



## Celebrating the Power of Community Kindness: A Reflection on World Mental Health Day 2023

Deniz Fardi<sup>1</sup>, Ali Montazeri<sup>2\*</sup> 

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### Abstract

This short communication reflects on this year's mental health day. The theme for this year is 'Mental health is a universal human right'. However, here the focus is on simple instances (politeness, and the culture of apology) to highlight how these could contribute to improved psychological well-being and mental health. It is hoped that by insisting on such deeds we could spread kindness in our community to make it a safer place for living and make life more enjoyable regardless of its all difficulties and limitations.

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### Introduction

Every year the 10th of October we celebrate the world mental health day. This is a very worthy opportunity to discuss issues related to mental health nationally, and internationally. The World Health Organization defines mental health as 'a state of well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community' (1). The theme for this year (2023) is: 'Mental health is a universal human right'. However, as suggested earlier to Great Mental Health Day 2023 the theme was: 'Celebrating the power of community kindness'. Here the focus is on the former since it is a touching and appealing topic. Perhaps it is one of strategies that is affordable, effective and feasible to promote, protect and restore mental health (1). As such the relationship between mental health and the power of community kindness deserves attention, especially from a

global health perspective. Investigation into mechanisms that how community kindness could contribute to improved mental health is of prime importance. However, we do not want to dig the topic deeply from pure psychological standpoints, and rather the focus is limited to very simple instances to show how such deeds could improve mental health. In fact, this commentary focuses on two issues that could spread out kindness in the community, a thing which is a very powerful means for improved mental health and psychosocial well-being.

#### *Politeness in social interactions and the art of kindness*

Being polite or impolite in day-to-day life and daily social interactions or even in a more limited circle in the family life is one of the most visible aspects of everyone's per-

*Corresponding author:* Prof. Ali Montazeri, [montazeri@acecr.ac.ir](mailto:montazeri@acecr.ac.ir)

<sup>1</sup> Independent Registered Psychotherapist, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Health Metrics Research Center, Iranian Institute for Health Sciences Research, ACECR, Tehran, Iran

#### ↑ *What is "already known" in this topic:*

Mental health is an integral component of health and is defined as 'a state of well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community'. Celebrating World Mental Health Day is about bringing the issue to the public agenda so that it could be improved.

#### → *What this article adds:*

Several internal and external aspects including individual, social and structural factors could contribute to improved mental health and mental well-being. The current communication highlights two simple deeds (politeness and the culture of apology) in order to celebrate and briefly reflect on world mental health day.

sonality. Politeness is described differently in different scientific disciplines. For instance, from linguistic angle politeness as applies to our daily conversations was referred to as 'verbal hygiene' and warned that in some instances this might be the source of discrimination since politeness relies naturally on socio-historically rooted discriminatory practices of placing value on the language usage of certain groups while delegitimizing that of others (2). In contrast 'verbal violence' which might imply impoliteness is the other side of the coin. However, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines politeness as 'the process by which a speaker attempts to avoid harm to a listener's public image or private self-concept through the use of non-threatening or face-saving forms of speech' (3). Politeness also involves behaviors that could be related to facework as described by the same source. In social interactions the APA describes facework as 'a set of strategic behaviors by which people attempt to maintain both their own dignity ("face") and that of the people with whom they are dealing' (4). It is believed that politeness in social interactions, regardless of one's understanding of what constitutes politeness, could create positive emotions and spread the kindness in community. Furthermore, as suggested politeness does not mean you should always agree with someone's argument but disagreement could be seeking politely (5). Polite communication is a key to our social life where we could positively touch one's heart or conversely make someone upset and feel bad.

When a person acts politely in a given community, its immediate outcome is the creation of a feeling of appreciation. Appreciation itself leads to positive emotions which undoubtedly could contribute to improved satisfaction and mental health. Imagine when you see impolite individuals how you feel badly and how you might involve in a dialogue or interactions that could interrupt your mentality and well-being. It has been shown that prosocial behaviors, such as being polite to someone, for instance in a busy bus offering your seat to a stranger, could greatly improve your disposition and mental health. There is evidence that engaging in prosocial behaviors reduces the impact of stress on emotional functioning (6). Additionally, when you do a kind act for someone not only it benefits the receiver, but also it is good for your mental health, although people usually underestimate the value of their own act of kindness (7).

There is a suggestion that undervaluing the positive impact of kindness may emerge in early life (8). Thus, families, educational systems from the beginning, and significant others have great responsibilities in this respect. Being polite to each other could lead to increased kindness, which is a hidden source of mental well-being that could be achieved at a very low cost.

### The culture of apology

When a member of the community does wrongdoing in daily social interactions or in workplace or the inner circle of family life apparently two possible outcomes might occur: the wrongdoer does not take responsibility for his/her doing and insists that he or she did not do anything wrong or it is possible to apologize. Obviously the first scenario

could cause several side effects including anger, and verbal or physical violence and consequently, it causes disruption in the mental and social well-being of people. In the second scenario, when one does something wrong and requests forgiveness and apologizes, it is very likely that the wrongdoer and the victim achieve a mutual benefit. There is evidence that apologies on most occasions have strong effect on the reduction of anger and hostility of victims and may also foster forgiveness toward the offender (9). It is not therefore unexpected if one believes that the culture of apology has therapeutic effects on improved mental health.

It is argued that there are two types of apologies: voluntary apology and forced apology. After being insulted a study compared receiving no apology, a voluntary apology, a forced apology with consequences, and a forced apology without consequences. The study found that receiving any apology produced more positive perceptions of the offender and less serious recommended punishments than no apology (10). The relationship between apology and mental health is not so complicated. As suggested apology can create a positive environment for forgiveness which is very likely to increase empathy, gratitude, and positive emotions (11). There is evidence that an apology from the offender not only reduces the victim's tendency to react aggressively but also changes the victim's implicit attitude and neural responses toward the offender (12).

However, community kindness could not be achieved in the abstract. It needs every person belonging to a community to be nice to each other and when doing something wrong simply say 'I am sorry' and the person who receives an apology of any type should forgive the offender. As suggested saying 'sorry' can do miracles. When you forgive you feel so relaxed and the offender also might learn lessons and spread forgiveness on another occasion.

### Concluding remark

Community kindness is a powerful weapon that could improve our mental health, reduce stress-related hostility, make us feel better, and make our communities safe and a better place for living. We need to do simple and costless doings as addressed here. With such comprehension achieving improved mental health would be more possible.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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