

## Level of Empathy among Third Year Nursing Students in Schools of Nursing in Sri Lanka

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The profession of nursing combines scientific knowledge, technical skills and care to form a unique nurse-patient relationship. The care component, often referenced as the art of nursing, involves actions and attitudes of virtue including compassion, respect, and empathy. However, nurses seem to only concentrate on medical management to enhance patient's health and rare attention has been paid to patients' psychological health; patients are treated as object with less empathy. Though several studies have identified nurses' empathy levels, there are few studies investigating student nurses' empathic ability. However, it has not been assessed for nursing students in Sri Lanka whether it is successfully achieved. This study is carried out to estimate the Empathic ability among third year nursing students in Schools of Nursing Sri Lanka.

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted. Quantitative data was collected from final year nursing students of three selected nursing schools. In total, 198 nursing students, represented the general population, and Proportionate Random sampling method was used. The Data collected by using pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire based on the Jefferson Scale of Empathy which was previously tested one.

**Results:** A sample of 198 (N=198) nursing students agreed to participate in the study, giving a response rate of 99%. Students completed the Jefferson Scale of Nursing Students Empathy, a valid and reliable self-report scale. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the data analysis. Results: The students evaluated their ability of empathy according to sub dimensions such as, cognitive ability, emotional ability, and communication skills. Student nurses had poor nonverbal communication skills and this would greatly impact on a student nurse's ability to be empathic. Majority of students (78.5 %, n=154) had an understanding about their patients' feelings as well as their relations. Findings revealed that student nurses had moderate level cognitive ability and findings indicated that nursing students at the end of nursing program do not have adequate emotional abilities. This is a disappointing finding as many of the clinical experiences designed for nursing students involve service-based learning with vulnerable populations. Due to a limited sample size and diversity, a conclusion cannot be formulated to explain why age, religion, and race significantly influenced students' empathy ability.

Empathy is an important multi-dimensional trait of nurses which could be fostered in the early stages of nursing students. As this study shows, empathy is a skill that may be taught. So, it would be advisable to introduce these into the traditional nursing curriculum. It also suggests that additional knowledge is needed about the relationship of empathy and nonverbal communication. Thus, nursing students could learn how to enhance their nonverbal communication skills in order to become more empathetic.

**Key words:** *Empathy, Jefferson scale of empathy, Nursing school, Student nurse*