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Research Paper

Gender Differences in Alexithymia

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ABSTRACT

Alexithymia is a condition in which individual have difficulty in distinguishing between different emotions, describing feelings and differentiating between physical and emotional sensations .Review suggest that this condition is increasing day by day therefore this study was done to examine the gender differences on various dimensions of alexithymia on college student population. For the purpose, Toronto Alexithymia scale (Taylor, Bagby & Parker, 1994) was used on the participants who were of age between 18 to 25 years with education qualification of at least graduation and above. Statistical analysis done was t-test and the results suggested a significant difference on externally oriented thinking dimension of alexithymia.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Emotion, Cognition.*

Alexithymia is a word coined by Sifneos in 1973, who defined Alexithymia as a condition of difficulty in understanding, processing or describing emotions. This word originally derived from the ancient Greek words (lexis, "diction", "word") and (thumos, "soul", as the set of emotions, feeling, and thought" modified by an alpha private, literally meaning "without words for emotions" It can also be defined as a state which includes difficulty distinguishing between different emotions, difficulty describing feeling and difficulty differentiating between physical and emotional sensations (Sifneos, 1972, Kooiman Spinhoven & Trijsburg, 2002).

Impact of Alexithymia

- ***Social role of emotion and Alexithymia***

  In the complexity of human societies and groups, emotions play an important social rate. Basic emotions including fear, for instance, often promote affiliation among individuals, as frightened individuals may seek support from the group and utilize these group resources against a real or imaginary enemy (Eibl-Eibesfeldt I, 1971).

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Other emotions (for instance empathy or envy) are eminently social in nature. Decreased levels of empathy have been linked to greater loneliness (Beadle JN, Brown V, et AL, 2012). Because of the importance of emotions both for the individual and social groups, the fact that some individuals show a diminished capacity to recognize and describe emotions has been widely regarded as a highly important psychological and clinical issue (Kohler CG, Turner TH 2004).Individuals with moderate to high scores of alexithymia show an array of difficulties in their relationship with others and need for social approval and poor sociability (Semerari A, Lysaker PH, (2011), messina A, 2010).

- ***Alexithymia and cognition***

Individuals with alexithymia typically have difficulties using language to describe their experiences of emotions that are rooted in bodily sensations. Henry et al (2006) observed significant inverse correlations between difficulty identifying emotions and verbal fluency in patients with a history of traumatic brain injury. The mechanisms of alexithymia may be more complex and may extend beyond traditional cognitive functions.

- ***Alexithymia, disease and Somatic Symptoms***

Individual with alexithymia communicate their emotions using somatic channels (Mattila AK, Jula A, et al, 2008) and individuals with alexithymia show an excess of medically ascertained physical illness (Lumley MA, Neely LC, et al, 2007) and alexithymia among individuals with ascertained medical conditions may hinder recovery and delay rehabilitation efforts (Spalletta, G., Serra, L., Fadda, L., Ripa, A., Bria, P., & Caltagirone, C. (2007).

TYPES OF ALEXITHYMIA

There are two types of Alexithymia based on two fundamental points that is Natural or nurtured.

- ***Primary Alexithymia***

The studies suggest that if Alexithymia comes from nature, it is "Primary Alexithymia". Primary Alexithymia is an enduring feature of a patient's Profile, like a personality trait, that changes little over time or with changing circumstances. (Berger 1971).

- ***Secondary Alexithymia***

The studies suggest that if Alexithymia comes from nurture, it is “Secondary Alexithymia". Secondary Alexithymia occurs as a response to rigorous psychological disturbances, whereby a long suffering suppresses aching emotions as an impermanent protections adjacent to disturbance. In such cases as the stressor reduces, the Alexithymia disappears.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pasini, Chiaie, Seripa & Ciani, (1992) Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS) was administered to 417 normal subjects. Total TAS scores and scores of the four TAS factors were correlated with sex, age and educational level. Age ranged from 21 to 64 years. The sample was subdivided into three groups according to age. In their study found that men score higher than women, especially on difficulty identifying feelings subscale of alexithymia.

Richard D Lane, Lee Sechrest, Robert Riedel, (1998) tested 380 subjects from the community stratified equally across sex, five age groups and three socioeconomic classes. They revealed that Alexithymia (or low emotional awareness) is associated with older age, male sex, lower SES and fewer years of education.

Mark A. Lumley & Kevin Sielky, (2002) used the Toronto Alexithymia scale - 20 (TAS-20) and the tactile finger localization task of Zeitlin et al. to test these relationships on nonclinical samples of college men and women, and also considered the role of short term memory. Among 47 men, the TAS - 20 facets of difficulty identifying feelings or difficulty describing feelings were correlated with poorer performance by the right compared with the left hemisphere in uncrossed trials and poorer inter hemispheric transfer of information on crossed trials ; short term memory was not related. Among 58 women, alexithymia was completely unrelated to either index of hemispheric functioning; instead, poorer short term memory strongly predicted poorer inter hemispheric transfer. They conclude that deficiencies in the right hemisphere contribute to alexithymia in men, but not in women.

Lumley & Roseb Brandla Spitzera, Nauckb, (2005) found that there is a relationship between TAS-20 scores and neurotransmitter activities in men, but not in women.

Larsen et al (2006), found a significant interaction between gender and alexithymia. More difficulty in identifying or describing feelings was specifically associated with more emotional eating in men. These findings suggest that alexithymia is more strongly involved in emotional eating of obese men than women.

Ronald F. Levant, Rosalie J. Hall, Christine M. Williams, and Nadia T. Hasan (2009) were performed final meta analysis on a total of 42 samples; 33 of these were nonclinical and 9 were clinical and they found small differences in mean alexithymia between women and men and men exhibited higher levels of alexithymia.

Syed Muhammad Imran Haider Zaidi, Muhammad Arshad & Nazia Yahoo (2015) selected Graduated Students of Pakistan. Participants of (N=200) students men (n=100) and women (n=100) selected from Poles apart academic organization in Faisalabad city of Punjab, Pakistan. Their findings of earlier studies indicated a significant gender differences in Alexithymia. It was concluded that men an experience high level of Alexithymia as compared to women.

Fatemeh Ghavi, Leili Mosalanejad, Fariba Keshavarz, Masomeh Golestan Jahromi and Saeed Abdollahi fard (2016) compare Alexithymia and social anxiety. They used 198 infertile couples who visited the Infertility Center of Yazd, Iran and they shows that there is not a significant differences between differences between the means alexithymia scores of the male female groups. The overall level of alexithymia is higher in women than men.

As the studies shows that there are gender differences in alexithymia in older adult and mixed results about which gender experience higher alexithymia, thus the purpose of current study is to identify the gender differences in alexithymia in college population.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

- To find out the gender differences on Alexithymia and its dimensions between young male & females adults.

Hypothesis

- There would be a significant gender difference on Alexithymia and its dimensions.

Research Design

The current study is a comparative study.

Sample

This study has a random purposive sampling design and hence allow for the survey of individuals of 12^{th} and Graduate from various course. A total of 140 survey responses were used in the final data analysis. The sample selected was in the range of 17-28.

Tool

Toronto Alexithymia Scale:- [TAS; Taylor, Bagby & Parker, (1994):

The TAS 20 has 3 Subscales;

- Difficulty Describing Feeling: - This subscale measures the difficulty describing emotions. It has 5 items 2,4,7,12,17.
- Difficulty Identifying Feelings: - This subscale measures the difficulty identifying emotions. It has 7 items 1,3,6,9,11,13,14.
- Externally oriented Thinking: - This subscales measures the tendency of individuals to center their concentration outwardly. It has 8 items 5, 8,10,15,16,18,19,20.

Items are rated by means of a 5 point likert scale whereby 1= strongly agree. And 5= strongly disagree. There are 5 items that are negatively keyed [items= 4, 5,10,18, &19].

The total score of alexithymia is the sum of response to all 20 items, while the score for each subscale factor is the sum of the response to that subscale. The TAS-20 uses cut off scoring: equal to or less than= 21 = non Alexithymia, equal to or greater than 61= alexithymia. Scores of 52 to 60= Possible alexithymia.

TAS-20 make obvious good internal consistency [Cronbach's alpha= .81] and test retest reliability [.77.P<.01]. Research using the TAS-20 demonstrates adequate levels of convergent and concurrent validity.

Procedure

For the present study the Researcher individually contacted students during their college hours by prior appointment from the teachers of concerned college authorities. The objective

of the study was clearly explained to the participants. After establishing proper rapport with the participant they were assured regarding the confidentiality of personal information. Afterwards, they were provided with the questionnaire, assistance was provided as and when required by them. All the participant completed the questionnaire independently and other their responses were collected for scoring. Before taking back the responses sheets it was ensure that none of the items or statement left unattended with the vote of thanks the session was end.

Ethical consideration

The aim of the study was clearly defined to the participants and the participation was fully voluntary. Consequently, participants fully agreed to take part in the study. In addition, participants were told that they can withdraw at any time if they feel to do so. During the data collection process, privacy was maintained and confidentiality of information was assured.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences s SPSS version 21.0 .Descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation was calculated and inferential statistics t test was used.

RESULT

Summary table of Mean, S.D, and T-test.

Group	N		Mean	S.d	t	df	Sig(2tailed)
AXL1	Female	70	15.03	3.51	-1.51	141	.133
	Male	70	15.97	3.93			
AXL2	Female	70	20.14	4.68	0.53	141	.596
	Male	70	19.66	6.12			
AXL3	Female	70	23.81	4.49	2.53	141	.013
	Male	70	21.78	5.10			
AXL4	Female	70	58.99	9.27	0.97	141	.333
	Male	70	57.41	10.08			

Note: - AXL1= Difficulty Describing Feeling, AXL2= Difficulty Identifying Feelings, *AXL3= Externally oriented Thinking, AXL4= Alexithymia [overall scores]*

DISCUSSION

Based on the conceptual understanding and available review of literature the researcher was interested to assess the Alexithymia and its dimensions among males and females. To meet the interest, Primary objective of the investigator was to present a comparative analysis between males and females on alexithymia and its dimensions (Difficulty describing feelings, Difficulty identifying Feeling, Externally oriented Thinking).

To accomplish the above mentioned objective, t-test for independent sample was applied. From Table 1 it could be inferred that obtained mean score an Alexithymia [overall scores] is 58.99 and mean score of males is 57.41 for which the obtained t value/ value of mean difference is 0.97 which is non-significant. Meaning thereby the present sample of male and

female are exposed to similar cultural and social factors which are responsible for there non significant gender difference on alexithymia. Further the result of gender differences were also obtained on various dimension on Alexithymia. To identify whether the two group reveals the similar trends of non significant gender differences or not. For the purpose mean statistical tools for mean differences for independent sample was computed on difficulty describing feeling, difficulty identifying feelings, externally oriented thinking.

There was a significant gender differences only on externally oriented thinking ($t=2.53$; $p\leq .01$). This significant group difference is in favor of females on in other words females were found significantly high on externally oriented thinking as compared to Males.

High scores on this particular dimension (Externally Oriented Thinking) means the individual is have disposition to focus on external rather than internal events and experiences. But on dimension (Difficulty describing Feelings, Difficulty identifying feelings) no significant gender differences were found. Hence, it could be said that males and females have similar tendency on these dimensions. Results can be supported by study done by Levant et al (2009) found small differences in mean alexithymia between women and men and men exhibited higher levels of alexithymia. And Muhammad et.al. (2015) in their findings of earlier studies indicated a significant gender differences in Alexithymia. It was concluded that men an experience high level of Alexithymia as compared to women.

Practical Implication of the Study

The finding of the present study can be useful to researchers working on similar topics.

Limitation

1. The data has been collected from only Bhiwani city, thus the results could not be generalized.
2. There are possible demographic predictors that were not included in this study, and thus, prevent discovering some important data. This support further analysis and replication with this kind of prediction.

CONCLUSION

The results highlight that there is only significant difference on externally oriented Thinking dimension between male and female college students but remaining two subscales and the overall score do not differ, significantly between the two.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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