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Relationship of Alexithymia with Mindfulness among Adolesecents

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ABSTRACT

Alexithymia is a trait that makes it hard to find words for thoughts and feelings. It is experienced by both children and adults. Alexithymia is a personality construct characterized by the sub-clinical inability to identify and describe emotions in the self. Whether people are trying to regulate negative emotions or experience more positive emotions, having insight and understanding of the nature, source, and maintenance of emotions is important. The main objective was to study the Relationship of alexthymia with mindfulness among adolesecents girls and boys. The sample consisted of 60 Adolescents (30 boys, 30 girls). Tests used were The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) of Brown & Ryan, 2003 and Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) Of Bagby, Parker & Taylor (1994).

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Mindfulness, Adolescents*

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Alexithymia is defined as the inability to recognize emotions and their subtleties and textures. Here are a few examples those with alexithymia experience:

- Difficulty identifying different types of feelings
- Limited understanding of what causes feelings
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Difficulty recognizing facial cues in others
- Limited or rigid imagination
- Constricted style of thinking
- Hypersensitive to physical sensation
- Detached or tentative connection to others

Alexithymia was first mentioned as a psychological construct in 1976 and was viewed as a deficit in emotional awareness. Research suggests that approximately 8% of males and 2% of females experience alexithymia, and that it can come in mild, moderate and severe intensities. Studies also show that alexithymia has two dimensions – a cognitive dimension, where a child or adult struggles to identify, interpret and verbalize feelings (the "thinking" part of our emotional experience) and an affective dimension, where difficulties arise in reacting, expressing, feeling and imagining (the "experiencing" part of our emotional experience).

Alexithymia has long been associated to a range of psychological disorders, from autism, depression, schizophrenia, and somatoform disorders, just to name a few. It's very challenging for those who struggle with alexithymia to cope with co-existing psychological disorders because their innate vulnerability to understanding themselves and others complicates recovery.

There is a growing interest of psychosocial research in mindfulness and its role in coping with day-to-day stressors (KabatZinn 1990), as well as a treatment for clinical populations (Baer 2003; Segal et al. 2002). However, many aspects of the relationship between mindfulness and emotion regulation still need to be addressed (Hill and Updegraff 2012). Specifically, no study has looked at the direct associations between mindfulness, differentiation of self, and

alexithymia. It is well established that poorly differentiated individuals are less flexible and adaptive under stress, since they are less able of modulating the emotional arousal stemming from psychological pressure (Skowron et al. 2004). As a result, these individuals tend to be more emotionally reactive and engage in enmeshed or emotional cutoff relationships in response to stress or overwhelming anxiety (Nichols and Schwartz 2000)

According to Ricardo and Pereira (2015) results indicate that mindfulness seems to be a construct with great therapeutic and research potential at different levels, suggesting that some aspects of mindfulness seem to promote a better self-differentiation and prevent alexithymia. The dimensions of quality of mindfulness and acceptance were mediators in the relationship between self-differentiation and alexithymia.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that has been linked to emotional processing (Hayes et al., 2004). The word meditation actually means familiarization, and focus of meditative practices is to become more aware, familiar, and reflective of the processes and contents of one's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness meditation and the concept of mindfulness itself can be contrasted with alexithymia to the extent that mindfulness encourages open curiosity and attentiveness to inner experiences and becoming familiar with the arising thoughts or feelings in the body. Mindfulness has also been described as a multifaceted construct that can be compared and contrasted with competencies (or lack of) such as meta cognition, emotional intelligence and alexithymia (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Bishop et al., 2004).Research suggests that some individuals struggle with competencies that facilitate the understanding and use of emotions (Frawley & Smith, 2001; Taylor, Bagby, & Parker, 1997).

Objective

- To study the relationship of alexthymia with mindfulness among adolesecents.

Hypotheses

- There will be no relationship between alexithymia and mindfulness among adolesecents.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

- For the present study 60 adolescents were selected.
- The age of the boys and girls in the sample is 15-17 years.

Tool used

- The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) -The MAAS is a 15 item instrument that measures people's tendency to be mindful of moment to moment experience. Thus, the instrument focuses on the presence or absence of attention and awareness of what occurs in the present.
- The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) - (Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994) measures three factors of alexithymia: (1) Difficulty identifying feelings (2) Difficulty describing feelings (3) Externally oriented thinking.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

The analysis of data and its interpretation is presented below. The results are shown in the following tables:-

Table, Table showing r value of relationship between alexithymia and mindfulness among Adolescents

Variable	N	R	Level of significance
Alexithymia and mindfulness	60	-0.3123	Significant at .05 level

The Table Shows that the obtained r value is .312 is greater than the table value at 0.05 significant level. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It is thus inferred that there is significant negative relationship between alexthymia and mindfulness among adolescents.

DISCUSSION

Alexithymia is a personality dimension that involves both *cognitive deficits*, including difficulties in recognizing, describing, and distinguishing feelings from bodily sensations of emotional arousal, and *affective deficits*, including difficulties in emotionalizing and fantasizing (Bermond et al., 2007).

The table shows that the obtained r value between alexithymia and mindfulness is greater than the table value at 0.05 significant level. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It is thus inferred that there is significant negative relationship between the alexithymia and mindfulness. The negative correlation shows that lesser the scores better the alexthymia and higher the scores better the mindulness.

According to Ricardo and Pereira (2015) results indicate that mindfulness seems to be a construct with great therapeutic and research potential at different levels, suggesting that some aspects of mindfulness seem to promote a better self-differentiation and prevent alexithymia. The dimensions of quality of mindfulness and acceptance were mediators in the relationship between self-differentiation and alexithymia. According to Bowen (1976), poorly differentiated individuals with a less coherent sense of self are less able to tolerate the experience of strong affect and are unable to distinguish thoughts from feelings. It would make sense, then, that less differentiated individuals would report greater levels of alexithymia.

Poorer mindfulness abilities (namely quality of mindfulness, awareness, and acceptance) predicted greater clinical alexithymia. Differentiation of self was not a significant predictor. In fact, studies have shown that mindfulness and stress tolerance are intimately related (Farb et al. 2012; Kabat-Zinn 1990).Individuals high in alexithymia not only lack the ability to use emotions to guide their behavior, but they are also intolerant to stress, showing limited coping resources in the presence of stressful situations (Parker et al. 2001).

Baer et al. 2004, alexithymia showed significant negative correlations with mindfulness scores. The findings clearly support a partial mediating effect of mindfulness. This is the first study to show

that mindfulness has a mediating effect in the relationship between self differentiations and alexithymia.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of present study it can be concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between *Alexithymia* and mindfulness. Adolescence who has greater alexthymia show less mindfulness and less alexthymia show greater mindfulness.

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