

Empathy among Nurses Working at Teaching Hospitals

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ABSTRACT

A descriptive (cross-sectional) study design used in the present study from the period of 26th September ,2022, to 14th June, 2023 to assess the level of empathy among nurses working at teaching hospitals. A purposive (non-probability) sample of 180 nurses is recruited in current study and selected from four teaching hospitals in kerbala city according to specific criteria. A pilot study is employed to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability, and panel of (17) experts is used to determine the questionnaire's content validity. The data were collected through interview using Jefferson Scale of Empathy Physician/Health Professions (HP – version)) and data were analyzed and interpreted through use application of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version (IBM 22). The study findings indicate that nurses have low level of empathy and there is a significant relationship between nurses' empathy and job desire . The study recommended that efforts be made to provide training programs and promote a culture of compassion within healthcare institutions, as this can lead to better patient outcomes and increased patient satisfaction.

Keywords: Empathy , Nurse

Introduction

According to studies in the health care field, empathy is a special psychological resource, due of its effects on both patients and medical personnel, through the establishment of personal relationships and improved patient communication (Yue et al.,2022). Empathy is a notion that was brought to medicine in the 1980s and is now seen as an essential skill for medical personnel(Li et al.,2018).). Providing care and support to patients when they are at their weakest is a major focus of healthcare creating connections with patients and medical staff is essential for delivering special care, the capacity to empathize with patients is an essential component of these relationships. Empathy is the capacity to understand and express another person's thoughts and feelings to other people(Peisachovich et al.,2023).After conducting a systematic review , when given care by nurses who show empathyYu & Kirk (2009) found that patients' levels of anxiety and discomfort are reduced, additionally, the ability of nurses to empathize helps them to understand the requirements that patients perceive, for these reasons, the significance of developing an empathetic relationship with patients and fundamental communication skills remains emphasized to nursing students in undergraduate programs (Altwalbeh et al.,2018).

Methodology

Study Design: the researcher used descriptive (cross-sectional) study design.The study period started from the period of 26th September ,2022, to 14thJune, 2023. **Setting of the Study:** Data were collected from academic nurses who worked in four teaching hospitals in kerbala city(Al-Imam Al –Hussian Medical City, Al-Imam Al- Hassan Al- Mujtaba Teaching Hospital, Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children and Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Hospital). **Population:** The target population was 335 academic nurses working in four teaching hospitals in kerbala city(Al-Imam Al –Hussian Medical City,Al- Imam Al- Hassan Al- Mujtaba Teaching Hospital, Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children and Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Hospital)the population of academic nurses from each hospital was 142,144,31,and 18 , respectively. **Sample size:** The sample size was estimated according Soper sample calculator ; the minimum sample size was 128 academic nurses ,considering the possibility of incomplete or non-responses from the participants.

The researcher selects a sample of 180 academic nurses to get more representation of sample population and get more accurate results. **Sample Method:** A purposive (non- probability) sample of 180 nurses are selected according to specific inclusion criteria, the population of academic nurses from each hospital was (Al-Imam Al –Hussian Medical City, Al- Imam Al- Hassan Al- Mujtaba Teaching Hospital, Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children and Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Hospital) 142,144,31,and 18 .Sample number of each hospitl 78,74,14,14 respectively. **Administrative Arrangements:** The College of Nursing/University of Karbala has independently examined the study protocol and granted official clearance for the study to be carried out After receiving the study's title and questionnaire, the College of Nursing's Ethics Committee evaluated the study's instruments (questionnaire) and approved moving on with the study, the survey was conducted with the knowledge and written consent of every respondent. **Study Instrument:** The questionnaire was designed by researcher according to the previous studies related to variables included in current study; the researcher uses an instrument consist two parts demographic information data, and Jefferson Scale of Empathy Physician/Health Professions (HP – version) to measure the problem statement include: **Part I : Demographic Data:** The socio-demographic sheet includes nurse ' age, gender, marital status, , work shift , job desire, monthly income, hospital ,and years of experience. **Part II: Jefferson Scale of Empathy Physician/Health Professions (HP – version)** was developed by (Hojat et al., 2002). Used the scale translated into the Arabic language by (Nashawi ,2009)in this study .The JSE is a 20-item instrument specifically developed to measure empathy in the context of health professions education and patient care for administration to health professions students and practitioners, items are answered on a 7-point Likert -type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree), ten of the items are positively worded and directly scored , while the other ten are negatively worded (reverse scored) (Hojat et al.,2018). Possible score range is 20–140: the higher the mean score, the higher the self-reported empathy level. **Validity of the Questionnaire:** To enhance the validity of the instrument, it was reviewed by a panel of 17 experts with more than 10 years of experience in relevant fields related to the study. Based on the experts' suggestions and recommendations, slight changes and modifications were made to ensure the instrument's appropriateness for the nursing sample. for example **Jefferson Scale of Empathy** item 6" Because people are different, it is difficult for me to see things from my patients' perspectives" to " It is difficult for him to see things from my patient perspectives because people are different". **Pilot Study:** A pilot study is done before data collecting to determine the study instrument’s reliability. It was applied on

(20) Academic nurses working in hospitals (Al-Imam Al –Hussian Medical City and Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children) time taking to fill the forms before conducting a full-scale study. The average time taken to fill the form was 5- 10 minutes which was considered acceptable, The pilot study was conducted from December 21th, 2022, to 25th December 2022. the sample of the pilot study is excluded from the original study. **Reliability of the Instrument:** Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were used to test reliability of the current study instrument. The result of the test showed acceptable and demonstrated construct validity. Cronbach’s alpha 0.70 for Jefferson Scale of Empathy. **Data collection:** The self-administer scheme was utilized by asking the applicants to fill the format of the inquiry form and fulfill the requests. The data collection process has been performed from December 26 th, 2022, to January 8th, 2023, after obtaining permission from Kerbala Health Directorate to conduct the questionnaire in its hospitals and institutions. Then the researcher explaining the purpose of the study in simple way to nurse . An agreement of participation was obtained from academic nurse prior to the interview, the average time required for each respondent of the nurses has taken approximately 5-10 minutes to filling out the questionnaire form. **Data Analysis:** The data were analyzed and interpreted with the SPSS version 22 software version (IBM 22).

Ethical Approval

The first ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee at College of Nursing, University of Kerbala which reviews the content of questionnaire and giving their approval. Then, the researcher obtained written informed approval from each nurse. Before nurses participated in the study, the researcher described the goal of the study to them. Additionally, the researcher made it clear to the participants that taking part in this study was entirely elective and according to the subject's consent sheet, also gave assured them that would maintain the confidentiality of the data and that it would be safely maintained both during and after the course of the research

Results and Discussions

Table (1) Study Sample Demographic Data

| Demographic data | Rating and Intervals | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Age / Years | <= 25 | 68 | 37.8 |
| | 26 – 30 | 90 | 50.0 |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----|-------|
| | 31 – 35 | 12 | 6.7 |
| | 36 – 40 | 7 | 3.9 |
| | 41+ | 3 | 1.7 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Gender | Male | 85 | 47.2 |
| | Female | 95 | 52.8 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status | Single | 94 | 52.2 |
| | Married | 83 | 46.1 |
| | Divorced | 2 | 1.1 |
| | Widowed | 1 | .6 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Work Shifts | Morning | 134 | 74.4 |
| | Evening | 46 | 25.6 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Job Desire | Yes | 161 | 89.4 |
| | No | 19 | 10.6 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Monthly Income | Sufficient | 116 | 64.4 |
| | Insufficient | 16 | 8.9 |
| | Barely sufficient | 48 | 26.7 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Hospital | Al-Imam Al –Hussian Medical City | 78 | 43.3 |
| | Al-Imam Al- Hassan Al- Mujtaba Teaching Hospital | 74 | 41.1 |
| | Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children | 14 | 7.8 |
| | Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Hospital | 14 | 7.8 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |
| Years of experience | <= 5 | 146 | 81.1 |
| | 6 – 10 | 21 | 11.7 |
| | 11 – 15 | 6 | 3.3 |
| | 16 – 20 | 7 | 3.9 |
| | Total | 180 | 100.0 |

The table (1) shows that the highest percentage is seen with age group of “26-30 year” among 50.0% of nurses followed by age group of “<= 25year” among 37.8%.The gender refers to Female

as represented by 52.8% participant nurses. Regarding Marital Status , the majority of study sample reported single represented (52.2%) followed by married represented (46.1%).Concerning the work shifts the highest percentage indicates that morning as reported by 74.4% of participants, while other participants from evening represented only (25.6%).In relation to the job desire the highest percentage indicates (Yes) represented (89.4%) , while other participants indicates (No) represented only (10.6%) . Regarding monthly income , the highest percentage of study sample were sufficient represented (64.4%).Regarding hospital highest percentage of Al- Imam Al –Hussian Medical City represented (43.3%).Concerning years of experience highest percentage indicates (≤ 5) represented (81.1%).

Table (2) Assessment of Empathy

| Empathy Levels | Frequency | Percent | Mean | Overall Assessment |
|----------------|-----------|---------|--------|--------------------|
| Low | 108 | 60.0 | 59.167 | Low |
| Moderate | 69 | 38.3 | | |
| High | 3 | 1.7 | | |
| Total | 180 | 100.0 | | |

Low (score 20-60), moderate (score 61-100), high (score 101-140)

Table (2) illustrates the assessment of Empathy among nurses, the results indicate that (60%) of nurses have a low level of empathy. Additionally, the average total means also indicate that nurses have low level of empathy (Mean = 59.167).

Table (3) Relationship between Nurses' Empathy and their Demographic Data

| Demographic Data | Rating and Intervals | Empathy | | | Chi-square value | d.f. | p-value |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|------|------------------|------|------------|
| | | Low | Moderate | High | | | |
| Age / Years | ≤ 25 | 46 | 21 | 1 | 5.779 | 8 | .672 NS |
| | 26 – 30 | 51 | 37 | 2 | | | |
| | 31 – 35 | 5 | 7 | 0 | | | |
| | 36 – 40 | 5 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| | 41+ | 1 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| Total | | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Gender | Male | 55 | 30 | 0 | 3.667 | 2 | .160 NS |
| | Female | 53 | 39 | 3 | | | |
| Total | | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Marital Status | Single | 58 | 33 | 3 | 4.904 | 6 | .556 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|----|---|-------|---|------------|
| | Married | 49 | 34 | 0 | | | NS |
| | Divorced | 1 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| | Widowed | 0 | 1 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Work Shifts | Morning | 82 | 49 | 3 | 1.581 | 2 | .454 NS |
| | Evening | 26 | 20 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Job Desire | Yes | 102 | 56 | 3 | 8.230 | 2 | .016 S |
| | No | 6 | 13 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Monthly Income | Sufficient | 74 | 41 | 1 | 4.094 | 4 | .393 NS |
| | Insufficient | 9 | 7 | 0 | | | |
| | Barely sufficient | 25 | 21 | 2 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Hospital | Al-Imam Al – Hussian Medical City | 45 | 32 | 1 | 3.018 | 6 | .807 NS |
| | Al-Imam Al- Hassan Al-Mujtaba Teaching Hospital | 48 | 24 | 2 | | | |
| | Kerbala Teaching Hospital for Children | 8 | 6 | 0 | | | |
| | Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Hospital | 7 | 7 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |
| Years of experience | <= 5 | 88 | 55 | 3 | .988 | 6 | .986 NS |
| | 6 – 10 | 12 | 9 | 0 | | | |
| | 11 – 15 | 4 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| | 16 – 20 | 4 | 3 | 0 | | | |
| | Total | 108 | 69 | 3 | | | |

P= Probability, N.S= Not significant, S= Significant, df = Degree of freedom

Table (3) shows no-significant relationship between nurses' empathy and their (age / years, gender, marital status, work shifts, monthly income , and years of experience) at p-values >0.05, except with their job desire, the study results indicate that there is a significant relationship with the nurses' empathy at p-values <0.05 .

Discussion:

The result of the current study mentioned that nurses have a low level of empathy, The results of the present study agree with study conducted by Pitanupong et al. (2023) the outcomes of study revealed

that most participants reported a below-average level of empathy. In addition, the study of Kesbakhi & Rohani (2020) demonstrated that the level of empathy decreases with increasing students' academic year.

Also a study done by Williams et al. (2014) showed that Paramedic students scored statistically lower on an empathy findings compared to their counterparts in other medical fields (with the exception of nursing students). The present study findings disagree with study Williams et al. (2014) that examined levels of empathy among undergraduate students majoring in emergency health, nursing, and midwifery which indicated that midwifery students have greater empathy than nursing and emergency health students. Also a study conducted by Matalinares-Calvet et al. (2019) showed that the level of empathy among nursing students is higher than that of medical and psychology students. In addition, a Study at Spanish university that tested Empathy in occupational therapy Students by Serrada-Tejeda et al. (2022) that showed occupational therapy students showed a high level of empathy. Also the present study findings disagree with the study done by Taleghani et al. (2017) which revealed that most of the nurses had moderate score of empathy. In addition, a study done by Bogiatzaki et al. (2019) showed that the empathy score of healthcare professionals ranged at a relatively high levels. The disparity in findings may be attributable to the various study instruments, study samples, or populations. Many authors noted a variety of issues that hindered nurses from showing empathetic behavior, including a lack of time, work shifts, conflicting relationships with patients, coworkers, and care-givers, workload, time pressures, and competitiveness (Ferri et al., 2015). Also lack of empathy is also linked to emotional, physical, and job-related problems such as depression, burnout, sleep disorders, and difficulty concentrating, all of which have the potential to adversely affect patient care (Yu et al., 2022). According to relationship between nurses' empathy and their demographic data .our results found indicated that there is a significant relationship between nurses' empathy and job desire. The present study findings disagree with the study conducted Yue et al. (2022) that showed empathy was significantly and negatively correlated with job desire. Regarding to other demographic data the study results indicated there are no significant relationship between nurses' empathy and their (age / years, gender, marital status, work shifts, monthly income , hospital, years of experience). The present study findings agree with the study conducted by Özdemir et al. (2019) which results showed that there are no relationship was found between the levels of empathy and age, marital status, total period of employment in nursing, and shift work. Also the results of present study are consistent with study done by Roger et al. (2022) which showed that there is no association between empathy and marital

status and job experience. A study done by Chatterjee et al. (2017) the findings also showed that age of the participant not significantly associated with students' empathy scores. In addition Khalid et al. (2021) mention that there are no significant differences in empathy with age, gender, and marital status. In this same line, Ghaedi et al. (2020) reported that there was no significant correlation between age, gender, marital status, type of shift work, work experience and empathy George et al. (2016) back up the current study's findings, which showed that there was no significant association between empathy and socioeconomic status. The study done by Kuo et al. (2012) which results revealed that there is significantly correlation between empathy and household monthly income, this finding disagrees with our present study. In addition Hasan et. al. (2013) who found that empathy scores were significantly associated with household income.

Conclusions: The study found that the job desire may be an important factor that is related to nurses' empathy

Recommendations:

1-Efforts should be made to provide training programs and promote a culture of empathy within healthcare organizations, it could lead to better patient outcomes and increased patient satisfaction.

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