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Perception of Empathy among medical students: A cross sectional study

Background: The term empathy has its origin from the Greek word 'empathia' which means appreciating feelings of another person whereas sympathy assesses a person's perseverance of emotion towards others. Researchers have revealed that knowing and evaluating the level of empathy in medical students is of great significant but literature has limited information about the perception of empathy among undergraduate medical students in this part of the World. **Aim:** To find out the perception of empathy among undergraduate students of medicine. **Materials and subjects:** A 12-item empathy scale questionnaire (ESQ), developed by the authors and validated accordingly was completed by 120 subjects, 60 - females and the rest were males, of KMC, Mangalore, MAHE, Manipal, Karnataka, India, from MBBS 2nd, 3rd and 4th year, with each group consisting of 40 students. The collected data was coded and entered into SPSS version 11.5. The results were expressed as Mean \pm SD and proportions using appropriate tables and graphs. For comparison, student 't' test, ANNOVA and chi-square test were used. $p \leq 0.05$ was considered to be statistically significant. **Results:** Among 2nd, 3rd and 4th year MBBS students, though slight variations were observed between the years, the difference with respect to total score of perception of empathy, among these medical students, was statistically not significant. Total empathy score was found to be significantly higher ($p < 0.0001$) in female students as compared to their male counterparts. **Conclusion:** It is known that the affective component of empathy is mostly not taken care of during medical carrier. So, identification of this component will reinforce the need to develop educational strategies for a good professional medical training. Since empathy flags the path for a better interpersonal communication, it plays an important role in cultivating doctor-patient relationships, for better clinical outcomes and if not a better quality of life.

Keywords: Empathy, Sympathy, Affective component, quality of life.