

# Research Progress on Emotional Expression Disorders in Nursing Students

Xingya ZHAO<sup>1△</sup>, Songhong XIE<sup>2△</sup>, Bing LIU<sup>3\*</sup>

1. School of Nursing, Hubei University of Medicine, Shiyan 442000, China; 2. Department of Nursing, Neijiang Health Vocational College, Neijiang 641102, China; 3. Center for Health Affairs and Health Development, Hubei University of Medicine, Shiyan 442000, China

**Abstract** Nursing students often exhibit emotional suppression, avoidance, or over-expression when confronted with high-pressure work environments and emotional challenges. These disorders affect nursing students' mental health, professional adaptation, and quality of communication with patients. The causes of emotional expression difficulties include individual personality, emotional intelligence, educational background, and socio-cultural pressures. To address this issue, it is recommended to enhance nursing students' emotional expression and regulation capabilities through psychological interventions, emotional intelligence training, and optimization of educational systems, thereby improving their mental health and career development, ultimately enhancing nursing service quality and doctor-patient relationships.

**Key words** Nursing students, Emotional expression disorder, Research progress, Psychology

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, with increasing societal attention to the nursing profession, mental health issues in nursing education and practice have gradually become a focus of academic and industry concern<sup>[1]</sup>. Particularly, the mental health issues of nursing students, especially emotional expression disorders, are drawing growing attention from researchers. As a profession highly dependent on emotional labor, nursing requires practitioners to possess not only solid professional skills but also excellent emotional support capabilities and efficient communication techniques. However, the complex work environment, immense pressure, and stringent clinical practice requirements create significant emotional challenges for many nursing students during their work<sup>[2]</sup>. Particularly when facing patient suffering, death, and doctor-patient conflicts, many nursing students experience notable difficulties in emotional expression, manifested as emotional suppression, avoidance, and inadequate expression. These emotional expression disorders not only affect nursing students' emotional regulation and mental health but also exert profound negative impacts on their career development and personal adaptation<sup>[3]</sup>. Emotional expression disorders pose multifaceted challenges to nursing students' careers. First, emotional expression disorders often lead to communication difficulties in interpersonal interactions and team collaboration, affecting work efficiency and team atmosphere. Second, the highly emotional labor-intensive nature of nursing work directly links nursing students' emotional expression abilities to patient care quality. Therefore, studying the causes, manifestations, and interventions of emotional expression disorders in nursing students holds significant

practical importance. Understanding the mechanisms behind these disorders helps identify and prevent potential emotional issues in clinical practice while providing theoretical foundations for optimizing nursing education systems. Through scientific interventions and support, nursing students can enhance their emotional expression and management capabilities, thereby improving their mental health status, elevating nursing work quality, and ultimately fostering doctor-patient relationships and promoting sustainable development of the nursing profession.

## 2 Definition and classification of emotional expression disorders

**2.1 Definition** Emotional expression disorder refers to significant difficulties individuals experience in emotional expression, exchange, and communication<sup>[4]</sup>. This disorder is typically manifested as an inability to effectively and appropriately express or regulate emotional responses when facing emotional stimuli, thereby affecting emotional interactions with others and social adaptation<sup>[5]</sup>. In the nursing profession, nursing students under high-intensity emotional labor pressures are prone to developing various forms of emotional expression disorders, which not only affect their personal mental health but may also negatively impact patient care quality and doctor-patient relationships. Based on different manifestations of emotional expression in individuals, emotional expression disorders can generally be classified into the following types:

### 2.2 Classification

**2.2.1 Emotional suppression type.** This type is manifested as individuals showing lack of response to external emotional stimuli or appearing unusually indifferent and unresponsive when expressing emotions<sup>[6]</sup>. Such individuals typically suppress emotional expression, possibly due to internal repression, excessive self-control, or fear of emotional expression, resulting in failure to timely share their feelings and experiences with others. Emotionally suppressed individuals may exhibit characteristics like emotional numbness

Received: May 13, 2025 Accepted: July 2, 2025

Supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (71774049).

△These authors contributed equally to this study.

Xingya ZHAO, master's degree candidate; Songhong XIE, master's degree, teaching assistant. \* Corresponding author. Bing LIU, professor.

and isolation, making it difficult to establish deep emotional connections with others, further affecting team collaboration and communication<sup>[7]</sup>.

**2.2.2 Emotional avoidance type.** Individuals with this type typically actively avoid emotional exchanges, especially when facing negative emotions or complex feelings, demonstrating avoidant emotional responses<sup>[8]</sup>. For instance, during nursing practice, students might avoid emotional communication with patients or colleagues, particularly when encountering emotional stimuli like patient suffering or death, often choosing to suppress or escape these emotional expressions. This emotional avoidance not only hinders effective emotional catharsis but also makes it difficult for students to handle complex emotional conflicts, thereby increasing occupational burnout and psychological stress.

**2.2.3 Emotional overexpression type.** This type is manifested as excessively intense or frequent emotional expression, often accompanied by emotional dysregulation or dependence<sup>[9]</sup>. Individuals may exhibit emotional reactions, excessive reliance on others for emotional support, or frequent emotional outbursts in work settings. Such disorders may lead nursing students to overreact in high-pressure clinical environments, affecting not only their professional image but also interfering with patient care and undermining team stability and cooperation.

**2.3 Negative impacts** In nursing practice, emotional expression disorders have profound impacts on nursing students' emotional communication, doctor-patient interactions, and occupational burnout. Emotionally suppressed nursing students may appear indifferent during patient interactions, affecting patients' trust and satisfaction; emotionally avoidant students may feel emotionally isolated under clinical pressure, leading to increased psychological burden and reduced work motivation; while emotionally overexpressive students may exhibit excessive reactions in communication with patients and colleagues, reducing work efficiency and undermining teamwork. Therefore, early identification and intervention for emotional expression disorders are crucial for improving nursing students' professional adaptability and mental health.

### 3 Influencing factors of emotional expression disorders in nursing students

The occurrence of emotional expression disorders in nursing students is influenced by multiple factors, among which individual characteristics, educational background, and social support/cultural atmosphere are particularly significant. The following sections analyze the impacts of these factors on nursing students' emotional expression disorders.

**3.1 Individual factors** Nursing students' personality traits significantly influence their methods and capabilities of emotional expression<sup>[10]</sup>. For instance, introverted students tend to be reserved and less adept at expressing emotions, particularly prone to emotional suppression when facing emotional challenges, which may

lead to emotional expression disorders. Additionally, individuals with emotional expression difficulties, particularly those with low emotional intelligence, may struggle to accurately recognize and manage their emotional responses. In nursing practice, students with low emotional intelligence may fail to discern patients' emotional needs or provide adequate emotional support during communication, thereby exacerbating emotional exchange difficulties. Individual psychological resilience, emotion regulation capabilities, and emotional cognition levels may all serve as significant contributing factors to emotional expression disorders<sup>[11]</sup>.

**3.2 Educational background** Traditional nursing education models primarily focus on skill training and knowledge acquisition while relatively neglecting the cultivation of emotional expression and mental health. Such educational approaches often leave nursing students deficient in effective emotional support and psychological adjustment capabilities when facing clinical work pressures. In nursing practice, students are required to possess not only professional skills but also emotional awareness and emotion management abilities<sup>[12]</sup>. However, if the education system inadequately addresses emotional expression and management, students may lack corresponding emotional regulation skills, leading to emotional expression disorders in high-pressure environments. Furthermore, competitive pressures and emotional apathy in educational environment may intensify students' sense of isolation, leaving them without effective support when confronting emotional distress, thereby increasing tendencies toward emotional suppression or avoidance.

**3.3 Social support and cultural atmosphere** The nursing profession faces high societal expectations and pressures, with societal role definitions for nurses typically demanding efficiency, composure, and high professional competence<sup>[13]</sup>. Society generally expects nurses to demonstrate resilience and calmness when confronting emotional challenges like patient suffering and death, yet this often overlooks nurses' own emotional needs. Within such cultural contexts, nursing students may experience significant psychological stress, particularly when addressing patients' emotional needs, often feeling their emotional expression is suppressed or ignored, further exacerbating emotional expression disorders. Additionally, the internal cultural atmosphere within the nursing profession may influence nursing students' emotional expression patterns. If emotional indifference and lack of effective support prevail in the work environment, students may frequently experience difficulties and isolation in emotional communication, leading to behaviors of emotional suppression or avoidance that intensify these disorders.

### 4 Intervention strategies to enhance emotional expression and communication in nursing students

To help nursing students better address emotional expression challenges and alleviate emotional expression disorders in their work,

the following intervention strategies are particularly critical. Through psychological interventions, emotional intelligence training, and adjustments to educational systems, nursing students' emotional expression abilities can be effectively enhanced, improving their emotional regulation and communication skills, thereby boosting professional adaptability and mental health<sup>[14]</sup>.

**4.1 Psychological interventions: alleviating emotional suppression and promoting healthy expression** Psychological interventions are one of the key strategies to enhance emotional expression in nursing students. Through individual counseling, emotional expression training, and group therapy, nursing students can be guided to identify and release suppressed emotions, fostering healthier emotional expression. Individual counseling provides a safe space for students to deeply understand and confront their emotional struggles with the assistance of professional counselors, effectively alleviating emotional suppression and anxiety<sup>[15]</sup>. Emotional expression training, using methods like scenario simulations, helps students learn appropriate emotional expression in specific contexts, reducing their communication stress. Group therapy enhances emotional connections among students through peer interaction and support, establishing an emotional support network to reduce loneliness and emotional barriers while boosting confidence and competence in emotional expression.

**4.2 Emotional intelligence training: enhancing emotional awareness and regulation** Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, and regulate their own and others' emotions. Improved emotional intelligence enables nursing students to better address emotional challenges and respond appropriately in complex clinical environments. Emotional intelligence training aims to enhance students' sensitivity and comprehension of emotions while cultivating their ability to regulate emotions under pressure. Through emotional awareness training, students can more accurately recognize and interpret their own and others' emotional states, thereby reducing misunderstandings and conflicts<sup>[16]</sup>. Additionally, enhanced emotional regulation allows students to remain calm and professional when facing emotional challenges like patient suffering or end-of-life care, avoiding excessive suppression or outbursts and ensuring smooth nursing practice<sup>[17]</sup>. Through emotional intelligence training, nursing students not only improve patient care but also achieve personal growth in emotional management, elevating professional adaptability and job satisfaction.

**4.3 Educational system reform: cultivating emotional expression and communication skills** Current traditional nursing education predominantly emphasizes technical skills and knowledge acquisition, often neglecting emotional education and communication skill development. Therefore, reforming and optimizing the educational system by integrating emotional education curricula is key to improving students' emotional expression abilities. Emotional education courses, combining theoretical learning with

practice, help students recognize the importance of emotions in nursing and develop self-awareness and emotional management skills<sup>[18]</sup>. Role-playing serves as an effective pedagogical method, simulating common emotional scenarios in nursing practice to help students practice expression and communication skills in real or simulated environments, thereby enhancing their workplace adaptability<sup>[19]</sup>. Furthermore, teachers can provide emotional support by offering more emotional attention and feedback during instruction, assisting students in building healthier emotional support systems. Integrating emotional education and mental health cultivation into the educational system not only enhances students' emotional expression but also strengthens their capacity to handle work pressures and emotional distress, ultimately improving their overall competencies<sup>[20]</sup>.

## 5 Conclusions

Emotional expression disorders in nursing students are a prevalent psychological issue in the nursing profession, exerting profound impacts on their mental health, career development, and care quality. Through diverse interventions, particularly emotional intelligence training and psychological support, these disorders can be effectively alleviated, enhancing their emotional expression capabilities. Future research should further explore effective educational intervention strategies and refine nursing education systems to better equip students in meeting professional demands and emotional challenges.

## References

- [1] QIN LW, ZHANG QY, LIU LN, *et al.* Application of a standardized case database for clinical nursing skills teaching based on nurses'core competencies in education of nursing interns[J]. *Journal of Qiqihar Medical University*, 2025, 46(6): 586–590. (in Chinese).
- [2] ZHOU LH, ZHANG ZH, YAO YF, *et al.* Analysis on the status quo and influencing factors of team psychological capital in undergraduate nursing students' innovation and entrepreneurship projects[J]. *Military Nursing*, 2025, 42(3): 6–9. (in Chinese).
- [3] WANG JW, WANG M, GU HX, *et al.* Translation and validation of the sense of belonging in nursing school scale[J]. *Journal of Nursing Science*, 2025, 40(5): 84–88. (in Chinese).
- [4] XU CX, LI HZ, MENG YC, *et al.* Influence of self-esteem, alexithymia and alienation on non-suicidal self-injury behaviors in adolescents[J]. *Sichuan Mental Health*, 2025, 38(1): 65–70. (in Chinese).
- [5] XIAO J, WU SY, WU M, *et al.* Latent profile analysis and its influencing factors of alexithymia among nursing students in vocational[J]. *Chinese Nursing Research*, 2025, 39(2): 225–230. (in Chinese).
- [6] NIU XM, NIU SF, ZHANG HM, *et al.* Reliability and validity of the Chinese version of the Perth Alexithymia scale in adolescents[J]. *Modern Preventive Medicine*, 2025, 52(2): 274–279. (in Chinese).
- [7] GAO S, HU F, LI YS. Interaction of alexithymia and nutritional status on quality of life in decompensated liver cirrhosis patients[J]. *Practical Preventive Medicine*, 2024, 31(11): 1360–1363. (in Chinese).

Chinese).

- [13] WU Y, SHENG W, WANG LS, *et al.* Qinggan Huoxue Recipe regulates the cell pyroptosis mediated by Caspase-4/Caspase-3/GSDME to improve alcoholic liver injury[J]. *Tianjin Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2024, 41(6): 773–780. (in Chinese).
- [14] CHEN XH, LI H. Application and research progress of berberine in regulating Bcl-2/Bax signaling pathway to induce cell apoptosis[J]. *Pharmaceutical Biotechnology*, 2024, 31(2): 211–215. (in Chinese).
- [15] ZHAN XY. Study on the efficacy and mechanism of Huanglian Wendan Decoction against ulcerative colitis and colon cancer[D]. Guangzhou: Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, 2023. (in Chinese).
- [16] LI L, WANG ZQ, HU Y, *et al.* Exploring the therapeutic effect and mechanism of Huanglian Wendan Decoction on insomnia rats based on neurotransmitter and 5-HT1A/Gαi/o/cAMP signaling pathway[J]. *Traditional Chinese Drug Research & Clinical Pharmacology*, 2023, 34(5): 591–598. (in Chinese).
- [17] ZHANG X, DU WZ, ZHAO HQ, *et al.* Effects of wogonoside on pro-inflammatory factors, oxidative stress markers and mucosal repair in ulcer-

ative colitis rats[J]. *Chinese Journal of Gerontology*, 2022, 42(12): 2994–2998. (in Chinese).

- [18] LI Y, GAO MS, XIAO FX, *et al.* Effects of berberine on the aortic pathology and PERK/eIF2α expression in diabetic rat models[J]. *Chinese Journal of Pharmaceutical Analysis*, 2021, 41(5): 826–831. (in Chinese).
- [19] LIU R, LI XD. Antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties of the citrus flavonoids hesperidin and hesperetin: An review of their molecular mechanisms[J]. *Chinese Journal of Medicinal Guide*, 2019, 21(12): 749–752. (in Chinese).
- [20] CHEN ZY, LI DL, YU XF, *et al.* Effect of glycyrrhizic acid on promoting wound healing and preventing scar formation in wound healing model rats[J]. *Journal of Regional Anatomy and Operative Surgery*, 2019, 28(10): 771–777. (in Chinese).
- [21] WU T, NIU SL, BAI M. Effects of a baicalin intervention on endoplasmic reticulum stress in response to infection with the PR8 strain of influenza virus[J]. *Journal of Pathogen Biology*, 2017, 12(6): 553–556, 559. (in Chinese).

(From page 38)

## References

- [1] PANG F, XU MF. Clinical observation on external application of self-made Xiehuo Jiedu Powder combined with warm acupuncture surrounding needling for herpes zoster (qi stagnation and blood stasis syndrome)[J]. *Journal of Emergency in Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2019, 28(7): 1262–1265. (in Chinese).
- [2] YANG LY, HUANG YZ, LANG N, *et al.* Effect of Shufeng Jiedu Decoction on clinical efficacy, sequelae neuralgia and inflammatory cytokines in herpes zoster[J]. *Journal of Emergency in Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2017, 26(8): 1457–1459. (in Chinese).
- [3] ZHU M, QIU PF, NIE N, *et al.* Analysis of electroacupuncture treatment parameters for postherpetic neuralgia[J]. *Journal of Emergency in*

*Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2019, 28(4): 641–644, 657. (in Chinese).

- [4] TU T, DONG SH. Expression changes and significance of MITOL in spinal dorsal horn tissue of rats with postherpetic neuralgia[J]. *Shandong Medical Journal*, 2015, 55(23): 24–25. (in Chinese).
- [5] HUANG P, AO JB, GUO LH, *et al.* Clinical study of acupoint injection of erigeron breviscapine combined with floating needle laser on the treatment of herpes zoster neuralgia[J]. *Journal of Emergency in Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2016, 25(6): 1160–1162. (in Chinese).
- [6] LI GS, TANG YH, XU CD, *et al.* The effect of botulinum toxin A on the expression of inflammatory neurotransmitters in mice with postherpetic neuralgia[J]. *Journal of Wenzhou Medical University*, 2020, 5(1): 51–55. (in Chinese).

(From page 87)

- [8] DYRBYE LN, SHANAFELT TD, SINSKY CA, *et al.* Burnout among health care professionals: A call to explore and address this under recognized threat to safe, high-quality care[J]. 2017. DOI:10.31478/201707b.
- [9] SCHAUFELI WB, SALANOVA M, GONZÁLEZ-ROMÁ V, *et al.* The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach[J]. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 2002, 3(1): 71–92.
- [10] BOS P, VOSHAAR RCO, HANSSEN DJC. Prevalence and correlates of alexithymia in older persons with medically (un)explained physical symptoms[J]. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 2022, 37(6): 10.1002/gps.5736.
- [11] LI S, CHEN X, LIU L, *et al.* The relationship between social withdrawal and problematic social media use in Chinese college students: A chain mediation of alexithymia and negative body image[J]. *BMC Psychology*, 2024, 12(1): 246.
- [12] HEI RN. Relationship between self-disclosure and alexithymia in college students: The mediating role of self-concept clarity and rumination and intervention study[D]. Zhengzhou: Henan University, 2024. (in Chinese).
- [13] JIANG XH, TU Y. Relationship between alexithymia and emotion regulation strategies in medical students with different attachment types[J]. *Psychology Monthly*, 2025, 20(5): 89–92. (in Chinese).
- [14] YU H, ZHOU B, YU L. The influence of alexithymia on non-suicidal

self-injury behavior of medical students in higher vocational colleges: Mediating role of resilience[J]. *Journal of Taishan Medical College*, 2020, 41(3): 189–192. (in Chinese).

- [15] GUO Q. Application of Satir model combined with traditional Chinese emotional nursing in alexithymia of vocational nursing freshmen[D]. Chengdu: Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2023. (in Chinese).
- [16] MAO C, LI YY, ZHANG YX, *et al.* The relationship between alexithymia and cognitive emotion regulation strategies in nursing college students: A network analysis model[J]. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2021, 29(4): 753–757. (in Chinese).
- [17] WU QH. Current status and influencing factors of alexithymia among nurses[D]. Huzhou: Huzhou University, 2020. (in Chinese).
- [18] FENG YC. Relationship between insecure attachment and fear of happiness in college students: The role of alexithymia and depression and intervention study[D]. Chengdu: Sichuan Normal University, 2024. (in Chinese).
- [19] LIU HY, YANG JY, KONG DR, *et al.* Influences of alexithymia on network moral anomie behavior of medical students in a college in Zhengzhou[J]. *Medicine and Society*, 2023, 36(12): 98–103. (in Chinese).
- [20] MCINTYRE JRS, BURTON C, HOLMES D. From discipline to control in nursing practice: A poststructuralist reflection[J]. *Nursing Philosophy*, 2020, 21(4): e12317.