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Alexithymia and interpersonal problems
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Abstract
The aim of this study was to examine the relations between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in a sample of students. A correlational analysis was performed to assess the kind of association exist among alexithymia and its three components including difficulty identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking with interpersonal problems and its subscales including assertiveness, sociability, submissiveness, intimacy, responsibility, and controlling. Three hundred and fifty seven students (147 boys, 210 girls) from the University of Tehran were included in this study. All participants were asked to complete Farsi version of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (FTAS-20) and Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP). Analysis of the data involved both descriptive and inferential statistics including means, standard deviations, multivariate analysis of variance, pearson’s correlation coefficients and regression analysis. Alexithymia showed a significant positive association with interpersonal problems. Results of regression analysis revealed that alexithymia and its components can predict the students’ interpersonal problems regarding assertiveness, sociability, submissiveness, intimacy, responsibility, and controlling. It can be concluded that alexithymia is associated with interpersonal problems. Results and implications are discussed.

Keywords: Alexithymia, interpersonal problem, information processing.

1. Introduction
Alexithymia is known as the inability to process the excitement-based information and their regulation (Meganck et al, 2009). Enthusiasm-based disorders is a polygonaceous structure whose components are as follows: taking painstaking endeavors to identify sensations and discerning bodily excitements and feelings pertinent to emotional arousal, having difficulty in describing sensations to others, limited imagination power which is made out by lack of figment of imagination, objective non-imaginative identification style, pragmatic and reality-based with bias-free thoughts (Teylor & Begbi, 2000). Currently, the concept is used in research on diverse psychiatric disorders like depression (e.g., Saarijärvi, Salminen, & Toikka, 2006), substance-related disorders (e.g., Speranza et al., 2004), or posttraumatic stress disorder (e.g., Sondergaard & Theorell, 2004). Moreover, research on alexithymia is increasingly interdisciplinary, with both psychological research and studies of brain functioning (e.g., Berthoz et al.,...

2002), the inclusion of experimental (e.g., Coffey, Berenbaum, & Kerns, 2003) and treatment studies (e.g., Özsahin et al., 2003), in addition to classic cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Taylor & Bagby, 2004). Recent research also has considered the validity of the concept and studied relationships with adjoining concepts such as aspects of personality disorders (Honkalampi et al., 2001) or depression (Saarijärvi et al., 2006). These studies indicate that alexithymia cannot be reduced to any of these concepts. Hurwitz and Witkas (1986) managed to identify, summarize and list a set of interpersonal quandaries including the problems of the people in the society pertinent to conclusiveness sociability, submissiveness, sincerity, responsibility, and controlling (Humphreys, Wood, & Parker, 2008). Although the hypothecation denoting the interpersonal predicaments of those smitten with enthusiasm-based disorders have been propounded in findings and evidence, the specific relationship between enthusiasm-based disorders and the interpersonal problems has not been delved into yet. Due to the aforementioned reason the chief objective of the extant research is to check the probable relationship between the emotion-based clutter, and the related components to identify emotions including difficulty to describe the feelings, and objective thoughts, interpersonal problems, and hexagonal aspects of the interpersonal quandaries comprising the conclusiveness, sociability, intimacy, sincerity, responsibility and controlling. Given the observation from psychotherapy research that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is strongly predictive of the outcome of therapy (Roth & Fonagy, 2006), and that clients’ interpersonal problems interfere with the development of a therapeutic relationship (Saunders, 2001), we consider systematic knowledge about the style of interpersonal relating that is linked to alexithymia to be important.

2. Method

The sample consisted of 357 undergraduate students (210 female and 147 male) of university of Tehran, with a mean age of 22.6 years (SD =2.92). They were included different majors and participate voluntarily in this study. The main factor in participate in this study was that participants should have no important physical or psychological problems that influence daily life.

After describing the goals of the study for participants, they filled Farsi version of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale -20 (Besharat, 2007) which is a self-report measure for alexithymia consisting of 20 items. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale and higher scores indicate greater alexithymia. and Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (Besharat, 2007) which measures interpersonal problems in six domain including assertiveness, sociability, submissiveness, intimacy, responsibility, and controlling.

3. Results

Analyse of scores by ANOVA show a significant deference between females and males in sociability, submissiveness and intimacy, and there wasn’t significant difference in other scales.

Results of pearson correlation test showed that there is a positive significant relation between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in students (r =0.72, p =0.001); alexithymia has a positive significant relation with problems associated with assertiveness (r =0.45, p =0.001), sociability (r =0.40, p =0.001), intimacy (r =0.37, p =0.001) and responsibility (r =0.46, p =0.001). There wasn’t significant relation between alexithymia and problems associated with submissiveness and controlling.

Then, we explored the relation of alexithymia as predictor variable and interpersonal problems as criterion variable in regression test. The results are presented in table 1. The F was significant (p<0.001) and 58% of variance related to interpersonal problems is explained by alexithymia (R² = 0.584).

Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics in domain showed a significant relation between alexithymia and (p<0.001) and 27% of variance related to interpersonal problems in assertive domain was explained by alexithymia variables (R² = 0.275).
Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in sociability showed a significant F( p< 0.001) and 31% of variance in interpersonal problems in sociability domain explain by characteristics of alexithymia( R² = 0.310).

Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics between alexithymia and problems in submissiveness showed a significant F( p< 0.039) and 2% of variance in interpersonal problems in submissiveness domain explain by characteristics of alexithymia( R² = 0.028).

Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in intimacy showed a significant F( p< 0.001) and 18% of variance in interpersonal problems in intimacy domain explain by characteristics of alexithymia( R² = 0.180).

Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in responsibility showed a significant F( p< 0.001) and 31% of variance in interpersonal problems in responsibility domain explain by characteristics of alexithymia( R² = 0.312).

Results of ANOVA and regression characteristics between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in controlling showed a significant F( p< 0.001) and 5% of variance in interpersonal problems in controlling domain explain by characteristics of alexithymia( R² = 0.053).

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<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Ms</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
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<td>764/0</td>
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<table>
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<td>Alexithymia(total score)</td>
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<td>69/0</td>
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<td>579/5</td>
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<td>73/0</td>
<td>-243/4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty in description the feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective thinking</td>
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</table>

### 4. Discussion

This study showed that alexithymia can predicts the interpersonal problems regarding assertiveness, sociability, submissiveness, intimacy, responsibility, and controlling in college students .

Studies showed that alexithymic people have problem in correct emotional diagnosing of others faces .This is the important factors in interpersonal relationships .

Power of alexithymic people also is restricted in empathy with others .Disability in empathy influences on interpersonal relationships, specially sociability and intimacy .Then, it can be concluded that alexithymia increses the interpersonal problems by dificiency in empathy and sympathy .

Alexithymia is the equelance of having problem in emotional self - regulating .When emotional information can’t perceieve and evaluating in cognitive proccessing, the person be helplessed and deranged emotionally and cognitively .This dysfunction make many problems in social relations for person .

In the basis of this two explanation, interpersonal problems may induced directly by dysfunction in cognitive proccessing of emotional information and regulation of emotions or by dysfunction in individual mental health .

The another explanation is structural explanation .In this explanation, structure of triad factors of alexithymia which have integration and continuity )the characteristic that internal validity of items of alexithymia scale confirm it ( reinforces and completes other role by inter influence.
In short, this study show a positive correlation between alexithymia and interpersonal problems. This results can be useful in interventional programs in treatments based on processing of emotional information and regulation of emotions.

In theoretical level, this findings can confirm current theories on alexithymia and interpersonal problems and, in addition, suppose new questions in this realm.

Finally, subjects of this study were students, therefore, it can be limitation in generalization.

References


