the framework. Modest effect sizes are common in complex, high-stress environments like policing, where outcomes result from many interacting factors (Hoeve et al., 2021). The pattern of associations indicates not redundancy but differentiation,

Table 4. Correlations among EI, resilience and happiness.

Pearson correlation	Constructs	EI Factor 1: SEA	EI Factor 2: UOE	EI Factor 3: OEA	EI Factor 4: ROE	Resilience Factor 1: Recovery	Resilience Factor 2: Control	Happiness
	EI Factor 1: SEA	1						
	EI Factor 2: UOE	0.684**	1					
	EI Factor 3: OEA	0.561**	0.497**	1				
	EI Factor 4: ROE	0.269**	0.214**	0.142**	1			
	Resilience Factor 1: Recovery	0.135*	0.137*	0.148**	0.190**	1		
	Resilience Factor 2: Control	0.084	0.102	0.128*	0.377**	0.466**	1	
	Happiness	0.072	0.072	0.114*	0.200**	0.421**	0.169**	1
EI = Emotional intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)								
(Source: Calculated from survey results)								

indicating that some EI abilities are more relevant than others in predicting adaptive outcomes under persistent stress.

While prior studies report positive associations between overall EI and resilience (Trigueros et al., 2020; Bohrer, 2021), the present findings indicate that examining EI as a single, composite construct may conceal important differences between its dimensions. This supports the perspective that emotion regulation is a critical ability for effective functioning during sustained stress (Preece et al., 2025). Similarly, the non-significant effects of SEA, OEA and UOE further underscore the need for more detailed, mechanism-oriented models of EI, particularly in high-risk occupations such as policing. SEA primarily reflects emotional awareness rather than adaptive regulation. Awareness alone may be insufficient for stress recovery under chronic threat exposure, potentially intensifying distress in the absence of regulatory capacity (Zhang et al., 2024). Similarly, OEA has been more consistently linked to interpersonal effectiveness and social functioning than to individual stress tolerance, particularly in roles involving repeated exposure to others' trauma (Pekaar et al., 2020; Elshaer et al., 2025; Suson et al., 2025). Regarding UOE, studies indicate that this dimension is more strongly associated with motivational and performance-related outcomes than with resilience or emotional recovery processes (MacCann et al., 2020).

The study also contributes to the theoretical knowledge of resilience by supporting a two-factor structure consisting of resilience recovery and resilience control, consistent with process-oriented conceptualisations of resilience (Vella & Pai, 2019). The differences in how EI dimensions relate to resilience suggest that resilience capabilities may develop through distinct psychological pathways. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of contextualising EI and resilience theories within extreme work environments. With reference to the South African policing, characterised by persistent exposure to violence and stress, the significance of emotion regulation indicates that current theories may point to realignment to accommodate for example the specific organisational context.

Limitations and future study implications

A cross-sectional research design was used in the study, which limited the study as it was conducted at one point in time, subsequently limiting inferring causality, thus preventing determination of causal direction. The use of self-report measures in the study is a further limitation as it could have led to the misinterpretation of questions, response bias and social desirability bias. A longitudinal approach that examines police officers' EI, resilience and happiness over time could yield different results. A mixed-method approach should be considered for the collection of in-depth experiences encountered by police officers as the current study did not consider descriptive information regarding police officers' feelings, thoughts and fears. Regarding the difference in item loadings of

Table 5. Regression analysis between EI, resilience and happiness.

Model 1: Dependent variable (Resilience recovery)	**Unstandardised coefficients**		**Standardised coefficients**			**Collinearity statistics**	
	B	**Std. error**	**Beta**	**T**	**Sig**	**Tol**	**VIF**
Independent variable EI Factor 1: SEA	-0.002	0.109	-0.001	-0.018	0.986	0.454	2.204
Independent variable EI Factor 2: UOE	0.065	0.092	0.054	0.711	0.478	0.512	1.953
Independent variable EI Factor 3: OEA	0.116	0.078	0.098	1.482	0.139	0.661	1.513
Independent variable EI Factor 4: ROE	0.173	0.059	0.165	2.937	0.004	0.925	1.081
$R^2 = 0.053$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.041$ **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 2: Dependent variable (Resilience control)	**Unstandardised coefficients**		**Standardised coefficients**			**Collinearity statistics**	
	B	**Std. error**	**Beta**	**T**	**Sig**	**Tol**	**VIF**
Independent variable EI Factor 1: SEA	-0.160	0.109	-0.111	-1.461	0.145	0.454	2.204
Independent variable EI Factor 2: UOE	0.050	0.093	0.038	0.539	0.590	0.512	1.953
Independent variable EI Factor 3: OEA	0.146	0.078	0.117	1.858	0.064	0.661	1.513
Independent variable EI Factor 4: ROE	0.427	0.059	0.382	7.193	0.000	0.925	1.081
$R^2 = 0.153$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.143$ **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 3: Dependent variable (Happiness)	**Unstandardised coefficients**		**Standardised coefficients**			**Collinearity statistics**	
	B	**Std. error**	**B**	**T**	**Sig**	**Tol**	**VIF**
Independent variable Resilience recovery	0.365	0.043	0.421	8.406	0.000	1.000	1.000
$R^2 = 0.177$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.175$ **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 4: Dependent variable (Happiness)	**Unstandardised coefficients**		**Standardised coefficients**			**Collinearity statistics**	
	B	**Std. error**	**B**	**T**	**Sig**	**Tol**	**VIF**
Independent variable Resilience control	0.138	0.044	0.169	3.109	0.002	1.000	1.000
$R^2 = 0.029$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.026$ **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
EI = Emotional intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion							
(Source: Calculated from survey results)							

the WLEIS and the single factor structure of resilience resulting in a two-factor structure, it must be emphasised again that the characteristics of the sample, cultural factors, contextual factors as well as demographic factors could explain these findings. CMV was reported as a slight possibility due to CMB for the happiness variable. This could be ascribed to the cross-sectional design of the study and the single measuring instrument distributed

Table 6. Hypotheses outcomes.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta coefficient	t-value	p-value	Supported/not supported
H1	EI SEA → RES RECOVERY	-0.001	-0.018	0.986	Not supported
H2	EI UOE → RES RECOVERY	0.054	0.711	0.478	Not supported
H3	EI OEA → RES RECOVERY	0.098	1.482	0.139	Not supported
H4	EI ROE → RES RECOVERY	0.165	2.937	0.004	Supported
H5	EI SEA → RES CONTROL	-0.111	-1.461	0.145	Not supported
H6	EI UOE → RES CONTROL	0.038	0.539	0.590	Not supported
H7	EI OEA → RES CONTROL	0.117	1.858	0.064	Not supported
H8	EI ROE → RES CONTROL	0.382	7.193	0.000	Supported
H9	RES RECOVERY → HAP	0.421	8.406	0.000	Supported
H10	RES CONTROL → HAP	0.169	3.109	0.002	Supported
EI = Emotional intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion; RES = Resilience; HAP = Happiness					
(Source: Calculated from survey results)					

Table 7. Reliabilities.

Construct	Cronbach alpha	No. of items
EI (Total Scale)	0.904	16
EI Factor 1: SEA	0.878	6
EI Factor 2: UOE	0.911	4
EI Factor 3: OEA	0.772	4
EI Factor 4: ROE	0.866	2
Resilience (Total scale)	0.824	6
Resilience Factor 1: Resilience recovery	0.833	4
Resilience Factor 2: Resilience control	0.710	2
Happiness	0.850	3
EI = Emotional Intelligence; SEA = Self emotion appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; ROE = Regulation of emotion		
(Source: Calculated from survey results)		

with similar Likert-type scales. It is recommended that future studies utilise further measures to reduce response bias. Additionally, future studies could extend the framework by including predictors such as personality traits, workplace climate, perceived health, social support, meaning in life and motivation. Regarding the six hypotheses rejected in this study, it is necessary to indicate that the conceptual framework should be further refined. Therefore, future research could include moderating variables. Multiple comparisons should also be included in future studies. The sample was limited to police officers in the Sedibeng West District, South Africa and can, therefore, not be generalised to other populations.

Conclusions and practical implications

The results of the study showed that police officers have moderate levels of EI, resilience and happiness, suggesting the ability to cope with demanding work conditions. Higher levels of the ability to respond positively to stressful work situations will assist police officers with the ability to understand their own emotions and those of others and how to regulate these emotions. The results highlight the dimension ROE as a key

EI ability, underpinning resilience, enabling officers to manage their emotional responses and recover from challenging or traumatic situations. Police officers will then recover from stressful events and bounce back from challenging situations. Given that EI and resilience are skills and therefore, potentially developable and improvable constructs, organisational interventions should prioritise strengthening police officers' EI rather than adopting broad, generic EI programmes, alongside structured post-incident debriefings that support emotional recovery. Therefore, implementing programmes and interventions that are focused specifically on each one of the EI factors (SEA, UOE, OEA and ROE). These interventions can include for example role-play and exercises where reflection on emotions is encouraged. Furthermore, interventions and programmes must focus on exercises to reduce negative emotions and equip the police officers with coping strategies to manage the multitude of emotions they experience daily. Such targeted EI interventions will not only buffer the negative effects of stress but also promote happiness, positive workplace relationships and resilience among police officers. Therefore, equipping police officers to increase their levels of EI will improve the ability to appraise their own and others' emotions, use their emotions in a positive manner and regulate their emotions, thus contributing to a resilient and happier police force. EI and resilience among police officers are certainly abilities that will contribute to police officers' happiness. Hence, police officers with EI abilities can evaluate their cognitive and affective areas of life, such as work and relationships, thus resulting in nurturing happiness within the work environment.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The interdisciplinary scope is demonstrated through the quantitative approach informed by positivism in determining the relationships between EI, resilience and happiness to acquire an integrated understanding of the police force in South Africa.

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