

Feeling Through the Body: Alexithymia and Eating Disorders

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INTRODUCTION

Alexithymia is characterized by difficulties identifying and communicating feelings, and problems differentiating between feelings and bodily sensations; its concrete cognitive style focused on the external environment is typical of psychosomatic patients. Patients with eating disorders (EDs) have high levels of alexithymia, particularly difficulties identifying and describing their feelings.

OBJECTIVE

The aims of our study are (1) to assess the alexythymia, emotional empathy, facial emotion identification skills and social inference abilities in a sample of ED patients; (2) to compare these variables between ED patients and healthy controls (HC); and (3) to correlate levels of alexithymia with the severity of the ED as measured by the Eating Disorder Inventory-3 (EDI-3) EDRC score in the ED group.

METHODS

ED (N=42) and HC (N=42) were tested with the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20), Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI-3), Facial Emotion Identification Test (FEIT), The Awareness of Social Inference Test (TASIT) and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI).

RESULTS

Data collection is being completed and the results' analysis is ongoing. We expect the ED sample to show greater alexythymia and a poorer performance at FEIT and TASIT than HCs. We expect to find a linear correlation between the TAS-20 and EDRC score.

CONCLUSION

A better understanding of the role of alexithymia in ED etiology and maintenance might allow the development of targeted treatment approaches to help patients improve their skills in identifying and expressing emotions.