



ALEXITHYMIA

Emotional blindness



What is **ALEXITHYMIA**?

- A – lack
- Lexis – Greek for “word”
- Thymos- Greek for emotion/mood

Alexithymia = Without words for emotions





History of the concept

- 1976 - First described by psychiatrist Sifneos and Nemiah
- 1996 Daniel Goleman – “Emotional Intelligence” draws attention on the value of emotional skills



Main features of **ALEXITHYMIA**

- 1. Difficulty in identifying feelings and differentiating feelings from the bodily sensations of emotional arousal
- 2. Difficulty in describing feelings to other people;
- 3. Impaired imagination
- 4. Thinking style bound to the external world

Taylor, Bagby and Parker, 1997



Difficulty in identifying feelings

- Difficulty in identifying the causes of emotions;
- Own emotional states are blamed on adverse environmental influences, weather, uncomfortable mattress, medical condition;
- Often misread the physical expression of emotion (emotional arousal) as a symptom of a disease;
- Difficulty in reading the emotional expressions in others;



Difficulty in describing feelings

- People with alexithymia experience strong feelings just like others, but they lack the appropriate language to describe their emotions.
- They talk about what is happening around them or about the somatic complaints rather than the inward emotional experience.
- Horror question: How do you feel?



Impaired imagination



Thinking style bound to the external world

- concrete, realistic, logical thinking, often to the exclusion of emotional responses to problems;
- Preoccupation with facts and the minute details of external events;
- Excessive doubt, negativity;
- Unable to understand metaphors.



Associated characteristics and behaviors (I)

- Monotonous speech, detailed recounting of mundane, ordinary facts and events;
- 'No' the favorite default response
- Avoidance of self disclosure;
- Sleep disturbances and poverty of dreams;
- Emotional outbursts, inappropriate expression of emotions.
- Ambivalent and avoidant attachment style



Associated characteristics and behaviors (II)

- Preoccupation with order, control and details;
- Rigidity and stubbornness;
- Inflexibility in matters of morality, ethics or values;
- Absence of empathic attunement;
- Social skills deficits;
- Restricted emotional expression;
- No fantasies;
- Hypersensitivity to physical sensations.



What Alexithymia is not ?

- Lack of feelings;
- Refusal to disclose feelings;
- Repression of emotions;
- Shyness and social phobia;
- Apathy;
- Sociopathy.



What causes Alexithymia?

- Biogenic/primary alexithymia – physical abnormalities in the brain structure due to genetics, brain injury, hypoxia, exposure to toxins;
- Psychogenic/secondary alexithymia – trauma, chronic pain, excessive stress cultural or parental conditioning.
- State vs Trait Alexithymia



Consequences of Alexithymia

- Interpersonal relationship difficulties
- Reduced marital satisfaction
- Health and mental health problems – health anxiety, somatisations, eating disorders, substance abuse disorders, pathological gambling, depression; sleep disturbances;
- Prone to impulsive acts or compulsive behaviors



Interventions

- Journaling – expressive writing;
- Reading novels;
- Expressive arts – dance, music, arts and drama classes,
- Skills based psychotherapy treatments;
- Group Psychotherapy
- Individual and Family Psychotherapy



References

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Thank you!

