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Differences in facial emotion recognition in alexithymia patients depending on emotional contentsJun-Young Lee^{1,2}¹Seoul National University, South Korea²SMG-SNU Boramae Medical Center, South Korea

Background & Aim: Alexithymia refers to a clinical condition that makes it difficult to recognize and express one's own emotions. A number of researchers have found that people with alexithymic characteristics are also deficient in processing affective facial information in others, resulting in many interpersonal challenges and low social competency. However, little research has been done on how to identify facial expressions for each specific emotion, although there is some evidence to suggest that recognition of individual facial expressions regarding the types of emotions may affect those who have been diagnosed with alexithymia. In this study, we investigated the differences of emotional recognition and intensity depending on emotional contents.

Method: A total of 115 adults (57 males, 58 females) participated in the current study. For the analysis, the groups were divided into two levels (i.e. low, high) of alexithymia measure based on the median as a cut-off point.

Result: Among the types of emotions, the ratio of subjects who were able to correctly identify disgust was lower in the high alexithymia group than in the low group ($p=0.022$). The ratio difference in sadness was marginally significant between the groups ($p=0.10$). Among the emotions, those who had a higher level of alexithymia (i.e., high group) were able to correctly perceive a lower intensity of happiness ($p=0.047$) and a somewhat significant lower intensity of sadness ($p=0.089$).

Conclusion: The study found that the more a person shows alexithymia characteristics, the less they are able to recognize disgust in others. This finding indicates that interpreting the emotions of others might significantly relate to the recognition of one's own emotions, considering that it has an influence on their social interactions.

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