



Original Article

Predicting alexithymia in adolescents based on early trauma and attitudes toward father and mother

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Abstract

Introduction: Recent studies show that there is a positive correlation between alexithymia and a wide range of diseases including mood disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, intestinal inflammation, cancer, respiratory diseases, and chronic pains. The aim of this study is to predict alexithymia on the basis of early trauma and attitudes toward mother and father.

Materials and Methods: In this canonical correlation study in 2012-2013, 300 students (150 girls, 150 boys) were selected via multi stage random sampling in Shiraz high schools. All participants were asked to complete Early Trauma Inventory, Child's Attitude toward Father (CAF) and Mother (CAM) Scales and Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS). Data analysis was done using SPSS software version 18 and canonical correlation.

Results: Structural coefficients showed that the pattern of high scores in difficulty identifying feelings and difficulty describing feelings correlate with the pattern of high scores in early trauma, attitudes toward father and attitudes toward mother ($P < 0.001$). Therefore, our findings show that the combination of low difficulty identifying feelings and low difficulty describing feelings can probably decrease the likelihood of early trauma and attitudes toward father and mother.

Conclusion: In general, the findings show that early trauma and attitudes toward father and mother can predict difficulty identifying feelings and describing feelings and explain a considerable variance of survival index.

Keywords: Alexithymia, Attitudes, Childhood, Parents, Trauma

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Introduction

Sifneos (1973) used alexithymia to describe those whose lack of emotional capacity fails to recognize and describe the emotions and express them by words (1). In Greek "a" means "lack", "lexis" means "words", and "thymos" means "emotions". Therefore, alexithymia means "lack of words for emotions". Alexithymia is characterized by four features including: "difficulty identifying feelings", "difficulty describing feelings", "difficulty distinguishing between emotions and physical stimulation caused by emotional arousal", and "external oriented thinking style". Alexithymia has been observed in a variety of patients with a wide

Range of clinical and psychiatric pathology and even in non-clinical populations (2). There have been different views on the etiology of alexithymia. Some researchers believe that this is a trait-like construct (3). In contrast, some consider this as a state-related phenomenon (4). Another cause of alexithymia is confrontation with stress and traumatic events (1) and many studies also have noted the severity and prevalence difference of alexithymia in two male/female genders. Many environmental factors such as illness, divorce, death, presence or absence of a parent, war, poverty or great wealth, affect the children's growth and caregivers ability to act their parental role. Equally, the way parents manage the adverse events of life and their ability to protect their children from harm might be important (5). Cohen et al (6) reported that about 68 percent of adolescents in their primary care settings are at risk of threatening events and more than half of them experience multiple

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