Medical and Nursing Students Crying in Hospital Settings

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ABSTRACT

Crying may be described as a loss of control, the result of feelings of helplessness and inadequacy, or a sign of suffering. It may occur in a variety of situations, such as unhappiness, sadness, illness, death, anxiety, pain, or failure, but it can also arise from joy and fulfillment. Crying is frequently observed in hospitals. The aim of this study was to determine the crying patterns of undergraduate medical and nursing students. The study design included non-experimental, descriptive research using a self-report questionnaire. Of the 130 students who completed the questionnaire, 90 were medical students and 40 were nursing students. Seventy-nine of the students were women, and 51 were men. All of the students were in their last semester of study.

Many of the medical and nursing students reported having cried in a hospital. Of students who had cried, 90% were women, and 10% were men. Medical students usually cried outside the hospital setting, whereas nursing students usually cried in the nurses' room. Personal problems faced by students during their education were the primary reason for crying. Although more than half of the students felt relaxed after crying, only the nursing students sought comfort from the people around them. These findings should be useful in the development and continuous improvement of the curricula of medical and nursing students.

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One of the places where crying most likely occurs is a hospital. The person crying is generally expected to be a patient, a member of the patient's family, or a friend of the patient, rather than a health care professional. However, health care professionals cry in hospitals for a number of reasons, including a sense of compassion for patients who are suffering or dying or for patients' families, frustration, helplessness, or being overworked.

Emotional coping strategies such as crying are often considered palliative and ineffective, but have some adaptive outcomes (Lazarus, 1995). Crying is a way to unburden oneself; in a sense, suffering can be reduced simply through its expression. But this is not always the case, in that crying does not always reduce the intensity of the emotion. Indeed, the reverse may occur: despite the person's wish, the intensity of the emotion may be increased by its expression. In addition, sometimes crying is not always used as a means of expressing and thereby reducing an unwanted emotion, but just for the sake of manifesting it and enjoying its expression (Micelli & Castelfranchi, 2003).

Crying is fundamentally universal, but emotional expression can differ according to the social context. In Turkey, women report incidents of crying more often than do men (3.5 times in 4 weeks, as opposed to 1.1 times in 4 weeks for men). In addition, women in general have a greater tendency to cry (Vingerhoets & Becht, 1996). There is no other research on this subject, to our knowledge.

In Turkey, people believe it is wrong for a "real man" to cry. Women's tears are viewed much more positively, and crying is considered a feminine behavior. Men who are crying are commonly told to "stop crying like a woman." In addition, women try not to cry in public for fear of being labeled as stereotypically "feminine," that is, overly weak and emotional.

Crying patterns in Turkey can be demonstrated in many examples. An individual is allowed, and even encouraged, to shed tears at funerals, but Turkish guests at a funeral are not allowed to cry during the actual burial; instead, one is obliged to shed tears before and after the burial, and in some areas, mourners are hired. Women often cry when engaging in religious activities, such as praying. On the all-female "henna day" before the wedding ceremony, guests try to make the bride cry by wailing and singing traditional Turkish folk