Empathy Among Nursing Students and its Socio Demographic Correlates: A Descriptive Study

Mrs. Jessa George	MSc (N), Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychiatric Nursing, Mount Zion College of Nursing
Manoj Kumar L	MSc (N), DCCN, Lecturer, Dept. of Psychiatric Nursing,Sree Gokulam Nursing College, Trivandrum-695607
Libina Babu	MSc (N), Lecturer, Dept. of Psychiatric Nursing,Sree Gokulam Nursing College, Trivandrum

ABSTRACT *The emotional realm it is of empathy seems somewhat different from the cognitive, and it is the emotional domain with which we are centrally concerned. Nurses are handling with the life of human beings. A descriptive study was conducted to assess the level of empathy among nursing students and to find out the association between empathy and selected socio-demographic variables. A sample of 197 nursing students was taken on the basis of total enumeration sampling from Sree Gokulam Nursing College, Venjaramoodu. The empathy among nursing students was assessed by using multi-dimensional emotional empathy scale. The scores of the scale were categorized as no empathy, mild empathy, moderate empathy and high empathy. Based on the scores and demographic variables the assumptions are tested to see whether there will be a significant association between level of empathy and selected demographic variables. The result shows that out of 197 subjects 109(55.4%) were having high empathy meanwhile 89(41.6%) subjects with medium empathy, 5(2.5%) subjects with low empathy and only 1(0.5%) subject with no empathy. The association between empathy and selected socio-demographic variables were computed and found that only age is having significant association with empathy at 0.05 levels.*

Introduction

Nurses are handling with the life of human beings. As we know the life of each human being is considered as so precious, it is the responsibility of each nurse to save the life of each client with their maximum effort. But if they want to do it sincerely, they have to develop empathy with in them. As we look around we can see that the upcoming generation is brought up by satisfying all their needs without any delay. By the same time, due to their busy schedule from early morning to late night, they are getting less time for social interactions. Meanwhile if they get a free time, they will be in front of various electronic devices, within their fantasy world. Because of this, they are not getting chances to understand other's feelings.

The opportunities for developing empathy are reducing day by day. But nurses are in need of empathy to provide quality care. If there is no empathy in nurses, their quality of care will also become poor. The term empathy is defined in various ways. On the one hand empathy can be defined cognitively in relation to perspective taking or understanding of others. In 1969 Hogan defined "empathy as the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feeling".

In another sense, empathy has also been defined as emotional arousal or empathy in response to the feelings of others. In 1972 Mehrabian and Epstein defined empathy as the heightened responsiveness to another's emotional experience. More recently, empathy has been conceived as a multi-dimensional construct. Davis (1983) included cognitive and emotional components in his view of empathy, and he believes that empathy can best be considered as a set of constructs, related in that they all concern responsibility to others.

An empirical study of decline in empathy among undergraduate nursing students conducted by Julia ward, Julianne cody, Mary schaal, Mohammadrezahojat conducted on undergraduate nursing students the study reveals that an empathic relationship between caregiver and patient not only defines the quality of the patient's experience as a recipient of care. It also contributes to patient outcomes .This longitudinal study was designed to examine changes in empathy during an academic year among undergraduate nursing students. Participants were 214 undergraduate nursing students who completed the Jefferson scale of empathy at the beginning and at the end of 2006- 2007 academic year. Statistical analysis showed a statistically significant decline of empathy for nursing students who were exposed more than others to patient encounters during study period (F (2,211) =4.2p<0.01). Findings are consistent with those found among medical students in that nursing student's encounters with patient which ironically are supposed to strengthen empathetic engagement have shown a decline in student empathy.

Empathy is one of the qualities of a good nurse. If it is absent, we cannot expect a better care from such nurses. As a part of their work, they are simply coming and going back at right time. For that our nurse's strike is a best example. Strike was their need to be fulfilled but the same time they have to look for the patent's satisfaction too.

Materials and Methods

The design followed to achieve the objectives of the study is a cross sectional descriptive design using quantitative approach. 197 nursing students were recruited as samples using total enumeration sampling from Sree Gokulam Nursing College Venjaramoodu. Tools used for collecting data were a socio demographic proforma and a multi-dimensional emotional empathy scale. The socio demographic proforma consisted of total 10 items to collect data regarding the demographic profile of the subjects. It consist of items for obtaining information about sample's characteristics such as age, sex, religion, year of studying, socio -economic status, no of siblings, type of family, area of living, marital status and qualification before joining the course. Multi-Dimensional emotional empathy scale is a five point likert Scale which has a total of 30 items. This rating scale is designed to rate the general empathy of a person. In general, the items depend on the subject's report; however, the final rating is based on the clinical judgment of the inter-

viewer. This rating scale is intended as a self- reporting tool. The reliability of Multi-Dimensional Emotional Empathy Scale was done by spearman-Brown formula. The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.8. This indicates that the tool was reliable. Formal permission for data collection was obtained from the Principal of Sree Gokulam Nursing College and corresponding Class Co-coordinators The data was collected after obtaining informed consent from the students.

Results
Socio demographic variables of subjects
Distribution of the subjects according to the age shows that among 197 of the samples 79 (40.1 %) were in the age group of 17-19 years of age, 114(57.87%) were between 20-22years of age and 4(2.03%) were above 22years. According to the gender distribution, about 163 (82.7%) subjects were females and 34 (17.26%) were males. The subjects from Hindu Religion were the highest with 148(75.1%) subjects, 27(13.7%) subjects belongs to Christian Religion, 21(10.7%) subjects belong to Muslim religion and 1(0.5%) subject belongs to other religion. According to the year of studying, about 63(31.98%) subjects were I year, 65(32.99%) subjects were II year and 69(35.03%) subjects were from III year. Regarding socio-economic status, majority of the subjects 184(93.41%) was from middle class family. About 12(6.1%) subjects were from low socio-economic status and only 1(0.5%) subject was from upper socio economic status. Majority of the subjects 140(71.1%) were having 1 sibling. 35(17.8%) subjects were having 2 siblings, 5 (2.5%) subjects having 3 siblings and 17(8.6%) subjects were having no siblings. Among 197 subjects, 179(90.9) subjects belongs to nuclear family, 18(9.14%) subjects belongs to joint family and none of them were from extended joint family. According to area of living 139(70.6%) subjects were from rural area and 58(29.4%) subjects were from urban area. According to marital status of the subjects, highest number of the subjects 189 (95.9%) were unmarried and rest 8 (4 %) were Married. Majority of the subjects 193(97.97%) were qualified Plus two/ VHSE before joining the course and 2(1.02%) subjects each were qualified Degree and Others (Diploma) courses before joining the course.

Empathy among nursing students
Table.1: Frequency and percentage distribution of samples (n=197)

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Frequency percentage.
1.	No empathy	1	0.5%
2.	Low empathy	5	2.54%
3.	Medium empathy	82	41.63%
4.	High empathy	109	55.33%

Table.2: Association between selected Socio demographic variables and level of empathy

Variable	Chi-squire value	Degree of freedom	Table value	Level of significance
Age of students	0.0001	1	3.841	0.05
Gender	9.184	1	3.841	0.05*
Religion	0.0143	1	3.841	0.05
Year of Studying	6.6045	4	9.49	0.05
Socio economic Status	0.9622	1	3.841	0.05
Number of Siblings	0.2004	1	3.841	0.05
Type of Family	0.0004	1	3.841	0.05
Area of Living	0.05603	1	3.841	0.05

*= Significant at 0.05 level

Only Gender have significant association with empathy ($\chi2cal > \chi2tab$) (p>0.05)

Discussion
This cross sectional descriptive study was done to assess level of empathy among nursing students in a selected setting and to determine its socio demographic correlates. Level of empathy was assessed by using multi-dimensional emotional empathy scale and later analysed by descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage). The result shows that out of 197 subjects 110 (55.83%) were found to have more empathy. At the same, gender difference was identified. The result shows that females 99 (60.73%) have more empathy compared to males 11 (32.35%). These study findings were supported by a study conducted by Fields .S.K., Mahan.P, et al at USA on empathy among health care professional students revealed that females have more empathy than males. Whereas another study conducted by Juliaward, Juhanne Cody, et al on empathy among undergraduate nursing students showed that there is a significant decline of empathy among nursing students which is contradictory to the above findings.

The association between the level of empathy and selected socio demographic variables were analysed by chi-square test. The result shows that there is only one socio demographic variables has association with level of empathy and that is gender. The result shows that females have more empathy than males. The above study result was supported by a study conducted by Fields .S.K., Mahan .P et al is showed that females have more empathy than males.

Empathy is essential factor to determine the quality of Nurse. Only an empathetic nurse could provide quality care to patient. As nurses are dealing with human beings and their precious life, empathy has an essential role in providing such a care. Hence nurses are handling with human life; empathy is an essential quality of a good nurse.

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