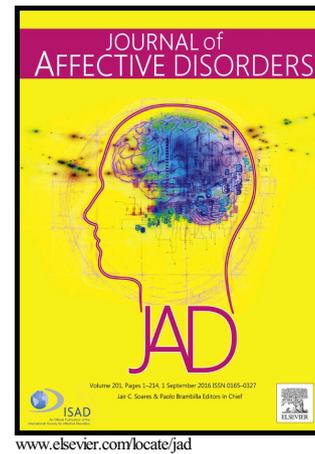


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## **Pain experience in Fibromyalgia Syndrome: The role of alexithymia and psychological distress**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Background**

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic pain syndrome with a high prevalence of alexithymia, a personality disposition that affects emotional self-awareness. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between alexithymia and pain, differentiating between the sensory and affective components of pain experience, in a sample of FM patients.

#### **Methods**

One hundred and fifty-nine FM patients completed a battery of tests assessing pain experience, pain intensity, alexithymia and psychological distress. In order to characterize the clinical profile of alexithymic FM patients, alexithymic and non-alexithymic groups were compared on the different measures. Two regression analyses were performed on the total sample, in order to investigate the relationship between alexithymia and pain, controlling for psychological distress.

#### **Results**

Alexithymic FM patients presented higher scores on all the clinical measures compared to non-alexithymic ones. Positive correlations were found between alexithymia and the affective, but not the sensory, dimension of pain experience variables. Regression analyses showed that alexithymia (difficulty identifying feelings factor) ceased to uniquely predict affective pain, after controlling for psychological distress, particularly anxiety. In addition, none of the alexithymia variables significantly explained pain intensity variance. Finally, a significant effect of anxiety in mediating the relationship between alexithymia and affective pain was found.

#### **Limitations**

No longitudinal data were included.

#### **Conclusions**

These findings show the presence of higher levels of pain and psychological distress in alexithymic vs. non-alexithymic FM patients, and a relevant association between alexithymia and the affective

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