

Poster presentation

## Psychological aspects of eating disorders

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### Background

Eating disorders are becoming more apparent in primary care. We hypothesised that many individuals with active eating disorders have alexithymic traits and a tendency to somatize their distress.

### Materials and methods

Fifty one obese women completed self-report questionnaires, including the Beck Depression Inventory, the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Dutch Eating Behaviour Questionnaire, and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale. The presence of BED, screened using the Questionnaire of Eating and Weight Patterns, was confirmed by interview.

### Results

Forty obese women were identified as having. The relationships between alexithymia and emotional eating in obese subjects differed between the two groups according to the presence of BED. Alexithymia was the predictor of emotional eating in BED subjects, whereas perceived stress and depression were the predictors in non-BED subjects.

### Discussion

The results of this study emphasise the difference between those with active eating disorders who achieved high scores for privacy, introversion, and alexithymia, and those who have recovered. These character traits give potential helpers an important indication of the areas that can both block and facilitate recovery, and they act as a reminder that the presenting symptoms in eating disorders and other psychosomatic conditions are the outward presentation of internal conflict. It is suggested that effective screening and needs assessment will facilitate a more appropriate and prompt therapeutic response. This may

be provided in the primary care setting where appropriate training has occurred.

These data suggest the involvement of alexithymia in eating disorders among obese women.