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WHY WE CRY AND HOW IT AFFECTS MOOD. M. Becht and A. Vingerhoets, PhD, Department of Psychology, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Within the context of the International Study on Adult Crying, data were collected on the psychological aspects of crying in 2214 female and 1651 male students in 29 countries all over the world. Subjects had to rate how frequently each of 55 listed situations and emotions made them cry. In addition, they estimated their crying frequency in the last four weeks and indicated their mood changes after a crying spell. Situations that made people cry most often are: (1) personal tragic events; (2) funerals; (3) loss of a love relationship; and (4) sad movies or television programs. There were significant gender differences for each of these items. The grand mean of the estimated four weeks crying frequencies is 2.76 for women and 1.06 for men. Turkey (3.61), Chile (3.56) and the USA (3.55) occupy top rankings for the females and Italy (1.89), USA (1.88) and Austria (1.86) take the highest positions for the males. Lowest frequencies were reported by Spain (.59), Peru (.58) and Bulgaria (.43) for the males and Bulgaria (1.75), Peru (1.56) and Nigeria (1.39) for the females.

Self reported mood changes can be summarized as follows: after a crying spell more than 70% of the subjects felt more relaxed, less tense and more relief. As many as 61.5% also felt less depressed and 49.0% less sad. Almost 50% felt more in control after having cried. Finally, 29.4% felt more happy. Although these data suggest that crying induces positive mood changes, caution should be exercised when interpreting these findings, given the data from quasi-experimental studies and the relationships between mood changes of crying and the possible instrumental effects of crying on the situation and relationships.