



Research Article

EVALUATION OF NURSING STUDENTS' EMPATHIC TENDENCIES

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Introduction Aim: Empathy is the study of understanding the feelings of the person by placing himself/herself in another's shoes. This study was planned to evaluate the empathic tendencies of nursing students.

Method: This study is a descriptive study. 216 nursing students studying in ArtvinÇoruh University Health High School formed the sample of the study. "Sociodemographic characteristics form" and "Empathic Tendency Scale" were used as a data collection tool.

Findings: The average age of the sample was 20.57, and empathic tendencies did not vary according to age group ($p>0.05$). Although females had higher tendencies than males, the difference was not significant ($p>0.05$). The empathic tendencies of 3rd and 2nd grade students were higher than other grades but the difference was not significant ($p>0.05$). Students were regular high school graduates (52.8%), medical vocational high school graduates (11.6%) and other high school graduates (35.6%), there was no difference between the groups ($p>0.05$). The majority of the sample (46.8%) lived in cities, however, their empathic tendencies did not vary significantly according to place of living ($p>0.05$). Although the empathic tendency point average of students with nuclear families (68.486) was higher than the average of students with extended family (67.342), there was no significant difference between these two groups ($p>0.05$). The majority of families of the students (81.5%) were from middle income group, 14.4% of them were from low income group and 4.2% of them were from high income group, and the empathic tendency point averages of these groups were significantly different from each other ($p<0.05$). Educational statuses of fathers and mothers were, respectively, primary school, secondary school and higher education, and the empathic tendencies of both fathers and mothers did not vary according to educational status ($p>0.05$).

Result: It was observed that the empathic tendencies of the students did not vary according to variables such as age, gender, grade, place of living, graduated high school, family type, family income level and the educational statuses of father and mother. It was observed that students with middle and high family income levels had higher points than the students with low family income levels.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, empathy is the process in which a person places himself/herself in another's shoes and looks at the events with his/her point of view, understands and feels the true feelings and thoughts of that person, and conveys this to that person (Dökmen, 2002). In the profession of nursing, empathy is defined as the fact that "the nurse tries to understand the patient's condition, feelings and thoughts and conveys what he/she perceives during this process" (Dizer, İyigün, 2009; Mert, Sezgin, 2011).

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Empathic tendency is defined as the understanding the emotions of the client, the ability to be affected by the emotional experience and the desire to help (Dökmen, 2002). Nursing should be included in professions in which empathic tendency is at the top level. Because, the nurse should have effective communication skills, be aware of his/her feelings, manage his/her feelings and empathize in order to establish a good communication with the patient (Avşar, Kaşıkçı, 2010). Nurses should act with empathic tendency towards patients in order to understand the patients, determine their needs and get positive feedbacks. When nurses act with empathic tendency towards patients, they can understand the patients, determine their needs and get positive results from their nursing attempts (Dizer, İyigün, 2009; Nazik, Arslan, 2011).

Being understood is one of the basic human needs, and the correct understanding of an individual is related to the nurse's empathic skill. An individual, who feels that he/she is understood by the nurse, thinks that he/she is considered important, trusted and valued. In this case, the nurse can easily reach to the individual, and the individual accepts the nurse's care. Therefore, individualized care and positive therapeutic environment can be ensured. After such a service provided to the individual, healing rate increases and the adverse effects of treatment and care are reduced. Also, the effective use of empathy positively affects the patient satisfaction and overall health status (Cevahir *et al.*, 2008; Mete, Gerçek 2005). Empathy is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the nurse which must be developed in assisting relationship in order to define the individual and the problems. Empathic skill is a personality trait and can be developed by training, and nursing students should develop these skills during their training (Williams and Stickley 2010). Studies carried out with nurses who were graduates and students showed that empathy was a behavior that could be gained through training (Sabancıoğlu *et al.*, 2007; Mete *et al.*, 2005). In light of all these literature, this study in which the empathic tendencies of nursing students were evaluated was planned.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Type: Research was carried out as a descriptive.

Time of Research: This study was carried out between the dates of January 2015 - June 2015.

Population and sample: Health high school nursing department students formed the population of the study. All students were included in the study scope. 216 students formed the sample of the study as there were students who gave incomplete answers to the questionnaire forms or who did not want to participate in the study.

Data Collection: Data of the study were collected at the end of the spring semester in 2014- 2015 academic year. With the purpose of ensuring the data collection stage to be safe (such as; in order for students not to be under the influence, and not to feel under pressure), researchers were excluded from the data collection stage, and data were collected by the faculty members who were known by the students but who were not related to this study.

Data Collection Tools: In the data collection stage of the study, sociodemographic characteristics questionnaire form, "Communication skills evaluation scale" and "empathic tendency scale" were used.

Sociodemographic characteristics form: It was a form examining the demographic characteristics of students, which was prepared by the researchers.

Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS): The aim of the Empathic Tendency Scale which was developed by Dökmen (1988) was to measure the people's tendencies to empathize in daily life. It was Likert-type scale and composed of 20 questions, and each question was given points from 1 to 5. The 3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 15th questions in the scale were reversely calculated.

The minimum point to be taken from the scale was 20 and the maximum point was 100. Total point refers the empathic tendency points of the subjects. High point means that the empathic tendency is high, and the low point means that the empathic tendency is low. Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was determined to be .82.

Evaluation of data: The evaluation of data was performed on SPSS 17.0 environment by using number, percentage and mean Anova, t-test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

Ethical Aspect of the Research: In this study, ethics committee approval from ArtvinÇoruh University, the written permissions from the institutions in which the study was carried out and the informed consent form the participants were received.

RESULTS

The average age of the sample was 20.57, 51.4% of the sample was aged 50.57 and below and 48.6% of the sample was above aged 20.57, and the empathic tendency point averages did not vary. Although the ratio of female students (63%) and the average points of empathic tendency were higher than males, the empathic tendency point averages of these two groups did not show significant differences. When analyzed the empathic tendency point averages of students according to their grades, they were as, respectively, 3th grade, 2nd grade, 4th grade and 1st grade, and it was observed that there was no significant difference among grades.

More than half of the students (52.8%) were regular high school graduates and the others were health vocational high school (11.6%) graduates and other high schools (35.6%) graduates, and there was no significant difference among groups in terms of empathic tendency point averages. The majority of the sample (46.8%) lived in cities and the others lived in villages (24.5%) and small towns (28.7%), however, the empathic tendency points did not show a significant difference according to place of living.

81% of the students had nuclear family and 19% of them had extended family. Although the empathic tendency point average of students with nuclear families was higher than the average of students with extended family, there was no significant difference between these two groups. The majority of families of the students (81.5%) were from middle income group, 14.4% of them were from low income group and 4.2% of them were from high income group; and students with middle and high family income level had significantly higher empathic tendency skills than the students with low family income levels.

When analyzed the empathic tendencies of students according to educational statuses of fathers and mothers, 52.3% of father were primary school graduates, 35.2% of them were secondary school graduates and 12.5% of them were higher education graduates. The great majority of mothers (77.3%) were primary school graduates and a small portion of them (4.6%) were higher education graduates. There was no statistically significant difference between empathic tendency point averages of students according to educational status of both fathers and mothers.

Table 1. Some Personal Characteristics and the Differences Among Empathic Tendency Scale Point Averages According to These Characteristics

Variable	Sub-variable	n	%	Average	Standard Error	Significance
Age	Aged 20.57and below	111	51.4	68.648	0.884	t:.626
	Aged 20.57and above	105	48.6	67.867	0.880	p>0.05
Gender	Male	80	37.0	66.725	1.116	t:-1.911
	Female	136	63.0	69.177	0.733	p>0.05
Grade	1. Grade	62	28.7	66.338	1.133	F:0.844
	2. Grade	54	25.0	69.907	1.206	p>0.05
	3. Grade	49	22.7	69.918	1.229	
	4. Grade	51	23.6	67.294	1.094	
Graduated High School	Regular High School	114	52.8	68.816	0.798	KW:3.643
	*PHC	25	11.6	65.360	1.702	p>0.05
	Other	77	35.6	68.403	1.160	
Place of living	Village	53	24.5	69.283	1.253	F:0.870
	Small town	62	28.7	67.194	1.186	
	City	101	46.8	68.396	0.905	p>0.05

*PHC: Public Health Center

Table 2. Some Familial Characteristics and the Differences Among Empathic Tendency Scale Point Averages According to These Characteristics

Variable	Sub-variable	n	%	Average	Standard Error	Significance
Family Type	nuclear family	175	81	68.486	0.697	t:0.719
	Extended family	41	19	67.342	1.401	p>0.05
*Family Income Status	Low	31	14.4	63.871	1.961	KW:6.296
	Middle	179	81.5	69.148	0.649	
	High	9	4.2	66.222	3.201	p<0.05
Educational Status of Father	Primary Education	113	52.3	68.628	0.874	KW:2.123
	Secondary Education	76	35.2	68.500	1.058	
	Higher Education	27	12.5	66.111	1.630	p>0.05
Educational Status of Mother	Primary Education	167	77.3	68.952	0.697	KW:5.200
	Secondary Education	39	18.1	66.615	1.568	
	Higher Education	10	4.6	63.300	2.357	p>0.05

*P<0.05

DISCUSSION

In the study carried out to determine the empathic tendency levels of nursing students, the average age of the sample was 20.57, and there was no difference between empathic tendency points and age groups (Table 1). Also in another study in which the age group was similar to the age group in this study, the empathic tendency point did not show a significant difference according to age (Arpacı, Özmen 2014). There are also other studies that support this. Kokmaz *et al.* (2003) revealed that age had no significant relationship with the empathic tendency point in their study carried out on physical education students. Dereboy *et al.* (2005) revealed that age had no significant relationship with the empathic tendency point in their study carried out on medical faculty students.

Dizer and İyigün (2009) revealed that age had no significant relationship with the empathic tendency point in their study carried out on nurses. However, Çelik and Çağdaş (2010) revealed in their study that teachers of aged 42 and above had the highest empathic tendency points, there was no significant difference in other age groups, and the points were close to each other. This situation may suggest that the empathic tendency increases with increase of age. When analyzed students in the study in terms of gender and the graduated school, there was no significant difference in terms of ETS point averages (Table 1). Similar results were achieved also in other studies (Tutuk *et al* 2002; Korkmaz *et al.* 2003; Ekinci and Aybek 2010; Nazik and Arslan 2011). However, Kapıkıran (2009) revealed in his study carried out on faculty of education students that the empathic and sympathetic tendencies of female students were significantly different than the points of males.

Also in another study, it was observed that ETS points of female students were significantly higher than males among students studying in different departments related to health (Yiğitbaş *et al* 2013). In a study related to the graduated school, it was observed that medical vocational high school graduates had higher empathic ability points than the graduates from other high schools. This situation was interpreted to have been derived from the fact that the lessons taken by these students showed parallelism with the lessons at the university, and that these lessons would be a basis for the empathy training given/to be given at the university (Yurttaş and Yetkin 2003). In this study, it was reported that students who graduated from regular high schools received higher points than the students who graduated from Anatolian High School and Superior High Schools, and the difference between the point averages was statistically significant (Sabancıoğulları *et al.*, 2007).

Regarding the places where students lived; there are studies indicating that the empathic tendency points increase from small places like the village to larger settlements such as city (Özyazıcıoğlu *et al.*, 2009; Nazik and Arslan 2011). However, in this study, no significant relationship was observed between the ETS points of students regarding the place where they lived. Similarly, Yurttaş and Yetkin (2003) revealed in their study on health high school students that the place where students lived did not indicate any difference in empathic skill points. When analyzed the empathic tendency point averages of students according to their grades, they were as, respectively, 3th grade, 2nd grade, 4th grade and 1st grade, and it was observed that there was no significant difference among grades (Table 1). This is not a very expected result. Similarly, Mete and Gerçek (2005), in their study carried out on nursing students, could not find a significant difference among grades in terms of ETS points.

However, some studies revealed that students' empathic tendency points increased as the grade increased, and emphasized that emphatic tendency could be increased by training (Özyazıcıoğlu et al., 2009; Williams and Stickley 2010; EkinciandAybek 2010; Kapıkıran, 2011). In this study, the fact that there was no difference in emphatic tendency skill may make think that instructors use training methods to increase emphatic tendency less often and they should improve this. According to other findings of the research, ETS points of students with middle and high income levels were higher and more significant than the students with low income levels (Table 2). This is actually an expected result. Ekinci and Aybek (2010) observed in their study that ETS points of university students who were teacher candidates were significantly higher than students in low and high income groups. In this study, no significant difference was observed between students' ETS points regarding the educational status of fathers and mothers (Table 2). Although there were similar studies indicating that the educational statuses of fathers and mothers did not affect the ETS points (Arifoğlu and Razi 2011), Ekinci and Aybek (2010) revealed in their study that ETS points of students increased as the educational statuses of fathers and mothers increased.

Results and suggestions

According to the findings of the study, the following results were reached;

- Empathic tendencies of the students did not vary according to variables such as age, gender, grade, place of living, graduated high school, family type, family income level and the educational statuses of father and mother;
- Students in the groups of middle and high family income levels had higher empathic tendency points than the students in the group of low family income levels.

In line with these results, the followings were suggested;

- To carry out studies investigating the methods to develop the skill of empathic tendency
- Instructors should use and develop the training methods to increase the empathic skill levels of students,
- Instructors should be provided training for the training methods to increase the empathic skill level,
- Similar studies should be carried out with other student groups.

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