
I HAVE WORDS FOR FEELINGS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ALEXITHYMIA IN PERSONALITY DISORDERS.

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Introduction: While several theoretical models imply that personality disorders (PD) show an altered cognitive processing of emotions (alexithymia), empirical evidence linking alexithymia with PD is controversial.

Objectives: investigating whether alexithymia is associated with PD regardless of psychopathology severity.

Aims: 1) evaluating the association between alexithymia (Toronto Alexithymia Scale, TAS-20) and PD, controlling for comorbid psychopathology severity; 2) evaluating whether alexithymia decreases over a 2-year follow-up as a function of the remission of PD, Axis I disorder or their interaction.

Methods: 167 psychiatric outpatients (56 males) completed the Structured Interviews for DSM-IV Personality and Axis I disorders, the General Severity Index (GSI) of the Symptom- Checklist-90 and the TAS-20. At two-years follow-up, patients who had both an Axis I and II disorder at baseline (n=121) were re-evaluated, and TAS-20 reduction was calculated. The association between PD, TAS scores and severity and presence of Axis I disorders was assessed using Hayes'(2012) bootstrapping procedure for conditional effects.

Results: At baseline PD criteria predicted TAS-20 score at low (CI=.238-1.364, p=.006) and average (CI=.153-.757, p=.003) levels of GSI, but not at high GSI scores (CI=-.174-.393, p=.44). At follow-up, TAS-20 reduction did not differ between non-remitted and remitted PD patients, but was higher among patients remitted from their Axis I conditions. However, the remission from PD was associated with a greater decrease in 'Externally Oriented Thinking' for men who still had an Axis I disorder (B=11.95, p=.01, CI= 2.33-21.57).

Conclusions: The relationship between alexithymia and PD could be influenced by comorbid psychopathology severity and gender.