

## Tilburg University

### Alexithymia is associated with low tolerance to experimental painful stimulation

Nyklicek, I.; Vingerhoets, A.J.J.M.

*Published in:*  
Psychosomatic Medicine

*Publication date:*  
1996

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Nyklicek, I., & Vingerhoets, A. J. J. M. (1996). Alexithymia is associated with low tolerance to experimental painful stimulation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, (58), 66.

#### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

#### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

ALEXITHYMIA IS ASSOCIATED WITH LOW TOLERANCE TO EXPERIMENTAL PAINFUL STIMULATION, I. Nyklíček, M.A., and A.J.J.M. Vingerhoets, Ph.D., Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Alexithymics are known to report more somatic complaints and to exhibit a stronger tendency towards hypochondria than individuals scoring low on alexithymia. It may be hypothesized that this association is mediated by a general hypersensitivity to unpleasant physical stimulation, either proprioceptive or external. The aim of the present study was to investigate this notion by examining the relationship between alexithymia and sensitivity to experimentally induced pain.

40 healthy male and female subjects with a mean age of 33.9 years completed the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS) and participated in a laboratory protocol consisting of 2 identical electric stimulation trials. The subjects were requested to raise the intensity of a continuous electric stimulus from 0 mA up to their pain tolerance level, i.e. the level at which the subjects stopped the stimulation because it became too uncomfortable.

Multiple stepwise regression analyses were performed, entering first those potentially confounding variables that correlated significantly with pain tolerance level. The analyses revealed that after controlling for sensory threshold, self-reported alcohol use and caffeine intake, the total TAS-score predicted significantly the pain tolerance level, both in the first and in the second trial ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .12$ , and  $\beta = -.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r^2 = .12$ , respectively).

These findings thus support the hypothesis that enhanced general sensitivity to unpleasant somatic sensations may underlie the higher levels of somatic complaints in alexithymic individuals.