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# Emotional expression styles of healthcare professionals working in community mental health center

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The style of emotional expression has an important place in communication with health professionals and patients. This study aimed to determine the style of emotional expression of healthcare personnel working in community mental health centers.

**Methods:** All healthcare personnel working in six community mental health centers in xxxx, Türkiye were included in the study (N=48). The Emotional Expression Styles Inventory (EESI), which is used to determine the style of emotional expression towards the individual who makes their experience that emotion as a result of experiencing happiness, sadness and anger, was used in the study.

**Results:** It was found that healthcare personnel working in community mental health centers reflected the self-oriented expression most frequently in the happiness emotion subscales. In sadness emotion expression sub-scale, it was found that verbal expression was the most common and aggressive expression was almost never exhibited. In the anger expression subscale, it was found that verbal expression and facial projection were the most common and aggressive expression was the least common.

**Conclusion:** Determining the emotional expression styles of the employees of the community mental health center will be useful in terms of noticing emotional expression towards patients.

**Keywords:** Community mental health, community mental health professionals, community mental health nursing, emotional expression styles

### Introduction

In the evaluation of mental disorders, many features such as inadequacy, inappropriateness, inconsistency, inconsistency in the behavior, thoughts and emotions of the person and their duration and severity, the environment, culture, society, the possibilities and abilities of the person, balance and harmony, and the connection with real life are evaluated together <sup>[1]</sup>. Individuals with mental disorders can only be treated in hospital-affiliated institutional-based mental health services when they are symptomatic, and their treatment is limited to psychopharmacological treatment or electroconvulsive interventions <sup>[2]</sup>. One of the most important developments in the field of mental health in our country in the last decade has been the adoption of a community-based mental health approach and the decision to open Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) <sup>[3]</sup>. The function of CMHCs is to minimize disability in individuals with mental illness and to provide the necessary psychosocial and biological services until the individual is reintegrated into society <sup>[4]</sup>. Health professionals spend most of their time with the patient as they provide continuous and long-term care <sup>[5]</sup> and frequently express their emotions. People experience various emotions during daytime and show certain behaviors after these emotional experiences. These behavioral responses are defined by the concept of "emotional expression" and are defined in different terms by many researchers <sup>[6]</sup>. The expression of emotions helps people to better comprehend the situation they are experiencing, to empathize by putting themselves in the other person's shoes, and then to make attempts to change their behavior <sup>[7]</sup>. Depending on the expressions of others, people make inferences about their attitudes, emotions, behaviors and intentions, and socially reorganize their communication <sup>[8]</sup>. These inferences may in turn influence the behavior of the individual who is targeted by the emotional expression. Inferences and emotional responses based on other people's expressions are not only related to information processing, but also to social-relational factors such as cultural norms, the person or situation

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to whom the emotion is directed, and the way the emotion is expressed. All these factors affect the relevance of perceived emotional expression and the behavioral responses of the target <sup>[9]</sup>. Emotional expression is an important psychosocial stressor and is directly related to recurrence of the disease <sup>[10]</sup>. Anger and its expression is the specific strategy and behavior that a person uses to respond to the feeling of anger. When individuals get angry, they tend to suppress their emotions and show typical behavioral patterns or express anger <sup>[9, 11]</sup>. Sadness and its expression is among the feelings that are universally experienced by individuals. Many words such as "grief", "sorrow", "pain", "disappointment", "sadness" are defined to express this feeling.

The person who expresses the feeling of sadness reflects the following message: "I am suffering and help to relieve me" <sup>[11]</sup> Happiness and its expression are generally expressed through verbal and non-verbal tips such as laughing, smiling, and being talkative. When people achieve a valuable goal or reach a result that exceeds their expectations, a feeling of joy emerges <sup>[12]</sup>. In many studies conducted with caregivers of patients with severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia, the effect of emotional expression on the course of the disease has been investigated and it has been found that excessive emotional expression increases the rate of relapse <sup>[13-15]</sup>. Emotions and emotional expressions of community mental health center health personnel who are in constant communication with the patient are very important for the interaction with the patient and the formation of a positive atmosphere. The correct expression of emotions will improve the self-expression skills of patients.

In community mental health centers, nurses are always together with patients from the admission stage of the patient to the CMHC to making attempts to ensure the patient's social adaptation, supporting the patient and the family in the process of recovery and adaptation to the new situation. Nurses are among the healthcare personnel who communicate with patients the most. Determining the emotional expression styles of all healthcare personnel, determining the difference between the emotional expression of nurses and other employees, and making remedial arrangements for these results will enable effective communication with patients.

This study was conducted to examine the emotional expression styles of health care personnel in CMHCs.

## Method And Materials

### Study design

The study was planned as a descriptive cross-sectional study to determine the emotional expression styles of healthcare professionals in community mental health centers. The study was conducted in six community mental health centers in xxx of Türkiye.

### Procedure

A descriptive general survey model was used by the researcher with face-to-face interview technique. In order to reach all of the employees, health professionals who were on leave and were not at the CMHC that day were either expected to return from leave or were asked to participate in the study by phone and e-mail.

### Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion in the Study

Inclusion criteria for healthcare personnel include;

- Being a healthcare personnel (Doctor, nurse,

psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, medical secretary) who has been working at the CMHC for at least one month,

- Being volunteer to participate in the study.

### Measurement instruments

Descriptive information form, Emotions and Reactions of Health Professionals to the Behaviors of Individuals with Chronic Mental Illness Questionnaire and Emotional Expression Styles Inventory (EDEI) were used as data collection tools.

### Descriptive information form

Descriptive information forms prepared by the researchers and including socio-demographic characteristics of healthcare professionals were used. It includes questions about age, gender, educational status, occupation, working time in CMHC and emotional expression.

### Emotions and Reactions of Healthcare Professionals to the Behaviors of Individuals with Chronic Mental Illness Questionnaire

This form includes nine questions about the feelings and reactions of healthcare professionals to the behaviors of individuals with chronic mental illness. Berksun's scale <sup>[15]</sup> was used in the preparation of this form, and for its use in our study, Berksun was contacted by telephone and informed about its use and his written permission was obtained via e-mail.

### Emotional Expression Styles Inventory (EESI)

It is a data collection tool developed by Araz and Erkuş <sup>[16]</sup> consisting of 40 items and three different scales in order to determine the style of emotional expression towards the individual who makes the person experience that emotion as a result of experiencing happiness, sadness and anger. EESI includes Happiness Expression Style Scale, Sadness Expression Style Scale, Anger Expression Style Scale. Scale items are answered on a 4-point scale (1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Usually, 4 = Always). Each scale consists of subscales showing different expression styles related to that emotion. An increase in the total score of each subscale indicates an increase in the related expression style.

### Statistical analysis

The data analysis was performed with SPSS 24.0, and the results were evaluated at a 95% confidence level. In addition to descriptive analyses, Mann Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests were applied to determine whether the scale scores differed according to various variables.

### Results

In the study, 62,5% of the participants were female and 56,3% were between the ages of 36-45. It was determined that 83.3% of the participants were married and 35,4% had only one child. When the mean Emotional Expression scores of the participants were examined, it was determined that self-oriented expression was the most common with an average value of 12,85 in the happiness emotion subscale, verbal expression was the most common with an average value of 10,69 in the sadness emotion subscale, verbal expression was the most common with an average value of 10,75 in the anger emotion subscale, and aggressive expression was the least common with an average value of 4,27.

**Table 1:** Comparison of Emotional Expression Styles of healthcare professionals according to level of education, occupation and duration of employment in the Profession

	Level of education						Occupation						Duration of Employment in the Profession				
	High school	University graduate	Post graduate	Post doctorate	X2	p	Physician	Nurse	Psychologist	Other	X2	p	<10 years	10-19 years	19> years	X2	p
Self-oriented Expression	12,60	12,96	13,10	12,50	0,358	0,949	12,38	13,00	13,86	12,55	1,757	0,624	13,27	13,00	12,33	1,203	0,548
Others-oriented Expression	10,00	10,00	10,20	9,40	1,364	0,714	9,31	10,71	10,86	8,82	5,451	0,142	10,64	9,73	9,67	1,284	0,526
Happiness Emotion	22,60	22,96	23,30	21,90	0,816	0,846	21,69	23,71	24,71	21,36	3,796	0,284	23,91	22,73	22,00	0,926	0,629
Facial reflection	10,00	9,78	9,60	9,60	0,356	0,949	9,92	9,82	8,57	10,09	1,024	0,795	10,27	9,45	9,73	0,963	0,618
Aggressive Expression	4,20	4,13	4,80	4,20	5,064	0,167	4,54	4,24	4,14	4,18	2,048	0,563	4,18	4,41	4,20	0,623	0,732
Verbal Expression	11,20	10,57	10,80	10,60	0,484	0,922	10,00	10,35	12,43	10,91	5,428	0,143	11,00	10,45	10,80	0,293	0,864
Concealment	6,40	7,35	7,10	7,10	0,714	0,870	7,38	7,47	6,43	6,82	2,176	0,537	7,09	7,36	6,87	0,554	0,758
Procrastination	5,60	5,13	5,60	5,20	0,752	0,861	5,54	5,59	4,29	5,18	3,448	0,328	5,45	5,00	5,60	1,972	0,373
Sadness Emotion	37,40	36,96	37,90	36,70	0,550	0,908	37,38	37,47	35,86	37,18	1,598	0,660	38,00	36,68	37,20	1,074	0,585
Aggressive Expression	4,40	4,09	4,80	4,10	10,806	0,013	4,46	4,18	4,14	4,27	0,356	0,949	4,18	4,36	4,20	0,016	0,992
Facial reflection	10,80	10,57	10,10	10,60	0,563	0,905	11,15	10,18	9,86	10,64	0,830	0,842	10,73	10,09	10,93	1,130	0,568
Retaliation	5,60	4,61	5,10	4,50	1,046	0,790	5,15	4,41	4,57	5,09	2,144	0,543	5,27	4,55	4,80	2,095	0,351
Calm Expression	6,00	6,35	6,80	6,90	2,306	0,511	7,08	6,88	5,14	6,18	7,460	0,059	6,64	6,50	6,47	0,113	0,945
Verbal Expression	11,40	10,91	10,20	10,60	1,046	0,790	9,92	10,65	12,71	10,64	3,621	0,305	10,64	10,86	10,67	0,083	0,959
Procrastination	5,00	4,96	5,30	4,80	0,517	0,915	5,23	5,35	3,71	5,00	7,763	0,051	4,82	5,05	5,07	0,092	0,955
Anger Emotion	43,20	41,48	42,30	41,50	0,256	0,968	43,00	41,65	40,14	41,82	0,501	0,919	42,27	41,41	42,13	0,270	0,874

According to the result of the comparison of the difference in the emotional expression of health personnel according to the profession, it was seen that the mean scores of aggressive expression from the emotion of sadness subscales and aggressive expression, reflection to face, retaliation and cool expression from the emotion of anger subscales were the highest in physicians, and the mean scores of self-oriented expression, other-oriented expression and verbal expression of sadness were the highest in psychologists. In nurses, the mean scores of concealment and postponement among the subscales of sadness emotion were the highest, and in other professions, the mean score of facial reflection of sadness emotion subscale was the highest, and no significant statistics were found ( $p>0,05$ ) (Table 1). According to the results of the comparison of the mean scores of the participants' emotional expression scores according to the duration of working in the profession, it was seen that the mean scores of the employees who worked less than 10 years were the highest in self-oriented expression and other-oriented expression, facial reflection and verbal expression from the sadness emotion subscales, and cool expression from the anger emotion subscales. It was observed that the mean scores of health care personnel with 10-19 years of experience had the highest mean scores

of aggressive expression and concealment from the subscales of sadness and aggressive expression and verbal expression from the subscales of anger. Healthcare personnel with 20 years and above had the highest mean scores for procrastination among the subscales of sadness and for facial projection and procrastination among the subscales of anger. However, these differences were not statistically significant ( $p>0,05$ ) (Table 1). As a result of the comparison of the emotional expression styles of healthcare personnel according to the average number of patients per day, the mean score of the aggressive expression of sadness of those who dealt with 1-10 patients per day was higher than the other mean scores and was found to be statistically significant ( $p=0,045$ ) (Table 2). As a result of the comparison of the emotion expression styles of healthcare personnel according to the frequency of seeing patients during working hours, it was observed that the aggressive expression of sadness decreased as the frequency of seeing patients during working hours increased. The mean score of those who usually see patients was the highest and the mean score of those who always see patients was the lowest, and it was found that there was a significant difference according to the frequency of seeing patients during working hours ( $p=0,005$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Comparison of Emotional Expression Styles of healthcare professionals according to the Average Number of Patients Cared for per Day and Working Hours

	How many patients do you take care of on average per day?				Kruskal Wallis H Test		How often do you interact with patients during working hours?			Kruskal Wallis H Test	
	1-10	11-20	21-30	30>	X2	p	Generally (3-4-5hours)	Frequently (6-7 hours)	Every time (8 hours)	X2	p
Self-oriented Expression	12,90	12,20	12,94	14,17	2,488	0,477	12,79	13,41	11,29	4,483	0,106
Others-oriented Expression	10,20	9,47	9,59	11,50	3,487	0,322	9,68	10,36	9,14	0,752	0,687
Happiness emotion	23,10	21,67	22,53	25,67	3,929	0,269	22,47	23,77	20,43	2,967	0,227
Facial reflection	10,60	9,73	9,41	9,17	2,346	0,504	10,26	9,36	9,43	1,257	0,533
Aggressive Expression	4,80	4,13	4,18	4,17	8,046	0,045	4,63	4,09	4,00	10,578	0,005
Verbal Expression	10,30	11,07	10,35	11,33	1,584	0,663	10,11	11,55	9,57	5,638	0,060
Concealment	7,50	6,47	7,18	8,17	5,577	0,134	7,53	6,91	6,86	3,247	0,197
Procrastination	5,90	4,87	5,12	5,83	2,536	0,469	5,68	5,09	4,86	2,303	0,316
Sadness emotion	39,10	36,27	36,24	38,67	3,743	0,291	38,21	37,00	34,71	3,635	0,162
Aggressive Expression	4,70	4,13	4,24	4,00	3,049	0,384	4,53	4,14	4,00	4,227	0,121
Facial reflection	12,10	9,67	9,94	11,50	4,138	0,247	11,11	10,27	9,57	0,944	0,624
Retaliation	5,50	4,27	5,00	4,33	3,690	0,297	5,16	4,64	4,29	1,053	0,591
Calm Expression	6,60	6,40	6,35	7,17	0,798	0,850	6,95	6,23	6,29	1,438	0,487
Verbal Expression	10,20	10,67	10,82	11,67	1,599	0,660	10,11	11,68	9,57	6,677	0,035
Procrastination	5,60	4,80	4,76	5,17	2,279	0,517	5,37	4,77	4,71	1,789	0,409
Anger Expression	44,70	39,93	41,12	43,83	3,506	0,320	43,21	41,73	38,43	2,170	0,338

## Discussion

In the study, it was determined that the highest observed expression of healthcare professionals with a master's degree was the aggressive expression of anger, and statistical significance was found between the data ( $p=0,013$ ) (Table 1). Van Humbeek *et al.* found that less educated personnel made significantly more critical comments [17]. In our study, it is thought to be lower since university graduates were more enthusiastic and curious to learn, and doctoral graduates had higher levels of knowledge and professional competencies.

Correct expression of emotions has an important place in the nursing profession. In this study, it was found that the mean score of concealment was the highest among the sadness emotion sub-scale in nurses, but there was no statistical significance (Table 1). Nursing is a profession with a high sense of compassion and empathy [18]. Community mental health centers have patients with severe mental disorders such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other psychoses with high disability [19]. It can be said that nurses feel sorry for patients due to their high level of compassion and empathy and choose to hide this from the patient.

According to the comparison of the emotion expression of healthcare personnel according to the duration of working in the profession; it was seen that the self-oriented expression of happiness was the highest for those working less than 10 years, the verbal expression of anger was the highest for those working between 10-19 years, and the facial reflection of sadness was the highest for those working 20 years or more, and no statistically significant difference was found (Table 1).

More experienced healthcare staff caring for men with psychosis and learning disabilities in a high security environment were found to experience high emotional expression and criticism [20]. Levy *et al.* stated in their study that older staff with professional experience were more likely to reject patients [21]. In this study, the fact that health care workers with more professional seniority express their feelings of happiness less frequently and their feelings of anger and sadness more frequently may be explained by the fact that they have these feelings by being worn out due to

reasons such as increasing workload and exhaustion over the years.

As a result of the comparison of emotional expression styles according to the average number of patients cared for per day, it was observed that those who cared for 1-10 patients per day had higher aggressive expression of sadness than the others ( $p=0,045$ ) (Table 1). In this study, it is interesting to note that the aggressive expression of sadness was higher in the group dealing with fewer patients than the others. In our country, health personnel working in CMHCs can work on temporary assignment and without specialization in mental health [22]. Sometimes, personnel who can handle less workload are assigned to these centers. On the other hand, these personnel may have dealt with fewer patients since the aggressive expression of sadness was high.

Verbal expression of anger showed a significant difference according to the frequency of the health personnel's contact with patients during working hours (Table 2). In the Community Mental Health Work Guidelines, it is stated that the staff working in a CMHC should meet with the patient frequently (6-7 hours) even if not always [4]. Frequent contact with patients may cause overstepping of boundaries, and the ability of the staff to express their anger verbally can be evaluated as positive.

In conclusion, it can be said that health care workers with higher education level criticize their patients less, those with more than 10 years of experience and those with fewer patients experience more negative emotional expression, and nurses feel sorry for their patients and conceal it.

## Conclusion

Community mental health personnel are together with patients many times in the process of making attempts to ensure the patient's social adaptation, recovery and adaptation to the new situation. Emotional expression styles have a great impact on human life as a social being. The correct expression of emotions of community mental health center staff will enable patients to recognize emotions and strengthen their communication. The ability of individuals to express themselves comfortably and convey their emotions to the outside in a healthy way will benefit them in



various ways. It is recommended that community mental health center staff should be trained on emotional expression and qualified personnel in this field should work in community mental health centers.

### Declarations

#### Ethical Statement

In order to conduct the research, the approval number 2019-06/323 was obtained in writing from the ethics committee of Ankara Oncology Training and Research Center on 29.06.2019, and written permissions were obtained by the CMHC administrations and clinic responsible physicians where the study was conducted.

Written permission for the use of Emotions and Reactions of Healthcare Professionals to the Behaviors of Individuals with Chronic Mental Illness Questionnaire has been obtained from Berksun by electronic mail. Written permission has been obtained from Arzu Aras via electronic mail for the use of Emotional Expression Styles Inventory (EESI).

#### Relevance Statement

The study was conducted in six community mental health centers located in xxxx of Türkiye. Determining the emotional expression styles by reaching more health personnel, determining the difference between the emotional expression of nurses and other employees, making remedial arrangements for these results will enable effective communication with patients.

#### Conflict Of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

#### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions

#### Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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