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AFFECT DYSREGULATION AND EATING DISORDERS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE CONSTRUCT OF ALEXITHYMIA

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Introduction: Alexithymia correlates with fundamental psychological traits of eating disorders in a complex causal model and high relapse rates which may be due to a lack of affect regulation. The literature does not reach definitive conclusions about the usefulness of this construct in the clinical field.
Aims: The purpose of this preliminary study was to evaluate the presence of alexithymia and its correlation with epidemiological variables, psychological characteristics, symptom severity, and general psychopathological dimensions.
Materials and methods: A sample of 125 patients with eating disorders was recruited from outpatient care for eating disorders at the San Paolo Hospital in Milan. Patients were administered the following scales: the TAS20, SCL-90 and EDI-2..
Results and conclusions: The results indicate that 38% of the sample were alexithymic, an underestimation when compared to literature; different types of ED did not differ in alexithymia scores. The TAS20 did not correlate with the epidemiological variables. Diagnoses of Axis II disorders predicted the presence of alexithymia, suggesting that it may contribute to affective dysregulation found in personality disorders. The TAS20 further correlated with EDI-2, in particular with the subscales relating to the body and the relational aspects, and with the level of general psychopathology on the SCL-90, indicating that alexithymia may be a dimension that extends across nosographies in disorders of affective dysregulation.

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