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HOW CAN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BENEFIT VETERINARIANS?

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A MIXED-METHODS ANALYSIS

Introduction



The veterinary profession can be highly rewarding, but the emotional nature of clinical work can also contribute to mental distress and poor job satisfaction.

Positive psychology has the potential to improve mental health and the retention of veterinarians in the profession.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- Investigate factors that influence EI throughout the first year of veterinarians in Canada post-graduation.
- Understand early-career veterinarians' experiences with managing intense emotions in veterinary work.

Methods

Convergent, parallel, mixed-methods framework (QUAN + QUAL)

QUALITATIVE

Individual Interviews

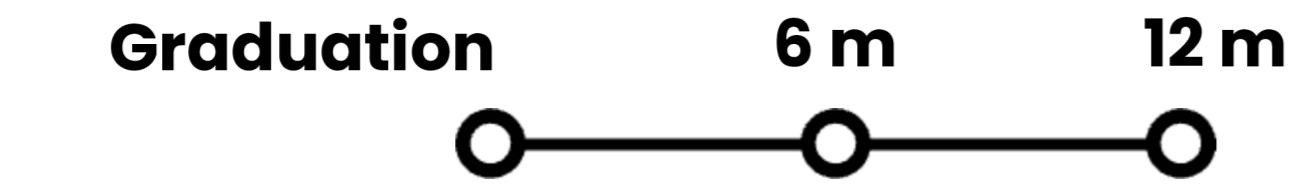
- English only
- 21 graduates of Canadian veterinary colleges from 2016 – 2023
- November 2022 – September 2023

Template Analysis

A form of **thematic analysis** which involves coding and categorizing data into themes using a subset of the data to create an initial template.

QUANTITATIVE

Online Longitudinal Survey

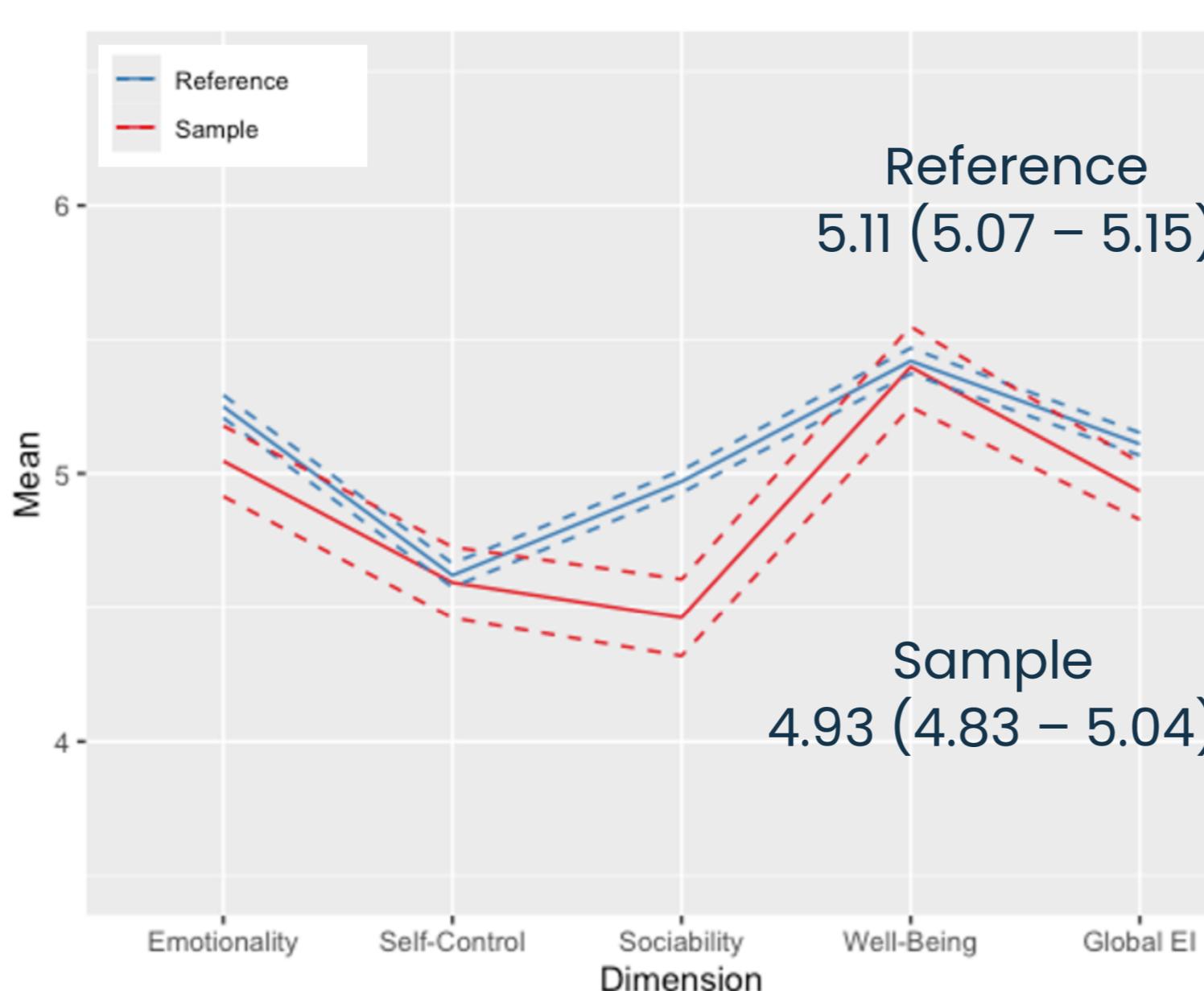


- English and French
- Classes of 2022 and 2023
- All Canadian veterinary colleges
- Demographic and lifestyle
- Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form

Linear Mixed-Effects Model

- nlme package in R
- Outcome of interest: EI score
- Random effects: Subject-level
- Fixed effects: mental health, disability, time spent outdoors, social support, etc.

Results & Discussion



QUANTITATIVE

Compared to the general population, veterinarians in our sample had slightly lower emotional intelligence.

Specifically, in Emotionality (understanding one's emotions) and Sociability (influencing emotions of others).

Emotional intelligence scores did not change significantly ($p>0.05$) during the first year after graduation.

Consistent predictors of high EI included



Mental health



Time spent outdoors



Satisfaction with social support

QUALITATIVE

Most veterinarians lacked the time to process their emotions during work hours and ended up “putting their emotions in a box”

“Eventually, that box can be so full that I really can't move on to the next thing. And I don't want it to come to that point where ... I can't, like, move on to the next thing because I'm so stuck on this thing that I've kind of neglected for a long time.” (P01)

Some veterinarians internalized beliefs that their emotions were “not important”

“One of the number one skills I think that [vet] school teaches you, which sounds terrible, is how to control your emotions, and to not cry” (P07)

Many veterinarians already appreciate the benefits of emotional intelligence in client communication



... and also believed that being able to manage their own emotions makes them a “better veterinarian”

Conclusions

Our results support calls for increasing emotional intelligence capacity in veterinary professionals as evidenced by:

- Lower emotional intelligence scores
- Lack of resources to process emotions
- Internalized beliefs that modify behaviours

Opportunities for intervention

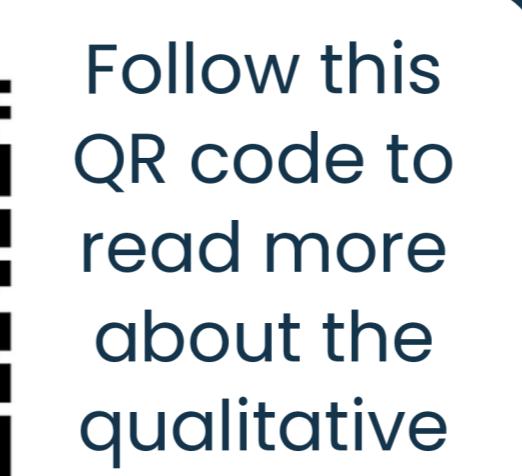
- Integration with practical training
- Social support and mentorship programs

References

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Follow this QR code to read more about the qualitative research



We would like to thank the participants for their contribution.
As well as funding from...

