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DIFFICULTIES IN ASSESSING ALEXITHYMIA IN MOTOR AND NON-MOTOR
FUNCTIONAL GASTROINTESTINAL DISORDERS

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Introduction: Alexithymia is said to be an important feature of functional gastrointestinal
disorders (FGD). Most studies focus on the presence of alexithymia in patients suffering
non-motor FGD (NMFGD) but few studies have analyzed its occurrence in motor FGD
(MFGD) patients.

Objectives:

- To describe the presence of alexithymia, measured with the Toronto Alexithymia Scale
(TAS-20), in a sample of FGD inpatients.
- To analyze the differences in alexithymia, measured with the TAS-20, between MFGD and
NMFGD inpatients.

Material and method: 46 inpatients admitted to the Vall d'Hebron Digestive System
Research Unit to study the existence of FGD were evaluated from January 2008 to July
2010. All patients completed the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20).

Results: The mean age of the sample was 41.02 ± 16.86 years, 89.1 % were women and
10.9 % were men. With regard to their diagnostic condition, 31 met criteria of NMFGD, 13 of
MFGD, and 2 did not met criteria of both disorders. The mean TAS-20 total score was: 46.24 ± 13.60 .
MFGD patients obtained a mean score of 45.45 ± 12.53 , and patients with NMFGD
had a mean score of 45.75 ± 12.53 . No statistically significant differences were found
between both subtypes with regard to alexithymia.

Conclusions: Alexithymia, measured with the TAS-20, may not be present in FGD.

Discordances of our results with previous findings in FGD may be due to complex
psychosocial factors and to psychometric difficulties in assessing alexithymia in this group of
patients.