

ALEXITHYMIA IN PATIENTS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA AND IN PATIENTS WITH ASTHMA

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Introduction: The pathogenesis of schizophrenia is still unclear. Genetic, biological and environmental factors are thought to intervene. It is known that schizophrenia is characterized by a difficulty to express one's feelings and identify other persons' feelings (theory of mind) and so does alexithymia which is a psychosomatic concept.

Objectives: To compare patients with schizophrenia with patients presenting a disease that is classically considered as a psycho-somatic disease: asthma.

Methods: Thirty-nine patients with schizophrenia (group S) and thirty nine sex and age matched patients with asthma (group A) were assessed by the same psychiatrist using the 20 items-Toronto Alexithymia Scale validated in Arabic.

Results: The mean alexithymia score in group A was 70, 45 versus 68,44 in group S, with no statistically significant difference.

The prevalence of moderate alexithymia (score superior to 60) was 22, 6% in group A and 37, 5% in group S, with no statistically significant difference.

The prevalence of severe alexithymia (score superior to 70) was 57% in group A and 26% in group S. Difference was statistically significant ($p=0,003$).

Conclusion: This study showed that severe alexithymia was significantly higher in patients with asthma compared to patients with schizophrenia. Nevertheless, the high prevalence of moderate alexithymia in patients with schizophrenia shows that alexithymia should be taken into account when treating a patient with schizophrenia, and a psychotherapy addressing this issue would be helpful.