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THE EMOTIONAL PATHWAY FROM PERSONALITY TRAITS TO ALEXITHYMIA: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTION REGULATION

Kişilik Özelliklerinden Aleksitimiye Uzanan Duygusal Yol: Duygu Düzenlemenin Aracı Rolü

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Abstract
Although the various consequences of the Big Five personality traits are well documented, the pathway from these personality traits to alexithymia has not been sufficiently investigated. This study aims to examine the relationships among the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation skills, and alexithymia, as well as the mediating effect of emotion regulation on the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia. The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI), the Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire (ERSQ), and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) self-report measures were administered to a non-clinical sample of 402 individuals aged 18 to 55 in Turkey. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 27 and Process Macro 4.2. Results revealed significant correlations between the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation skills, and alexithymia. All personality traits are strong predictors of emotion regulation, with extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness showing positive predictive relationships regarding emotion regulation, while neuroticism exhibits a negative predictive relationship. Emotion regulation is a significant negative predictor of alexithymia. Each personality trait significantly predicts alexithymia; specifically, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness are negatively predictive, whereas neuroticism is positively predictive. Furthermore, emotion regulation mediated each of these relationships between the Big Five personality traits and alexithymia. These results significantly contribute to existing research by demonstrating the predictive effect of emotion regulation, along with personality traits, on alexithymia and identifying emotion regulation as a mediator.
Keywords: *The Big Five personality traits, Alexithymia, Emotion regulation skills, Mediation analysis*
Öz
Beş büyük kişilik özelliğinin çeşitli sonuçları iyi bir şekilde belgelenmiş olsa da bu kişilik özelliklerinden aleksitimiye giden yol yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Beş Büyük kişilik özelliği, duygu düzenleme becerileri ve aleksitimi arasındaki ilişkileri ve duygu düzenlemenin kişilik özellikleri ve aleksitimi arasındaki ilişkideki aracı etkisini incelemektir. Beş Büyük Kişilik Envanteri (BFI), Duygu Düzenleme Becerileri Ölçeği (ERSQ) ve Toronto Aleksitimi Ölçeği (TAS-20) öz bildirim araçları, Türkiye'de 18-55 yaş arası 402 kişilik klinik olmayan bir örnekleme uygulanmıştır. Veri analizi IBM SPSS 27 ve Process Macro 4.2 kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Büyük Beşli kişilik özellikleri, duygu düzenleme becerileri ve aleksitimi arasında anlamlı korelasyonlar olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Tüm kişilik özellikleri duygu düzenlemenin güçlü

yordayıcılarıdır; dışadönüklük, uyumluluk, sorumluluk ve deneyime açıklık duygu düzenleme ile ilgili pozitif yordayıcı ilişkiler gösterirken, nevrotizm negatif bir yordayıcı ilişki sergilemektedir. Duygu düzenleme, aleksitiminin anlamlı bir negatif yordayıcısıdır. Her bir kişilik özelliği aleksitimiyi anlamlı şekilde yordamaktadır; özellikle dışadönüklük, uyumluluk, sorumluluk ve deneyime açıklık negatif yordayıcı iken nevrotizm pozitif yordayıcıdır. Ayrıca, duygu düzenleme, Büyük Beşli kişilik özellikleri ve aleksitimi arasındaki bu ilişkilerin her birine aracılık etmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, kişilik özelliklerinin yanı sıra duygu düzenlemenin aleksitimi üzerindeki yordayıcı etkisini göstererek ve duygu düzenlemeyi bir aracı olarak tanımlayarak mevcut araştırmalara önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Beş büyük kişilik özelliği, Aleksitimi, Duygu düzenleme becerileri, Aracılık analizi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Alexithymia, characterized by an individual's inability to recognize, understand, and express their emotional experiences (Taylor et al., 1997), was first defined by Sifneos (1973). It is accepted that alexithymia has three basic dimensions (Taylor et al., 1997): difficulty in identifying and distinguishing emotions, difficulty in expressing emotions, and externally oriented thinking. Individuals with alexithymia have limited awareness of both their internal emotional experiences and their ability to communicate emotions in relationships with others (Bird & Cook, 2013). Alexithymia is also considered a significant risk factor for various psychopathologies (Preece et al., 2023). For example, strong relationships have been found between alexithymia and psychopathologies such as psychosomatic symptoms, substance use, eating disorders, and self-harming behaviors (Orsolini, 2020; Young & Kyranides, 2022).

Emotion regulation, on the other hand, is defined as a psychological capacity that encompasses the processes of initiating, directing, changing, or maintaining emotional states (Gross, 2015). It includes adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and maladaptive strategies like emotional suppression (Laloyaux et al., 2015; Swart et al., 2009), but can be hindered by insufficient emotional awareness and challenges in identifying emotions (Pandey et al., 2011; Preece et al., 2022; Walker, 2011).

Research has shown that early attachment experiences and neurocognitive differences underlie an individual's emotional awareness and emotion regulation capacities. Secure attachment patterns support a child's ability to recognize and regulate emotions, while insecure or disorganized attachment patterns negatively impact these processes (Orsolini, 2020). Early impaired parent-child relationships may lead to the development of attachment insecurity and related alexithymia later in life (Venta, 2012). It has also been suggested that processes such as avoidance of emotional

experiences and experiential avoidance may act as mediating mechanisms between alexithymia and difficulties in emotion regulation (Venta, 2012). Additionally, neuroscientific studies have revealed that individuals with alexithymia exhibit decreased activation in brain regions such as the anterior cingulate cortex, insula, and prefrontal cortex when responding to emotional stimuli (Berthoz et al., 2002; Kano & Fukudo, 2013). The inadequate integration of medial prefrontal and limbic structures, especially when confronted with negative emotional stimuli, is linked to difficulties in emotional regulation and psychosomatic tendencies in these individuals (Kano & Fukudo, 2013). Furthermore, significant neurocognitive differences have been identified between alexithymia and empathy, emotional awareness, and emotional decision-making processes (Kessler et al., 2009; Swart et al., 2009).

The association between alexithymia and difficulties in emotion regulation has been shown to correlate with clinical presentations such as depressive symptoms, anxiety disorders, and addiction (Orsolini, 2020; Preece et al., 2022). For instance, individuals with elevated alexithymia levels often depend on maladaptive emotion regulation strategies like suppression or avoidance, which contributes to the persistence of psychopathological processes (Laloyaux et al., 2015; Sfärlea et al., 2019).

Personality traits, the fundamental aspects of an individual's psychological structure that influence behaviors, thoughts, and emotional experiences (Costa & McCrae, 2008), are accepted to include five major dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (John & Srivastava, 1999). Each personality trait influences the expression of emotions and behaviors: individuals high in extraversion tend to be more extroverted and emotionally expressive; those high in agreeableness understand and respond to the emotional needs of others; conscientious individuals tend to regulate their emotions better and maintain emotional stability; people with high neuroticism experience strong emotional reactivity and negative affect, while those with greater openness often have deeper emotional experiences and express them (Hamdi Bacha, 2023).

Existing literature offers insights into the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation, and alexithymia. Neuroticism, a personality trait marked by a tendency toward negative emotions and emotional instability (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017), may lead to a greater use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (Preece et al., 2023; Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017). Significant relationships have also been identified between

high neuroticism, low agreeableness, and alexithymia (Rahimi et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). While existing literature illustrates strong connections between personality traits and alexithymia (Rahimi et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024), as well as between alexithymia and emotion regulation (Pandey et al., 2011; Preece et al., 2022), no studies have examined all three variables together to determine whether emotion regulation mediates the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia. This study aims to test this potential emotional pathway to enhance understanding of how individual differences impact emotional functioning and to explore the possible mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia.

2. METHODS

Before starting the study, ethical approval was obtained from Doğuş University (Decision No: 63102, Date: 31/05/2024). The research took place from September 1, 2024, to January 20, 2025, involving 402 non-clinical participants in Turkey, selected through simple random sampling. The participants were aged 18 to 55. Informed consent forms and questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms, and the data collection process was carried out on various online platforms. The sociodemographic data form, the Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI), the Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire (ERSQ), and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) were organized as sequential inquiries, uploaded to Google Forms, and then shared with the participants.

2.1. Data Collection Tools

2.1.1. The Sociodemographic Data Form: This researcher-developed form features questions regarding participants' gender, age, education, income, marital status, relationship status, and the duration of their relationships.

2.1.2. The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI): Developed by Benet-Martinez and John (1998) to evaluate personality traits, this inventory is a 5-point Likert-type self-report scale consisting of 44 questions across 5 sub-dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Sümer and Sümer (2005) conducted the Turkish adaptation of the inventory as part of an international study conducted across 56 nations (Schmitt et al., 2007). The internal reliabilities of the BFI scales for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were .74, .67, .77, .76, and .75 in the Middle East, which included

412 participants from Turkey (Schmitt et al., 2007), and were 83, .73, .80, .73, and .70, respectively, in this study.

2.1.3. The Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire (ERSQ): This instrument, created by Berking and Znoj (2008) and later adapted into Turkish by Vatan and Oruçlular Kahya (2018) comprises 27 items evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .93 in the original version and .89 in the Turkish adaptation, where the subscale reliability scores ranged from .49 to .75 (Vatan & Oruçlular Kahya, 2018). In the current study, the overall Cronbach's alpha value was .95, and the reliability values of the subscales were calculated as .72 for awareness/attention, .73 for sensations, .74 for clarity, .72 for understanding, .70 for acceptance, .74 for tolerance, .74 for readiness to confront, .75 for self-support, and .71 for modification

2.1.4. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20): This scale, created by Bagby et al. (1994 a,b), is a Likert-type self-evaluation tool that encompasses 20 items and is organized into three subscales: difficulty identifying feelings (DIF), difficulty describing feelings (DDF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT). The original version demonstrated good validity and reliability, with the exception of the EOT subscale. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Güleç et al. (2009), resulting in an overall Cronbach's alpha value of .78, while the subscale values varied from .57 to .80. The internal consistency was .85 for the total scale, .83 for DIF, .70 for DDF, and .71 for EOT in the present study.

2.2. Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 27, along with the Process Macro 4.2 and Model 4 plug-in. Statistical tests included descriptive and frequency analyses, normality tests, and Pearson correlation analysis to determine the relationships among the BFI, ERSQ, and TAS-20. Additionally, the Bootstrap method was used to examine the mediating variable. All statistical tests were conducted with a 95% confidence interval, and significance was assessed at $p < .05$.

3. RESULTS

The study involved 402 participants aged 18 to 55. Among the participants, 251 (62.4%) were female, and 151 (37.6%) were male. Additionally, 68 (16.9%) were aged 18 to 25, 253 (62.9%) were aged 26 to 40, and 81 (20.1%) were aged 41 to 55. Regarding monthly income levels, 18.2% of the participants reported low income, 76.9% reported medium

income, and 5.0% reported high income. In terms of educational status, 10.4% graduated from high school, 65.7% hold bachelor's or associate's degrees, and 23.9% have master's or doctorate degrees. Concerning marital status, 53.2% of the participants were single, while 46.8% were married. Relating to relationship status, 39.1% stated that they were in a relationship, whereas 14.2% indicated they were not. The duration of the relationships was found to be 0-12 months for 4.5%, 1-3 years for 6.7%, 3-5 years for 19.9%, and 5 years or more for 8.0%. The participants' sociodemographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The sociodemographic characteristics of participants

		n	***%***
Gender	Female	251	62.4
	Male	151	37.6
Age	18-25	68	16.9
	26-40	253	62.9
	41-55	81	20.1
Monthly Income	Low	73	18.2
	Middle	309	76.9
	High	20	5.0
Education Status	High school graduate	42	10.4
	Bachelor's degree	264	65.7
	Master's / PhD degree	96	23.9
Marital Status	Single	214	53.2
	Married	188	46.8
Relationship Status	In a relationship	157	39.1
	No relationship	57	14.2
Relationship Duration	0-12 Months	18	4.5
	1- 3 Years	27	6.7
	3-5 Years	80	19.9
	Over 5 years	32	8.0
Total		402	100.0

Before conducting the correlation and mediation analyses, preliminary tests were performed to evaluate the descriptive statistics and normality assumptions of the study variables. As shown in Table 2, the mean scores for the extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness subscales of BFI were $\bar{X}$ = 2.64 (SD = 0.93), $\bar{X}$ = 2.81 (SD = 0.74), $\bar{X}$ = 3.04 (SD = 0.85), $\bar{X}$ = 2.41 (SD = 0.81), and $\bar{X}$ = 2.92 (SD = 0.69). The mean scores for the ERSQ and TAS-20 were $\bar{X}$ = 3.49 (SD = 1.03), and $\bar{X}$ = 49.38 (SD = 10.95). The internal consistency (α) values for the variables ranged from 0.70 to 0.95, confirming the reliability of the scales (Fitzner, 2007). Additionally, when examining the skewness and kurtosis coefficients

to assess the appropriateness of the scales for normal distribution, it was found that all scales fell within the range of ±2; therefore, the normality assumption was met (Hahs-Vaughn, 2020).

Table 2. **Descriptive statistics and reliabilities of BFI, ERSQ, and TAS-20**

	n	***Min***	***Max***	***X̄***	***SD***	***Kurtosis***	***Skewness***	***(α)***
BFI Extraversion	402	1	5	2.64	0.93	-1.07	0.14	0.83
BFI Agreeableness	402	1	4	2.81	0.74	-0.77	-0.48	0.73
BFI Conscientiousness	402	1	5	3.04	0.85	-0.86	-0.27	0.80
BFI Neuroticism	402	1	5	2.41	0.81	-0.64	0.12	0.73
BFI Openness	402	1	5	2.92	0.69	-0.19	-0.04	0.70
ERSQ	402	1	5	3.49	1.03	-0.16	-0.86	0.95
Awareness/Attention	402	1	5	3.25	1.27	-0.88	-0.43	0.72
Sensations	402	1	5	3.38	1.25	-0.68	-0.63	0.73
Clarity	402	1	5	3.80	1.27	-0.37	-0.89	0.74
Understanding	402	1	5	3.56	1.22	-0.38	-0.79	0.72
Acceptance	402	1	5	3.00	1.25	-1.05	-0.18	0.70
Tolerance	402	1	5	3.53	1.24	-0.82	-0.58	0.74
Readiness to confront	402	1	5	3.44	1.25	-0.86	-0.48	0.74
Self-support	402	1	5	4.06	1.16	0.24	-1.14	0.75
Modification	402	1	5	3.39	1.22	-0.59	-0.64	0.71
TAS-20	402	20	77	49.38	10.95	-0.19	-0.12	0.85
DIF	402	7	32	15.51	5.25	-0.33	0.46	0.83
DDF	402	5	21	12.20	3.48	-0.44	0.00	0.70
EOT	402	8	36	21.91	5.36	0.85	-0.33	0.71

BFI: The Big Five Personality Inventory; ERSQ: The Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire; TAS-20: The Toronto Alexithymia Scale; DIF: difficulty identifying feelings; DDF: difficulty describing feelings; EOT: externally oriented thinking

As shown in Table 3, all of the five personality traits, alexithymia and emotion regulation variables, were found to be correlated. A significant negative relationship was observed between extraversion and alexithymia ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$), including the DIF ($r = -.26$, $p < .001$) and DDF ($r = -.25$, $p < .001$) subscales of the TAS-20. Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was identified between extraversion and emotion regulation ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), encompassing all sub-dimensions of the ERSQ. Agreeableness was found to correlate with alexithymia ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$) and all sub-dimensions of the TAS-20, including the DIF ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$), DDF ($r = -.19$, $p < .001$), and EOT ($r = -.11$, $p = .030$). Additionally, agreeableness was associated with emotion regulation ($r = .18$, $p < .001$) and dimensions such as awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, acceptance, readiness to confront, self-support, and modification. Conscientiousness correlated with alexithymia ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$), as well as the DIF ($r = -.23$,

p < .001) and DDF (r = -.19, p < .001) subscales. Furthermore, conscientiousness was associated with emotion regulation (r = .15, p = .003) and various aspects like awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, self-support, and modification. Neuroticism was found to correlate with alexithymia (r = .29, p < .001) and the DIF (r = .28, p < .001), DDF (r = .27, p < .001), and EOT (r = .13, p = .010) dimensions. Additionally, neuroticism also correlated with emotion regulation (r = -.32, p < .001), encompassing all sub-dimensions of the ERSQ. Openness was found to correlate with alexithymia (r = -.22, p < .001), as well as the DIF (r = -.22, p < .001) and DDF (r = -.24, p < .001) subscales. Moreover, openness was found to correlate with emotion regulation (r = .17, p = .001) and dimensions such as awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, acceptance, tolerance, readiness to confront, self-support, and modification. Significant negative correlations were found between alexithymia and emotion regulation (r = -.33, p < .001), as well as with all sub-dimensions. Further correlations include: between DIF and emotion regulation (r = -.30, p < .001), along with all sub-dimensions of the ERSQ; between DDF and emotion regulation (r = -.30, p < .001), encompassing all sub-dimensions of the ERSQ; and between EOT and emotion regulation (r = -.15, p = .002), including the awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, acceptance, tolerance, readiness to confront, and self-support sub-dimensions of the ERSQ.

Table 3. Correlations of personality traits, emotion regulation and alexithymia

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
1-BFI Extraversion	1																		
2-BFI Agreeableness	.55**	1																	
3-BFI Conscientiousness	.56**	.75**	1																
4-BFI Neuroticism	-.53**	-.40**	-.37**	1															
5-BFI Openness	.53**	.44**	.45**	-.34**	1														
6- TAS-20	-.23**	-.22**	-.21**	.29**	-.22**	1													
7-DIF	-.26**	-.21**	-.23**	.28**	-.22**	.84**	1												
8-DDF	-.25**	-.19**	-.19**	.27**	-.24**	.82**	.69**	1											
9-EOT	-.05	-.11*	-.08	.13*	-.05	.65**	.25**	.27**	1										
10- ERSQ	.30**	.18**	.15**	-.32**	.17**	-.33**	-.30**	-.30**	-.15**	1									
11-Awareness/Attention	.24**	.18**	.14**	-.30**	.14**	-.18**	-.14**	-.14**	-.12*	.79**	1								
12-Sensations	.18**	.06	.07	-.22**	.10	-.27**	-.25**	-.29**	-.09	.79**	.56**	1							
13-Clarity	.28**	.19**	.16**	-.26**	.15**	-.38**	-.35**	-.37**	-.16**	.86**	.57**	.69**	1						
14-Understanding	.30**	.25**	.22**	-.30	.18**	-.32	-.28	-.28	-.15	.88**	.69**	.60**	.74**	1					

15-Acceptance	.19**	.14**	.09	-.24**	.14**	-.21**	-.22**	-.14**	-.12*	.78**	.67**	.54**	.59**	.66**	1						
16-Tolerance	.22**	.09	.07	-.23**	.12*	-.23**	-.22**	-.21**	-.11*	.85**	.59**	.57**	.70**	.73**	.64**	1					
17-Readiness to confront	.23**	.12*	.09	-.24**	.15**	-.32**	-.28**	-.30**	-.18**	.84**	.60**	.56**	.69**	.72**	.61**	.76**	1				
18-Self-support	.30**	.20**	.15**	-.32**	.16**	-.36**	-.32**	-.35**	-.16**	.84**	.57**	.69**	.76**	.71**	.53**	.67**	.68**	1			
19-Modification	.27**	.15**	.11*	-.24**	.13**	-.17**	-.15**	-.17**	-.07	.83**	.62**	.66**	.63**	.73**	.57**	.66**	.62**	.70**	1		

***p<0.01, *p<0.05 Used: Pearson Correlation Test*

BFI: The Big Five Personality Inventory; ERSQ: The Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire; TAS-20: The Toronto Alexithymia Scale; DIF: difficulty identifying feelings; DDF: difficulty describing feelings; EOT: externally oriented thinking

As shown in Table 4, the analysis of the impact of the independent variables on the mediating variable revealed that personality traits significantly predicted emotion regulation: extraversion (β = .30, 95% CI [.22, .43]), agreeableness (β = .18, 95% CI [.12, .39]), conscientiousness (β = .15, 95% CI [.06, .29]), and openness to experience (β = .17, 95% CI [.11, .40]) positively and significantly predicted emotion regulation. Conversely, neuroticism (β = -.32, 95% CI [-.51, -.28]) negatively and significantly predicted emotion regulation. Additionally, when analyzing the effect of the mediating variable on the dependent variable, it was found that ER predicted alexithymia (β = -.33, 95% CI [-4.50, -2.51]) negatively at a significant level.

Table 4. The predictive relationships among personality traits, emotion regulation, and alexithymia

						%95 CI	
	B	***E***	***β***	***t***	***p***	***LL***	***UL***
BFI Extraversion →Emotion Regulation	0.33	05	0.30	6.24	0.000*	0.22	0.43
BFI Agreeableness→Emotion Regulation	0.25	07	0.18	3.73	0.000*	0.12	0.39
BFI Conscientiousness →Emotion Regulation	0.18	06	0.15	2.97	0.003	0.06	0.29
BFI Neuroticism →Emotion Regulation	-0.40	06	-0.32	-6.66	0.000*	-0.51	-0.28
BFI Openness →Emotion Regulation	0.25	07	0.17	3.46	0.001*	0.11	0.40
Emotion Regulation → Alexithymia	-3.51	50	-0.33	-6.95	0.000*	-4.50	-2.51
Total Impact (c1) (Extroversion)	-2.74	57	-0.23	-4.80	0.000*	-3.86	-1.62
Direct Impact (c1) (Extraversion)	-1.75	58	-0.15	-3.04	0.003*	-2.88	-0.62
Indirect Effect (c1) (Extroversion)	-0.99	27				-1.57	-0.52

Total Impact (c2) (Agreeableness)	-3.22	72	-0.22	-4.47	0.000*	-4.64	-1.81
Direct Impact (c2) (Agreeableness)	-2.42	70	-0.16	-3.45	0.001*	-3.79	-1.04
Indirect Effect (c2) (Agreeableness)	-0.80	28				-1.41	-0.31
Total Impact (c3) (Conscientiousness)	-2.74	53	-0.21	-4.37	0.000*	-3.97	-1.51
Direct Impact (c3) (Conscientiousness)	-2.17	50	-0.17	-3.58	0.000*	-3.36	-0.98
Indirect Impact (c3) (Conscientiousness)	-0.57	24				-1.10	-.0.13
Total Impact (c4) (Neuroticism)	3.85	54	0.29	5.97	0.000*	2.58	5.11
Direct Effect (c4) (Neuroticism)	2.72	56	0.20	4.15	0.000*	1.43	4.01
Indirect Effect (c4) (Neuroticism)	1.12	30				0.60	1.76
Total Impact (c5) (Openness)	-3.48	77	-0.22	-4.52	0.000*	-5.00	-1.97
Direct Impact (c5) (Openness)	-2.68	75	-0.17	-3.59	0.000*	-4.14	-1.21
Indirect Effect (c5) (Openness)	-0.80	27				-1.41	-0.33

**p<.05*

BFI: The Big Five Personality Inventory

As presented in Figure 1, the total effect analysis, which measures the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable, indicates that all personality traits significantly predict alexithymia, with emotion regulation mediating these relationships. The total effect (c1) analysis found that extroversion significantly predicts alexithymia (β = -.23, 95% CI [-3.86, -1.62]). When emotion regulation was incorporated into this model as a mediating variable, a reduction in the β value of the independent variable extroversion was observed, leading to the conclusion that the direct effect remained significant (β = -.15, 95% CI [-2.88, -0.62]). In the bootstrap analyses for the indirect effect, it was determined that the mediation did not include a zero (0) value within the 95% confidence interval, and the indirect effect (β = -.08, 95% CI [-1.57, -.52]) was statistically significant. The total effect (c2) analysis found that agreeableness significantly predicts alexithymia (β = -.22, 95% CI [-4.64, -1.81]). With emotion regulation included as a mediating variable, the β value for agreeableness decreased, indicating a significant direct effect (β = -.16, 95% CI [-3.79, -1.04]). Bootstrap analyses for the indirect effect confirmed that the mediation did not include a zero (0) value in the 95% confidence interval, showing a statistically significant indirect effect (β = -.06, 95% CI [-1.41, -.31]). According to the total effect (c3) analysis, conscientiousness was found to significantly predict alexithymia (β = -.21, 95% CI [-3.97, -1.51]). The addition of emotion regulation as a mediating variable resulted in a reduction

of the β value for conscientiousness, confirming a significant direct effect (β = -.17, 95% CI [-3.36, -0.98]). In the bootstrap analyses for the indirect effect, it was determined that the mediation did not encompass a zero (0) value within the 95% confidence interval, and the indirect effect (β = -.04, 95% CI [-1.10, -.13]) was statistically significant. The total effect (c4) analysis found that neuroticism significantly predicts alexithymia (β = .29, 95% CI [2.58, 5.11]). With emotion regulation included as a mediating variable, the β value for neuroticism decreased, indicating a significant direct effect (β = .20, 95% CI [1.43, 4.01]). Bootstrap analyses for the indirect effect confirmed that the mediation did not include a zero (0) value in the 95% confidence interval, showing a statistically significant indirect effect (β = .09, 95% CI [0.60, 1.76]). According to the total effect (c5) analysis, openness was found to significantly predict alexithymia (β =-.22, 95% CI [-5.00, -1.97]). The addition of emotion regulation as a mediating variable resulted in a reduction of the β value for openness, confirming a significant direct effect (β =-.17, 95% CI [-4.14, -1.21]). In the bootstrap analyses for the indirect effect, it was determined that the mediation did not encompass a zero (0) value within the 95% confidence interval, and the indirect effect (β = -.09, 95% CI [-1.41, -.33]) was statistically significant.

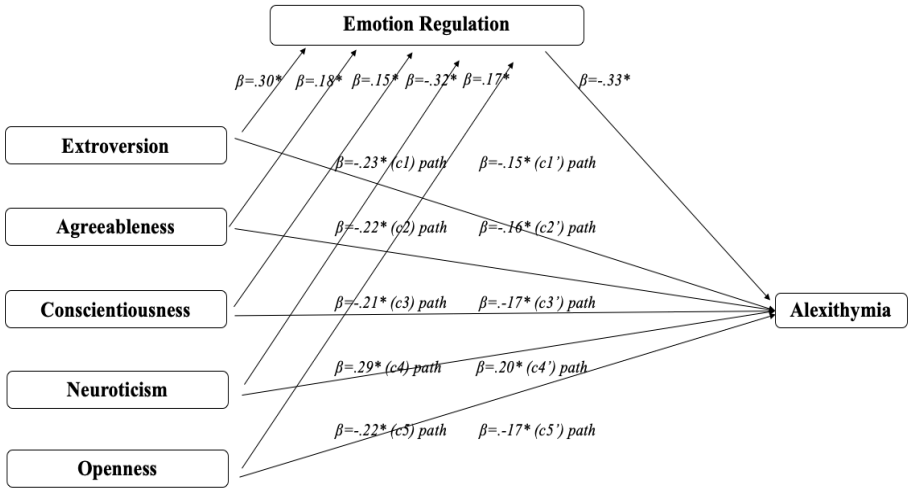

Figure 1. The mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia

4. DISCUSSION

This study reports findings from research involving 402 participants aged 18 to 55. The assessment covered sociodemographic factors such as

gender, age, education, income, marital status, relationship status, and relationship duration. To investigate the connections between personality traits, emotion regulation, and alexithymia, the BFI, ERSQ, and TAS-20 instruments were employed.

Significant correlations were observed between personality traits and alexithymia. Agreeableness and neuroticism correlated with alexithymia, as well as with all sub-dimensions, including difficulty identifying feelings (DIF), difficulty describing feelings (DDF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT). Meanwhile, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness also correlated with alexithymia, particularly with the DIF and DDF subscales. While the traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness showed negative correlations with alexithymia, a significant positive correlation was found between neuroticism and alexithymia. This finding aligns with the findings of other studies (Barańczuk, 2019; Gaggero et al., 2022; Heshmati & Pellerone (2019)), which reported that alexithymia negatively correlates with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, while positively correlating with neuroticism.

Personality traits were found to be correlated to emotion regulation skills, as well as alexithymia. Neuroticism and extraversion were associated with emotion regulation across all sub-dimensions, while agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness related to emotion regulation and several sub-dimensions. Neuroticism was identified as having a negative correlation with emotion regulation, whereas significant positive correlations were noted among the traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness regarding emotion regulation. Studies have reported that higher neuroticism is linked to greater difficulties in emotion regulation (Horwood & Anglim, 2020; Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a/b; Stanton et al., 2016; Tholia & Suri, 2020) and an increased tendency to use suppression (Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2022), while it demonstrates a negative correlation with cognitive reappraisal (Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018). Additionally, studies have found that higher extraversion is associated with increased reappraisal (Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018) and reduced suppression (Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018;). Studies also indicate that greater agreeableness correlates with increased reappraisal (Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Kobylińska et al., 2020;), more problematic emotional responses (Stanton et al., 2016), and less suppression (Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018). Findings regarding conscientiousness include positive correlations

with reappraisal (Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Shi et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2022), a negative correlation with problematic emotional responses (Stanton et al., 2016), but mixed associations with suppression (Shi et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies have reported that openness correlates positively with reappraisal (Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018). Although no study in the literature presents findings identical to this study, it aligns with the broader literature on the relationship between personality traits and emotion regulation/difficulties in emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation and alexithymia were found to be negatively correlated. Emotion regulation and all its subdimensions showed a negative correlation with alexithymia, DIF, and DDF, while the subdimensions of awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, acceptance, tolerance, readiness to confront, and self-support negatively correlated with EOT. These findings align with existing literature, indicating a strong relationship between emotion regulation and alexithymia. Studies in both clinical and nonclinical samples report that higher alexithymia is associated with greater difficulties in emotion regulation (Garofalo et al., 2018; Preece et al., 2022; Vaiouli and Panayiotou, 2021; Venta et al., 2013); suppression is positively correlated with alexithymia (Laloyaux et al., 2015; Stasiewicz et al., 2012; Swart et al., 2009); and elevated alexithymia correlates positively with maladaptive strategies and emotion regulation deficits while correlating negatively with adaptive strategies (Besharat et al., 2014; Sfärlea et al., 2019; Preece et al., 2023).

Current research demonstrates that all personality traits are significant predictors of emotion regulation. Specifically, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness show positive predictions regarding emotion regulation, while neuroticism exhibits a negative predictive relationship. Existing research indicates that extraversion and conscientiousness account for dimensions of emotion regulation (Purna & Prawitasari, 2019); self-regulation (Fuente et al., 2024); life satisfaction and positive affect (Kobylińska et al., 2020); adaptive strategies such as reappraisal (Sadr, 2016); and neuroticism predicts emotion regulation (Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001), situation selection, attentional deployment, and suppression (Purnamaningsih, 2017). Furthermore, openness positively predicts self-regulation, while agreeableness and neuroticism negatively predict it (Fuente et al., 2024); extraversion and openness negatively predict maladaptive strategies like suppression (Sadr, 2016), while openness and agreeableness predict adaptive strategies such as situation modification and cognitive change (Purnamaningsih, 2017). Additionally, research shows that

emotion regulation, including techniques like reappraisal and suppression, mediates the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and outcomes such as learning engagement, depression, anxiety, and relationship satisfaction (Dang et al., 2024; Kobylińska et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2022; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). The findings of the current study align with related studies (Purna & Prawitasari, 2019; Sadr, 2016; Sandhu & Kapoor, 2013), indicating that personality traits can predict emotion regulation in various respects.

Furthermore, the findings of the current research indicate that emotion regulation is a significant predictor of alexithymia in a negative direction. In the literature, there is no research indicating that emotion regulation predicts alexithymia. However, studies that examine these concepts together primarily focus on the correlation between them, the comparison of the two in relation to other variables, or the predictive effect of alexithymia on emotion regulation (Elmas et al., 2017; Laloyaux et al., 2015; Pandey et al., 2011; Pilkington et al., 2023; Preece et al., 2023; Sfärlea et al., 2019; Swart et al., 2009; Venta et al., 2013; Visted et al., 2018). Therefore, this finding is the first to demonstrate the negative predictive effect of emotion regulation in explaining alexithymia.

Additionally, the present study reveals that all personality traits significantly predict alexithymia; specifically, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness are negatively predictive, while neuroticism is positively predictive. This finding aligns with existing research indicating that conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness predict alexithymia (Heshmati & Azmoodeh, 2017); neuroticism, extraversion, and openness are predictors of alexithymia and its components (Besharat, 2008); lower-order traits of the Big Five, such as depression, assertiveness, feelings, altruism, and competence, predict alexithymia (Luminet et al., 1999); neuroticism serves as the strongest predictor of alexithymia and openness and conscientiousness negatively predict alexithymia (Heshmati & Pellerone, 2019); openness significantly predicts alexithymia, with stress mediating the relationship between neuroticism and alexithymia (Singh et al., 2011); specific personality traits significantly predict alexithymia (Picardi et al., 2005); neuroticism positively, conscientiousness and extraversion negatively predict alexithymia (Zhang et al., 2024); and an increase in neuroticism raises the likelihood of alexithymia, while an increase in conscientiousness lowers it (Rahimi et al., 2025).

Finally, the current study found that emotion regulation mediates the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and alexithymia.

Although existing literature presents findings on the effects of personality traits on emotion regulation and alexithymia separately, this study uniquely reveals the mediating effect of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia, contributing to the literature on personality, emotions, and psychological health in this context for the first time.

This study, while valuable, has certain limitations. The main limitation is the exclusive reliance on self-report scales for data collection. Future research would benefit from assessing the relationships among these variables using clinical observations and tests. Additionally, the fact that the sample comprises only non-clinical participants may limit the relevance of the study's findings for clinical populations.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, the relationships among the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation skills, and alexithymia were examined. The findings reveal significant correlations among the three variables, with personality traits serving as a strong predictor of both alexithymia and emotion regulation. Moreover, the study reveals the predictive effect of emotion regulation on alexithymia in this context and highlights the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia. Although no previous research in the literature has addressed all these variables together, these results are consistent with the broader literature evaluating the dual relationships. Thus, this study underscores the direct effect of the Big Five personality traits on alexithymia and identifies emotion regulation as a key mediator, making a significant contribution to the existing literature.

6. SUMMARY

Alexithymia, characterized by an individual's difficulty in recognizing, understanding, and expressing emotional experiences (Taylor et al., 1997), was first defined by Sifneos (1973). It is widely accepted that alexithymia consists of three core dimensions: difficulty identifying feelings (DIF), difficulty describing feelings (DDF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT) (Taylor et al., 1997). Emotion regulation, on the other hand, is defined as a psychological capacity encompassing the processes of initiating, directing, modifying, or maintaining emotional states (Gross, 2015). Moreover, personality traits—core aspects of a person’s psychological structure that influence behavior, thoughts, and emotional experiences—are commonly grouped into five broad domains: extraversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (Costa & McCrae, 2008; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Although the consequences of the Big Five personality traits have been extensively documented, the emotional pathway from these traits to alexithymia has been relatively underexplored. The aim of this study is to examine the relationships among the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation skills, and alexithymia, and to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between personality traits and alexithymia. To this end, self-report instruments—the Big Five Inventory (BFI), the Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire (ERSQ), and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20)—were administered to a non-clinical sample of 402 individuals aged between 18 and 55 in Turkey. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 27 and Process Macro 4.2.

Findings revealed significant correlations among the Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation skills, and alexithymia. In particular, agreeableness and neuroticism were correlated with alexithymia and all of its subdimensions (DIF, DDF, and EOT). Additionally, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness were also correlated with alexithymia and its DIF and DDF subdimensions. While extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness showed negative correlations with alexithymia, neuroticism was positively correlated. These results are consistent with previous research, which has reported negative correlations between alexithymia and extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, as well as a positive correlation with neuroticism (Barańczuk, 2019; Gaggero et al., 2022; Heshmati & Pellerone, 2019).

Personality traits were also found to be associated with emotion regulation skills. Neuroticism and extraversion were significantly related to emotion regulation across all subdimensions, whereas agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness showed correlations with overall emotion regulation skills and specific subdimensions. Neuroticism was negatively correlated with emotion regulation, while extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness were positively correlated. These findings are in line with the broader literature on the associations between personality traits and emotion regulation (Horwood & Anglim, 2020; Ioannidis & Siegling, 2015; Kobylińska et al., 2020; Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a, b; Shi et al., 2018; Stanton et al., 2016; Tao et al., 2022; Tholia & Suri, 2020).

Emotion regulation skills also showed a negative correlation with alexithymia. Overall emotion regulation, along with its subdimensions, was

negatively associated with alexithymia, DIF, and DDF. Conversely, the subdimensions of awareness/attention, clarity, understanding, acceptance, tolerance, readiness to confront, and self-support were negatively associated with EOT. These findings confirm a strong relationship between emotion regulation and alexithymia, consistent with prior research on the association between various dimensions and strategies of emotion regulation and alexithymia (Besharat et al., 2014; Garofalo et al., 2018; Laloyaux et al., 2015; Preece et al., 2022, 2023; Vaiouli & Panayiotou, 2021; Sfärlea et al., 2019; Stasiewicz et al., 2012; Swart et al., 2009; Venta et al., 2013).

According to the findings of the current research, all personality traits significantly predict emotion regulation skills. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness were positive predictors of emotion regulation skills, while neuroticism was a negative predictor. Moreover, emotion regulation was found to be a significant negative predictor of alexithymia. Each personality trait also significantly predicted alexithymia: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness were negative predictors, whereas neuroticism was a positive predictor. Furthermore, emotion regulation significantly mediated each of the relationships between the Big Five traits and alexithymia. These results contribute to the existing literature by identifying the predictive effect of both personality traits and emotion regulation skills on alexithymia, and by establishing emotion regulation as a mediator in these relationships.

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