

The Relationship Among Alexithymia And Dissociation In Eating Disorders

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AIM: This observational study was aimed to analyze the prevalence of alexithymia and dissociation in eating disorders, to investigate the existence and the extent of a possible correlation between the two constructs, and their relationship with Eating Disorders (ED) symptoms and traits.

METHOD: The sample was composed of ED patients (n=30) AN (N=19), BN (N=6) and BED (N=5) recruited from a residential care clinic for eating disorders. The psychometrics level were measured with self-report questionnaires. Alexithymia and Dissociation were assessed with the *Rome Alexithymia Scale (SAR – Scala Alessitimica Romana)* and the *Dissociative Experiences Scale-II (DES-II)*, respectively. Data related to disordered eating psychopathology was collected using the *Eating Disorders Inventory-3 (EDI-3)* and the *Body Uneasiness Test (BUT)*.

RESULTS: The majority of the subjects was alexithymic (66.67%) and reported to have moderately frequent to very frequent dissociative experiences (63.34%). Alexithymia and dissociation showed significant correlation ($p < 0,05$). Difficulties in empathizing and in identifying, expressing and communicating emotions were also associated to emotional dysregulation, interoceptive deficits, risk of developing an eating disorder, and body image-related discomfort. Possible interpretations for these results are discussed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: The presence and prevalence of both alexithymia and dissociative state in our sample, and the relationship between the two constructs suggest that they might share a common origin; this study's findings highlight the importance of specific assessment and selective treatment for alexithymia when dealing with patients with ED.



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