

## Level of Alexithymia as a Mediator of Empathy and Communication Satisfaction

Nurul Adiningtyas<sup>1</sup>, Sri Wahyuning Astuti<sup>2\*</sup>  
Universitas Mercu Buana<sup>1</sup>, Universitas Indonesia<sup>3</sup>  
E-mail: [nurul.adiningtyas@mercubuana.ac.id](mailto:nurul.adiningtyas@mercubuana.ac.id), [\\*2swgastuti@gmail.com](mailto:*2swgastuti@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** The Digital Generation is considered a generation that lacks empathy. Based on the research results, this generation tends to think for themselves. One that makes a person have low empathy is alexithymia, which is a person's lack of ability to identify and describe and identify emotions within themselves. The lack of emotion and the absence of emotion makes satisfaction in communication also low. This study aims to see the level of alexithymia and empathy on communication satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The research method used is descriptive quantitative. There were 102 research participants using random sampling technique. Data collection used the Alexithymia Scale ( $\alpha=840$ ) Empathy Scale ( $\alpha=675$ ) and Communication Satisfaction Scale ( $\alpha=819$ ). Test results using Path Analysis show that Alexithymia mediates the relationship between empathy and communication satisfaction with a contribution of 83%. It can be concluded that individuals who have high levels of alexithymia have high empathy and communication satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Alexithymia, Communication Satisfaction, Empathy*

### Introduction

As individuals who live in a group and community environment, each of us is required to be part of the group by sharing and feeling. Unfortunately, not everyone has the ability to feel what other people feel, especially those who are growing into young adulthood. Individuals aged 18-24 years show low empathy and willingness to help others.

The results of research on 14,000 people at the University of Michigan produced quite surprising findings. There is a decrease in empathy compared to individuals who lived in the 80-90s (Martin Swanbrow Becker, 2019). This finding is in line with the book written by Jean Twenge entitled 'Me Generation'. The book discusses how the current generation tends to be selfish, so it is called a lack of empathy and self-absorption (Twenge, 2017).

Low empathy made it difficult for teenagers to provide help. They also tend to engage in aggressive behavior. The research findings explain that apart from encouraging antisocial behavior, empathy prevents antisocial behavior. (Eisenberg, Eggum, & Giunta, 2010). The degree of helping behavior in individuals is also determined by empathy,

because empathy is emotional behavior that encourages people to help (Nancy Eisenberg, Natalie D. Eggum, 2010).

One thing that makes someone have low empathy is Alexithymia. Alexithymia is a lack of ability to identify or explain one's emotions (FeldmanHal, Dalgleish & Mobbs, 2012). Those with high levels of alexithymia are described as individuals who have deficits in awareness and emotional regulation (Oriell FeldmanHall\*, 2012).

Low empathy in individuals with high levels of alexithymia makes them very prone to aggressive behavior. A number of supporting studies have produced findings that there is a relationship between the level of alexithymia and aggressive behavior. Individuals who have high levels of alexithymia tend to easily commit violent and destructive acts. This behavior of course makes it difficult for individuals to establish relationships with other people.

Establishing relationships with other people is one of the 3 general characteristics of alexithymia proposed by FeldmanHall, Dalgleish, & Mobbs (2012). The individual's inability to express feelings is related to social-affective. The level of alexithymia affects how individuals interact. The higher the level, the less able the individual is to interact with other people (Oriell FeldmanHall\*, 2012).

Good interpersonal relationships always start with good communication. Communicating with other people, for some people, creates comfort. This comfort arises because of the communication patterns they use or their motives for communicating. Comfort of interpersonal communication is a person's comfort in carrying out interpersonal communication.

The conversations that individuals have with their interpersonal partners can influence the level of relational satisfaction, which in turn influences the way they view other people. In this sense, interpersonal communication has a significant influence on the emotional and mental view of oneself. Individuals who have poor communication patterns are reported to have problems with interpersonal relationships that affect their psychological well-being (Heeman, 2008).

A person's perception of their level of relationship satisfaction has a significant influence on their communication satisfaction. (Beatty, 1992) Interpersonal relationships are developed and maintained primarily through communication exchanges, so it makes

sense that interpersonal interactions with other people influence their perception of satisfaction with the relationship itself. Unfortunately, these characteristics are usually not found in those who are considered to be experiencing symptoms of alexithymia (Beatty & Dobos, 1992).

People with alexithymia will find it difficult to communicate, have poor interpersonal relationships and feel stressed when they have to communicate (Zarei & Besharat, 2010). People with alexithymia have disorders in intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. This is because they are unable to identify, understand and respond to their own and other people's feelings, so they are known as people who lack empathy. When they have to communicate directly, they will feel negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress and depression. Someone with alexithymia finds it difficult to make friends and is not active in society, this will result in them having poor interpersonal relationships (Adiningtyas & Astuti, 2022).

Individuals who experience alexithymia are generally unable to communicate healthily. There are many factors that cause this condition to occur, starting from the inability to understand other people's emotions, resulting in communication failures. Several studies have shown that individuals with alexithymia have difficulty understanding other people's emotions, but not all studies have found consistent results regarding its impact on communication satisfaction. Therefore, the aim of this research is to see the effect of empathy on communication satisfaction with alexithymia as a mediator variable. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that the level of alexithymia mediates the relationship between empathy and communication satisfaction.

### **Method**

The method used is a quantitative method with a correlational design. Data collection using google forms. The psychological measurement scale used, namely the Alexithymia scale, Empathy Scale and Communication Satisfaction. Alexithymia was measured using the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, (TAS-20) The TAS-20 consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, assessing various aspects of alexithymia. Individuals are considered to exhibit pathological levels of alexithymia if their score is 61 or above. The scale has a three-factor structure that corresponds to the concept of alexithymia: difficulty

identifying feelings (DIF), difficulty expressing feelings (DEF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT) (González-Arias et al., 2018)

The Communication Satisfaction Scale consists of two parts: communication satisfaction based on theory (Hecht, 1978a; 1978b) and relational satisfaction based on theory (Norton, 1983). The items consist of 24 items. Some of the steps that have been taken in adapting the communication and relationship satisfaction measuring instruments include conducting Expert Judgment, Readability tests and conducting research scale trials. After conducting the trial, of the 24 items, 6 were declared Failed and 18 items of communication satisfaction and relational satisfaction scales were used (Hecht, M. L., & Marston, 1987)

Empathy Scale. Using the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire which consists of 16 question items. which are rated on a five-point Likert scale, assessing various aspects of alexithymia (Spreng, R. N., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., & Levine, 2009)

The research participants taken were 102 people using random sampling. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Form. Participant description is presented in. To prove the results of the alexithymia level mediation test, path analysis was used by using Jamovi 2.3.26.

### **Result**

The research participants taken were 102 people using accidental sampling. The questionnaire was distributed using Google Form. Participant descriptions are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Data Respondent demographics**

Description		frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	86	84,3
	Male	15	15,7
	Total	102	100
Age	19-21 years old	68	66,7
	22-24 years old	23	22,5
	25-27 years old	2	2,0
	31-39 years old	7	6,9
	Above 39 years old	2	2,0
	Total	102	100
Occupation	Student	1	1,0
	University Student	88	86,3
	Private Employee	12	11,8

	Others	1	1,0
	Total	102	100
Domicile	Jabodetabek	94	92,2
	Bandung	7	6,9
	Yogyakarta	1	1
	Total	102	100
Expenses	Less than 1 mio	37	36,3
	1-3 mio	43	42,2
	3-5 mio	13	12,7
	More than 5 mio	9	8,8
	Total	102	100

The results of the reliability of the measuring instrument after statistical calculations are as follows:

**Table 2: Reliability of Measuring Instruments**

	Reliability
Alexthymia	.840
Empathy	.675
Communication Satisfaction	.819

Based on the results of statistical calculations, the reliability value of the measuring instrument for alexithymia is .840, and empathy is .675 and Communication Satisfaction is .819. With the values shown in the table being above 0.600, the measuring instrument is reliable and measures what it should measure.

The description of Alexithymia, Empathy, Communication Satisfaction is explained in the following table.

**Table 3. Mean Value of Variables**

Variable	Total Subject	Mean	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Standard Deviation
Empathy	102	45.7745	32.00	60.00	6.18831
Alexithymia	102	57.1078	26.00	77.00	11.13278
Communication Satisfaction	102	86.8235	67.00	110.00	9.67226

Based on the table above, the mean Empathy score is 45.774 (SD=6.188), the mean Alexithymia score is 57.1078 (SD=11.132) and Communication Satisfaction is 86.8235 (SD=9.6722)

Meanwhile, the results of the respondents' empathy categorization are explained in the table below.

**Table 4. Empati Categorization**

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$X < 40$	Low	20	19.6
$41 \leq x < 52$	Moderate	67	65.7
$53 \leq X$	High	15	14.7
	Total	102	100.0

Based on the table above, 15 respondents had high empathy, 20 people had low empathy and 67 people were in the medium category.

Meanwhile, the categorization of alexithymia levels is explained in the following table:

**Table 5. Alexithymia Categorization**

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$X < 46$	Low	18	17.6
$47 \leq x < 68$	Moderate	71	69.6
$69 \leq X$	High	13	12.7
	Total	102	100.0

Based on the table above, the average respondent has a level of alexithymia in the medium category, namely 71 people, while 18 people are in the low category and 13 people are in the high category. Alexithymia has several types, namely types I, II, and III. The difference in these types is based on the scores on cognitive and affective factors. High alexithymia levels are individuals who have high cognitive and affective scores, while moderate levels are respondents who have moderate cognitive and high affective scores, or low cognitive scores and high affective scores. While individuals who have the low alexithymia category are those who have low cognitive and affective scores.

**Table 6. Communication Satisfaction Categorization**

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$X < 77$	Low	19	14.6
$78 \leq x < 97$	Moderate	69	67.1
$98 \leq X$	High	14	18.3
	Total	82	100.0

Based on the table above, 14 respondents had a high level of communication satisfaction, 19 people had a low level and 69 people had a moderate level. Respondents who are in the high satisfaction category have high scores in each dimension of

communication satisfaction, namely high emotional satisfaction, substance and content of communication, free interaction and relationship satisfaction, and respondents who are in the low category also have low scores in each dimension of communication satisfaction.

**Table 7. Difference Test of Empathy based on Sex**

Subject	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	Sig
Male	43,2	5,92	1,73	.0068
Female	46,3	7,13		

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the 2-way significance value (t-tailed) is  $0.092 > 0.05$ . So, there is no significant difference in score points between men and women.

**Results of data analysis and hypothesis testing**

**Normality Testing**

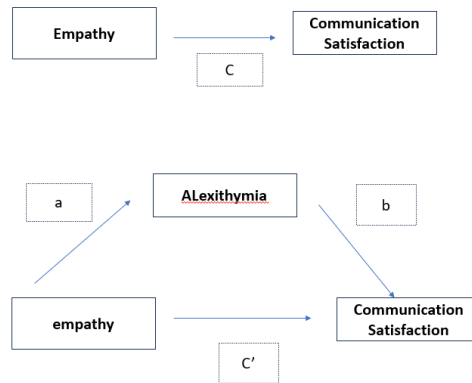
The normality test is carried out to test whether data distribution is normal or not using the Shapiro-Wilk test from Jamovi. If the Shapiro-Wilk test probability value is greater than 0.05 then it can be said that the data is normally distributed, and conversely if the Shapiro-Wilk test probability value is less than 0.05 then it can be said that the data is not normally distributed.

**Table 8. Normality Testing**

	Shapiro-Wilk	Kesimpulan
	Sig	
Empathy	0,990	Normally Distributed
Communication Satisfaction	0.969	Normally Distributed

**Path Analysis**

Path Analysis of Regression Equations with mediator variables can be described as follows:



Picture 1. Path Analysis

Table 9. Path Analysis

		Estimate	SE	Z	p
Empathy	→ Alexithymia (Path a)	-0.600	0.1679	-3.57	< .001
Alexithymia	→ Communication Satisfaction (Path b)	-0.182	0.0876	-2.08	0.037
Empathy	→ Communication Satisfaction (Path c)	0.202	0.1576	1.28	0.200

Based on the table above, the correlation or relationship value or R is -0.600, which indicates that alexithymia has a negative relationship with empathy. The higher the level of alexithymia, the lower the empathy. Meanwhile, empathy has a positive relationship with communication satisfaction. The higher empathy, the more satisfied a person is with communicating. The table above shows a negative relationship, where when a person's alexithymia level is high, then he or she will have low empathy. Likewise with the level of communication satisfaction obtained. Individuals with low levels of empathy will make their level of communication and relationship satisfaction also low.

Meanwhile, from the path analysis, the contribution of the mediator variable to variables X and Y is also seen:

Table 10. mediation contribution table

Effect	Estimate	SE	z	p	% mediation
Indirect	0.109	0.0608	1.80	0.072	35.1
Direct	0.202	0.1576	1.28	0.200	64.9
Total	0.312	0.1517	2.05	0.040	100.0

From the table above can be concluded, since paths a and b are significant, there is a mediating role of the Alexithymia Level variable. The mediator variable, in this case Alexithymia, provides a direct effect of 64.9% and an indirect effect of 35.1%. These results



also illustrate that the mediation effect produced is partial. In this case, it means that the independent variable directly or through the mediation variable affects the dependent variable. The influence of the independent variable, namely Alexithymia mediated by empathy on communication satisfaction, was 35.1%. Meanwhile, the direct influence of the variable independent Alexithymia on communication satisfaction was 64.9%.

With the above results, the hypothesis states that Alexithymia Level mediates Empathy and Communication Satisfaction.

### **Discussion**

The Digital Generation, where most of their time is spent surfing the internet, makes it difficult for teenagers to communicate directly or have interpersonal relationships. The reduction in communication makes them also experience dissatisfaction in communicating. In fact, the satisfaction they get from communicating will increase their satisfaction in establishing interpersonal relationships. The findings revealed that generally, respondents had a level of communication satisfaction in the medium and low categories, while only a small portion were in the high category.

Dissatisfaction in communication allegedly occurs because the person communicating is unable to express feelings. They find it difficult to identify the emotions and physical sensations experienced, they also sometimes find it difficult to distinguish whether the physical response that arises comes from emotions or from bodily sensations. They even tend to ignore the meaning of an event (Astuti et al., 2021)

Even though it is in the moderate category and only a few are in the high category, the condition of Alexithymia needs full attention. Because if students or teenagers are unable to express their feelings, feelings of lack of empathy will emerge. Not only that, when they have to communicate directly, they will feel negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress and depression. Someone with alexithymia finds it difficult to make friends and is not active in society, this will result in them having poor interpersonal relationships (Adiningtyas & Astuti, 2022)

People with alexithymia feel socially anxious, even though they often try to communicate with other people. The way they communicate can often make other people confused because their attitude is awkward, lacks humor, and lacks empathy. Even though

it is not categorized as a mental disorder, the emergence of this psychological phenomenon is often associated, and even appears together with mental disorders such as depression, PTSD, autism, and schizophrenia. That's why serious attention needs to be given to those who are unable to express their feelings or have alexithymia (Aaron et al., 2018).

The findings from this research state that alexithymia has a relationship with satisfaction in communicating, in line with previous research conducted by (Adiningtyas & Astuti, 2022) which stated that there was a negative relationship between the level of alexithymia and communication satisfaction. Apart from that, the findings from (Sri Mulyani, 2020) also state that the level of alexithymia is related to relationship satisfaction in early adulthood. The higher the tendency to alexithymia, the lower the close relationships with other individuals.

When individuals with alexithymia communicate directly, they will feel negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress and depression. This condition causes dissatisfaction in communicating or establishing interpersonal relationships with other people. A person suffering from alexithymia finds it difficult to make friends and is not active in society, this will result in him having poor interpersonal relationships (Ershard & Aghajani, 2017; Hesse, (Luminet et al., 2021)). Interpersonal skills, one of which is establishing communication and interpersonal relationships, are influenced by the level of alexithymia. This condition is in line with the results of research by (Faradina Muhardi, 2019) which states that there is a relationship between the level of alexithymia and interpersonal skills. Individuals with high levels of alexithymia are generally unable to establish healthy communication with other people. The inability to communicate with other people will automatically make them experience dissatisfaction in communicating (Scimeca et al., 2014).

Lack of communication by alexithymia sufferers because they feel unable to resolve things independently can have bad consequences. The poor quality of communication carried out also means that the person you are talking to or yourself is sometimes unable to understand each other's emotions. Especially if this happens to men. Based on another study, it was also said that men tend to have higher levels of alexithymia than women. This research tries to reveal the tendency of jealous behavior in dating relationships (Lestari et al., 2020)

Adolescents who experience alexithymia will use the internet as a means to make it easier for them to express their emotions and as a medium to fulfill their social needs. According to Spence & Courbasson a person with alexithymia tends to have poor mood regulation and may involve poor resistance to stress. The more negative emotions, such as stress and depression that are felt, the more the symptoms of alexithymia increase. When alexithymia sufferers experience negative emotions, they will vent these emotions into something that makes them feel happy, such as accessing their smartphone.

Social media can be a means to socialize, but it can also be a weapon to kill oneself because if this behavior is carried out continuously it will lead to addiction to playing on cellphones. Minimize interactions with other people because they prefer easy communication using cellphones. Losing the ability to be more sensitive to the surrounding environment. The loss of this ability is due to a lack of expertise in interpreting other people's behavior due to minimal social interaction (Sahin, 2017) It would be better if the transfer of emotions was not focused on continuous use of cellphones and social media but rather by interacting with a more positive social environment (Astuti et al., 2020)

According to Lu et. al (2011) teenagers who experience depression can change their emotions for the better through the use of the internet or text messages rather than using illegal drugs and the internet is easier to use and easy to access. Social media can help teenagers overcome discomfort in socializing in real life and will make teenagers feel happier when communicating even if only through social media. Alexithymia needs serious attention because of the impact it causes (Di Lorenzo et al., 2019).

The negative impact of social media on alexithymia sufferers is cyberbullying (Wachs et. al., 2017). Cyberbullying is bullying that occurs in society through online media. According to UNICEF in 2016, in Indonesia, 41% to 50% of teenagers aged 13 to 15 years had been victims of cyberbullying (Yenny. & Astuti, 2019). Because the conditions are different from teenagers in general, teenagers suffering from alexithymia are unable to retaliate and even allow themselves to continuously become targets of bullying. If this condition continues, it will increasingly endanger the mental condition of alexithymia sufferers (Berryman et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The level of empathy influences a person's satisfaction in communicating which is mediated by the level of alexithymia. Individuals who have high levels of alexithymia are unable to build empathetic relationships, thereby reducing the level of communication satisfaction. The higher a person's level of Alexithymia, the lower their empathy, which results in lower satisfaction in communicating.

### **Suggestion**

Empathy can be developed by establishing relationships in the real world. Continuous use of the internet means that the digital generation no longer communicates directly, so that they often develop empathy. Teenagers with high levels of alexithymia and who feel disturbed by their condition because they have difficulty establishing relationships with other people, should get professional help as much as possible. For future researchers, this research is worth developing by adding other variables such as family issues and personality traits.

### **References**

- Aaron, R. V., Snodgrass, M. A., Blain, S. D., & Park, S. (2018). Affect labeling and other aspects of emotional experiences in relation to alexithymia following standardized emotion inductions. *Psychiatry Research*, 262, 115–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.02.014>
- Adiningtyas, N., & Astuti, S. W. (2022). Level Alexithymia Sebagai Mediator Motif Komunikasi dan Kepuasan Komunikasi. 11, 190–201.
- Astuti, S. W., Bajari, A., Rachmiatie, A., & Venus, A. (2020). Correlation between Interpersonal Communication Motive and Interpersonal Communication Gratification with Psychological Well Being of Media Digital user in Indonesian Millennial Generation. 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.26-11-2019.2295165>
- Astuti, S. W., Bajari, A., Rachmiatie, A., & Venus, A. (2021). Love Is One of the Reasons Students Communicate: Study About Motive Communication and Relational Satisfaction Students. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(2), 4655–4667. <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.2853>
- Beatty, M. J., & Dobos, J. A. (1992). Adult Sons' Satisfaction with Their Relationships with Fathers and Person-Group (Father) Communication Apprehension. *Communication Quarterly*, 40(2), 162–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379209369831>
- Berryman, C., Ferguson, C. J., & Negy, C. (2018). Social Media Use and Mental Health among Young Adults. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 89(2), 307–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-017-9535-6>
- Di Lorenzo, R., Venturelli, G., Spiga, G., & Ferri, P. (2019). Emotional intelligence, empathy and alexithymia: A cross-sectional survey on emotional competence in a group of

- nursing students. *Acta Biomedica*, 90(February), 32–43.  
<https://doi.org/10.23750/abm.v90i4-S.8273>
- Faradina Muhardi, N. B. (2019). Hubungan Antara Level Alexithymia dengan Keterampilan Interpersonal pada Remaja (Suatu Penelitian pada Siswa di SMAN 1 Peukan Bada Aceh Besar). *JIMBK: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 4(4).
- González-Arias, M., Martínez-Molina, A., Galdames, S., & Urzúa, A. (2018). Psychometric properties of the 20-Item Toronto Alexithymia Scale in the Chilean population. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(JUN), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00963>
- Hecht, M. L., & Marston, P. J. (1987). Communication satisfaction and the temporal development of conversations. *Communication Research Reports*, 4((2)), 60–65.
- Heeman, V. C. (2008). Interpersonal communication motives satisfaction, and psychological well-being in father-young adult daughter relationships. M.A., Kent State University-Ohio.
- Lestari, Y. M., Dewi, S. Y., & Chairani, A. (2020). Hubungan alexithymia dengan kecanduan media sosial pada remaja di Jakarta selatan. *Scripta Score Scientific Medical Journal*, 1(2), 1–9.
- Luminet, O., Nielson, K. A., & Ridout, N. (2021). Having no words for feelings: alexithymia as a fundamental personality dimension at the interface of cognition and emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 35(3), 435–448.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2021.1916442>
- Martin Swanbrow Becker. (2019). First Generation College Students' Perceptions of an Academic Retention Program. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(5), 61–76.
- Nancy Eisenberg, Natalie D. Eggum, and L. D. G. (2010). Empathy-related Responding: Associations with Prosocial Behavior, Aggression, and Intergroup Relations. *Soc Issues Policy Rev.*, 4(1), 143–180.
- Oriel FeldmanHall\*, T. D. and D. M. (2012). Alexithymia decreases altruism in real social decisions. *Cortex*, 1–6.
- Sahin, C. (2017). The predictive level of social media addiction for life satisfaction: A study on university students. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 2017(December Special Issue INTE), 515–520.
- Scimeca, G., Bruno, A., Cava, L., Pandolfo, G., Muscatello, M. R. A., & Zoccali, R. (2014). The relationship between alexithymia, anxiety, depression, and internet addiction severity in a sample of Italian high school students. *Scientific World Journal*, 2014.  
<https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/504376>
- Spreng, R. N., McKinnon, M. C., Mar, R. A., & Levine, B. (. (2009). "The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire." *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91(1), 62–71.
- Sri Mulyani, S. M. N. (2020). Hubungan Antara Kecenderungan Alexithymia dengan Hubungan Dekat pada Dewasa Awal. *Jurnal Communicate*, 6(1), 7–12.
- Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy--and completely unprepared for adulthood--and what that means for the rest of us.* (Simon and Schuster. (ed.)).
- Zarei, J., & Besharat, M. A. (2010). Alexithymia and interpersonal problems. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 619–622.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.153>