

## Relationship between Alexithymia and Life Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Aliasghar Hosseinzadeh<sup>1</sup>, Hossein Tavakoli<sup>2</sup>, Fattaneh Aghaee and Morteza Azizi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD in Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Mahoodabad, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Master of Psychology: Counseling Center for Management Education, the city of Noor, Iran

<sup>3</sup> Master of Clinical Psychology, International Branch of Qeshm, Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences,  
Bandar Abbas, Iran

<sup>4</sup> PhD in Psychology, Department of Psychology, Sarab Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sarab, Iran

*Received: January 22 2014*

*Accepted: March 31 2014*

### ABSTRACT

In the present study were examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between alexithymia and life satisfaction. Participants of this study were included 253 undergraduate students (136 women and 117 men) were selected by the cluster method the between universities of Mazandaran Province from Iran. To measure of the study's variables, Toronto's Alexithymia Scales-20 (TAS-20; Bagboy, Taylor, Parker, 1994), Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS) were used. To determine mediating role, a set of regression analysis, to simultaneous way according to Baron and Kenny's proposed method (1986) was performed. Results showed that emotional intelligences play a mediating role between alexithymia and life satisfaction. This study provided further evidence based on alexithymia and emotional intelligence specific importance in life satisfaction.

**KEYWORDS:** Alexithymia, Emotional Intelligence, Life Satisfaction.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Sifneos [1] invented alexithymia term for a set of characteristics due to these verity reduction the components of emotional and cognitive in feelings experience. It is noted that alexithymia increases psychological-physical compliments [2]. After decades of research, a number of cognitive and behavioral alexithymia features have been identified which are included: The inability to identify and describe feelings verbally; markedly reduced symbolic thought, limitation in express of attitude, feelings, wishes and drives; inability to use emotions as a sign of emotional problems; obsessed with utilitarian thought, superficial and external events; reduce recall of (often uncolored and routinized) dreams, difficulty in distinguishing between emotional states and bodily sensations; stiff posture; lack of affective facial expressions; reduced capacity for empathy and self-insight [3].

Emotional Intelligence is multi-dimensional construction [4] which in the literature has been pointed to the two concept models, ability and emotional intelligence trait. Proponents of ability model in the emotional intelligence construction definition are considered it as another standard intelligence (for example, verbal intelligence, numeric intelligence, etc.) which through objective tests is measurable as intelligence quotient or IQ. In contrast, proponents of emotional intelligence trait, believe organizational goal is key aspect and effective is related to an personality infrastructural conceptual framework [5]. Thus, according to theoretical models have been provided different definitions of emotional intelligence. From Salovey and Mayer's view [6] emotional intelligence, is monitoring ability on the self and others' feelings and emotions, self and others' recognizing ability and feelings separation and use of emotional knowledge in order to self and others' thought guidance and relations. From Bar-On's view [7] emotional intelligence is consists of stimulate a person, persistent versus helplessness, intra-feelings controlling, reduce manner and avoid of tension in order to prevention of thoughtful disorder. On the others hand, emotional intelligence is individual's ability in express self and others' emotion positively [7]. Therefore, due to belief of some theoreticians emotional intelligence has been important and can be solved at least some of the life problems of nowadays human by emotional intelligence [8].

More studies dramatically in the field of emotional intelligence ability model, have been done as predictor psychological well-being, interpersonal health and problem [9]. According to, many studies mainly are concentrated on the role emotional intelligence has over individual's mental and emotional reactions at the time of face to stressful events, and that how these reactions can be effect on the individual's well-being [10]. Performed studies about relationship between emotional intelligence and alexithymia mainly indicated, emotional intelligence has negative relationship with alexithymia [11, 12]. In the same finding, Karimi and Besharat [13] have been reported in considering two groups of gifted and normal high-school students, alexithymia has negative relationship to emotional intelligence and with emotions regulation incompatible styles and feelings has positive relationship [14].

\*Corresponding Author: Morteza Azizi (PhD in Psychology), Department of Psychology, Sarab Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sarab, Iran. E-mail: [dr.azizim2013@gmail.com](mailto:dr.azizim2013@gmail.com)

Life satisfaction is one of the important mental variables which health qualified individual should be enjoyed of it. Pavot and Diener [15] know life satisfaction as a judgment process in which individuals evaluate quality of their life based on own unique criteria. Individuals who are satisfied their lives, experience a lot of positive feelings such as happiness, enjoyment, pleasure and enjoy of low negative feelings level such as sadness, grief, loneliness and depression. Taylor & Bagboy [16] noted that alexithymia subscales, difficulty in identifying feelings (DIF) and difficulty in describing feelings (DDF) are likely to predict low life satisfaction. However, the relationship externally-oriented thinking (EOT) is not clear more to life satisfaction. In support of this view some performed studies indicate that alexithymia has a negative relationship to life satisfaction [17-20].

Based on performed studies, emotional intelligence is another indexes which has relationship to life satisfaction [21]. In addition, emotional intelligence is account strong predictor of subjective well-being (including life satisfaction) and interpersonal function [22], and even after control of IQ effect and personality variables, it can be predict life satisfaction [23]. Rey et al. [23] found that emotional intelligence directly and indirectly by self-esteem has relationship with life satisfaction. Karademas [24] found that optimism component in emotional intelligence mediate relationship between social support and subjective well-being.

Considering the importance of life satisfaction has as a well-being index and various variables which can be effect on it and due to above correlation relationships among variables, since Based on our knowledge so far, study has not been conducted with this set of variables. This research is follow respond to this question, whether alexithymia through emotional intelligence has relationship to life satisfaction?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were undergraduate students (N = 253) consisted of 117 men and 136 women ranging in age (19 to 24) which were selected by cluster sampling method from universities of Mazandaran province (Iran). In this study was used following scales.

Toronto alexithymia scale (TAS-20): The TAS-20 is a self-report measure of alexithymia that is divided into three sections: Individual difficulty identifying feelings, individual difficulty describing feelings, and a tendency toward externally-oriented thinking. The TAS-20 is the most widely used measure of alexithymia, and has been validated in numerous studies across several cultures [25-28]. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for total scal was 0.83.

Schutte's emotional intelligence scale (EIS): This scale has 33-item and was developed by Schutte et al. [29] in order to measure emotional intelligence based on Salovey and Mayer's [6] components. Although this scale has emotional intelligence components (management of utilizing and evaluate of emotions), but it has an overall score. Its reliability and validity has been established by the builders of scale. Its Persian Scale reliability has been reported ideal [30]. In this study, Cronbach's alpha calculated 0.79.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): This scale was developed by Diener et al. [31] to measure individual's overall judgment of life satisfaction which theoretically predict based on compare of life conditions to pre-determined standards. This scale has 5- item that measure overall life satisfaction rate of individual and would be scoring based on Likert range. Scale Internal Consistency coefficient has been reported the coordination between 0.79 to 0.89 [31]. Test-retest reliability of this scale were reported 0.83-0.84 [31-33]. For the present study, the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) was 0.85.

## 3. RESULTS

Average and correlation of variables of study are shown in the Table 1. Based on data of this table, the relationship between DIF, DDF and EOT to emotional intelligence and life satisfaction is negative and significant. Also, the relationship between alexithymia subscales to each other and emotional intelligence to life satisfaction is positive and significant. In addition, DIF with DDF and EOT have the highest and the lowest correlation coefficients, respectively.

Considering the correlation coefficient significant between variables (Table 1), there is this likely that the difficulty in identifying and describing feelings and objective thinking style are related through the mediating role of emotional intelligence with life satisfaction. To determine the role of a mediating emotional intelligence variable in the relationship between alexithymia and life satisfaction, based on the suggestion Baron and Kinney [34] was performed a set of simultaneous regression analysis (standard)

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix of research variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
<b>DIF</b>	15.41	6.17	-				
<b>DDF</b>	11.16	3.21	0.38 **	-			
<b>EOT</b>	16.12	5.45	0.25**	0.31 **	-		
<b>EI</b>	27.61	7.89	0.34 **	0.30**	0.28**	-	
<b>SWL</b>	22.13	5.26	0.31**	0.27**	0.21**	0.37**	-

\*\*=P<0.01; DIF=Difficulty identifying feelings; DDF=Difficulty describing feelings; EOT=Externally-oriented thinking; EI=Emotional intelligence; SWL= Satisfaction with Life

This method needs to the following steps: 1) regression of life satisfaction on the DIF, DDF and EOT; 2) Regression of Emotional Intelligence on the DIF, DDF and EOT; 3) regression of life satisfaction on emotional intelligence; 4) regression of life satisfaction on the DIF, DDF, and EOT and emotional intelligence, the first three steps to establish the relationship between the variables. If one of these relationships is not significant, the researchers conclude that there is not probably an intermediary role. In the fourth stage if simultaneous to entering intermediate variable and predictor in the equation, the effect of the independent variables, reduce to the first step, supports the role of the intermediate. As mentioned stages, at the first stage simultaneous regression results showed alexithymia subscales (DIF, DDF, and EOT), can predict life satisfaction ( $F=14.01$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $\beta=-0.24$ ,  $\beta=-0.15$ ,  $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $R^2=0.13$ ).

In the second stage, was performed a set of regression analysis. Results showed DIF and DDF, and EOT, predict emotional intelligence ( $F=19.27$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $\beta=-0.26$ ,  $\beta=-0.14$ ,  $\beta=-0.19$ ,  $R^2=0.18$ ).

**Table 2.** Summary of regression results to predict life satisfaction based on alexithymia variable and emotional intelligence

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	SE	B	$\beta$
	0.45	0.17			
<b>DIF</b>			0.08	0.23	0.17**
<b>DDF</b>			0.07	0.15	0.11
<b>EOT</b>			0.09	0.11	0.07
<b>EI</b>			0.01	0.06	0.26**

\*\* $P<0.01$ ; DIF=Difficulty identifying feelings; DDF=Difficulty describing feelings; EOT=Externally-oriented thinking; EI=Emotional intelligence.

In the third stage of emotional intelligence, predicted life satisfaction ( $F=14.01$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $\beta=0.37$ ,  $R^2=0.14$ ). In order to specify whether to entering Emotional Intelligence with predictor variables in the regression equation is changed or not predicting power predictor variable, of the simple multi-regression, were used the life satisfaction on the difficulty in identifying feelings, difficulty describing feelings, objective thinking style, and emotional intelligence (table 2). Results showed that alexithymia subscales effect decreased in compared with the first step (DIF  $\beta=-0.17$ , DDF  $\beta=-0.11$  and EOT  $\beta=-0.07$ ), and the only effect DIF and emotional intelligence were significant in the equation. These results based on Baron and Kenny's suggest [34], support the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between alexithymia and life satisfaction.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was considering the role of a mediating emotional intelligence in the relationship between alexithymia and life satisfaction. Results showed that alexithymia has negative relationship with emotional intelligence which agrees with previous findings [11-14] that explains are in accordance with the following possibilities.

Mayer and Salovey [6] stated that emotional intelligence be defined the conception ability, evaluate, and express emotion, emotional facilitation of thinking, cognitive, analyzing and employing emotional knowledge and judicious regulation of emotions. On the other hand Taylor [16] believes that alexithymia is a general deficit in emotion regulation in fact a consequence of specific deficits is in cognitive – experience elements emotional response system and deficit in the interpersonal emotional regulation. Therefore, it seems that individual with alexithymia inability in identify self and others' emotions and also express their emotions, have faced to more problems in emotion regulation, as a result they have less emotional intelligence.

Also, the findings showed that emotional intelligence, predict that high levels of life satisfaction that with previous findings [21, 22, 23, 35] is the same and parallel and is in accordance with the following possibilities.

Individuals with high emotional intelligence, have social competence, and have been enjoyed richer social network and more effective strategies use to regulation and management their emotions [36], In addition, emotions provide information about our relationship with the environment and other people that the correct interpretation of this information and use it for effective function and face to the environmental challenges is caused to increase well-being and life satisfaction [37-39]. Ultimately, have been recognized emotional intelligence are related to lower levels trend to the negative emotions and higher levels trend to the experience of positive emotions [40], is associated with more life satisfaction. However, findings of this study showed that alexithymia individuals have enjoyed lower levels of emotional intelligence, leading to lower life satisfaction. Possible explanation is that alexithymia individuals have difficulty in processing emotional information and ineffective strategies they use to regulate their emotions [16], and as a result they experience higher tension, distress and interpersonal problems. In addition, according to Schmidt's view [41] alexithymia individuals cause to the inability in reduction painful emotional states, lower enjoy of their life. The above things is factors that may cause to increasing life dissatisfaction in the alexithymia individuals.

Also, alexithymia individuals have enjoyed of more limited social networks and have a desire to retreat or withdraw from others [42], since emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor on their own and others' feelings and emotions, the ability to detect and differentiate self and others' feelings and are used the emotional

knowledge in order to guide self and others' thinking and communications, [6], and alexithymia individuals have less ability in applying these skills to face the environmental challenges. This issue may cause to experience more negative emotions to them and have been a negative effect on their life satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with some restrictions. To collect data all variables were used self-reported scale may be the participants in this study potentially be orientated in response to that. Another limitation is the generalizability of the results. Considering that only undergraduate students participated in this study, so the results generalization limits to age groups others. In addition, other variables such as personality other characteristics may be considered as reducer of this relationship that is suggested in future studies to be considered.

## REFERENCES

1. Sifneos, P.E. 1973a. The prevalence of alexithymia characteristics in psychosomatic patients. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 22, 255-262.
2. Taylor, G. J., Bagboy, R.M. & Parker, J.D.A. 1997. Disorders of affect regulation: Alexithymia in medical and psychiatric illness. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
3. Frawley, W., & Smith, R.N. 2001. A processing theory of alexithymia. *Journal of Cognitive Systems Research*, 2, 189-206.
4. Saklofske, D.H., Austin, E.J., & Minski, P. 2003. Factor structure and validity of a trait emotional intelligence measure. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 34, 707-721.
5. Petrides, K.V., Perez-Gonzalez, J.C., & Furnham, A. 2007. On the criterion and incremental validity of trait emotional intelligence. *Cognition and Emotion*, 21, 26-55.
6. Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D. 1990. Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 9, 185-211.
7. Bar-On, R. 1997. "Bar- on Emotional Quotient Inventory, Technical manual, Toronto, Canada, Multisystems.
8. Goleman, D. 1995. Emotional intelligent, New York. Bantam Books Press.
9. Heck, G. L. van & Oudsten, B. L. den 2008. Emotional intelligence: relationship to stress, health, and well-being. In A. Vingerhoets, I. Nyklicek, & J. Denollet (Eds.), *Emotion regulation. Conceptual and clinical issues* (pp.97-121). New York, NY: Springer.
10. Salovey, P., Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D., & Yoo, S. H. 2009. The positive psychology of emotional intelligence. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *The handbook of positive psychology* (2nd Edition, pp. 237-248). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
11. Parker, J.D.A., Taylor, G.J., & Bagboy, R.M. 2001. The relationship between emotional intelligence and alexithymia. *Personality and individual differences*, 30, 107-115.
12. Taylor, G.J., & Bagby, R.M. 2004. The 20-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale -III. Reliability and factorial validity in a community population. *Journal of psychotherapy practice and research*. 55, 269-275.
13. Karimi, M., & Besharat, M.A. 2010. Comparison of alexithymia and emotional intelligence in gifted and non-gifted high school students. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 753-497.
14. Dubey, A., Pandey, R., & Mishra, K. 2010. Role of emotion regulation difficulties and Positive/negative affectivity in explaining alexithymia-health relationship: An overview. *Indian Journal of Social Science Research*, 7(3), 20-31.
15. Pavot, W. & Diener, E. 1993. Review of the Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 5(2), 164-172.
16. Taylor GJ. 2000. Recent developments in alexithymia theory and research. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 45, 134-42.
17. Palmer, B., Donaldson, C., Stough, C. 2002. Emotional intelligence and life satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33, 1091-1100.
18. Kyamrsi, A, IlBegay Gale Nee, R. 2012. Relationship between correlation feeling and emotional disorders with life satisfaction in female with symptoms of attention deficit /hyperactivity. *Journal of School Psychology*, 1(1), 76-92.
19. Mattila, A.K., Poutanen, O., Alokangas., Kpivisto, A.M, Raimo, K.R. Salokangas, R.S., & Joukamaa. J. 2007. Alexithymia and Life Satisfaction in Primary Healthcare Patients. *Psychosomatics*, 48, 523-529.

20. Humphreys, T. P., Wood, L. M., & Parker, J. D.A. 2009. Alexithymia and satisfaction in intimate relationships. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46, 43–47.
21. Ahadi, B; Narimani, M; Abolghasemi, A., & Asiye, M. 2008. Considering relationship between emotional intelligence style and efficient documentation of life satisfaction among employed women. *Training Studies and Psychology*, 10 (1), 121-117.
22. Extremera, N., & Fernandez, P. 2005. Perceived emotional Intelligence and life satisfaction: Predictive and incremental validity using the trait meta- mood scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 937-948.
23. Rey, L., Natalio Extremera1, N., & Pena.M. 2011. Perceived Emotional Intelligence, Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction in Adolescents. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 20(2): 227-234.
24. Karademas, E.C. 2006. Self – efficacy, social support and well- being. The mediating role of optimism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 40, 1281-1290.
25. Bagboy, R. M., Parker, J. D. A., & Taylor, G. 1994. The twenty-item Toronto alexithymia scale-I. Item selection and cross validation of the factor structure. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 38, 23–32.
26. Bressi, C., Taylor, G., Parker, J., Bressi, S., Brambilla, V., Aguglia, E., et al. 1996. Cross validation of the factor structure of the 20-item Toronto alexithymia scale: An Italian multicenter study. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 41, 551–559.
27. Parker, J.D.A., Taylor, G.J., & Bagby, R.M. 2003. The 20-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale -III. Reliability and factorial validity in a community population. *Journal of psychotherapy practice and research*. 55, 269-275.
28. Besharat, M. A. 2007. Reliability and factorial validity of farsi version of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale with a sample of Iranian students. *Psychological Reports*, 101(5), 209- 222.
29. Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, C. J., & Dornheim. L.1998. Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25, 167-177.
30. KhosroJavid, M. 2002. Considering the reliability and validity of Schutte's emotional intelligence construction in teenagers. Master's thesis in psychology. Tehran: Tarbiat Modarres University.
31. Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. 1985. The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.
32. Pavot, W., Diener, E., Colvin, C. R. & Sandvik, E. 1993. Further validation of the satisfaction with life scale: evidence for the cross-method convergence of well-being measures, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 57, 149–161.
33. Alfonso, V.C., Allison, D.B., Rader, D.E., & Gorman, B.S. 1992. The Extended Satisfaction With Life Scale: Development and psychometric properties. *Social Indicators Research*, 38(3), 275–301.
34. Baron, Reuben M. and David A. Kenny 1986. Moderator-Mediator Variables Distinction in Social Psychological Research: Conceptual, Strategic, and Statistical Considerations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51 (6), 1173-82.
35. Ciarrochi, J.V., Chan, A.Y.C., & Caputi, P. 2000. A critical evaluation of the emotional intelligence construct. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 28, 539–561.
36. Salovey, P., Bedell, R. T., Detweiler, J., & Mayer, J. 2000. Current directions in emotional intelligence research. In M. Lewis & J. M. Haviland-Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions* (pp. 504–520). New York: Guilford.
37. Lazarus, R. S. 1991. *Emotion and adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press. Locke, E.A. 2005. Why emotional intelligence is an invalid concept. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26, 425–431.
38. Parrott, W.G. 2002. The functional utility of negative emotions. In L. Feldman- Barrett & P. Salovey (Eds.), *The wisdom in feeling: Psychological processes in emotional intelligence* (pp. 341–359). New York: Guilford Press.
39. Salovey, P., Bedell, B., Detweiler, J. B., & Mayer, J. 1999. Coping intelligently: Emotional intelligence and the coping process. In C. R. Snyder (Ed.), *Coping: The psychology of what works* (pp. 141–164). New York: Oxford University Press.
40. Mikolajczak, M., Nelis, D., Hansenne, M., & Quoidbach, J. 2008. If you can regulate sadness, you can probably regulate shame: Associations between trait emotional intelligence, emotion regulation and coping efficiency across discrete emotions. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 44, 1356–1368.
41. Schmitz, M.J. 2000. Alexithymia, self-care, and satisfaction with life in college students. Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri.
42. Hesse, C. & Floyd, K. 2011. The impact of alexithymia on initial interactions. *Personal Relationships*, 18, 453-470.