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Role of Alexithymia in Predicting Self-Efficacy in Academic Students of a North Indian Institution: A Cross Sectional Study

DEVANSHU CHAUDHARY¹, ANJALI MEENA^{*2}

INTRODUCTION: Alexithymia is a cognitive-affective style and a personality construct that is associated with various physical and psychological disorders. It refers to a personality trait associated with difficulties with identifying or describing feelings, mental imaging and fantasy, and external cognitive orientation

AIM: To access the problem of alexithymia among the Academic (Dental and Ayurvedic) students of an Institution in North India.

MATERIALS AND METHOD: A questionnaire based cross-sectional survey was carried out among the medical students of D.J. Group of Institutions, Modinagar, Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, India. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, Modinagar and informed consent was obtained from all the study participants prior to the study.

RESULTS: The questionnaire based study was carried out among 252 medical students of D.J. Group of Institutions, Modinagar, Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, India. Out of which 113 students were of Ayurveda and 139 were dental students. The inter group comparison of respondents according to course of study in which majority of the Ayurveda students were having significant result for the alexithymia problem.

CONCLUSION: This study demonstrates that alexithymia plays significant role in decreasing self-efficacy in academic students. As alexithymia is high in college students and affects self-regulation, goal orientation, and academic function, we suggest that mental physicians routinely evaluate medical college students for alexithymia.

KEYWORDS: Alexithymia, Ayurveda, Dental, Student

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INTRODUCTION

Now a day's people are facing difficulties in identifying, describing, and expressing their subjective feelings and cannot distinguish between feelings and the emotional arousal. Even they have difficulty in reflecting and regulating their emotions with constricted imagination capacities such as paucity of fantasies, and have an externally oriented cognitive thinking, which is popularly known as Alexithymia. Literally, alexithymia is a Greek word meaning "lack of words for emotions" or lack of the ability to find words that identify and describe feelings. Alexithymia is a cognitive-affective style and a personality construct that is associated with various physical and psychological disorders.¹ Also; it is difficult for people with alexithymia to verbally communicate their psychological distress, with failure to seek help from others. As a result, this could lead to a feeling of isolation and not being understood by others and potential of negative effect.² It is associated with a trait of human personality that has difficulties with identifying or describing feelings, mental imaging and fantasy, and external cognitive orientation.¹

Researches have also documented that alexithymia is often found to be associated with certain psychiatric disorders, such as psychosomatic disorders²⁻⁴, depression⁵, and anxiety.⁶ A few studies have reported

a positive relationship between alexithymia and pain disorders in their study population.^{7,8} It has the tendency to influence the academic achievement of college students, and that effect could also be moderate in nature.⁹ A positive relationship between test anxiety and alexithymia among students was reported by and Sepahvand et al. (2015).¹⁰

The prevalence of different kinds of psychiatric disorders are more frequently observed among college students than in a matched non-student populations and this reason could be due to multiple stressors, which include, but are not limited to academic overload, inadequate time, final examinations and peer pressure.^{11,12} The above statement can be supported as there is documented evidence that a marked increase in psychiatric disorders, including depression and anxiety in college students has been seen over the last decade.¹³

Authors across the world have reported a high degree of alexithymia in medical students^{8,14} and subsequently, its influence on their mental well being.¹⁵ Among students, low self-efficacy was associated with depression and anxiety.¹⁶ However, there still are numerous gaps in the academic mental health literature and the questions among the scientific



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community is that (i) whether low self-efficacy is associated with alexithymia, (ii) whether alexithymia is related to depression and anxiety in academic students, and (iii) which factors impact alexithymia in academic students and hence, this study was undertaken with an aim to provide the scientific community with important data regarding the problem of alexithymia among the medical students.

MATERIALS & METHOD

A questionnaire based cross-sectional survey was carried out among the medical students of D.J. Group of Institutions, Modinagar, Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, India. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, Modinagar and informed consent was obtained from all the study participants prior to the study.

DATA COLLECTION

A total of 252 students were included in the study and those who were non-hostellers was excluded. These students were divided into 2 groups. One group having dental students whereas other one includes ayurveda students.

The questionnaire used in the study consisted of 20 Questions. Face validity and content validity was assessed. Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using test-retest and internal consistency of the questionnaire was ascertained by Chronbachs-Alpha (α). Construct validity of the questionnaire was assessed using Spearman's correlation coefficient between individual parameter/construct and overall score of the construct. The data was entered and analyzed in SPSS version 16.0. and both descriptive and inferential tests were applied.

RESULTS

The questionnaire based study was carried out among 252 academic students of D.J. Group of Institutions, Modinagar, Ghaziabad district, Uttar Pradesh, India. Out of which 113 students were of Ayurveda and 139 were dental students. Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of respondent regarding alexithymia in which majority of the respondents were agreeing regarding the alexithymia problem whereas table 2 shows the inter group comparison of respondents according to course of study in which majority of the Ayurveda students were having significant result for the alexithymia problem.

DISCUSSION

The condition of alexithymia is referred to a personality trait associated with difficulties with identifying or describing feelings, mental imaging and fantasy, and external cognitive orientation in a person. This construct was first conceptualized by Nemiah and Sifneos (1970) as a difficulty in the communicative patterns of certain individuals who demonstrated an inability to verbally express or describe feelings, as well as had a marked diminution of fantasy and since then, many researchers have tried to test and expand this construct. As per Bagby, Taylor, Parker & Dickens, (2006), alexithymia is a disorder of affect regulation resulting from developmental impairments in cognitive representations that process all emotional information.

The present questionnaire based study which consisted of questions regarding the perception of the study participants towards the alexithymia scale. The study was carried out among the academic students which consist of ayurveda students and dental students where it was clearly seen that majority of the participants did agree and some did strongly agree when they were asked whether they found it difficult to say how they felt inside or about expressing the exact feeling of anger, being scared and/or sad and it highlights a majority of the students academic students in the dental and ayurvedic field are suffering from the problem of alexithymia. In agreement, few authors have also reported a positive relationship between alexithymia and pain disorders among students.⁸⁻¹⁰

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that alexithymia plays significant role in decreasing self-efficacy in academic students. As alexithymia is high in college students and affects self-regulation, goal orientation, and academic function it is suggested that they are regularly assessed and easy access to college counsellors and support groups is available, especially during examinations.

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QUESTION	STRONGLY AGREE n (%)	AGREE n (%)	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE n (%)	DISAGREE n (%)	STRONGLY DISAGREE n (%)	MEAN \pm SD
1. I am often confused about the way I am feeling inside	0 (0%)	169(67.1%)	30(11.9%)	53(21.0%)	0(0%)	3.46 \pm 0.820
2. I find it difficult to say how I feel inside	0 (0%)	169(67.1%)	30(11.9%)	53(21.0%)	0(0%)	3.46 \pm 0.820
3. I feel things in my body that even doctors don't understand	3(1.2%)	145(57.5%)	36 (14.3%)	68 (27.0%)	0 (0%)	3.33 \pm 0.887
4. I can easily say how I feel inside	16(6.3%)	169(67.1%)	34 (13.5%)	33 (13.1%)	0 (0%)	3.67 \pm 0.783
5. When I have a problem, I want to know where it comes from and not just talk about it	30(11.9%)	147(58.3%)	44(17.5%)	26(10.3%)	5 (2.0%)	3.68 \pm 0.886
6. When I am upset, I don't know if I am sad, scared or angry	17(6.7%)	157(62.3%)	41 (16.3%)	37(14.7%)	0 (0%)	3.61 \pm 0.818
7. I am often puzzled by things that I feel in my body	9(3.6%)	144(57.1%)	17(6.7%)	79(31.3%)	3 (1.2%)	3.31 \pm 0.993
8. I'd rather wait and see what happens, instead of thinking about why things happen	0(0%)	126(50.0%)	61(24.2%)	65 (25.8%)	0 (0%)	3.24 \pm 0.838
9. Sometimes I can't find the words to say how I feel inside	37(14.7%)	150(59.5%)	45 (17.9%)	20(7.9%)	0 (0%)	3.81 \pm 0.780
10. It is important to understand how you feel inside	53(21.0%)	142(56.3%)	31(12.3%)	26(10.3%)	0 (0%)	3.88 \pm 0.857
11. I find it hard to say how I feel about other people	39(15.5%)	137(54.4%)	31(12.3%)	45(17.9%)	0 (0%)	3.67 \pm 0.943
12. Other people tell me that I should talk more about how I feel inside	46(18.3%)	139(55.2%)	38(15.1%)	29 (11.5%)	0 (0%)	3.80 \pm 0.870
13. I don't know what's going on inside me	15(6.0%)	185(73.4%)	32(12.7%)	20(7.9%)	0 (0%)	3.77 \pm 0.674
14. I often don't know why I am angry	29(11.5%)	174(69.0%)	41 (16.3%)	8(3.2%)	0(0%)	3.89 \pm 0.628

15. I prefer talking to people about everyday things, rather than about how they feel	41 (16.3%)	162(64.3%)	36(14.3%)	12 (4.8%)	1(4.0%)	3.91± 0.725
16. I prefer watching funny television programmes, rather than films that tell a story about other people's problems	93(36.9%)	116 (46.0%)	26(10.3%)	8 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	4.27 ± 0.818
17. It is difficult for me to say how I really feel inside, even to my best friend	55(21.8%)	160(63.5%)	36(14.3%)	1 (4.0%)	0 (0%)	4.07± 0.611
18. I can feel close to someone, even when we are sitting still and not saying anything	20(7.9%)	174(69.0%)	41 (16.3%)	17 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	3.78± 0.683
19. Thinking about how I feel, helps me when I want to do something about my problems	33(13.1%)	142(56.3%)	48(19.0%)	25 (9.9%)	4 (1.6%)	3.69± 0.878
20. When I have to concentrate on a film to understand the story, I enjoy the film much less	97 (38.5%)	129 (51.2%)	22 (8.7%)	4(1.6%)	0(0%)	4.27± 0.683

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondent Regarding Alexithymia

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	GP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean difference	P value
1 I am often confused about the way I am feeling inside	Ayurveda	113	3.45	.802	.075	-.016	0.5**
	Dental	139	3.47	.837	.071	-.016	
2 I find it difficult to say how I feel inside	Ayurveda	113	3.45	.802	.075	-.016	0.5**
	Dental	139	3.47	.837	.071	-.016	
3 I feel things in my body that even doctors don't understand	Ayurveda	113	3.33	.871	.082	-.004	0.4**
	Dental	139	3.33	.904	.077	-.004	
4 I can easily say how I feel inside	Ayurveda	113	3.70	.693	.065	.059	0.02*
	Dental	139	3.64	.851	.072	.059	
5 When I have a problem, I want to know where it comes from and not just talk about it	Ayurveda	113	3.62	.783	.074	-.107	0.1**
	Dental	139	3.73	.962	.082	-.107	
6 When I am upset, I don't know if I am sad, scared or angry	Ayurveda	113	3.69	.733	.069	.144	0.005*
	Dental	139	3.55	.878	.074	.144	
7 I am often puzzled by things that I feel in my body	Ayurveda	113	3.24	1.002	.094	-.121	0.6**
	Dental	139	3.36	.985	.084	-.121	
8 I'd rather wait and see what happens, instead of thinking about why things happen	Ayurveda	113	3.21	.796	.075	-.054	0.02*
	Dental	139	3.27	.873	.074	-.054	
9 Sometimes I can't find the words to say how I feel inside	Ayurveda	113	3.67	.700	.066	-.248	0.9**
	Dental	139	3.92	.826	.070	-.248	
10 It is important to understand how you feel inside	Ayurveda	113	3.95	.789	.074	.120	0.06**
	Dental	139	3.83	.908	.077	.120	
11 I find it hard to say how I feel about other people	Ayurveda	113	3.66	.951	.089	-.020	0.8**
	Dental	139	3.68	.941	.080	-.020	
12 Other people tell me that I should talk more about how I feel inside	Ayurveda	113	4.11	.783	.074	.552	0.1**
	Dental	139	3.55	.861	.073	.552	
13 I don't know what's going on inside me	Ayurveda	113	3.82	.671	.063	.089	0.5**
	Dental	139	3.73	.676	.057	.089	
14 I often don't know why I am angry	Ayurveda	113	3.97	.589	.055	.153	0.1**
	Dental	139	3.82	.651	.055	.153	
15 I prefer talking to people about everyday things, rather than about how they feel	Ayurveda	113	4.06	.631	.059	.271	0.01*
	Dental	139	3.79	.775	.066	.271	
16 I prefer watching funny television programmes, rather than films that tell a story about other people's problems	Ayurveda	113	4.17	.833	.078	-.192	0.2**
	Dental	139	4.36	.799	.068	-.192	

17 It is difficult for me to say how I really feel inside, even to my best friend	Ayurveda	113	3.96	.706	.066	-.186	0.01*
	Dental	139	4.15	.510	.043	-.186	
18 I can feel close to someone, even when we are sitting still and not saying anything	Ayurveda	113	3.78	.741	.070	-.005	0.006*
	Dental	139	3.78	.634	.054	-.005	
19 Thinking about how I feel, helps me when I want to do something about my problems	Ayurveda	113	3.80	.888	.084	.185	0.3**
	Dental	139	3.61	.864	.073	.185	
20 When I have to concentrate on a film to understand the story, I enjoy the film much less	Ayurveda	113	4.07	.678	.064	-.354	0.002*
	Dental	139	4.42	.648	.055	-.354	

Table 2. Inter Group Comparison of Respondents According to Course of Study

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AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS: (*Corresponding Author)

1. PG Student, Department of Public Health Dentistry, D.J. College of Dental Sciences and Research, Modinagar, UP, India
2. *Junior Resident, Department of Dentistry, GTB Hospital, New Delhi, 110095

Contact corresponding author at: anjalimeena2311[at]gmail[dot]com