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ALEXITHYMIA AND INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONING: AN EXTENSION OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH BY USING A DIMENSIONAL APPROACH FOR INTERPERSONAL STYLE AND THE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR ALEXITHYMIA

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Introduction: The concept of alexithymia refers to problems in experiencing and regulating affects; clinical study as well as empirical research suggests that alexithymia is related to cold and socially inhibited interpersonal functioning. However, empirical studies frequently use only self-report questionnaires.

Objectives/aims: This study investigates the relation between alexithymia and self-reported interpersonal problems. By using an interview measure of alexithymia next to a questionnaire, we want to avoid artificially high correlations due to shared method variance and thus get a clearer picture of the link between alexithymia and interpersonal style. We hypothesize that alexithymia will be related to a cold, but not to a dominant or submissive interpersonal style.

Method: The Toronto Structured Interview for Alexithymia (TSIA) was administered by a trained researcher to 74 psychiatric inpatients, who also filled out the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP-64). Dimensional affiliation and dominance scores of the IIP-64 were computed and Pearson correlations between TSIA, TAS-20 and IIP-64 dimensional scores were calculated.

Results: As hypothesized, we observed no significant correlation between TSIA, TAS-20 and the dominance dimension of the IIP-64 and a significant correlation between the affiliation dimension and TSIA and TAS-20.

Conclusions: Our results support previous research and confirm that alexithymia is related to a cold interpersonal style. Since our findings converge for both measurements of alexithymia, the link between alexithymia and interpersonal style can not be explained by shared method variance. The measurement of only self-reported interpersonal problems is a limitation of this study.