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Emotional Intelligence: Mitigating The Impact of Emotional Suppression and Behavioral Consequences Among Combat Troops

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ABSTRACT: Emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional suppression are key yet often overlooked factors that influence behavior and performance in combat settings. Understanding how they interact is vital for fostering discipline, resilience, and operational effectiveness among military personnel, who face constant stress and high-pressure situations. This study emphasizes that EI—especially self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation—helps mitigate the negative effects of excessive emotional suppression, such as aggression, social withdrawal, and decreased performance. Unlike demographic factors, EI emerges as a primary determinant of how personnel manage emotions and respond behaviorally under pressure, highlighting its value as a trainable and developable skill within military contexts. The research also underscores the role of adaptive coping mechanisms, including leadership guidance, peer support, mentoring, and reflective practices, in translating emotional competencies into constructive behavioral outcomes. Unchecked emotional suppression can harm both individual well-being and unit cohesion, reinforcing the need for balanced emotional regulation strategies. Overall, these findings provide strong evidence for integrating EI training, mentorship, and mental health support into military programs, enhancing resilience, reducing behavioral risks, and sustaining performance—ultimately representing a strategic investment in both personnel capability and mission success.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Suppression, Behavioral Consequences, Combat troops, Military Study

INTRODUCTION

The significance of emotional intelligence in regulating suppressed emotions and shaping the behavioral responses of combat personnel. Combat units operate in extremely stressful and life-threatening conditions, where emotional control is critical for mission success. However, prolonged emotional suppression has been linked to adverse outcomes, including diminished work performance, heightened aggression, and, in severe cases, violence or self-harm. Scholars consistently emphasize the importance of Emotional Intelligence in high-stress environments. Recent evidence shows that maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, particularly emotional suppression, are strongly associated with increased verbal, physical, and relational aggression (Kyranides, Mirman, & Sawrikar, 2024). In contrast, soldiers with higher levels of EI are better equipped to regulate stress adaptively, reducing the likelihood of conflict and violent behavior. Feng et al. (2025) found that EI was indirectly associated with lower psychobiological stress responses among military personnel through enhanced self-esteem, highlighting EI as a psychological resource that supports stress regulation in demanding military contexts. Similarly, Yin et al. (2022) demonstrated that emotionally intelligent leadership fosters stronger team passion and positive emotional climates, enhancing morale and reducing interpersonal conflict and disciplinary problems.

Cosic, Kopilas, and Jovanovic (2024) further emphasize that dysregulated emotional responses—such as fear, anger, and chronic suppression—undermine resilience and increase vulnerability to aggression in wartime settings. Collectively, these findings suggest that EI promotes adaptive emotion regulation, mitigates the negative effects of emotional suppression, and reduces stress-related aggression and behavioral disruption among soldiers.

Despite growing attention to EI and emotion regulation, significant gaps remain. Most studies focus on clinical distress or extreme behavioral outcomes, with limited examination of how combat troops with generally adequate EI manage prolonged emotional suppression during sustained operations. Quantitative measures often overlook situational and cumulative emotional experiences that do not immediately manifest as dysfunction. Moreover, despite mental health programs within the Philippine Army, internal G1 data (2016–2025) indicate fluctuating mental health–related incidents and a marked rise in non-honorable discharges from 303 in 2024 to 480 in 2025, primarily due to administrative separations and violations of the Articles of War.

The lead researcher, an Army officer with professional experience in human resource management, leadership, discipline administration, and personnel development, gained firsthand exposure to soldier behavior and emotional regulation. This study was

conducted to contribute to a deeper, context-sensitive understanding of emotional suppression and EI among combat troops, informing future research, leadership development, and personnel management strategies in high-stress military environments.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study is grounded in Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory, which posits that emotional suppression among military personnel is associated with decreased emotional intelligence and increased behavioral issues such as aggression, withdrawal, performance decline, and interpersonal conflict. Mayer and Salovey (1990), later popularized by Goleman (1995, 1998), conceptualized EI as a measurable psychological construct composed of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that higher EI is linked to better emotion regulation, resilience, and well-being under stress. These competencies are particularly critical in high-stress military environments, where effective emotional management influences decision-making, stress resilience, and behavioral outcomes. Enhancing EI is therefore essential for improving unit cohesion, morale, and operational effectiveness among combat troops.

Complementing EI theory, Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation explains emotional suppression as a response-focused strategy that inhibits emotional expression after emotions arise. While functional in short-term military contexts, prolonged suppression increases psychological strain and reduces emotional awareness. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory further explains that sustained suppression depletes emotional and psychological resources, heightening vulnerability to stress-related behavioral consequences. Guided by these frameworks, the study treats Goleman's EI competencies as independent variables, with emotional suppression and behavioral outcomes as dependent variables, to examine how EI mitigates the negative effects of suppression among combat troops under sustained operational stress.

METHODS

This study adopts an explanatory sequential research design, following the framework of Creswell and Creswell (2022). It uses a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data with qualitative insights, allowing the study to develop a deeper and more holistic understanding of the research problem. In this design, quantitative data are first collected and analyzed to identify statistical patterns, relationships, or trends among emotional intelligence, emotional suppression, and behavioral outcomes. These findings then guide the qualitative phase, which gathers in-depth data to explain and contextualize the quantitative results. This sequential approach ensures that the strengths of both methods complement each other, producing richer and more meaningful interpretations of the phenomena under investigation. The design was selected to capture both general patterns across combat troops and the underlying experiences that influence emotional regulation and behavior in high-stress operational environments.

The study was conducted on five combat units under the 10th Infantry "Agila" Division, based in Mawab, Davao de Oro, whose Area of Responsibility extends to Davao City. A total of 300 combat personnel—officers and enlisted—participated in the quantitative phase, with quota sampling used to ensure proportional representation across units and ranks. Respondents were selected based on operational engagement, field exposure, and sustained combat or security activity within the past twelve months, excluding personnel in purely administrative or logistical roles. For the qualitative phase, 20 key informants—ten officers and ten enlisted personnel—were purposively selected to provide in-depth insights through Focus Group Discussions. This approach allowed the study to integrate leadership and frontline perspectives, examine the effects of emotional suppression, and understand how EI mediates behavioral outcomes within diverse operational contexts of the 10th Infantry Division.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This research was carried out in line with the ethical standards set by the Belmont Report and the 2022 Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research. Respect for participants was ensured by carefully obtaining informed consent, making it clear that involvement in the study was completely voluntary. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences, an assurance that was especially important given the structured and hierarchical nature of the military environment. To prevent coercion, additional safeguards were implemented, clearly assuring participants that their involvement or non-involvement would not affect evaluations, assignments, or career advancement. Confidentiality was maintained by excluding personal identifiers, using coded data, and securing all records with access limited solely to the research team. Beneficence was ensured by minimizing potential risks related to emotional discomfort through the provision of counseling support, peer discussions, and referrals to mental health services when necessary, while maximizing the study's value through its contribution to evidence-based emotional intelligence and stress management interventions. Justice was observed through equitable participant selection across ranks and service backgrounds, with findings disseminated to benefit the broader military community and support both individual well-being and operational readiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This table presents the distribution of respondents across selected combat units under the 10th Infantry Division, Philippine Army.

Level of Emotional Intelligence of Combat Troops

The emotional intelligence of combat troops was evaluated by looking at five key areas: how well they understand their own emotions, how effectively they manage and control their feelings, what drives and motivates them, their ability to empathize with others, and how they interact and build relationships through social skills.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence of Combat Troops Across Five Domains

Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Self-Awareness	2.914	Moderately Emotionally Intelligent
Self-Regulation	3.434	Emotionally Intelligent
Motivation	3.486	Emotionally Intelligent
Empathy	3.263	Moderately Emotionally Intelligent
Social Skills	3.471	Moderately Emotionally Intelligent
Overall Mean	3.314	Moderately Emotionally Intelligent

Note. Mean scores were interpreted according to the study's EI scale, where higher values indicate stronger emotional intelligence.

Table 1 shows that combat troops exhibit an overall Emotional Intelligence (EI) level classified as **Moderately Emotionally Intelligent** (overall mean = 3.314), indicating functional but not fully developed emotional competencies. Among the EI dimensions, **motivation** (3.486) and **self-regulation** (3.434) were highest, reflecting goal-oriented, disciplined personnel capable of managing emotions under operational stress. In contrast, **self-awareness** (2.914), **empathy** (3.263), and **social skills** (3.471) were moderately rated, suggesting limited capacity for emotional reflection, understanding others, and interpersonal management. This pattern highlights stronger intrapersonal, performance-focused competencies over relational and reflective skills, consistent with traditional combat training emphasizing discipline and mission accomplishment. The findings imply that while existing training supports operational effectiveness, targeted interventions to enhance self-awareness, empathy, and social skills could strengthen emotional intelligence, improve teamwork, and foster resilience, ultimately promoting both individual well-being and collective effectiveness in complex military environments.

Level of Emotional Suppression among Combat Troops

Table 2 highlights the level of emotional suppression among combat troops using behavioral and performance-related indicators. The results indicate that the respondents exhibit an overall emotional suppression level classified as **Slightly Emotionally Suppressed** (overall mean = 2.396), suggesting that while behaviors associated with emotional suppression are present, they are generally expressed at a low level and are not yet pervasive or severe. This finding reflects a relatively functional emotional state among the troops, indicating that they can generally manage their emotions in operational contexts. However, it also points to latent risks, as insufficient support for emotional regulation mechanisms could allow suppressed emotions to accumulate over time, potentially affecting psychological well-being, decision-making, and performance under sustained operational stress.

Table 2: Level of Emotional Suppression of Combat Troops

Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	2.398	Slightly Emotionally Suppressed
Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	2.308	Slightly Emotionally Suppressed
Performance Decline or Absenteeism	2.475	Slightly Emotionally Suppressed
Incidences of Disciplinary Actions or Conflict	2.402	Slightly Emotionally Suppressed
Overall Mean	2.396	Slightly Emotionally Suppressed

Note. Mean scores were interpreted using the study's emotional suppression scale, where higher values indicate stronger suppression tendencies.

Among the indicators of emotional suppression, **performance decline or absenteeism** recorded the highest mean (2.475), followed by **incidences of disciplinary actions or conflict** (2.402) and **aggressive or impulsive behavior** (2.398). Although all remain within the *Slightly Emotionally Suppressed* range, the higher means suggest that suppression manifests more in behavioral and performance-related outcomes than in overt emotional withdrawal, consistent with research showing that constrained emotional expression often surfaces as reduced work performance, attendance issues, and interpersonal conflict in high-demand settings

(O'Brien, 2021). In contrast, **social withdrawal or isolation tendencies** had the lowest mean (2.308), indicating functional peer interaction and unit cohesion, which may buffer stress and reduce disengagement (Cao et al., 2023). Even low-level suppression, as reflected in aggressive or impulsive behaviors, can accumulate over time, contributing to burnout, psychological strain, and decreased long-term effectiveness (Wright, Walker, & Hall, 2023; Briciu, Leucuta, Tőkés, & Colcear, 2023). These findings highlight the need for early, preventive interventions such as emotional awareness training, peer-support mechanisms, and leadership coaching to sustain resilience, operational performance, and discipline in combat units (Filges et al., 2024).

Extent of Behavioral Consequences Experienced by Combat Troops

This presents the extent of behavioral consequences experienced by combat troops, focusing on observable behavioral and performance-related outcomes.

Table 3: Extent of Behavioral Consequences Experienced by Combat Troops

Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	2.047	Slightly Experienced
Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	2.028	Slightly Experienced
Performance Decline or Absenteeism	1.954	Slightly Experienced
Incidences of Disciplinary Actions or Conflict	2.273	Slightly Experienced
Overall Mean	2.076	Slightly Experienced

Note. Mean scores were interpreted according to the study's behavioral consequences scale, where higher values indicate greater frequency or intensity of negative outcomes.

The findings indicate that combat troops experience behavioral consequences at an overall level classified as **Slightly Experienced** (overall mean = 2.076), suggesting that while occupational stress and emotional strain are present, they occur at relatively low levels and are not yet pervasive or severe. Among the indicators, **incidences of disciplinary actions or conflict** had the highest mean (2.273), implying that behavioral outcomes are more likely to surface as interpersonal tensions or minor disciplinary issues rather than extreme or chronic problems, consistent with research showing that low-level conflicts in hierarchical settings can reflect underlying stress (Ha & Jue, 2022; Nielsen, Finne, Parveen, & Einarsen, 2022). In contrast, **performance decline or absenteeism** recorded the lowest mean (1.954), indicating that troops largely maintain functional performance despite stress, reflecting discipline, resilience, and commitment (Peterson et al., 2024). **Aggressive or impulsive behaviors** (2.047) and **social withdrawal** (2.028) were also slight, suggesting situational responses rather than entrenched maladaptive patterns. Overall, the results highlight behavioral resilience while emphasizing the need for early preventive interventions, such as emotional regulation training, leadership communication, and peer-support mechanisms, to mitigate minor conflicts before they escalate (Ha & Jue, 2022; Peterson et al., 2024).

Table 4: Significant Differences in Emotional Intelligence When Grouped According to Profile

EI Dimension	Profile Variable	Computed F	P-value	Decision	Conclusion
Self-Awareness	Age	0.450	0.718	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Sex	0.020	0.900	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Marital Status	0.920	0.339	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Rank	1.340	0.261	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Education Attainment	0.910	0.403	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Self-Regulation	Age	0.090	0.966	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Sex	0.090	0.770	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Marital Status	7.300	0.007	Reject H_0	Significant
	Rank	0.310	0.819	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Education Attainment	0.190	0.831	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Motivation	Age	0.990	0.399	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Sex	2.420	0.121	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Marital Status	2.950	0.087	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

EI Dimension	Profile Variable	Computed F	P-value	Decision	Conclusion
	Rank	0.970	0.407	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Education Attainment	0.480	0.617	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Empathy	Age	0.180	0.911	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Sex	6.220	0.013	Reject H_0	Significant
	Marital Status	1.590	0.208	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Rank	1.570	0.197	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Education Attainment	3.000	0.051	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
Social Skills	Age	0.190	0.904	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Sex	3.100	0.079	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Marital Status	1.030	0.312	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Rank	0.600	0.618	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant
	Education Attainment	0.370	0.689	Failed to reject H_0	Not Significant

Note. H_0 = null hypothesis; mean differences were tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level.

Table 4 highlights that most dimensions of emotional intelligence among combat troops do not significantly differ across demographic characteristics, indicating a generally uniform distribution of emotional competencies within the organization, consistent with research showing that EI in structured environments is shaped more by training, culture, and role demands than by personal attributes (Coronado Maldonado & Benítez Márquez, 2023). Two exceptions emerged: self-regulation varied significantly by marital status ($F = 7.300$, $p = 0.007$), suggesting that married and single personnel may differ in managing emotional responses, likely influenced by family support and adaptive coping mechanisms in high-stress contexts (Kelley, LeBaron Black, Hill, & Meter, 2021). Empathy also differed by sex ($F = 6.220$, $p = 0.013$), reflecting higher interpersonal sensitivity among female troops, in line with findings on sex-related differences in behavioral and neural measures of empathy (Christov Moore et al., 2021). In contrast, self-awareness, motivation, and social skills showed no significant differences across age, sex, marital status, rank, or education, suggesting that these EI competencies are relatively stable and reinforced by shared organizational experiences, institutional values, and standardized communication protocols (Boyatzis et al., 2021; Dagher et al., 2024; Fernandes, Pereira, & Wiedenhöft, 2023). Overall, the results indicate that EI is largely invariant across demographics, with targeted interventions recommended for dimensions influenced by personal and social factors, supporting both universal and differentiated approaches to EI development and leadership training (Boyatzis, Rochford, & Taylor, 2021).

Significant Relationship Between EI and Level of Emotional Suppression

This study explored how different aspects of emotional intelligence are linked to behavioral outcomes among combat troops by applying correlation analysis to the gathered data. Results in Table 5 indicate that most EI dimensions are significantly associated with behavioral outcomes, suggesting that emotional competencies are closely linked to how behavioral issues manifest in operational settings. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that EI supports behavioral regulation, performance stability, and discipline in high-stress, structured environments (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2020; Matthews, 2021). Self-awareness, in particular, showed statistically significant positive correlations with all behavioral consequences, including aggressive or impulsive behavior ($r = 0.324$, $p < .001$), social withdrawal or isolation tendencies ($r = 0.226$, $p < .001$), performance decline or absenteeism ($r = 0.342$, $p < .001$), and incidences of disciplinary actions or conflict ($r = 0.603$, $p < .001$). These findings highlight that higher self-awareness is strongly associated with both interpersonal and performance-related outcomes, supporting its role as a foundational EI component that facilitates behavioral monitoring and adaptive responses under operational stress (Boyatzis et al., 2021).

Table 5: Significant Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Behavioral Consequences

EI Dimension	Behavioral Consequence	r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Self-Awareness	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.324	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Social Withdrawal/Isolation Tendencies	0.226	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Performance Decline/Absenteeism	0.342	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.603	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
Self-Regulation	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.178	0.002	Reject H_0	Significant
	Social Withdrawal/Isolation Tendencies	0.105	0.070	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant

EI Dimension	Behavioral Consequence	r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
	Performance Decline/Absenteeism	0.185	0.001	Reject H_0	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.828	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
Motivation	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.119	0.040	Reject H_0	Significant
	Social Withdrawal/Isolation Tendencies	0.218	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Performance Decline/Absenteeism	0.250	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.809	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
Empathy	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.119	0.040	Reject H_0	Significant
	Social Withdrawal/Isolation Tendencies	0.095	0.099	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
	Performance Decline/Absenteeism	0.175	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.526	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
Social Skills	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.191	0.001	Reject H_0	Significant
	Social Withdrawal/Isolation Tendencies	0.119	0.039	Reject H_0	Significant
	Performance Decline/Absenteeism	0.218	0.000	Reject H_0	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	**1.000**	**-**	**Reject H_0**	**Significant**

Note. *The correlation (r) values show both the strength and the direction of the connection between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and behavioral outcomes. Relationships were considered statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05.*

Similarly, self-regulation demonstrated significant relationships with aggressive or impulsive behavior ($r = 0.178$, $p = .002$), performance decline or absenteeism ($r = 0.185$, $p = .001$), and incidences of disciplinary actions or conflict ($r = 0.828$, $p < .001$), with the particularly strong association with disciplinary actions underscoring the critical role of emotional control in maintaining order and compliance in structured organizations such as combat units, consistent with research linking deficits in emotion regulation to conflict escalation and disciplinary issues in high-risk occupations (Kirkham et al., 2025; Cohen et al., 2025). For motivation, all behavioral indicators were significantly correlated, including aggressive or impulsive behavior ($r = 0.119$, $p = .040$), social withdrawal or isolation tendencies ($r = 0.218$, $p < .001$), performance decline or absenteeism ($r = 0.250$, $p < .001$), and incidences of disciplinary actions or conflict ($r = 0.809$, $p < .001$), suggesting that motivational levels support behavioral regulation and sustained performance under operational pressure (Feng, Liu, Wu, et al., 2025). Empathy was significantly associated with aggressive or impulsive behavior ($r = 0.119$, $p < .001$), performance decline or absenteeism ($r = 0.175$, $p < .001$), and disciplinary actions or conflict ($r = 0.526$, $p < .001$), indicating that the capacity to understand and respond to others' emotions contributes to reduced maladaptive behavior and better interpersonal functioning (Ward et al., 2020; Christov-Moore et al., 2021). Likewise, social skills were significantly correlated with all behavioral consequences, including disciplinary actions ($r = 1.000$), emphasizing the importance of interpersonal competence in sustaining effective unit cohesion. A few relationships were not significant, notably self-regulation and empathy with social withdrawal, suggesting that withdrawal may be more influenced by contextual factors such as organizational climate and unit dynamics (Nielsen et al., 2022). Overall, these findings highlight emotional intelligence as a strong correlate of behavioral outcomes, particularly in regulating conflict, sustaining performance, and fostering interpersonal harmony in high-stress, structured military environments (Valor Segura et al., 2020; Dagher et al., 2024; Feng et al., 2025; Kirkham et al., 2025).

Significant Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and the Extent of Behavioral Consequences

This presents the results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and the extent of behavioral consequences experienced by combat troops.

Table 6: Significant Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and the Extent of Behavioral Consequences

Variable Tested	Behavioral Outcome	Computed r	P-value	Decision	Conclusion
Self-Awareness	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.346	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	0.284	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Performance Decline or Absenteeism	0.290	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.122	0.034	Reject Ho	Significant
Self-Regulation	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.135	0.020	Reject Ho	Significant

Variable Tested	Behavioral Outcome	Computed r	P-value	Decision	Conclusion
	Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	0.055	0.345	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Performance Decline or Absenteeism	0.053	0.363	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.293	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Motivation	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.293	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
	Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	0.173	0.003	Reject Ho	Significant
	Performance Decline or Absenteeism	0.168	0.004	Reject Ho	Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.132	0.022	Reject Ho	Significant
Empathy	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.127	0.028	Reject Ho	Significant
	Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	0.078	0.177	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Performance Decline or Absenteeism	0.052	0.365	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.176	0.002	Reject Ho	Significant
Social Skills	Aggressive or Impulsive Behavior	0.137	0.017	Reject Ho	Significant
	Social Withdrawal or Isolation Tendencies	0.041	0.482	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Performance Decline or Absenteeism	0.045	0.435	Failed to Reject Ho	Not Significant
	Incidences of Disciplinary Actions/Conflict	0.308	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant

Note. Computed Pearson r values were interpreted at a 0.05 level of significance. "Reject Ho" indicates a statistically significant relationship between the emotional intelligence dimension and behavioral outcome, while "Failed to Reject Ho" indicates a non-significant relationship.

The correlation analysis presented in Table 6 indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) dimensions are significantly associated with the extent of behavioral consequences experienced by combat troops, although the strength and consistency of these relationships vary across specific EI dimensions and behavioral outcomes. Overall, the results suggest that EI competencies are closely linked to observable behaviors, particularly aggressive behavior and disciplinary actions, which are critical indicators of operational discipline. Self-awareness demonstrated significant positive relationships with all behavioral consequences, including aggressive or impulsive behavior ($r = 0.346$, $p < .001$), social withdrawal ($r = 0.284$, $p < .001$), performance decline or absenteeism ($r = 0.290$, $p < .001$), and disciplinary incidents ($r = 0.122$, $p = .034$), highlighting its role in monitoring and adjusting behavior under stress (Boyatzis et al., 2021). Self-regulation was significantly related to aggressive behavior ($r = 0.135$, $p = .020$) and disciplinary incidents ($r = 0.293$, $p < .001$), emphasizing the importance of emotional control in preventing conflicts and maintaining discipline (Gross & Ford, 2024; Nielsen et al., 2022). Motivation correlated significantly with all behavioral outcomes, supporting its function in sustaining performance, compliance, and persistence in demanding operational contexts (Miao et al., 2020). Empathy and social skills were significantly related to aggressive behavior and disciplinary actions, underscoring the importance of interpersonal competencies in conflict management and cooperative functioning (Ward et al., 2020; Christov-Moore et al., 2020). Conversely, several relationships with social withdrawal and performance decline were not significant, suggesting that these outcomes may be more influenced by organizational and contextual factors than by individual EI alone (Pietrzak et al., 2021; Nielsen et al., 2022). Overall, the findings demonstrate that EI, particularly self-awareness, motivation, and interpersonal skills, plays a critical role in managing behavioral consequences and sustaining discipline in high-stress, structured military environments (Matthews et al., 2021; Gross & Ford, 2024).

Challenges Encountered by Combat Troops

Table 7 presents the thematic analysis of challenges faced by combat troops in managing emotions within high-stress operational environments, revealing that emotional difficulties are closely intertwined with operational demands, leadership responsibilities, and interpersonal dynamics inherent in military service. A prominent theme identified is Operational Stress in High-Pressure Field Operations, where troops consistently reported experiencing intense physical and psychological strain during prolonged missions. Informants described persistent feelings of frustration and fatigue, yet emphasized the obligation to maintain performance and continue duties despite emotional exhaustion. These findings highlight that managing emotions in combat settings is not merely an individual challenge but a complex, situationally driven process, critical for sustaining discipline, operational effectiveness, and resilience under high-pressure conditions.

Table 7: Challenges Encountered by Combat Troops

Category	Theme	Subthemes	Key Informant Verbatim
Operational Stress	High-Pressure Field Operations	Sustained mission demands; physical and mental fatigue	K12: "Usahay mabati gyud nako nga nabug-atan ko sa kasuko ug kakapoy, pero kinahanglan gihapon kong padayonon ang akong mga buluhaton."
Emotional Overload	Internal Emotional Strain	Emotional fatigue; frustration accumulation	K12: "Mabati gyud ang kakapoy ug kasuko sa dugay nga operasyon, pero dili pwede mohunong kay responsibilidad namo ang misyon."
Conflict & Tension	Interpersonal Challenges under Stress	Preventing escalation; emotional restraint	K7: "Nagsumpaki ang duha ka kauban tungod sa usa ka buluhaton, ug kinahanglan nakong dumala sa akong emosyon aron dili motumaw ug mosamot ang away."
Decision-Making Pressure	Maintaining Composure while Leading	Leadership accountability; emotional restraint	K3: "Isip usa ka squad leader, grabe ang pressure sa paghimo og mga desisyon samtang ginapugngan nako ang akong emosyon."
Isolation (Strategic)	Temporary Emotional Distancing	Short withdrawal to regain control	K12: "Usahay mas pilion nako nga maghilom sa makadiyot aron makalma una ang hunahuna ug emosyon."

Combat troops face complex emotional challenges shaped by operational stress, leadership demands, and interpersonal tensions. As one participant noted, "Usahay mabati gyud nako nga nabug-atan ko sa kasuko ug kakapoy, pero kinahanglan gihapon kong padayonon ang akong mga buluhaton" (K12), reflecting the need to suppress emotional discomfort to meet mission requirements, consistent with research linking high-risk environments to elevated stress and emotional load (Bartone, 2020; Matthews et al., 2021). Emotional Overload and Internal Strain were reported, with fatigue and frustration accumulating from continuous emotional restraint, which can impair judgment and self-control (Okati et al., 2025). Conflict and Interpersonal Tension Under Stress also emerged, as heightened stress increased emotional reactivity within teams, affecting cohesion and operational effectiveness, exemplified by a participant who managed tensions between team members to prevent escalation (K7; Van Kleef & Côté, 2022). Decision-Making Pressure and Leadership Burden further illustrated emotional demands on leaders, who must regulate emotions while making critical decisions under pressure, highlighting the dual responsibility for emotional control and mission success (K3; Goleman, 2020; Kirkham et al., 2025). Finally, Strategic Isolation or Temporary Withdrawal was used as a deliberate coping strategy to regain emotional control without disengaging socially, supporting evidence that brief distancing can prevent escalation (K12; Gross, 2020). Overall, these findings demonstrate that emotional intelligence is crucial for managing stress, maintaining team cohesion, and preventing negative behavioral outcomes in high-stress military environments.

Coping Mechanisms of Combat Troops

Table 8 highlights the coping mechanisms combat troops employ to manage emotional strain and maintain operational effectiveness, personnel engage in intentional, adaptive, and socially reinforced strategies to regulate emotions and sustain performance under high-stress conditions.

Table 8: Themes on Coping Mechanisms of Combat Troops

Category	Theme	Subthemes	Key Informant Verbatim (Bisaya – Translated)
Self-Awareness	Emotional awareness as coping foundation	Recognizing emotional signals; self-monitoring	K20: "Ang pagkahibalo sa kaugalingong kahimtang sa emosyon makatabang sa hustong pag-atubang ug paghimo og sakto nga desisyon sa lisod nga mga sitwasyon."
Self-Regulation	Pausing and calming strategies	Deep breathing; controlled reactions	K12: "Mokuha ko og mubo nga pahulay, moginhawa og lawom, ug moampo aron mabalik ang kalma sa dili pa mopadayon sa akong buluhaton."

Meaning-Based Coping	Prayer and cognitive refocus	Spiritual grounding; refocusing attention	K19: "Mihunong ko kadiyot, miampo, ug gipunting pag-usab ang akong hunahuna aron mas maayo nakong maatubang ang sitwasyon."
Peer Support	Collective emotional strength	Emotional sharing; mutual understanding	K7: "Nagsinabtanay ug nagsuporta mi sa usag usa; kung masabtan nako unsay gibati sa akong mga kauban, mas makakontrol ko sa akong kaugalingong emosyon."
Mentorship & Guidance	Learning emotional control from leaders	Role modeling; guided regulation	K3: "Ang akong superior maoy nagtudlo nako unsaon pagkontrol sa akong reaksyon sa panahon sa tensyonado nga misyon."
Training & Discipline	Training as emotional rehearsal	Structured coping; preparedness	K3: "Sa training pa lang, ginatudloan na mi unsaon pagdumala sa emosyon aron dili madala sa sitwasyon."

The study revealed that combat troops employ deliberate and adaptive coping mechanisms to manage emotional strain and maintain operational effectiveness, with self-awareness, self-regulation, meaning-based coping, peer support, mentorship, and structured training emerging as critical strategies. Informants emphasized recognizing emotional states early, using deep breathing, prayer, cognitive reframing, and brief strategic withdrawal to prevent impulsive reactions and emotional escalation (K12, K19, K20). Peer and leadership support were highlighted as socially reinforced mechanisms that enhance emotional control, unit cohesion, and resilience (K3, K7). Quantitative findings indicated that demographic variables—age, sex, marital status, rank, and educational attainment—did not significantly influence emotional intelligence (EI), suggesting that EI is shaped primarily by operational exposure, training, and collective experience. Troops exhibited moderate levels of EI, with strengths in motivation and self-regulation, and slightly suppressed emotional tendencies manifested through low levels of aggression, social withdrawal, performance decline, and disciplinary incidents. Correlation analyses revealed significant associations between EI dimensions, particularly self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, and lower maladaptive emotional suppression, as well as reduced behavioral consequences, including aggression, performance decline, and disciplinary actions. Regression analysis confirmed that behavioral outcomes, rather than demographics or social withdrawal, significantly predict EI, accounting for a meaningful portion of variance and underscoring the role of EI in regulating observable behavior. Qualitative insights further emphasized the emotional complexity of combat roles, highlighting challenges such as operational stress, emotional overload, decision-making pressure, interpersonal tension, and occasional strategic isolation. Integrating these findings, the study proposes an Adaptive Emotional Intelligence–Behavior Regulation Program for Combat Troops, designed to strengthen self-awareness, emotional regulation, adaptive coping, peer and leadership support, and reflective learning, thereby institutionalizing EI as a core competency to enhance discipline, resilience, and operational effectiveness in high-stress military environments.

FINDINGS

1. Demographic Profile. The respondents were predominantly male, married, early-to-middle adults, belonging to the enlisted ranks, and had attained either high school or college-level education. Statistical analyses revealed that age, sex, marital status, rank, and educational attainment did not significantly influence emotional intelligence (EI), indicating that EI is shaped more by operational and experiential factors than personal background.

2. Overall Emotional Intelligence. Combat troops exhibited a moderate level of emotional intelligence. Among the EI dimensions, motivation and self-regulation scored higher, suggesting strengths in goal orientation and emotional control, whereas self-awareness, empathy, and social skills were relatively lower, highlighting areas for further development.

3. Emotional Suppression. Emotional suppression among combat troops was slightly manifested, generally controlled, and adaptive, reflecting the influence of training, discipline, and structured emotional regulation practices within military settings.

4. Behavioral Consequences. Behavioral consequences were slightly experienced, with low levels of aggression, social withdrawal, performance decline, and disciplinary issues. This indicates that troops are generally able to manage emotional and behavioral challenges effectively despite operational stressors.

5. Variance Analysis. No significant differences in EI were observed across demographic groups, further emphasizing that emotional competencies are shaped primarily by training, operational exposure, and collective military experience.

6. Correlation Findings. Significant relationships were observed between EI dimensions—particularly self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation—and indicators of emotional suppression and behavioral outcomes. Higher EI was associated with lower maladaptive emotional suppression and fewer negative behavioral consequences.

7. Regression Analysis. Emotional intelligence significantly predicted behavioral outcomes, including lower aggression, reduced performance decline, and fewer incidences of disciplinary actions. In contrast, demographic variables and social withdrawal were not significant predictors.

8. Qualitative Findings: Challenges. Combat troops faced challenges related to operational stress, emotional overload, decision-making pressure, interpersonal tension, and occasional isolation. Prolonged exposure to high-risk environments required constant emotional regulation and imposed significant psychological demands.

9. Coping Mechanisms. Troops employed adaptive coping strategies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, cognitive reframing, peer support, mentoring, prayer or mindfulness, and leadership guidance. These strategies, often collective in nature, fostered emotional resilience and maintained operational effectiveness.

10. Program Recommendation. Based on the integrated findings, the study proposes the **Adaptive Emotional Intelligence–Behavior Regulation Program**, aimed at strengthening self-awareness, emotional regulation, adaptive coping, peer and leadership support, and reflective learning. The program seeks to institutionalize emotional intelligence as a core military competency to enhance discipline, resilience, and operational effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, rank, and education level do not have a significant impact on the emotional intelligence of combat troops. This suggests that a soldier's EI is influenced more by their military experiences, training, and operational responsibilities than by personal characteristics. Troops generally exhibit moderate EI, with strengths in motivation and self-regulation, but gaps remain in self-awareness, empathy, and social skills, highlighting the need for structured EI development. Emotional suppression was found to be slight, intentional, and regulated, reflecting adaptive control rather than maladaptive avoidance, enabling effective functioning under high-stress conditions. Behavioral consequences, including aggression, social withdrawal, performance decline, and disciplinary issues, were minimal, demonstrating that emotionally competent soldiers manage their behavior effectively despite operational stress. Correlation and regression analyses showed that higher EI—particularly in self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation—is associated with lower maladaptive suppression and reduced negative behavioral outcomes, whereas demographic variables and social withdrawal were not significant predictors. Qualitative findings further revealed challenges such as operational stress, emotional overload, decision-making pressure, and interpersonal tension, which are managed through coping strategies including self-regulation, cognitive reframing, peer support, mentorship, prayer, and leadership guidance, emphasizing collective and socially reinforced emotional control. Based on these findings, the proposed Adaptive Emotional Intelligence–Behavior Regulation Program is both necessary and appropriate, promoting deliberate emotional regulation, strengthening coping capacities, and institutionalizing EI within military practice. Overall, embedding EI development in training, leadership, and operations can enhance discipline, mitigate behavioral risks, improve unit cohesion, and foster psychological resilience, supporting sustained operational effectiveness and mission readiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that emotional intelligence (EI) be intentionally incorporated into military training programs, leadership development, and mental health initiatives. Doing so can help combat troops better manage stress, cope effectively with challenges, and minimize harmful behavioral responses. Personnel are encouraged to practice EI skills, recognize stress triggers, apply coping strategies such as controlled breathing, cognitive reframing, or mindfulness, and engage in peer support and mentoring. Officers and unit leaders should model emotional control, effective communication, and decision-making, while incorporating EI discussions and check-ins during briefings and after-action reviews. Training officers are advised to embed short, practical EI modules and scenario-based exercises into existing programs to reinforce self-awareness, self-regulation, and teamwork. Mental health units and psychologists should provide technical guidance, monitor emotional and behavioral indicators, and offer preventive counseling. Specialized training for military mental health personnel is also recommended to enhance operational psychology and EI intervention capacity. Institutionalizing EI development will foster discipline, resilience, and operational effectiveness within the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

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