

*Original Article***The Relationship between Alexithymia and Emotional Intelligence with Social Adjustment in female Secondary School Students****Ferdows Falatoni<sup>1\*</sup>, Gholam Hossein Maktabi<sup>2</sup>, Mahnaz mehrabizadeh Honarmand<sup>2</sup>, Sirius Aali Pour Birgani<sup>2</sup> and Zekrollah Morovati<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup> MA student, Department of Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between alexithymia and emotional intelligence with social adjustment in female Secondary School Students. The statistical population of this study consisted of the entire female Secondary School Students of Dezful city (Khuzestan Province, Iran) within the academic years of 2011-2012. The sample of this study included 265 female secondary school students who were selected using a multi-stage random method. Data were collected using Alexithymia questionnaire for children, the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, Youth Version (EQ-I: YV) and California Personality Inventory (CPI). The results of the simple correlation showed that the alexithymia had a negative and significant relationship with social adjustment while the emotional intelligence revealed a positive and significant relationship. The results of regression analysis also showed that emotional intelligence and alexithymia orderly played a major role in predicting social adjustment.

**Key words:** alexithymia, emotional intelligence, social adjustment.**INTRODUCTION**

Most of the professionals have considered adjustment as a most important cue of psychological health [1]. Adjustment is a continues process in which individual change his/her behavior in order to make a sufficient relationship with environment, others, and self. The base of social adjustment is balancing one's needs and social requirements which can effect on all aspects of one's live [2]. Some children can learn to master social abilities skillfully, whereas other children have insufficient skills to interact effectively with others. Knowledge about an individual's differences can be important in understanding an individual's level of social abilities [3]. Alexithymia and emotional intelligence are as an example of those personal characteristics which studying them may make this understanding.

Some individuals are disabling to identify their feelings and emotions. For the first time, Sifneos [4] labeled this problem "alexithymia", which literally means having no words for describing emotions and feelings. Alexithymia is characterized by three aspects. Difficulties identifying feelings (DIF) refer to emotional awareness, difficulties describing feelings (DDF) refer to emotional expression and externally-oriented thinking (EOT) refer to a tendency to deal with objectives themes [5]. Consistent with the early suggestion, some authors suggested that people with alexithymia have some difficulties in interacting with their social environment [6]. Alexithymic individuals are generally not expressive and show little outside emotional states [7]. Therefore, this personality construct may be considered as an important risk factor for interpersonal problems.

Alexithymia is a similar sense to emotional intelligence. Individuals who are high in emotional intelligence generally are able to perceive emotions accurately and apply complex strategies to regulate their emotions in order to achieve important goals. In contrast, Individuals who have low levels of emotional intelligence may experience some difficulties in adaptability and life planning because such individuals are able to recognize emotions neither in themselves nor in others [3]. Previous researches using different self-report measures have shown that high emotional intelligence is associated with greater empathy, less negative interactions and less conflict with peers [8]. Individuals who are able to accurately identify their own and other's emotions manage

their emotions and also are able to empathy with others, have more emotional and social adjustment in their expressive behavior [9]. Knowledge about factors which accounts for the variability in children's social adjustment can help school psychologists to make some interventions in order to promoting child's social adjustment. Knowledge about alexithymia, emotional intelligence, and social adjustment relationship will also help teachers understand the child's reaction to educational programs and help them to shape social and emotional activities for children in the best way.

There is a wide variety studies on alexithymia among adults, because it is hypothesized as a risk factor for different health related problems meanwhile this construct has scarcely been investigated in children and adolescents. Yet, better knowledge about this construct in childhood could improve our insight about its development during lifespan [10]. The main research question was whether there is a relationship between alexithymia and emotional intelligence with social adjustment among female secondary school students. To answer this question, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a negative relationship between alexithymia with social adjustment in female students.

H2: There is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence with social adjustment in female students.

H3: There is a multiple relationship between alexithymia and emotional intelligence with social adjustment in female students.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a type of a correlation study. The research population consisted of all the female secondary school students in Dezful (Khuzestan Province, Iran) in the academic year of 2011-2012. Three hundred female secondary school students were selected through multi-stage random sampling. They were given a brief introduction of what the study would require and invited to participate. 265 students completed questionnaire. Also 96 students participated to validate questionnaire. Ethical approval has been obtained from Dezful Education Organization prior to testing. Alexithymia was assessed by means of Alexithymia questionnaire for children who are consisted of 20 items, representing 3 factors: Difficulty Identifying Feelings (DIF), Difficulty Describing Feelings (DDF) and Externally-Oriented Thinking (EOT). The internal consistency coefficients for DIF and DDF both showed a Cronbach's alpha around 0.75 but EOT did not meet the criteria for internal consistency [10]. In current study, Cronbach's alpha for DIF was 0.60, DDF was 0.40, and EOT was 0.21 and for whole questionnaire has obtained 0.58. Consistent with Rieffe et al. [10], in the present study, factor loadings and fit indices for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) suggest that the three-factor model is an acceptable fit for the data but EOT did not meet the criteria for a good validity. Emotional intelligence was assessed through The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, Youth Version (EQ-I; YV). This inventory has made by Bar-On and Parker [11] and has 60 items, applied to assess emotional intelligence in 7-18 years old. It involves five components including interpersonal, intrapersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. Bar-On [11] has reported Cronbach's alpha for different components between .65 to .90. In this research, Cronbach's alpha for interpersonal was 0.67, intrapersonal was 0.55, stress management was 0.78, adaptability was 0.70, general mood was 0.76, and for whole inventory has obtained 0.84. Nakhost ravan [12] has obtained a significant validity for this inventory. In the present study, factor loadings and fit indices for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) suggest that the five-factor model is an acceptable fit for the data. For assessing social adjustment, the social adjustment subscale of California Personality Inventory (CPI) was applied. This inventory is developed by Thorpe, Clark and Ties in 1935 and was revised in 1939. Based on psychological measurement yearbook the coefficients validity of the whole inventory was reported between 0.92 and 0.94 which was gained from 237 to 792 subjects [13].

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the scales. Table 2 shows correlation coefficients of the predictive variables with criterion variable.

As it can be seen in table 2, there is a negative and significant correlation between alexithymia and social adjustment ( $r = -0.26$ ,  $P \leq 0.001$ ). Thus, the research's first hypothesis is verified. There is a positive and significant correlation between emotional intelligence and social adjustment ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $P \leq 0.001$ ). Thus, the hypothesis 2 is approved.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of the predictive variables and criterion variable

Variable	M	SD	N
Alexithymia	14.08	4.21	265
Emotional intelligence	54.24	6.94	265
Social adjustment	54.55	10.02	265

**Table 2.** Correlation coefficients of the predictive variables and criterion variable

Criterion Variable	Predictive Variables	Correlation Coefficient (R)	Sig.
Social adjustment	Alexithymia	-0.26	$P \leq 0.001$

As shown in Table 3, multiple regression analysis (stepwise method) showed that emotional intelligence and alexithymia with social adjustment ( $F=26.31$ ,  $P\leq 0.001$ ). These variables explained 16% of social adjustment variance. Thus, the hypothesis 3 is approved.

**Table 3.** The results of multiple regression analysis with stepwise model

Dependent Variable	Predictors	MR	RS	F P	Regression coefficients	
					1	2
Social adjustment	Alexithymia	0.26	0.07	19.39=F p≤0.001	β=-0.26 t=-4.40 p≤0.001	-
	Emotional intelligence	0.41	0.17	26.31=F p≤0.001	β=-0.18 t=-3.08 p=0.002	β=0.32 t=5.60 p≤0.001

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between alexithymia and emotional intelligence with social adjustment among female secondary school student of Dezful city. Consistent with Rijn and et al. [14], Besharat [15], and vanheule, Vandenberghe, Verhaeghe, and Desmet [16] shows that there is a significant negative correlation between alexithymia and social adjustment. Research showed that alexithymic individuals have some difficulties in accurate identifying emotions in others. Communicating and make intimate relationship with others needs to recognize emotions in self and others. Disability in recognizing emotion and feeling cause to some difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, alexithymic individuals have limited capacity to empathy with others. This limitation can have effect on social relations [17]. The result indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and social adjustment. This finding is in line with Frederickson, Petrides, and Simmonds [18], Punia, and Sangwan [19] and Tso, Grove, and Taylor [20]. Emotional intelligent has defined as an ability to understand, process, and management of emotions in self and others; hence we prospect that it would covering essential processes of adaptation and adjustment in different social situations. High emotional perception and ability to understand and process of emotional signs in self and others enable individuals to adapt him/her to various emotional and social circumstances [9]. Emotions influence on how individuals think and behave, and closely related to motivation. Emotions provide important adaptive functions. For example, emotions guide attention and cognition to deal with opportunities and threats, facilitate learning, and coordinate social interactions. Emotion regulation in interpersonal conflict management enables individuals to avoid counteraction about disruptive and aggressive behavior [21]. This research has some limitation. First, this study has conducted on female secondary school student and the findings are not generalizable to other groups. Another important limitation of the study is that factor loadings of some items of Alexithymia Questionnaire for Children were low and Cronbach's alpha of externally-oriented thinking was inconsiderable. Furthermore, the results have to be interpreted with caution because of the use of self-report measures. The Cross-sectional designs of the current research prevent any assumption about causality in the relationship of studied variables. Replicating the study on different groups, applying interview or non-self-report methods to collect data and using longitudinal design may overcome these limitations. Despite these limitations, the current study adds to the growing number of studies that indicate that emotional intelligence and ability in identifying, processing, describing, and managing emotions are essential for social interactions.

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