



## The relationship between alexithymia and counterproductive behaviors in the workplace

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**Abstract.** *Purpose.* The concept of alexithymia which is expressed as individuals having difficulty defining, regulating, and expressing their emotions, is believed to be on the rise in organizational life. It is argued that it is not possible for employees who have difficulty defining their emotions to build positive relationships in the workplace. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether alexithymia has an impact on counterproductive work behaviors. *Study design.* Data were collected through the convenience sampling method from 334 employees working in public and private sector organizations in Turkey. The mean age of the participants is 34.1 years, the mean seniority in the profession is seven years, and the mean seniority in their organizations is three years. The data was collected through a survey form. The Counterproductive Work Behaviors Scale (CWB) and Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) were used in the data collection tool. *Findings.* The study revealed that alexithymia has a significant contribution to counterproductive work behaviors. Moreover, it was found that alexithymia has a stronger contribution to organizational deviance (Cwb-O) than employee deviance (Cwb-P). As a result of the simple regression analysis carried out to determine to what extent the sub-dimension of alexithymia predicts counterproductive work behaviors in the workplace. “Having difficulty recognizing and verbalizing emotions” significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviors towards the organization ( $\beta = .65, t = 15.7, p = .00$ ) and counterproductive work behaviors towards the employee ( $\beta = .42, t = 8.52, p = .00$ ). *Value of results.* The findings of the study will provide a new perspective on counterproductive work behaviors in organizations and contribute to the industrial and organizational psychology literature as it is the first study in Turkey regarding the relationship between alexithymia and counterproductive work behaviors.

**Keywords:** organizational psychology, alexithymia, counterproductive work behaviors, personality, industrial and work psychology, organizational behavior.

### Introduction

One of the fundamental requirements for people to establish healthy and balanced relationships in social life is to properly define their emotions and develop attitudes and behaviors that are compatible with those emotions. In the work environment, where more than one variable is interacting simultaneously, the importance of the harmony mentioned above and balance gradually increases, and the way employees recognize, make sense of, and express their emotions determines the quality and strength of an interpersonal relationship. At this point, it is believed that the impact of Alexithymia (Sifneos, 1973), expressed as individuals having difficulty defining, regulating, and expressing their

emotions in business life, is increasing. It is stated that it is not possible for employees who have difficulty describing their feelings to develop positive work relationships in the organizational environment. Furthermore, in the studies on alexithymia, the emotion most associated with the concept is “anger,” which can have socially unacceptable consequences, especially when it comes to its impact on interpersonal relationships (Berenbaum, 1996). This condition, which was initially thought to occur only in people with psychosomatic disorders, was also found in the average population in the following years, and this led to researchers being directed to other disciplines from the field of psychology. However, the lack of studies examining the concept’s impact in the workplace highlighted the need for more in-depth research in this area.

Although counterproductive behaviors, expressed as destructive behaviors deliberately performed by employees (Spector, 2011), have been described in different ways in most known studies, it should be noted that all existing definitions emphasize employee behaviors that harm the organization. The factors that cause the occurrence of these behaviors show that some individual characteristics come to the fore as well as organizational factors, and it is stated that lack of specific skills and not being able to control emotions can cause unproductive behaviors for people (Gültaş, Erigüç, 2019). At this point, people with alexithymia tend to engage in some negative behaviors without involving their emotions in the process, rather than thinking deeply about cause-effect relationships when they encounter a negative situation in the work environment (e.g., injustice, inadequate organizational support, pressure from management) (Atasayar, 2011). Moreover, H. Berenbaum and J. D. Prince pointed out that people with alexithymia are associated with high levels of negative emotions and tend to choose angry and dominant interpretations of information about these emotions (Berenbaum, Prince, 1994). On the other hand, according to R. W. Levenson, being aware of one’s emotions protects one from primitive and uncontrolled emotional reactions when confronted with adverse events (Levenson, 1999). It is assumed that it is essential for both managers and researchers working in this field to determine negative behaviors that people with alexithymia tend to engage in when solving problems in the work environment.

Many different views suggest that alexithymia is a personal predisposition, a condition resulting from inadequate social support, a psychological disorder or clinical symptom, a psychosomatic disease, a cognitive impairment, a personality trait, or a neurological problem. Many more studies are still needed to delineate the concept of alexithymia from existing structures and eliminate the question marks regarding its reliability and validity in both theoretical and measurement terms (Lesser, 1981). It is believed that the findings of this study will enrich the view of the concept of counterproductive work behavior, which occupies an important place in working life. In this regard, it is believed that this study will contribute to the literature on industrial and organizational psychology as it is the first study to examine the relationship between alexithymic characteristics and counterproductive employee behavior in Turkey. In addition, determining the extent to which individuals with alexithymia may be prone to counterproductive behaviors in the work environment is expected to guide work settings where concepts such as effective communication, productivity, and group cohesion are paramount.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Alexithymia**

Alexithymia, known as “not being able to find words for emotions,” is thought to occur as a result of clinical observations of psychosomatic patients (Freedman, Sweet, 1954; Krystal, 1968; Krystal, Raskin, 1970; McLean, 1949; Nemiah, Sifneos, 1970; Ruesch, 1948;) and in accompaniment

of various pathological diseases. Alexithymia (Sifneos, 1973) was formed from the combination of the Greek words “a: no,” “lexis: word,” “thymos: emotion” and translated into English as “the absence of words for emotions” (Dereboy, 1990) or “emotional deafness” (Şahin, 1991).

Although the concept of alexithymia was first formulated by P. E. Sifneos, it is noticeable that some researchers who had previously worked on psychosomatic patients examined some features thought to be related to the concept (Sifneos, 1972). For example, J. Ruesch called his patients who had difficulty in expressing their emotions and lacked imagination as having a “childlike personality” and described this situation as an immature personality structure (Ruesch, 1948). In other study, attributed the difficulties experienced by the people he observed in expressing their emotions to their mental inadequacy and stated that their limbic system was damaged (Mac Lean, 1949). On the other hand, the psychoanalysts explained the problems that people experience in understanding, identifying, and expressing their emotions as strong defenses against unconscious conflicts (Horney, 1952; Kelman, 1952).

M. B. Freedman and B. S. Sweet defined people who cannot express their feelings as “emotion ignorant” and noted that their awareness of their emotional life remains at its lowest level (Freedman, Sweet, 1954). In 1963, P. Marty, M. de M’Uzan, and C. David, in their interviews with people with psychosomatic problems, noticed that the patients had limited use of their imagination and emotional life, and they pointed to a practical and eccentric way of thinking that they called “operational thinking” (Dereboy, 1990). Consistent with their clinical observations, J. C. Nemiah and P. E. Sifneos found that individuals had difficulty in defining and expressing their emotions and were limited in their emotion and impulse-oriented dreams, and the researchers described these characteristics as “alexithymic features” (Nemiah, Sifneos, 1970). On the other hand, alexithymic people were defined as “emotionally blind” because they have little awareness of their emotions and inadequate communication with others (Krystal, 1979).

The studies conducted after 1980 show that alexithymia is not only a concept related to psychiatric disorders, but there may be people with similar characteristics in the healthy population as well (Batıgün, Büyükaşahin, 2008; Tolmunen et al., 2011). It is worth noting that people who have difficulty understanding (defining) emotions are introverts/dependents/detached in their social relationships (Ahrens, Deffner, 1986; Vanheule, Vandenberghe, Verhaeghe, Desmet, 2010). Although there is more than one opinion on whether alexithymia is a personal tendency, a psychosomatic illness, or a personality trait, the studies in the literature reveal that alexithymic properties are examined from a similar perspective under four main headings in all studies. These properties were classified as follows: (a) difficulty in recognizing, distinguishing, and verbalizing emotions (difficulty in understanding, distinguishing, expressing, and connecting the difference between emotions and thoughts), (b) limitation in dreaming (limitation by reality and a colorless and weak imagination) (c) operational thinking (tendency to find shortcuts and superficial solutions without getting to the bottom of problems), and (d) externally-oriented cognitive structure (external stimuli that control people’s relationships with their social environment rather than their emotions) (Koçak, 2002; Taylor, 1991). It is readily apparent that people perceive their emotions and express themselves adequately in their social environment. It affects the structure of the relationships they have established with other people. The problems that arise in this process point to the concept of alexithymia.

Another issue that studies on alexithymia have been known to address is whether it is a temporary condition or a fixed personality trait that occurs due to stressors / diseases. Some researchers have stated that alexithymia is a lifelong fixed personality trait and not a situational phenomenon (Ogrodniczuk, Piper, Joyce, 2011; Parker, Bagby, Taylor, 1991; Taylor, Bagby, 2004; Wise, Mann, Shay, 1992; Zackheim, 2007). On the other hand, studies suggest that alexithymia emerges temporarily in the face of a negative situation and decreases over time (Haviland, Shaw, Cummings,

MacMurray, 1988; Wise, Mann, Mitchell, Hryvniak, Hill, 1990). The approach — that alexithymia is a way of thinking, feeling, or associating that can accompany many psychiatric disorders is not a psychiatric disorder in its own — seems vital (Swiller's, 1998). In addition, H. Freyberger emphasized that alexithymia can be both a personality trait and a situational phenomenon and introduced the concepts of Primary Alexithymia (a personality trait that causes somatization of the inability to express one's emotions before expressing them) and Secondary Alexithymia (a temporary condition following a traumatic life event) to the literature (Freyberger, 1977). In a general assessment, it is noticeable that more studies conclude that alexithymia is a personality trait rather than a situational phenomenon (Kahramanol, 2016; Luminet, Bagby, Taylor, 2001; Taylor, Bagby, Parker, 1997).

### **Counterproductive behaviors**

Although the literature shows that the concept of counterproductive behavior has been explained in terms of various types of behaviors (e.g., theft, substance abuse, sabotage, interpersonal violence, absenteeism) and conceptualizations (e.g., workplace retaliation, sabotage, abuse, deviance, antisocial behavior, and workplace incivility), the most common acts mentioned in definitions of counterproductive behaviors are (a) intentionally harming the organization/employee/manager, (b) perpetrators acting in their self-interest, and (c) harming the organization's and its stakeholders' interests (Marcus, Taylor, Hastings, Sturm, Weigelt, 2016; Spector et al., 2006).

M. Gruys defines counterproductive behavior as the deliberate behavior of employees against the organization's interests and norms (Gruys, 1999). B. Marcus and H. Schuler explain any illegal and harmful behavior that a person voluntarily exhibits as counterproductive (Marcus, Schuler, 2004). On the other hand, for a behavior to be considered counterproductive, it must meet conditions such as violation of a rule in front of employees, a negative reaction to that situation, and a negative impact on productivity (Goode, 2008). The researchers consider all behaviors that reduce productivity by affecting the functioning of the organization (employees) as counterproductive behaviors (Mann, Budworth, Ismaila, 2012). Based on all the definitions, behaviors such as stealing, damaging property, misuse of information, bribery, favoritism, harming competition, leaving early, harassment are accepted as examples of negative behaviors that seek to harm the organization and employees.

Studies of counterproductive work behaviors show that first examined these behaviors under two dimensions, which they called "property deviance" and "production deviance" (Hollinger, Clark, 1982). Later the concept was assessed from a broader perspective, added the dimension of "interpersonal deviance" to this classification, and drew attention to the social aspect of the concept (Robinson, Bennett, 1995). According to this classification, minor behaviors towards the organization constitute the production deviance dimension, and serious behaviors constitute the property deviance dimension. Similarly, behaviors that can be considered minor in interpersonal relationships form the dimension of political deviance, and serious behaviors form personal aggression. These behaviors, which have quite different types, should be evaluated differently depending on their impact and negative consequences in the organization to better understand and prevent them by the employees and managers of the organization (Collins, Griffin, 1998). There are 66 different counterproductive behaviors and grouped these behaviors under 11 categories and two dimensions named "personal versus impersonal" and "task-related versus not task-related" (Gruys, 1999). T was examined these behaviors in three groups labeled "verbal-physical, indirect-direct, and active-passive" (Neuman, Baron, 2005). That counterproductive behaviors are too broad to examine in two categories, so they examined these behaviors in five dimensions, which they labeled "abuse, sabotage, production deviance, withdrawal, and theft" (Spector et al., 2006). The dimensions of counterproductive behaviors were discussed in two groups named "interpersonal and organizational" (Berry et al., 2007). Among these examples, gossip, violence, and theft from colleagues are presented as interpersonal deviant

behaviors, while organizational deviant behaviors are defined as intentionally damaging company property, consciously working slowly, and sharing confidential company information with others. E. K. Kelloway with colleagues argued that counterproductive work behavior could be a form of protest by which organization members express their dissatisfaction with their jobs for their personal goals and include sabotage, theft, aggression, incivility (Kelloway et al., 2010).

### **The relationship between alexithymia and counterproductive behaviors**

It is apparent that alexithymic people cannot form deep connections with people in the social environment because they are mainly preoccupied with external objects and situations instead of getting in touch with their inner world and making excessive efforts to fit in with the social environment. This process, called “false normality” (McDougall, 1982), is interpreted as the result of the excessive effort of alexithymic people not to have problems with their environment and their insincere and superficial relationships, far from empathy rather than their abilities to build healthy relationships (Epözdemir, 2012). According to the results of existing research, social and relationship difficulties such as avoidance of close relationships, being more distant, inability to be empathetic, and inability to maintain healthy and intimate relationships are reported in people with Alexithymia (Guttman, Laporte, 2002; Vanheule, Desmet, Meganck, Bogaerts, 2007). Therefore, considering that alexithymic people have problems in defining, controlling, and managing their own emotions and intensely expressing their anger — which is one of the main symptoms of aggression — (Tremblay, 2000; Wahlstrom, Scott, Tuliao, DiLillo, McChargue, 2015), it is expected that these emotions will trigger other signs of aggression such as hostility, physical and verbal violence (Li, Zhang, Guo, Zhang, 2015) and will lead to counterproductive work behaviors (Manninen et al., 2011; Spielberger, Reheiser, Sydeman, 1995).

Furthermore, it is argued that counterproductive work behaviors can be exhibited by employees in different ways depending on situational factors, individual differences, and personality traits (Spector, 2011). Personality traits — that are thought to have an impact on organizational outcomes and human behaviors — have mainly been addressed within the Big Five personality model (Goldberg, 1990) in studies conducted to date and studies that examine the effects of other personality traits (e.g., proactive personality, dark triad personality) on human behavior do not appear to have received sufficient attention in the literature. Considering that an alexithymic person, who has difficulty adjusting to interpersonal relationships, has difficulty defining his (her) own emotions and are unable to cope with prolonged stress (Taylor, Parker, Bagby, Acklin, 1992), it is believed that these individuals are prone to some negative behaviors in the work environment (Howald, 2019).

It is also known that the inability of these people to relate their emotions to memories, dreams, higher-level emotions, and specific situations (Taylor et al., 1997) is related to anger and its expressions which have an essential place in interpersonal relationships (Berenbaum, Irvin, 1996). Considering that these individuals enjoy their work less and feel less attached (Howald, 2019), such alexithymic characteristics reinforce other negative moods in the work environment (Berenbaum, Prince, 1994) and make anger management more difficult. Employees are also expected to engage in counterproductive work behaviors toward their organization more intensely than other employees, which will allow them to conceal their identity and avoid potential retaliation. As known, employees are accepted as representatives of the organization, and it seems more likely to direct one’s negative attitudes towards an entity that the employees represent. Based on the principle of reciprocity, individuals who engaged in one of the harmful behaviors, calculate to minimize the risks that they may face and will try to hide their identities as much as possible. Furthermore, according to the displaced aggression theory, an aggressive behavior is directed at a person or other target (e.g., an organization) that is not the source of the provocation or frustration (Dollard et al., 1939). In this

manner, it is expected for alexithymic people to displace their aggression when it is impossible or unwise to respond aggressively toward the source of the provocation or frustration.

In this context, alexithymic characteristics are hypothesized to positively contribute to counterproductive work behaviors, which are evaluated within the scope of behaviors that are detrimental to organizational operations, and people with alexithymia will direct counterproductive behaviors more toward their organizations than their coworkers.

*H1: The alexithymic characteristics of people in the work environment positively contribute to counterproductive work behaviors.*

*H2: The positive contribution of alexithymic characteristics of people in the work environment on counterproductive work behaviors toward the organization is stronger than the positive contribution on counterproductive work behaviors toward employees.*

## Method

### Sampling

The survey method was used as the instrument to collect research data, and data were collected online from 334 public and private sector employees with the convenience sampling method. The mean age of the participants is 34.1 years, the mean seniority in the profession is seven years, and the mean seniority in their organizations is three years. Examining the sample regarding gender and marital status revealed that 56 % of the participants were female, and 44 % were male. Their educational level showed that the participants had undergraduate (60.2 %) and postgraduate (39.2 %) education. The number of participants in managerial positions at work is 91 (27%). It was found that the income of the participants varies between 4000-7000TL on average. It is also noted that most of the participants work in the private sector (76.8 %) and banking / financial sector (25.2 %) sectors. The average number of employees in the organizations where the participants work is 127.

### Materials

***The Counterproductive Work Behaviors Scale*** developed by P. E. Spector with colleagues was used to measure counterproductive work behaviors (Spector et al., 2006). The measurement tool consists of 45 items and has a five-point rating ranging from "Never" to "Every day." Scale items were originally English and were translated into Turkish by H. Öcel (2010). Some expressions used in the measurement tool are "I purposely wasted my employer's materials / supplies," "I purposely came late to an appointment or meeting," "I blamed someone at work for error I made.," and "I purposely interfered with someone at work doing his/her job." The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was expressed as .90.

***The Toronto Alexithymia Scale*** was used to measure the level of alexithymia (Bagby, Taylor, Parker, 1994). The measurement tool consists of 20 items and has a five-point rating ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Scale items were originally English and were translated into Turkish by Güleç et al. (2009). The TAS-20 has three subscales: *Difficulty Describing Feelings subscale* (five items), *Difficulty Identifying Feeling subscale* (seven items), and *Externally-Oriented Thinking subscale* (eight items). Some expressions used in the measurement tool are "It is difficult for me to find the right words for my feelings", "I find it hard to describe how I feel about people," "Seeking for hidden meanings in movies or plays kills their enjoyment," and "People demand to talk about my feelings more." The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was expressed as .81.

### Procedure

After the approval of the Doguş University (Istanbul) ethics committee, the survey method was used as a data collection tool, and the data were collected online from 334 public or private sector employees with the help of a convenience sampling method. In the information form, the importance

of voluntary participation was emphasized, and it was underlined that the findings obtained in the research would only be used for academic purposes. After informing about the scope of the study and demographic questions, the participants answered the questions about the measurement instruments of the research variables. The questionnaire was distributed to 450 people in the first stage, and 154 responded with a 34% response rate. The questionnaire was distributed to 220 people in the second stage, and 67 questionnaires were returned. Finally, 113 responses were received from the questionnaire distributed to 320 people, with a 35% response rate. The completion time of the survey is approximately 15 minutes. The research data were collected between January–July, 2021, and the analyses were completed in August 2021.

## Results

### Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables

Factor analysis was performed to reveal the sub-dimensions of the alexithymia variable in the research model. As a result of the analysis of the Toronto Alexithymia scale consisting of 20 items; two sub-dimensions called “difficulty in recognizing and expressing emotions” and “external thinking” were obtained, and it was found that these dimensions explained 67.34% of the total variance ( $KMO = 0.947$ , Kikare Bartlett test = 6837.772,  $p = 0.000$ ). Factor Analysis results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor and reliability analyses for Toronto Alexithymia Scale

Factor	No	Items	Loading	Variance ex. (%)	Rel.
Difficulty describing & identifying feelings	2	It is difficult for me to find the right words for my feelings.	.799	35.290	0.957
	4	I am able to describe my feelings easily.	.754		
	1	I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling.	.753		
	12	People tell me to describe my feelings more	.731		
	13	I don't know what's going on inside me.	.719		
	7	I am often puzzled by sensations in my body.	.716		
	6	When I am upset. I don't know if I am sad. Frightened. Or angry.	.704		
	17	It is difficult for me to reveal my innermost feelings even to close friends.	.698		
	9	I have feelings that I can't quite identify.	.694		
	3	I have physical sensations that even doctors don't understand.	.666		
	14	I often don't know why I am angry	.636		
	11	I find it hard to describe how I feel about people.	.632		
	Externally-oriented thinking	18	I can feel close to someone. Even in moments of silence.		
19		I find examination of my feelings useful in solving personal problems.	.784		
15		I prefer talking to people about their daily activities rather than their feelings.	.779		
8		I prefer to just let things happen rather than to understand why they turned out that way.	.744		
16		I prefer to watch «light» entertainment shows rather than psychological dramas.	.705		
5		I prefer to analyze problems rather than just describe them.	.647		
20		Looking for hidden meanings in movies or plays distracts from their enjoyment	.633		
10	Being in touch with emotions is essential	.615			
<b>total 67.344</b>					
Kaiser — Meyer — Olkin				.947	
Barlett's test of sphericity chi square				6837.772	
SD				190	
p value				.000	

The other variable in the research model, counterproductive work behaviors, is conceptually conceived in two sub-dimensions. The CWB scale includes two separate sets of statements for the organization (CWB-O) and the employees (CWB-P), and each group is presented with two different instructions. For this reason, factor analysis was not applied to this scale.

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations of variables, and the reliability coefficients of the scales. Looking at the relationships of the variables in the model; there are positive ( $r = .65, p < .01$ ) and significant relationships between alexithymia and counterproductive work behaviors. When we look at the relations between the sub-dimensions of the scales; there is a positive and significant relationship between alexithymia and counterproductive behaviors towards the organization ( $r = .71, p < .01$ ) and employees ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	$\alpha$
1. Age	34.13	7.41	1	.001	.062	.022	-.089	-.046	-.075	
2. Cwb-O	1.38	.42	.001	1	.792**	.976**	.654**	.723**	.712**	.92
3. Cwb-P	1.06	.18	.062	.792**	1	.902**	.424**	.463**	.459**	.89
4. Cwb	1.24	.29	.022	.976**	.902**	1	.605**	.667**	.659**	.94
5. Alexithymia-F.	2.33	.78	-.089	.654**	.424**	.605**	1	.825**	.971**	.95
6. Alexithymia-E.T.	2.53	.79	-.046	.723**	.463**	.667**	.825**	1	.936**	.91
7. Alexithymia	2.41	.75	-.075	.712**	.459**	.659**	.971**	.936**	1	.96

**Note:** Cwb — Counterproductive work behaviors; Cwb-O — Counterproductive work behaviors for organization; Cwb-P — Counterproductive work behaviors for personnel (employees).

### Hypothesis testing

Within the scope of the research, it has been argued that the alexithymic characteristics of people in the working environment have a positive contribution to counterproductive work behaviors. As a result of the simple regression analysis, alexithymia ( $\beta = .65, t = 15.9, p = .00$ ) significantly predicted counterproductive behaviors in the workplace (Table 3). As a result of this analysis, the research hypothesis ( $H1$ ) was confirmed.

Table 3. The effect of alexithymia on counterproductive work behaviors

Dependent variable	Counterproductive work behaviors		
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Alexithymia	.659	15.948	.000
$R^2$		.434	
Adjusted $R^2$		.432	
<i>F</i>		254.348	
<i>P</i>		.000	

Table 4. The effect of difficulty describing and identifying feelings on counterproductive work behaviors

Dependent Variables	Cwb-O			Cwb-P		
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Difficulty describing and Identifying feelings	.654	15.736	.000	.424	8.522	.000
$R^2$		.427			.179	
Adjusted $R^2$		.425			.177	
<i>F</i>		247.614			72.628	
<i>P</i>		.000			.000	

**Note:** Cwb-O — Counterproductive work behaviors for organization; Cwb-P — Counterproductive work behaviors for personnel (employees).

As a result of the simple regression analysis carried out to determine to what extent the sub-dimension of alexithymia predicts counterproductive work behaviors in the workplace; “having difficulty recognizing and verbalizing emotions” significantly predicted counterproductive work behaviors towards the organization ( $\beta = .65, t = 15.7, p = .00$ ) and counterproductive work behaviors towards the employee ( $\beta = .42, t = 8.52, p = .00$ ) (Table 4).

As a result of the simple regression analysis performed to determine to what extent the extroverted thinking predicts counterproductive work behaviors in the workplace, it was found that “extroverted thinking” significantly predicted counterproductive behaviors towards the organization ( $\beta = .72, t = 19.06, p = .00$ ) and the counterproductive behavior towards the employee behaviors ( $\beta = .46, t = 9.53, p = .00$ ) (Table 5). As a result of these analyses, (H2) was also confirmed.

Table 5. The effect of externally-oriented thinking on counterproductive work behaviors

Dependent Variables	Cwb-O			Cwb-P		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Externally-oriented thinking	.723	19.068	.000	.463	9.530	.000
$R^2$		.523			.215	
Adjusted $R^2$		.521			.212	
$F$		363.571			90.826	
$P$		.000			.000	

## Discussion

This study examined whether employees' level of alexithymia affects counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. The results of the study have revealed a significant relationship between the degree of alexithymia of employees and their tendency to engage in counterproductive behaviors. As it is known, the events that occur in the work environment have many effects on employees' emotions. Considering that these emotions play an essential role in both interpersonal relationships and interaction with external stakeholders (Weiss, 2002), it is stated that employees must interpret their feelings properly to create a healthier work environment. It is also known that affirmative emotions in the workplace positively contribute to employee productivity (motivation) and undeniably impact business outcomes (Staw, Sutton, Pelled, 1994). As for the reflection of negative emotions such as fear, anger, hostility, sadness, and guilt in the workplace, these emotions form the basis for many negative attitudes and behaviors, especially deviant (unproductive) behaviors in the workplace (Lee, Allen, 2002).

For this reason, determining both the affective dimension of alexithymia, which affects an individual's ability to recognize and use their emotions, and the cognitive dimension (Krystal, 1979), is believed to play an important role in preventing negative attitudes and behaviors that may arise in the work environment. The fact that an alexithymic person has difficulty in understanding and interpreting the emotions of others in the work environment — as well as their feelings (Taylor, 2000) — is an obstacle to developing healthy relationships. This research indicates that employees' problems in defining, distinguishing, and verbally expressing their emotions allow them to turn to various behaviors that are considered counterproductive. It is well known that events in the work environment direct people's emotional reactions, and this state leads to changes in employees' attitudes and behaviors over time (Weiss, Cropanzano, 1996). The meta-analytic study by J. A. Colquitt with colleagues concluded that people's emotions play a mediating role between their perceptions of organizational justice and counterproductive work behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2013).

Similarly, it was presented that negative emotional reactions play a mediating role between negative work events and counterproductive behaviors (Matta et al., 2014). Consistent with

these studies, people's emotions in the work environment influence their tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviors. Considering that the problems that people have in recognizing and understanding their emotions also affect their ability to regulate their emotions, it is hypothesized that this condition may be one of the main factors behind the tendency of these people to engage in some negative attitudes and behaviors, incredibly counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. Although the relationship between these two concepts has not been examined in the studies conducted so far, it was found that people with high alexithymia exhibit nonverbal anger behaviors more intensely than other people (Berenbaum, Irvin, 1996). It is believed that this condition reveals the fact that the feeling of anger, which is one of the negative factors that cause the emergence of counterproductive behaviors (Spector et al., 2006), may be a crucial factor in triggering the relationship between alexithymia and the behaviors mentioned above. Employees who are exposed to abusive behaviors by managers, especially in organizations where hierarchical rules, supervisory mechanisms, and close relationships are prevalent, usually engage in counterproductive behaviors toward the organization — that may be relatively less costly when discovered rather than tend to engage in negative behaviors toward other employees (Üçok, Turgut, 2014). Similarly, when classification of counterproductive work behaviors is examined, it is stated that when individuals' identification with their organization is low, they may engage in harmful behaviors targeted against that organization (Kelloway et al., 2010).

The fact that an alexithymic person is more likely to be perceived as "cold" and "avoidant" by others in the social environment (Spitzer, Siebel-Jürges, Barnow, Grabe, Freyberger, 2005) and his or her lack of empathy skills (Krystal, 1979) also mean that he or she has difficulty in communicating with people in that environment and lack a sense of identity. For this reason, it is believed that the negative behaviors towards the organization identified in this research are compatible with classification of counterproductive work behaviors (Kelloway et al., 2010).

In addition, when the previous studies are examined, it has been stated that there may be more than one antecedent behind the counterproductive work behaviors aimed at different targets. For instance, it has been stated that counterproductive work behaviors directed towards the organization are more strongly associated with job dissatisfaction, distributive justice and individual's conscientiousness and interpersonal factors such as interpersonal conflict or agreeableness play a greater role behind counterproductive work behaviors directed towards the person (Berry et al. 2007; Fox et al. 2001; Hershcovis et al. 2007). In this research, it was found that alexithymic people tended their counterproductive work behaviors towards the organization rather than their colleagues. In future studies, it is thought that the inclusion of different organizational and situational variables in the research model may change the target of counterproductive work behaviors.

The concept of alexithymia initially came to the fore only in studies of psychosomatic disorders, which paved the way for it to be studied with other individuals over time (Nemiah, Sifneos, 1970). The realization that the concept in question also occurs in people in the healthy population, and is even accepted as a personality trait, has made it possible to consider the studies conducted in the following years in a broader framework. Nevertheless, it can be stated that more research is still needed to make the current definitions of alexithymia more understandable (Lesser, 1981; Leising, Grande, Faber, 2009). Furthermore, although there are many studies on the concept of alexithymia in psychology, it is known that the topic has not been extensively addressed in industrial and organizational psychology.

The existence of studies indicating that alexithymia may be an independent risk factor for occupational burnout in the work environment (Katsifaraki, Tucker, 2013; Mattila et al., 2007; Saeidi et al., 2020) is considered vital as it shows that the concept in question reveals negative emotions and attitudes in the workplace. In the study conducted by F. Cillers, the extent of alexithymia among

managers was investigated, and the results showed that employees perceived these individuals as inadequate, cold, and far from empathy (Cillers, 2012). These studies emphasize that alexithymia has characteristics that can affect the attitudes and behaviors of both employees and managers is considered an essential indicator of the need for further academic studies in industrial and organizational psychology.

For this reason, the fact that the relationship between employees' level of alexithymia and their counterproductive behaviors is highlighted in this study is considered important because there is no previous study on this topic in Turkish literature, and this study takes into account the suggestions of researchers who draw attention to the gap in this area. Moreover, it is believed that the research findings will enrich the existing perspective on the antecedents of counterproductive behaviors that occupy an important place in working life. In this regard, the study will contribute to the literature as it is the first study to examine the relationship between alexithymic characteristics and counterproductive behaviors of employees nationwide.

In future studies, the inclusion of other individual variables (e.g., impulsivity, lack of empathy, emotional intelligence) and situational variables (e.g., perceived organizational justice, leader-member interaction) that may impact the structure of counterproductive work behaviors will contribute to a deeper understanding of the hostile work behaviors. As noted above, the fact that the concept of alexithymia has been examined primarily in studies in psychology indicates a theoretical gap in the field of industrial and organizational psychology, suggesting that studies are needed to determine the impact of the concept at both the individual and organizational levels. In practice, by emphasizing the multiple effects of alexithymic characteristics on employees' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors, this study is expected to provide clues to the managers of organizations in determining the factors that cause the emergence of counterproductive behaviors. In addition, it is believed that the implementation of human resource practices (awareness training, emotional needs-based support programs, career counseling) in organizations, considering the possible impact of alexithymia in the work environment, is effective in creating an organizational environment in which employees can clearly express their feelings and thoughts. Also, considering that alexithymic individuals have weaker work skills in areas that require interaction with others (Bouchard, 2008), it is believed that considering employees' skills in the recruitment/placement processes will help managers predict the future behavior of these individuals.

Furthermore, D. Leising with colleagues found a difference between self-reports and observer reports in determining the alexithymia level of individuals (Leising et al., 2009). For this reason, the fact that the instrument used in this study to measure alexithymia, which includes items such as introspection and self-awareness, is based only on individuals' self-report is considered within the scope of a limitation. For future studies, it is recommended that observer/interviewer ratings should be included in addition to self-assessment to determine the extent of alexithymia. Finally, the fact that the managers of organizations implementing the management practices that enable the emergence/sharing of positive emotions in the working environment (psychological empowerment, provision of emotional/social support) are considered important both in terms of influencing the structure of communication with employees and preventing counterproductive work behaviors of individuals with alexithymia. For this reason, it is assumed that this study also contains features that promote the review of the concepts of positive affect, emotion control, and effective leadership in organizations.

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# Связь между алекситимией и контрпродуктивным поведением на рабочем месте

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**Аннотация.** *Цель.* Считается, что концепция алекситимии, которая выражается в том, что люди испытывают трудности с определением, регулированием и выражением своих эмоций, набирает обороты в организационной жизни. Утверждается, что сотрудники, которым трудно определить свои эмоции, не могут построить позитивные отношения на рабочем месте. Таким образом, это исследование направлено на изучение того, связана ли алекситимия с контрпродуктивным поведением на работе. *Дизайн исследования.* Данные были собраны методом удобной выборки от 334 сотрудников, работающих в организациях государственного и частного секторов в Турции. Средний возраст участников — 34,1 года, средний стаж работы по профессии — семь лет, средний стаж работы в их организациях — три года. Данные были собраны с помощью анкеты. В анкете использовались «Шкала контрпродуктивного поведения на работе» (*The Counterproductive Work Behaviors Scale, CWB*) и «Шкала алекситимии Торонто» (*Toronto Alexithymia Scale, TAS-20*). *Выводы.* Исследование показало, что алекситимия вносит значительный вклад в контрпродуктивное поведение на работе. Более того, было обнаружено, что алекситимия имеет более сильный вклад в отклоняющееся поведение по отношению к организации, чем в отклоняющееся поведение по отношению к сотрудникам. Был проведён простой регрессионный анализ, для определения того, в какой степени алекситимия предсказывает контрпродуктивное рабочее поведение на рабочем месте. «Трудности с распознаванием и вербальным выражением эмоций» существенно предсказал контрпродуктивное рабочее поведение по отношению к организации ( $\beta = 0,65$ ;  $t = 15,7$ ;  $p = 0,00$ ) и контрпродуктивное рабочее поведение по отношению к сотруднику ( $\beta = 0,42$ ;  $t = 8,52$ ;  $p = 0,00$ ). *Ценность результатов.* Результаты исследования открывают новый взгляд на контрпродуктивное поведение на работе в организациях и вносят свой вклад в литературу по промышленной и организационной психологии, поскольку это первое исследование в Турции, посвящённое взаимосвязи между алекситимией и контрпродуктивным поведением на работе.

**Ключевые слова:** организационная психология; алекситимия; контрпродуктивное рабочее поведение; личность; промышленная психология и психология труда; организационное поведение.