

ALEXITHYMIA LONELINESS AND INTERPERSONAL PROBLEMS IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's the term alexithymia was coined after menial and situeos (1970) Situeos (1973) proposed the word alexithymia to identify a cluster of behaviours he often observed in individuals experiencing various mental and physical health problems. Over the past few decades, the personality construct of alexithymia has come to be defined as the following set of basic features (Taylor, Bagby, & Parker, 1997): difficulty describing feelings to others; difficulty identifying feelings and distinguishing between these feelings and bodily sensations of emotional arousal; a stimulus bound, externally oriented, cognitive style; and constricted imaginal process. The features could be constructed as the outward manifestations of what situeos (1973) and Nemiah (1996) have highlighted as a key feature of alexithymia; an inhibited inner emotional and fantasy life. Along with these basic features.

Psychological Disorders Related to Alexithymia

Several studies have demonstrated relationships between personality construct of alexithymia and various psychological disorders. levels of alexithymia have been found to be higher among those with somatoform disorders (Puddu, Isaac, & Chaturvedi, 2003), generalized anxiety disorder (Schut, Castongnay, & Bokovec, 2001), social anxiety and panic disorder (Fukunishi, Kiruchi, Wogan, & Takubo, 1997) than among those without mental health issues. Alexithymia has also been associated with eating disorders (Zonnevrijle – Bender, Van Goozent, Cohen – Kettenis, Van Elburg, & Van Engeland, 2002), Substance use (Cecero&Homstrom, 1997) and problem gambling behaviours, (Parker, Wood, Bond, & ShangHnessy,2005) and boredom (Eastwood, Cavalieve, Fahlman, & East Wood,2007). Helmers and Mente (1999) found alexithymia to be associate with other unhealthy behaviours such as poor nutrition and a sedentary lifestyle among young men; an association that Waldstein, Kauhanen, Neumann, and Katzel (2002) also found in older adults.

Loneliness has been linked to a number of indicators of poor psychological well-being and personal functioning. Research supports the notion that long-term loneliness threatens future mental health and psychological functioning. Loneliness is subjective psychological discomfort that occurs when one's social relationships are perceived as being less satisfying than what is

desired. It significantly affects youth in many perspectives. Chronically lonely youth experienced academic difficulty, both in terms of academic progress and exit exam success (Benner,2011). Individuals with alexithymia might experience a feeling of loneliness.

Interpersonal Problems refers to difficulties that individuals have in relating to others and that cause or are related to significant distress (Horowitz et.all,1988).

Alexithymia has been linked to interpersonal functioning problems (Spitzer, Siebel-Jurges, Barnow, Grabe, & Freyberger, 2005), with the alexithymia characteristic of difficulty describing feelings correlating highly with interpersonal problems.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Research on Alexithymia is of recent origin in India. Particularly relationship between Alexithymia, loneliness and interpersonal problems is rarely explored. The purpose of the present study was twofold. First to study the relationship between alexithymia and loneliness, second to study the relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal problems in sample of college students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

In view of the above considerations the following research questions are addressed in the present study:

- 1) What is the relationship between alexithymia and loneliness?
- 2) What is the relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal problems?

METHODOLOGY

In the present study the relationship between alexithymia, loneliness and interpersonal problems was explored. The college students were selected as a sample for the study because they are prone to various mental health issues and psychological disorders and interpersonal relations.

Sample:

The sample comprised of males and females of different departments of autonomous college. Questionnaires were distributed the subjects were selected randomly, and the students were given general instructions and they were asked to complete the instruments in the order presented: alexithymia, loneliness and interpersonal problem.

Research Tools:

a) Toronto's Alexithymia Scale: (Bagby, R.M., Parker, J.D.A., & Taylor, G.J. 1994)

It is a self-report scale that is comprise of 20 items. This scale consists of three dimensions which are as follows, 1) Difficulty in describing feelings subscale, 2) Difficulty identifying feeling subscale, 3) Externally - Oriented Thinking subscale. It is a five-point Likert's scale that is scored from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5)

b) UCLA Loneliness Scale: (Russell, D., Peplau, L.A., and Ferguson, M. L., 1980)

UCLA Loneliness scale designed to measure one's subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation. It is a four-point Likert's scale scored from often (3) to Never (0)

c) Inventory of Interpersonal problems (IIP-48): (Leonard M. Horowitz, Lynn E. Alden, Jerry S.Wiggins, & Aaron L. Pincus 1998)

This scale is an abbreviated version of (IIP-60) that comprises of six subscales with 48 items and the dimensions are 1) Submissiveness, 2) Avoidance, 3) Neglectfulness, 4)

Aggressiveness, 5) Intrusiveness, 6) Over-conscientiousness. It is a five-point Likert’s scale that is scored from Not at all (0) to Extremely (4).

DISCUSSION

Table 1 showing the correlation coefficient between the variables

Alexithymia and Loneliness	Total no. of samples
	0.244**
Alexithymia and Interpersonal Problems	0.181**

Table no 1 shows a significant positive correlation between alexithymia and loneliness (0.244, <0.01). Alexithymia create conflict and generalized mistrust, which inhibits the formation of sustaining relationship leading to loneliness. This finding is consistent with the findings of Quarter et.all (2009) which have found there is a direct relationship of alexithymia with loneliness. Similarly, Nick and Colin (2013) have suggested that increase in alexithymia would increase the feelings of loneliness.

Table no 1 shows a significant positive correlation between alexithymia and interpersonal problems (0.181<0.01). Alexithymia characteristics like lower capacity to identify, label and describe feelings straight away leads to interpersonal problems. This finding is consistent with the findings of Besharat (2010) who manifested a significant relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal problems. Similarly, Spitzer et.all (2005), Vanheule et.all (2010) revealed that high alexithymia scored significantly higher on interpersonal problems compared to lower alexithymia.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The relationship between alexithymia, loneliness, and interpersonal problems was investigated because a correlation between these factors has not been determined by research in India. Hence the present study examines the relationship between alexithymia and the loneliness and interpersonal problems using the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell., Peplau, L.A., and Ferguson, M.L., 1980), Toronto’s Alexithymia Scale (Bagby, R.M., Parker, J.D.A., & Taylor, G.J. 1994), Inventory of Interpersonal problems IIP-48 (Leonard M. Horowitz, Lynn E.Alden, Jerry S. Wiggins, & Aaron L. Pincus 1998)

The collected data were analysed by using the statistical technique Pearson correlation
 On the basis of the present investigations the following conclusions are drawn.

1. There is a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and loneliness
2. There is a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal relations.

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