

## Evaluation of Physical Education Teachers in Way of Alexithymia

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**ABSTRACT** The present study endeavored to examine the alexithymia levels of physical education teachers and interpret the findings in terms of gender and professional seniority. This research is conducted as a kind of survey model and included 98 physical education teachers. Toronto Alexithymia Scale and personal information forms are used as data collection tools. To analyze the level of alexithymia of the teachers by gender and professional seniority t-test, one way variance analysis techniques, and descriptive statistics (number, percentage, arithmetic average) are used. The analysis figured out that physical education teachers have medium level of alexithymia. However, any meaningful difference in terms of gender and professional seniority variable was not observed. Further, working conditions, personal traits, age average and professional seniority of teachers affect the level of alexithymia.

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers have highly sophisticated and versatile roles in education system. Besides teaching, they are expected to use education materials effectively, have good communication skills and manage students' behaviors in the class (Richards et al. 2013). Teachers should have supporting roles outside the school as well (Konukman et al. 2010). These decrease the job satisfaction of the teachers, and result them to find teaching depressing, boring, and tiring profession (Arya et al. 2014).

Teachers who are stressful, anxious and exhausted encounter with several problems in acting their teaching roles, controlling teacher-student relations and in-class behaviors (Jong et al. 2014). As a result of all these, teachers may have some problems in separating physical or mental emotions, communicating with people, focusing on external experiences instead of internal, and constraints in dreaming. Taylor et al. (1985) describes it as alexithymia.

Alexithymia is deficiency in describing or recognizing emotions and moods. This term was used by Signees for describing people who define emotions based on physical feelings or behavioral reactions to connect them with associated thoughts (Amani et al. 2014). Alexithymia is useful for categorized individuals who seem not to understand the emotional feelings they experience, or lack the words to describe these feelings to others (Khodabakhsh and Fatehi 2012). Alexithymia is considered part of the emo-

tion research (Taylor and Bagby 2013; Ridings and Lutz-Zois 2014).

Recently, the role of alexithymia on development of psychopathology has become an interesting area for the researchers. Alexithymia traits, especially in cases of psychosomatic illnesses and affectivity problems, are seen as important risk factors for emotional arrangement (Constantinou et al. 2014). Thus, examination of teachers who hold alexithymia traits is important for the society. Teachers should be considered as an individual that may have alexithymic symptoms such as being functionally unaware of emotions and having problem in taking control of their anger (Margarit et al. 2014).

There are limited numbers of researches that focus on teachers with alexithymia in the literature. However, Posse et al. (2001) focused on this issue. In their study, authors selected sample from different professions including teachers. The results showed that research group's alexithymia levels are "high".

Several studies have shown that high levels of alexithymia is connected with a wide range of psychiatric problems such as inappropriate and irregular eating habits, inactivity, alcoholism and drug abuse (Lyvers et al. 2014), anxiety, internet addiction (Scimeca et al. 2014; Tselebis 2010), depression, somatization disorder (Sellami et al. 2014), neuroticism (Ihme et al. 2014), schizophrenia (O'Driscoll et al. 2014) and eating disorders (Nowakowski 2013). In addition, and above all, the main problem for people with alexithymia is the identification and regulation of their feelings

and emotions; thus, having high scores for alexithymia are associated with poor emotional regulation (Rad et al. 2014).

Physical education lessons have vital role in education system and affect student behaviors in several ways (Erbaş 2013). Further, the physical education teachers spend time with students out-class activities such as school team trainings or any ceremonial preparations. They have considerable effect on students; therefore, physical education teachers' probability of showing alexithymic personal traits is an important topic to be examined. The present study endeavors to define alexithymia levels of physical education teachers, classify and interpret these levels in terms of gender and professional seniority.

## METHODS

### Research Method

This study is a survey model. Survey model aimed to define and describe a situation in all ways what it is in the past and present (Karasar 2014). The study aimed to define and describe the alexithymia levels of physical education teachers.

### Research Group

Research group is consisted of 98 physical education teachers working in two different cities ( $M_{age} = 30.244$ ,  $SD = 4.657$ ). The descriptive statistics related to research group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Research group**

Variables		F	%
Gender	Female	45	46
	Male	53	54
Professional Seniority	1-5 year	30	30.6
	6-10 year	37	37.8
	11-15 year	31	31.6

### Data Collection Tools

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS 20): The original form of the scale is developed by Bagby et al. (1994). This scale measures three components of alexithymia such as difficulty identifying emotions (DIF), difficulty describing emotions (DDF) and externally-oriented thinking (EOT). This measure was shown to have good reliability as

well as construct, discriminant validity and convergent (Culhane and Watson 2003).

The scale consists of 20 elements, and is modeled as 5-point Likert type. Options are classified as (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often and (5) Always.

Scale's first sub-division "difficulty in recognizing feelings" are ordered 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, second sub-division "difficulty in expressing feelings" are ordered as 2, 4, 11, 12, 17, and third sub-division "difficulty in reflecting feelings" are ordered 5, 8, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20.

Scale's internal consistency coefficient is stated as 0.78 in total, while it is 0.80 for the first division factor, 0.57 for the second factor, and 0.63 for the third factor. Further, internal consistency coefficient is tested and in scale total Cronbach alpha is found as 0.72.

### Data Analysis

To analyze the levels of alexithymia of physical education teachers, t-test depending on difference between arithmetic average of independent groups and one way variance analysis technique are used. In addition, descriptive statistics technique (number, percentage, arithmetic average) is included. SPSS 18.0 software is applied in all analysis.

## FINDINGS

### Alexithymia Levels of Physical Education Teachers

As it is seen in Table 2, "difficulty in recognizing feelings", "difficulty in expressing feelings" and "difficulty in reflecting feelings" statistics of physical education teachers are found out at medium levels. Besides, total alexithymia levels are found at medium level.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics related to alexithymia levels (N= 98)**

Variables	M	SD
Difficulty in recognizing feelings	19.183	8.870
Difficulty in expressing feelings	15.102	1.543
Difficulty in reflecting feelings	25.306	2.391
Total alexithymia levels	59.591	9.920

### Comparison of Alexithymia Levels in Terms of Gender

t-test results of differences between independent groups' arithmetic averages can be seen in

Table 3 to compare the alexithymia levels in terms of gender.

As it is displayed in Table 3, there is no significant difference between gender of physical education teachers of difficulty in recognizing feelings, expressing feelings and reflecting feelings levels. Further, there is not any significant difference in total alexithymia levels in point of gender.

### Comparison of Alexithymia Levels In Terms of Professional Seniority

One way variance analysis (ANOVA) results are shown in Table 4. The test is executed to compare physical education teachers' alexithymia levels in terms of professional seniority.

As it is seen in Table 4, there is no significant difference in way of professional seniority of physical education teachers for difficulty in recognizing feelings, expressing feelings and reflecting feelings levels. Furthermore, there is not any significant difference in total alexithymia levels in point of professional seniority level.

## DISCUSSION

It is found that physical education teachers' level of difficulty in recognizing feelings, expressing feelings and reflecting feelings are at medium levels. In addition, it is clear that total alexithymia levels are also at mid-level and these results are consistent with similar studies (Gulec et al. 2009; Vandermeer 2014; Ersay et al. 2014; Darrow and Follette 2014; Fedorenko and Potapova 2014).

Fedorenko and Potapova (2014) concentrates on effects of collaborative learning on alexithymia on graduate students, and indicated that alexithymia levels are at mid-level and there is not any influence of collaborative learning on decreasing alexithymia levels. Gulec et al. (2009) focused on alexithymia levels in psoriasis patients, and figures out that alexithymia levels are at mid and low levels. However, Wastel and Taylor's (2002) findings do not overlap with this study's results. Their study connected alexithymia thinking with cognition theory and social adaptation and is done by observing 300 first year undergraduate students. They found

**Table 3: T-test results – comparison of alexithymia levels in terms of sex**

Variables	Sex	N	M	Ss	Sd	t	p
Difficulty in Recognizing Feelings	Female	45	18.200	1.322	96	-1.012	.314
	Male	53	20.018	1.217			
Difficulty in Expressing Feelings	Female	45	14.844	0.235	96	-1.533	.128
	Male	53	15.320	0.204			
Difficulty in Reflecting Feelings	Female	45	25.555	0.372	96	0.951	.344
	Male	53	25.094	0.315			
Total Alexithymia Levels	Female	45	58.600	1.454	96	-0.911	.363
	Male	53	60.434	1.383			

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01

**Table 4: ANOVA results - comparison alexithymia levels in terms of professional seniority**

Variables	Professional seniority	N	M	Ss	Sd	F	p
Difficulty in Recognizing Feelings	1-5 year	30	18.733	9.168	95	.216	.133
	6-10 year	37	19.945	9.436			
	11 year and over	31	18.709	8.071			
Difficulty in Expressing Feelings	1-5 year	30	14.866	1.613	95	.738	.440
	6-10 year	37	15.324	1.564			
	11 year and over	31	15.064	1.459			
Difficulty in Reflecting Feelings	1-5 year	30	25.533	2.750	95	.205	.578
	6-10 year	37	25.162	2.192			
	11 year and over	31	25.258	2.308			
Total Alexithymia Levels	1-5 year	30	59.133	9.950	95	.211	.369
	6-10 year	37	60.432	10.415			
	11 year and over	31	59.032	9.534			

out high alexithymia levels for both total and subdivision scales. However, in this study increasing number of teachers who have 6 years and more teaching experience explained why alexithymia levels are at mid-level. As experience and knowledge have significant role in increasing alexithymia levels (Darrow and Follette 2014).

There is no significant difference between male and female physical education teachers in difficulty of recognizing, expressing, and reflecting feelings levels. Again, there is not any significant difference in total alexithymia levels in point of gender. Although, it is expected to find a significant result for the role of gender on feelings, results showed that there is no significant determining effect of gender on the feelings. Thus, this study's findings support the results of Gulec et al. (2009).

Further, it is revealed that professional seniority of physical education teachers do not make a significant difference on recognizing, expressing, and reflecting feelings. Besides, it is also seen that there is not any significant difference in total alexithymia levels in point of professional seniority. Actually, this is not an expected result. Professions like teaching that deals with children, in general experience means more psychological problems like alexithymia (Posse et al. 2001). Even though, the results are expected to show an increase in alexithymia level with the growing professional seniority level, research findings do not provide such kind of a result. Thus, the differences in working conditions, physical education teachers' personal traits of being more open and socialized compared to other teachers may be considered as several effects that lead to these results.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that physical education teachers' alexithymia levels are at mid-level. The working conditions, physical education teachers' personal traits, and age average of research group and profession seniority level affect these findings. Having low alexithymia levels can be interpreted as having healthier communication with students, students' families and other colleagues as well as enabling teachers to be more qualified tutors. Although, the gender is a determining element, in this research it is revealed that there is no significant difference between alexithymia levels of men and women participants.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing the number of research groups and including several demographic variables, as well as taking different psycho-social variables into consideration that affect alexithymia can have substantial contribution to the research area and literature.

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