

Alexithymia, Empathy and Interpersonal satisfaction among couples: A Correlation Study

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Abstract

Relationship satisfaction plays an important role among everyone. Here, the study focused on the relationship between three variables such as Alexithymia, Empathy and Interpersonal satisfaction. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale[TAS-20], Toronto Empathy Questionnaire[TEQ] and Relationship Assessment Scale[RAS] were used to measure 200 individuals for those who are currently in relationship (age range 20-50 years) in Tamil Nadu, India. After that Pearson correlation analysis and fundamental statistics were used to examine the data. Basic statistically analysis indicated that an average respondents reported a level of alexithymia of 43.10 [SD =9.704], level of interpersonal satisfaction of 26.72[SD=5.164] and a level of empathy of 47.72 [SD =10.634]. There was evidence of a strong negative correlation between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction [$r = -0.745$, $p < 0.01$]. From these results, conclusion was made that alexithymia contributes high influence in both empathy and interpersonal satisfaction.

Keywords: Alexithymia, Empathy, Interpersonal satisfaction, Couples.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal satisfaction is about feeling happy and connected in relationships. It's very important in relationship, where understanding and talking to each other emotionally makes a big difference in how good the relationship is. Basically some people have trouble in processing emotions, which is called alexithymia. This means they can't recognize, describe or express their emotions well. As a result they may struggle with intimacy, awareness and communications. It leads to lack of understanding, solitude and mental pressure in relationships. Basically research shows that people with alexithymia have trouble in expressing emotions and lack of empathy. This reduces closeness in relationships and satisfaction in marriage. Empathy is when you can understand and share someone Feelings. It involves understanding their emotions and feeling with them. There are ideas about empathy like the Theory of Mind. According to this theory a person is able to understand the psychological state of other person. Empathy-Altruism hypothesis explains that when we feel empathy we tend to help other people. The Mirror Neuron System theory says that when we see others do something our brain acts like we're doing it too. Empathy helps us communicate better understand each other and be close. It also helps us behave in a way and resolve conflicts. On the hand low empathy leads to poor communication, shallow relationships and reduced emotional strength. Alexithymia has been explained in ways, including psychosomatic theory and neurobiological theory. These theories say it's related to how our brain works and how we attach to

others. Although alexithymia can sometimes be helpful like in high-stress situations it's generally bad for relationships. Its linked to empathy trouble expressing emotions, conflicts and increased risks of anxiety, depression and stress. Interpersonal satisfaction is important for our being, self-esteem and relationship stability. It's explained by theories like Social Exchange Theory, Attachment Theory and Interpersonal Needs Theory. Given that alexithymia disrupts communication and empathy enhances it's essential to study empathy as a factor that can help with alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction in romantic relationships. Thus the study aims to examine the relationship between empathy, alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction among individuals those who are in relationship. The findings will offer implications for psychologists, counsellors and mental health professionals. They will also provide a basis for research.

Concept of Alexithymia, Empathy and Interpersonal satisfaction

Definitions Alexithymia

- **Peter E. Siffneos (1973):** Alexithymia is defined as deficiency in understanding, processing or describing one's emotions, literally no words for emotions.
- **Taylor, G. J., & Bagby, R. M. (2012):** Alexithymia is a dimensional personality trait characterized by difficulties in identifying and describing subjective feeling, a limited imaginal capacity and an externally cognitive style.

Definitions Empathy

- **Carl Rogers (1957) :** Empathy is defined as trying to see the world of another person from their point of view and the ability to feel and sense another person's world so accurately and sensitively that you can translate that experience back to that person.
- **Egan, (1986):** The ability to enter into and understand the world of another person and to communicate this understanding to him or her.
- **Mark H. Davis (1980, 1996):** Empathy as the "reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another.

Definitions Interpersonal Satisfaction

- **Fincham & Rogge(2010); Kamp Dush et al. (2008):** Define it as individual's overall feeling and attitude toward their romantic relationship.
- **Taylor, Peplau, & Sears (2006):** Define it as the degree of satisfaction emerging adults experience in their most intimate relationship, which are characterized by high levels of interdependence.

2. Review Of Literature:

Vanheule et al. (2011) studied how alexithymia affects reflective functioning and mentalization which refers to the ability to understand one's own mental state and others. This study was conducted among adult psychiatric patients and healthy persons in Belgium using psychodynamic assessment methods and emotional awareness measures. From the study they that high level of alexithymia scores were significantly related with lower reflective functioning ($p < .01$). It indicates that individuals with alexithymia experience difficulties in identifying emotions and interpreting it.

Fletcher, G. J.O., et al. (2015) done a study to find the relationship between emotional competence and satisfaction in relationship. The sample population used in the study was the individuals who are in a romantic or intimate relationship from various cultural. It utilized the TAS-20, TEQ, and RAS as measures. By using the above given scales the research has been proved that emotional clarity and empathy has a higher level of connection so, it concluded as very much satisfaction in a relationship.

And so alexithymia has a very unhealthy pattern of relationship satisfaction. Some crucial factors such as emotional awareness and empathetic understanding is an important to lead a healthy relationship.

Graham et al. (2011) conducted a study to assess Relationship Assessment Scale to both men and women those who are in romantic relationships for a long period of time. This study collected data from participants using relationship satisfaction measures and analysed the results using reliability and correlational analyses. These findings showed that RAS indicated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx .86$) and significantly predicted relationship satisfaction through factors such as emotional communication and conflict resolution ($p < .01$). The results highlight that emotional characteristics and interpersonal skills are important predictors of relationship quality.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Aim:

To identify the relationship among alexithymia, empathy and interpersonal satisfaction for couples.

3.2 Objectives:

- To study the relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction.
- To understand the role of empathy in the relationship between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction.
- To explore the correlation between alexithymia and empathy

3.3 Hypothesis:

H₁ : There is a significant negative relationship between Alexithymia and Interpersonal satisfaction.

H₂ : There is a significant relationship between Alexithymia and Empathy.

4. Research Design:

The research design used in the study is quantitative study which included a correlational study to assess will the relationship between alexithymia, interpersonal satisfaction and empathy among individuals those who are in relationship. The independent variable is alexithymia, dependent variable is interpersonal satisfaction and mediating variable is empathy.

4.1 Sampling Technique:

The data will be collected through convenience sampling and snowball sampling . Participants will include both male and female who are currently in relationship. Sample size for the study consisted 200 individuals aged 20-50 years.

4.2 Tool description:

- Alexithymia was measured with Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) created by Bagby, Parker and Taylor(1994). The instrument consists of 20 items rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Higher scores indicates higher levels of alexithymia. The scale demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of approximately 0.81.
- Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was developed by Hendrick (1988) to measure satisfaction within romantic relationship. This scale consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point likert scale. High scores indicates greater interpersonal satisfaction. This scale has shown good construct validity and reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of approximately 0.86.
- Empathy was measured with Toronto Empathy Scale (TES) was developed by Spreng et al. (2009) . The scale consists of 16 items rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Always”.

High scores indicate greater levels of empathy. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency with a reported Cronbach’s alpha of approximately 0.85

4.3 Statistical analysis:

The data collected has been evaluated with assistance of the Statistical Package (SPSS). A covariance analysis was done using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to provide both strength and direction(i.e., positive or negative) for each variable’s relationship with one another.

4.4 Inclusive criteria:

- The participants in the age range of 20-50 years were selected.
- The sample will involve male and female those who are currently in relationship.
- Couples who voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

4.5 Exclusive criteria:

- The individuals those who have previously been diagnosed with any form of psychiatric/neurological disorder.
- Individuals presently undergoing psychological or couple therapy sessions.
- Participants who provide incomplete responses or withdraw from the study.

5. Result

This chapter discusses the results and interpretation of the analysis done to understand the relationship between Alexithymia, Empathy and Interpersonal satisfaction.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation of Alexithymia, Interpersonal satisfaction and Empathy among individuals those who are in relationship.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Alexithymia	43.10	9.704	200
Interpersonal satisfaction	47.72	10.634	200
Empathy	26.72	5.164	200

The above table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the variables. Alexithymia has a sample N=200, mean=43.10 and standard deviation=9.704. Interpersonal Satisfaction has a sample N=200, mean=47.72 and standard deviation=10.634. Empathy has a sample N=200, mean=5.164.

Table 2

Correlation analysis showing the relationship between Alexithymia and Interpersonal satisfaction among individuals those who are in relationship

Variables	Pearson correlation	r value	Decision
Alexithymia	1	-.770**	Rejected Ho
Interpersonal satisfaction			

****Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

The above Table 2 shows the scores of Pearson's correlation among the two variables. There appears to be a strong negative correlation between Alexithymia and Interpersonal satisfaction ($r = -.770^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as alexithymia increases, interpersonal satisfaction decreases among individuals those who are currently in relationship.

As per the statement of the earlier mentioned hypothesis given that there exists a substantial correlation between alexithymia and sexual interpersonal satisfaction in both female and male couples, the null (H_0) has been rejected. That is, statistically speaking, there is a statistical relationship to demonstrate that there are significant correlations between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction among couples, at the .01 level.

Table 2
Correlation analysis showing the relationship between Alexithymia and Empathy among individuals those who are in relationship

Variables	Pearson correlation	r value	Decision
Alexithymia	1	.412**	Rejected H_0
Empathy			

****Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

The above Table 3 shows the values of Pearson's correlation among the two variables. There appears to be a strong positive correlation between Alexithymia and Empathy ($r = .412^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as alexithymia increases, empathy also increases among individuals those who are currently in relationship.

As per the statement of the earlier mentioned hypothesis given that there exists a substantial correlation between alexithymia and sexual interpersonal satisfaction in both female and male couples, the null (H_0) has been rejected. That is, statistically speaking, there is a statistical relationship to demonstrate that there are significant correlations between alexithymia and empathy among couples, at the .01 level.

6. Discussion

The present study showed a statistically meaningful negative correlation between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction (Pearson $r = -.770^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and there is a positive relationship between alexithymia and empathy (Pearson $r = .412^{**}$). Alexithymia was measured using the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Mean=43.10, SD=9.704), Interpersonal satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (M=47.72, SD=10.634), and level of empathy was measured using the Toronto Empathy Scale (M=26.72, SD=5.164). The negative relationship between the alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction where one variable increases and another one decreases so, far from the study it shows that if a person have high level of alexithymia then their interpersonal satisfaction decreases. When it comes to alexithymia and empathy it shows a moderate level of relationship basically alexithymia is difficulty in identifying emotions and expressing it. In this there is a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and empathy. Overall this study shows alexithymia plays an important role in influencing both interpersonal satisfaction and empathy. There is a rejection of null hypothesis which confirms that the variables have a significant relationship. Future research could examine to apply in different population like family members, peer groups in other contexts and areas.

7. Summary

The study sought to examine the link between alexithymia, empathy and interpersonal satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction among couples depends upon the individuals because emotions plays a vital role for all kind of relationship. Especially when it comes to couples it is very important to maintain their relationship. How couples maintain closeness can depend on unseen internal balances. This study determines the correlation between the three variables. Significant relationship has been found between alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction and between alexithymia and empathy among individuals those who are currently in romantic relationship. For all the participants, priorly informed about the study and gave an assurance that their data's will be kept very confidential and will not misuse their data at any cost . Data for the study was collected with the help of three standardized questionnaires Toronto Alexithymia Scale(TAS-20)- Carnovale, M., Taylor, G. J., Parker, J. D. A., Sanches, M., & Bagby, R. M. (2021)., Toronto Empathy Scale(TEQ)- Spreng, R. N., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., & Levine, B. (2009) and Relationship Assessment Scale(RAS)- Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C.(1988)

8. Conclusion

The present study shows significant correlation between the scores obtained using the said questionnaires, and indicates a Negative correlation between the alexithymia and interpersonal satisfaction and a positive correlation for alexithymia and empathy.

9. Limitations

- This study used non-probability samplings which may limit the generalizability of the findings.
- The study considered only 3 variables while other factors influencing relationship were not included.
- Social factors and cultural factors influencing emotional expression and empathy were not explained in detail.
- The research only focused on one region alone, meaning results might not apply everywhere.
- Similar research could be done for other population and different ethnic group.

10. Recommendations

- Looking ahead, future work could involve participants drawn from various areas, increasing both size and diversity.
- To deepen insight into relationship studies can include different types of relationships such as family, friendship or workplace relationship.

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