

**Ayad Hajar  
Kaur Harleen  
Alsaykal Sura**

*Ural Federal University,  
Ekaterinburg, Russia*

## **The effect of diet and mindful eating on emotional intelligence: a cross-cultural study**

*Abstract.* This research investigates the effect of diet and mindful eating on emotional intelligence. Our first hypothesis states that vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets can influence emotional intelligence differently. The second hypothesis states that mindful eating affects emotional intelligence. Our sample consisted of 90 participants divided into three groups depending on their country of origin — Moroccan, Indian and Iraqi. The results demonstrated that the influence of diet on emotional intelligence was not statistically significant. We found a positive correlation between mindful eating and emotional intelligence in all the groups.

*Keywords:* Cross-cultural study, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, mindful eating, emotional intelligence.

*Introduction.* Behavioural effects of food is a topic that has for a long time attracted much scholarly interest. However, only recently, researchers have started exploring the relationship between nutrition and people's mental functioning and emotions [1]. It is known that certain foods and nutrients can produce specific chemical changes in the brain. Moreover, recent studies suggest that diets and meals should be taken in consideration when preparing to perform this or that task. For example, a low-protein, high-carbohydrate meal might not be the best idea before doing a complicated job that requires concentration and alertness. Food is a big part of our everyday life and our relationship with it is a never-ending story. It is also one of the keys to understanding our mental and emotional state.

This research focuses on the relationship between diet and emotional intelligence, on the one hand, and the relationship between mindful eating and emotional intelligence, on the other. Our first hypothesis states that vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets can have a different influence on emotional intelligence. The second hypothesis states that mindful eating affects emotional intelligence.

*Materials and methods.* To test the first hypothesis, we presented participants with an EQ test (Questionnaire modified by Suzanne Farmer et al. (c. 2013) UT Southwestern's Office of Development and Training) in order to measure their emotional intelligence. This test was given to two groups of participants, vegetarians and non-vegetarians. To find the influence of these two diets on emotional intelligence, we used the statistical method of one-way ANOVA. To test the second hypothesis, we used the mindful eating questionnaire [2]. To study the correlation of mindful eating with emotional intelligence, we used the method of Spearman's coefficient. Since our sample included people from different cultures, we were able to study the influence of the independent variables in a cross-cultural context.

Our sample consisted of 90 participants from three countries of origin — 30 Moroccans, 30 Indians and 30 Iraqi — aged 18–30. Each group was divided into two groups, 15 vegetarians and 15 non-vegetarians, in order to establish the comparison and study the first hypothesis. For the second hypothesis, we tested the difference on a cross-cultural basis without dividing the sample into smaller groups.

*Results.* We found that the influence of diet on emotional intelligence in all groups, contrary to our predictions, was not statistically significant. As for the second hypothesis, we found a positive correlation between mindful eating and emotional intelligence. The stability of results for this correlation was determined.

*Conclusion.* The results of this study can be used in further studies on mindful eating: for example, further research can be done to show the effect of mindful eating on cognitive processes. The influence of vegetarian and non-vegetarian diets on emotional intelligence can also be reinvestigated on larger groups. Moreover, the results of this study can be used to help people develop their emotional intelligence through mindful eating practices.

- 
1. Giraldo M., Buodo G., Sarlo M. Food processing and emotion regulation in vegetarians and omnivores: An event-related potential investigation // *Appetite*. 2019. 141:104334.
  2. Framson C., Kristal A. R., Schenk J. M., Littman A. J., Zeliadt S., Benitez D. Development and validation of the Mindful Eating Questionnaire // *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2009. 109:1439–1444.2.