



Development and Validation of the Mental Health Expression Scale: An Expert-Guided Approach for a Student-Centered Tool

Kianne G. Daling^{1*}, Evan P. Taja-on²

¹School of Arts and Sciences, San Isidro College

²University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines

Corresponding Author: Kianne G. Daling kdaling@sic.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

Mental health expression is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of emotional well-being. While current tools address stigma, literacy, and help-seeking, there is still a need to understand how people experience and engage in expressing their mental health. The tool was carefully reviewed by experts and tested among students, with results analyzed to ensure each item was clear, consistent, and meaningful. The results confirm that the developed scale has strong content validity and excellent internal consistency, making the scale a reliable measure of mental health expression. The developed scale holds the potential to enhance mental health programs by providing a simple yet effective way to give voice to students' experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health expression refers to an individual's ability to openly share, articulate, and reflect on their mental and emotional states. It plays a vital role in promoting mental health advocacy, as it encourages honest conversations, reduces isolation, and builds a culture where mental well-being is acknowledged and supported (Taja-on & Vergara, 2025). In the context of student-centered mental health efforts, expression serves as a powerful tool in challenging harmful narratives, fostering empathy, and promoting supportive environments by providing avenues for people especially students to express their struggles and emotional experiences, mental health advocacy shifts from a reactive to a proactive model (Esposito, 2024). Promoting mental health expression not only empowers individuals but also strengthens collective efforts to build mentally healthy communities.

Despite growing awareness and the increasing openness of public conversations surrounding mental health, many individuals still face challenges when it comes to expressing their mental and emotional experiences (Wiley, 2024). Deep-rooted stigma (Günaydin, 2024), fear of judgment (Popat & Tarrant, 2023), and cultural norms often discourage open communication, particularly among young people navigating academic and social pressures (Ran et al., 2021). This creates a gap between the recognition of mental health concerns and the ability to talk about them freely. In the current landscape, where advocacy efforts are growing, the lack of tools to support and understand mental health expression limits the effectiveness of these initiatives (Ionescu et al., 2024). Without addressing the barriers to genuine expression, many voices remain unheard and unsupported.

Existing mental health tools primarily focus on measuring stigma, awareness, literacy, and help-seeking behaviors (Breedvelt et al., 2020). However, few tools are specifically designed to explore the individual experience of mental health expression itself. This reveals a clear methodological gap in mental health assessment, where the nuanced and personal process of articulating one's inner struggles is often overlooked. Understanding how individuals express or withhold their mental health experiences is essential for developing more responsive and empathetic support systems. Without a reliable and focused tool to measure this aspect, important insights remain unrecognized, limiting the reach of current mental health interventions.

Creating a tool that captures the experience of mental health expression is essential in providing deeper insight into how people process and share their emotions. Such a tool would allow educators, counselors, and mental health advocates to identify both strengths and challenges in individual expression, paving the way for more personalized and effective support. It can serve as a guide for developing student-centered programs that encourage openness while respecting personal boundaries. More importantly, it helps translate advocacy into action by making invisible experiences more visible, ultimately strengthening the impact of mental health initiatives at the individual and community levels.

This effort aims to develop a tool that captures how individuals experience expressing their mental health and emotional states. The goal is to provide a clear and practical understanding of where support is needed, how people engage with their emotions, and what factors influence their willingness to share by focusing on the lived experiences surrounding mental health expression. This tool aims to provide both individuals and support systems with a means to assess and address expression-related needs, thereby grounding mental health advocacy in everyday realities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental Health Advocacy

Mental health is defined as a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being in which an individual can manage everyday stress, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their community (Blakemore, 2019). It plays a crucial role in a person's overall health and is deeply connected to one's thoughts, behaviors, and relationships. Mental health issues, when left unaddressed, can negatively affect many aspects of life, including academic performance, social interactions, and personal development (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Recognizing the importance of mental wellness, efforts have been made globally and locally to improve access to mental health support and create environments that nurture emotional well-being (Esposito, 2024; Wiley, 2024).

Advocacy plays a key role in promoting mental health programs and services by raising awareness, reducing stigma, and advocating for inclusive policies. It ensures that mental health is treated with the same urgency and respect as physical health, and it helps communities recognize the value of early intervention and emotional support (García-Carrión et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2022). Through campaigns, educational efforts, and institutional support, advocacy has opened more spaces for conversation and services tailored to specific populations, such as students (Ran et al., 2021; Ionescu et al., 2024; Günaydin, 2024). Advocacy also plays a crucial role in empowering individuals to openly discuss their mental health experiences, fostering a culture where emotional expression is accepted and encouraged (Taja-on & Vergara, 2025). As mental health advocacy evolves, so does the need for tools and systems that reflect its growing focus on individual voices and student-centered care.

Mental Health Expression

Mental health expression refers to the act of articulating one's emotional and psychological experiences, whether through words, actions, or behaviors (Jean-Berluche, 2024). It enables individuals to process their emotions, seek support, and gain a clearer understanding of their mental state. When people feel safe and supported in expressing their thoughts and feelings, they are more likely to build resilience, maintain healthy relationships, and access the help they need (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). In contrast, when expression is suppressed due to stigma or lack of understanding, it may lead to increased stress, emotional isolation, and worsening mental health conditions. Consequently, mental health expression is a foundational part of one's emotional well-being and plays a critical role in

recovery and self-awareness (Flores et al., 2025; Sumayang et al., 2025; Sumayang, 2025).

Given its importance, developing a structured tool to understand and assess mental health expression can support a more meaningful and targeted approach to mental health care. While existing tools measure general well-being, stigma, or help-seeking behavior, there is limited attention given to how individuals experience and navigate emotional expression (Breedvelt et al., 2020). A dedicated tool would provide clearer insights into how people communicate their mental states and what barriers they may face. This can guide mental health programs to become more responsive, inclusive, and reflective of real-life experiences. The conversation around mental health can become more personal and empowering, especially in settings like schools where emotional expression is often overlooked by focusing on this aspect.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Republic Act No. 11036 (2018), also known as the Mental Health Act, which serves as a national framework for promoting and protecting the mental health of all Filipinos. The law emphasizes the importance of providing accessible, rights-based, and culturally appropriate mental health services, particularly within schools, workplaces, and communities. It highlights the need for early intervention, awareness, and the development of inclusive programs that respect the emotional needs of every individual. Guided by this legislation, the study aligns with the act's principles by contributing to student-focused tools that aim to strengthen mental health support. The law not only legitimizes the need for mental health resources in educational settings but also encourages the development of practical solutions, such as tools that help recognize and support the emotional expression of students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a methodological research design (Sileyew, 2019), which is commonly used in developing and validating research instruments to ensure accuracy, reliability, and relevance in both academic and practical settings. The design followed a structured approach that involved systematic stages of tool construction, expert review, and refinement based on evidence and feedback. This approach allows the researchers to focus on the precision and usefulness of the scale being developed, ensuring that it captures the intended concept in a way that is applicable across real-life contexts.

Selection Criteria

The selection of experts was guided by the relevance of their professional backgrounds to the subject of mental health and emotional expression. The experts involved were professionals in the fields of psychology, guidance and counselling, and education, each bringing unique insights necessary for the development of a well-rounded and practical assessment tool. Psychologists offered clinical and theoretical knowledge on emotional and mental health patterns, while guidance counsellors provided experience in student behavior and well-being. Educators contributed their understanding of student needs and learning environments, ensuring the tool is context-appropriate. Together, their expertise ensured that the tool was reviewed from multiple perspectives, enhancing its credibility and applicability.

Table 1. Information of the Expert Evaluators (N=19)

Field	N	%
Psychology	3	15.79
Guidance and Counselling	5	26.32
Education	11	57.89

Table 1 presents the profile of the nineteen expert evaluators who contributed to the validation process, comprising three psychologists, five guidance counsellors, and eleven educators. This composition reflects a strong representation of the academic and student welfare sectors, with a balance of mental health professionals and educators. The diverse professional backgrounds of the evaluators support a holistic validation process, making the tool not only theoretically sound but also practically responsive to student needs.

Expert Evaluation of the Developed Scale

An expert evaluation was conducted using the criteria developed by Solanon et al. (2020) to ensure the quality and relevance of the developed questionnaire. Each expert was provided with a copy of the tool and an evaluation form that guided them in rating each item based on clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. In addition to numerical ratings, the experts were encouraged to give written comments and suggestions to improve the overall effectiveness of the scale. These qualitative insights were carefully reviewed and used to revise the content, ensuring that the tool reflected both professional standards and contextual suitability. The evaluation period was set for two weeks, giving the experts ample time to examine the scale thoroughly and provide meaningful feedback.

Pilot-Testing of the Developed Scale

Following the expert evaluation, the revised scale was pilot-tested among 1,194 college students to assess its clarity, usability, and initial psychometric properties. This phase allowed the researchers to observe how the target population interacted with the tool and to identify any items that needed further adjustment. The large sample size ensured that the responses represented a wide range of student experiences and backgrounds, strengthening the reliability of the preliminary results. Feedback from the participants during this phase, whether through their responses or general comments, provided essential data for refining the scale before its final application.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process employed a combination of online and on-site survey formats to maximize accessibility and accommodate the varying preferences and circumstances of student participants. This approach ensured broader participation across different academic levels and schedules. Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the process, beginning with the distribution of informed consent forms that clearly outlined the study's purpose, participants' rights, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Anonymity and confidentiality were prioritized by securely handling all responses and removing any identifying information. Additionally, efforts were made to foster a respectful and non-judgmental atmosphere, encouraging students to share their experiences honestly and without fear of bias or pressure.

Treatment of Data

The evaluation process began with a content validity index (CVI) analysis based on expert ratings to ensure the reliability and validity of the developed scale (Yusoff, 2019). This method was used to assess the relevance and clarity of each item, guiding decisions on which statements should be retained, revised, or removed. The CVI provided a structured approach to refining the scale by quantifying the level of agreement among experts. Following the content validation, the pilot test responses from student participants were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. This statistical measure helped identify how well the items worked together as a group, confirming the scale's reliability in capturing the intended construct.

RESEARCH RESULT

The following section presents the outcomes of the expert validation, content evaluation, and reliability testing conducted during the development of the scale. These results provide evidence of how the items were assessed, refined, and tested to ensure that the tool is both meaningful and statistically sound. Each table summarizes a key part of the validation process, guiding the overall evaluation of the scale's effectiveness in measuring mental health expression.

Content Validity

Table 2 presents the summary of the individual item content validity index (I-CVI), where each of the original eighteen items was rated by experts based on relevance and clarity. The table includes the numerical index for each item, along with the decision on whether the item was retained or removed. This step was essential in identifying which items effectively captured the intended construct.

Table 2. Summary of the Item Content Validity Index (I-CVI) for the Developed Mental Health Expression Scale

Item	Index	Decision	Item	Index	Decision
Item 1	0.84	Retain	Item 10	0.68	Remove
Item 2	0.95	Retain	Item 11	1.00	Retain
Item 3	0.63	Remove	Item 12	0.89	Retain
Item 4	0.89	Retain	Item 13	0.95	Retain
Item 5	1.00	Retain	Item 14	0.79	Retain
Item 6	0.68	Remove	Item 15	0.68	Remove
Item 7	0.89	Retain	Item 16	0.89	Retain
Item 8	0.89	Retain	Item 17	0.89	Retain
Item 9	0.58	Remove	Item 18	0.84	Retain

Table 2 outlines the item-level content validity index (I-CVI) results for the developed scale, where expert evaluators individually assessed each of the eighteen original items. Based on the analysis, thirteen items were rated as valid and retained, while five were removed due to low agreement among experts on their relevance or clarity. This filtering process played a crucial role in ensuring that only the most effective and appropriate items were included in the final tool. The removal of underperforming items helped sharpen the scale's focus and improve its ability to reflect real experiences of mental health expression. These results show how expert evaluation guided the refinement of the tool, aligning with the study's goal of developing a clear, meaningful, and user-friendly instrument.

Table 3 shows the overall scale content validity index (S-CVI) based on the average ratings provided by experts across different evaluation categories. These categories include ethical considerations, the construction of the questions, and the accuracy and completeness of each item. The table provides both the numerical ratings and their corresponding qualitative interpretations.

Table 3. Summary of the Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI) Regarding the Developed Mental Health Expression Scale

Category	Index	Qualitative Interpretation
Ethical Consideration	0.921	Excellent Content Validity
Construction of Questions	0.863	Good Content Validity
Accuracy / Thoroughness of the Questions	0.934	Excellent Content Validity
Mental Health Expression Scale	0.906	Excellent Content Validity

Table 3 presents the scale-level content validity index (S-CVI), which shows how the overall scale performed across multiple evaluation criteria. The tool received an “*excellent*” rating in ethical considerations and the accuracy and thoroughness of the questions, while the construction of the questions received a “*good*” rating. The resulting overall index of 0.906 confirms that the scale demonstrates excellent content validity. These findings support that the tool is well-constructed and ethically appropriate for use among students, ensuring it measures mental health expression accurately and respectfully. The high S-CVI also indicates that the content of the scale successfully reflects what it intends to measure, reinforcing the strength of the expert-guided development process.

Reliability

Table 4 presents the reliability result of the scale, based on the statistical analysis of responses gathered during pilot testing. The table includes the computed Cronbach’s alpha value and its interpretation, which reflects the internal consistency of the entire tool. This result supports the consistency and dependability of the scale in measuring mental health expression.

Table 4. Reliability Result of the Developed Mental Health Expression Scale (N=1194).

Scale	No. Items	Cronbach-Alpha	Interpretation
Mental Health Expression Scale	13 Items	0.922	Excellent

Table 4 shows the reliability result of the scale, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.922, interpreted as “*excellent*.” This strong internal consistency means that the items in the scale work well together to measure a single, coherent concept mental health expression. A high-reliability score like this indicates that the tool produces stable and consistent results, making it dependable for future use in academic or mental health-related settings. The reliability outcome confirms that the scale is not only valid in content but also statistically sound, further solidifying its value as a reliable instrument for understanding how students express their mental health.

The combined findings from the three tables indicate that the developed tool demonstrates both strong content validity and high reliability. From the eighteen original items, only those with high expert agreement were retained, ensuring the relevance of the final items. The scale-level validity index further confirmed that the tool was ethically constructed and conceptually sound. Additionally, the high-reliability score from the pilot testing supports the internal consistency of the scale, reinforcing its potential for widespread use. Together, these results highlight the tool’s strength in effectively capturing students’ experiences of mental health expression, setting a strong foundation for its practical application.

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the validation and reliability testing of the newly developed scale provide a strong foundation for understanding its quality and potential use. With expert input, statistical measures, and pilot testing informing its development, the final tool shows promising accuracy, clarity, and consistency. The following discussion highlights how these findings shape the strength, purpose, and practical relevance of the scale, especially in understanding and supporting mental health expression.

Mental Health Expression Scale

The results show that the new scale demonstrates high content validity, with most items meeting the standards set by the expert panel. The result means that the items included in the final version of the tool are not only relevant but also clearly written and aligned with the purpose of assessing mental health expression. The experts' agreement supports the idea that the tool captures the essential aspects of how individuals express their mental health experiences. This validation strengthens the credibility of the tool and ensures that it accurately reflects what it is intended to measure.

The scale also displayed excellent internal consistency, indicating that the different items on the tool work well together to assess a single, unified concept. This internal alignment suggests that respondents are likely to interpret and respond to the items consistently, allowing for meaningful and reliable insights. The consistency of the responses shows that the tool has been designed in a way that allows for smooth and coherent measurement, which is critical when dealing with a personal and sensitive topic like mental health expression (García-Carrión et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2022; Ionescu et al., 2024; Jean-Berluche, 2024; Günaydin, 2024).

Given these findings, the newly developed scale has strong potential as a practical tool for both academic and mental health settings. The scale provides an avenue for students and other individuals to articulate their emotional and psychological states, which can guide further support and interventions. The implications are particularly significant in educational institutions, where mental health often goes unspoken. This tool gives voice to these experiences, helping stakeholders better understand the emotional landscape of the student population (Flores et al., 2025; Taja-on & Vergara, 2025).

The scale's structure allows it to be used in different contexts, making it flexible and adaptable. Whether in classroom-based mental health programs, counseling sessions, or research efforts, the scale provides meaningful insights that can inform mental health strategies and interventions. It is student-centered and built with care, ensuring that it respects the diversity and complexity of individual experiences without overwhelming the respondent. This balance makes it accessible while still being grounded in evidence-based principles.

Overall, the developed mental health expression scale stands as a valuable contribution to existing mental health tools. Unlike other instruments that focus on awareness, stigma, or help-seeking behaviors, this tool places expression at the center. It empowers individuals to communicate their inner world, which is often the first step toward healing, understanding, and support. With its validity and reliability well established, the scale can serve as a bridge between silent struggles and meaningful conversations, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and supportive mental health environment (Blakemore, 2019; Breedvelt et al., 2020; Sumayang et al., 2025; Sumayang, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study successfully established the validity and reliability of a newly developed scale designed to measure mental health expression. Through expert evaluation, a careful selection of items was retained based on their clarity, relevance, and alignment with the scale's purpose. The results showed that most of the items achieved high content validity scores, while those that did not meet the criteria were removed. The evaluation also revealed that the scale demonstrated excellent overall validity in terms of ethical considerations, item construction, and comprehensiveness, ensuring that the tool is both appropriate and meaningful for its intended users.

Further testing showed that the scale achieved an excellent internal consistency score, confirming that the items work well together as a unified tool. The study suggests that the scale reliably captures a consistent pattern of responses related to mental health expression. The development process, supported by expert insights and statistical analysis, resulted in a student-centered tool that is practical and adaptable for mental health support, research, and intervention. The scale presents a new and accessible approach to giving voice to the emotional experiences of students, allowing for more informed and compassionate responses from institutions and support systems.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future studies are encouraged to explore the application of the developed scale in different educational levels and cultural settings to examine its adaptability and consistency across diverse student populations. Researchers may also investigate the relationship between mental health expression and other psychological factors such as coping strategies, resilience, and academic performance to deepen the understanding of student well-being. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess how mental health expression changes over time and how interventions may influence these patterns. Additionally, the scale may be integrated into mental health programs or counseling sessions to evaluate its effectiveness as a screening or communication tool. Expanding the use of the scale beyond academic institutions, such as in community-based youth programs, may also provide valuable insights and enhance its relevance in broader mental health advocacy.

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