

Empathic Tendency and Affecting Factors in Nursing students**Emine Derya İster¹, Yasemin Altınbaş²**¹*Research Assistant at Adiyaman University, Turkey*²*Research Assistant Doctor at Adiyaman University, Turkey***ABSTRACT**

Background: The profound impact of empathy on quality nursing care has been recognized. Studies have shown that there has been little improvement in nurses' communication skills, and that they should work to enhance this area. Therefore, it is very important for qualified nursing care to determine empathic tendency and factors that affect in nursing students, so to teach empathic approach and professional values, to develop correct communication and helping skills to the students in nursing education. **Objectives:** In this study it was aimed to determine empathy tendency in nursing students and factors that affect empathic tendency. **Methods:** The sample of this study that is sectional and definitive consisted of 225 students who received education in Nursing Department during 2013-2014 education year in Adiyaman University School of Health. Research data was collected with Personal Information Form and Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS). **Results :** It was determined that 51.2% of the students participating in the survey were in the 20-22 age group, 65.3% were female and 44.4% of them had 9 and close friends. It was determined that the average ETS score of the nursing students was 68.2 ± 10.3 . The average ETS score of the female students was 69.3 ± 9.7 , which was statistically significant difference ($p = 0.028$) than male students (66.1 ± 11.2). The average ETS score of the students who preferred nursing was 71.1 ± 8.0 , and it was found to be statistically significantly higher than students have chosen nursing by family orientation, coincidence and other reasons ($p = 0.001$). **Conclusion:** According to the results of this study, it was seen the empathic tendencies of the nursing students are moderate and the average ETS score of the students are affected by the age, sex, place of living, number of close friends and reasons for choosing the profession.

Key words: Students, Nursing, Empathic Tendency, Affecting Factor**Introduction**

Nursing is a profession that focuses on identifying and understand the physical, social and emotional needs of individuals and achieving independence of the individual from the dependent state [1,2]. The nurses carry out their primary responsibility that the maintenance function through interpersonal relationships with patients or healthy individuals [2]. Effective communication between the nurse and the patient is an important determinant of quality of caring [3]. In the focus of this relationship, the patient's feelings, thoughts, problems, experiences, needs, goals and understanding the patient are exist [2,4]. Therefore,

empathy is accepted as an important component of a supportive relationship in providing quality patient care [5].

Empathy is the process that a person puts himself/herself in the place of someone else and looks from their score of view, understands, feels their feelings and thoughts correctly and shows them [6]. The empathic tendency is the potential of the individual to empathize; the ability to understand the patients' emotions and desire to help them, the total prosocial behaviors which are expressed as conscious and voluntary for the benefit of others [7,8,9]. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in studies of prosocial behavior and its indicators and this focus has concentrated on the concept of empathy [6,10,11,12]. Empathic abilities are the basic abilities of nursing [4,13,14] and all of the nurses must have these abilities efficiently. Because only nurses with empathic ability can understand patient and can carry out helping relationship. Empathic approach in helping relationship

Correspondence*Emine Derya İster**

Research Assistant at Adiyaman University, Turkey

E Mail: ederya@adiyaman.edu.tr

of nurses; ensures correct understanding of advisee, emotion, thought and needs therefore provides needed help. As a result, to be aware of their problems and their needs, to evaluate them, to cope with their problems and to work in order to meet their needs, to get out of the situation by growing mature they are in, namely the desired patient outcomes come into question [15]. This status means access to the purpose of nursing care [2]. When looked from this aspect, emphatic tendencies cause positive effects on patient and in reaching aimed caring results, emphatic tendency is used as a criteria [9,16].

People that have emphatic tendencies, help in higher rates to the person who they perceived in need [16,17]. In this context, for eligible nursing care, teaching professional values to students and developing communication and helping skills in nursing education is very important [6,18-21]. In a profession that gives importance to emphatic tendency such as nursing, it is expected that nurses who have higher empathy level understand the patient more and their help towards patient are better in comparison with nurses who have low level of empathy [17]. Because of this reasons in this study it was aimed to determine empathy tendency in nursing students and factors that affect emphatic tendency.

Material and Method

Study area and design

This study was conducted as cross-sectional and definitive. Study universe consisted of all students who receive education during 2013-2014 education year in Adiyaman University Vocational Health High school Nursing Education. In determined term, 380 students registered. In the study, sample choice did not carry, all universe was tried to reach. However, some students who were not in the school when data was collected, did not accept joining the study and filled data gathering tools incompletely, left outside of study and data analysis was carried out over 225 students.

Data Collection Tools

Research data was collected with Personal Information Form and Emphatic Tendency Scale. **Personal information form:** In form that prepared by researchers, 15 questions which are important in the evaluation of emphatic tendency level and investigate socio-demographic characteristics of students (age, gender, parents education, etc.) and reason why they've chosen nursing department are existed.

Emphatic Tendency Scale (ETS): In order to determine potential of developing empathy of individual, it was developed by Dökmen in 1988. The

scale consists of a total of 20 items and in a measure of the likert type of 5 (1 = completely contrary, 2 = highly contradictory, 3 = unstable, 4 = fairly appropriate, 5 = perfectly appropriate). The 8 items of the scale (3,6,7,8,11,12,13,15) are stated inverse. The highest score that can be obtained is 100, the lowest score is 20. The total score expresses the empathic tendency scores of the individuals; High scores show high empathic tendency; low scores show the empathic tendency is low. The reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.72 [22]. In this study, the cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.76.

Application

Written consent was obtained from the institution before collecting data. The purpose of research was explained to students and verbal approvals were taken. The questionnaire and the time of application of the scale are arranged according to the course schedule and applied in the classrooms. The application lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

The SPSS 17 package program was used in the evaluation. Percentage distribution in statistical analyzes, student t test in independent groups, Onewayanova, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests were used. For significance level of statistical tests $p < 0.05$ was accepted.

Results

In Table 1, the distribution according to the descriptive characteristics of the students and the reasons for choosing the profession were given. It was determined that 51.2% of the students participating in the survey were in the 20-22 age group, 65.3% were female and 94.4% were single. When the distribution of the students according to the classes they have studied is examined; 27.6% of them were nursing first class, 29.8% were nursing second class, 21.3% were nursing third class and 21.3% were nursing fourth class. When the characteristics related to families of the students were evaluated; It was determined that 83.1% of the families were elementary family, 60.4% have siblings of 4-6 numbers, 94.2% of the mothers were not working and 68.9% of the fathers were working. It was determined that 62.7% of the students lived in the province center, 54.2% of them had graduated from high school, 41.3% preferred nursing profession and 33.8% stated that they have chosen because of preference of their family. When the characteristics of the students related to the number of close friends were examined, it was determined that 44.4% of them had 9 and close friends (Table 1).

In Table 2, the distribution of the ETS score average was given according to the socio-demographic

characteristics of the students and the reasons for choosing the profession. It was determined that the factors affecting ETS score average of students were age, gender, place of living, number of close friends and preference of profession. It was determined that the marital status, class of education, family type, number of siblings, maternal working status, father working status and graduating from high school factors did not affect ETS score average of students (Table 2). The ETS score average of the students in the 17-19 age group was 70.8 ± 9.6 and it was found that it is statistically significantly higher than ETS average scores of the students aged 20-22 and older (66.8 ± 10.0 , 67.0 ± 12.1 , respectively) ($p=0.020$). The average ETS score of the female students was 69.3 ± 9.7 , which was statistically significant ($p = 0.028$) for male students (66.1 ± 11.2). The average of the students living in the village was 64.6 ± 9.4 ; The average of the students living in the district was 69.9 ± 10.8 ; The average of the students living in the province center was 68.9 ± 10.3 and it was determined that the

difference between the average score of the three groups was statistically significant ($p = 0.02$). ETS score average of students with close friends 9 and above was 70.6 ± 9.8 and it was found statistically significantly higher among students with 5-8 and 1-4 close friends compared to their ETS score averages ($p = 0.012$). It was seen that as the number of close friends increased, ETS score average of students increase. The average ETS score average of the students who preferred nursing was 71.1 ± 8.0 , and it was found to be statistically significantly higher than students have chosen by family orientation, coincidence and other reasons ($p = 0.001$). It was determined that the students who prefer to work with the profession and family orientation have higher ETS score average than the students who have chosen by chance and other reasons (Table 2). Although not specified in the table, it was determined that the average ETS score of the students was 68.2 ± 10.3 . It has been determined that the students have a minimum of 40 scores, a maximum of 93 scores.

Table 1: The descriptive characteristics of nursing students

Özellik	number/percentage (n/%)
Age	
17-19	79(35.1)
20-22	116(51.6)
23 and ↑	30(13.7)
Gender	
Female	147(65.3)
Male	78(34.7)
Marital status	
Single	213(94.7)
Married	12(5.3)
The class that studied	
First class	62(27.6)
Second class	67(29.8)
Third class	48(21.3)
Fourth class	48(21.3)
Family Type	
Nuclear family	187(83.1)
Extended family	33(14.7)
The Divorced Family	5(2.2)
Number of siblings	
1-3	45(20.0)
4-6	136(60.4)
7 and ↑	44(19.6)
Working status of mother	
Yes	13(5.8)
No	212(94.2)
Working status of father	
Yes	155(68.9)

No	70(31.1)
Place of residence	
Village	44(19.6)
Town	40(17.8)
Province	141(62.7)
Number of close friends	
1-4	51(22.7)
5-8	74(32.9)
9 and ↑	100(44.4)
Graduated High School	
Normal highschool	122(54.2)
Health vocational high school	20(8.9)
Anatolian / Science High School	83(36.9)
The reason for choosing nursing profession	
Willingly	93(41.3)
Family Orientation	76(33.8)
By chance	24(10.7)
Other Causes	32(14.2)

Table 2: The mean of empathic tendency score according to sociodemographic characteristics of nursing students

Characteristic	X±SS	Test statistic	p value
Age			
17-19	70.8±9.6	F=3.96	p=0.020
20-22	66.8±10.0		
23 and ↑	67.0±12.1		
Gender			
Female	69.3±9.7	t=2.21	p=0.028
Male	66.1±11.2		
Marital status			
Single	68.2±10.2	U=1224	p=0.82
Married	68.9±12.0		
The class that studied			
First class	68.5±8.9	F=0.41	p=0.71
Second class	67.1±11.6		
Third class	68.5±8.6		
Fourth class	69.3±11.7		
Family Type			
Nuclear family	68.0±10.5	KW=0.767	p=0.68
Extended family	69.2±9.2		
The Divorced Family	66.0±6.9		
Number of siblings			
1-3	68.8±7.7	F=0.52	p=0.85
4-6	67.9±11.0		
7 and ↑	68.5±10.4		
Working status of mother			
Yes	68.2±10.4	U=1233	p=0.83
No	68.6±9.4		

Working status of father			
Yes	67.8±9.8	t=-0.40	p=0.68
No	68.4±10.5		
Place of residence			
Village	64.6±9.4	F=3.6	p=0.02
Town	69.9±10.8		
Province	68.9±10.3		
Number of close friends			
1-4	65.6±10.7	F=4.53	p=0.012
5-8	68.3±9.9		
9 and ↑	70.6±9.8		
Graduated High School			
Normal highschool	68.0±10.6	F=0.035	p=0.96
Health vocational high school	68.4±8.0		
Anatolian / Science High School	68.4±10.5		
The reason for choosing nursing profession			
Willingly	71.1±8.0	F=6.0	p=0.001
Family Orientation	67.7±10.7		
By chance	63.1±10.9		
Other Causes	64.7±11.3		

Discussion

In this study was intended to determine the factors affecting the empathic tendencies and scores of empathic tendencies of the nursing students, the mean ETS score of the students was determined as 68.2 ± 10.3. In the study conducted by Tutuk and his colleagues with the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade nursing students, the ETS score average was 69,55, and Akıncı and Akgün's study which was conducted with the first, second, third, and fourth grades in nursing department, this average score was 71.8 and 75.9 in the study conducted by Arifoğlu and Razi with 1st grade nursing students [23-25]. The ETS score average we obtained in our study differs from the previous studies. This is due to the sample group characteristics of the studies given because in the studies the sample group consists only of female students. In addition to this, there are also studies that report similar or less than average ETS score. In the study of Yiğitbaş et al. (2013) that evaluated the empathic tendencies of health education students, average ETS score of the students in study was 66.07, ETS score average of nurses who worked with Özcan (2012) is 65.95 and Avcı et al. (2013) stated as 67.66. [6,26,27]. In conclusion, the average ETS score of our study shows that the empathic tendencies of the nursing students are moderate.

In our study, the average score of ETS varies according to the age groups of the students. However, Ozcan (2012) and Arifoğlu (2011) report that the mean ETS

score does not change according to age [25, 27]. According to the study conducted on nurses working in intensive care unit by Dizer and İyigün (2009), it is reported that the average score of the ETS score of the nurses in the 20-25 age group is higher than the other age groups, but statistically, the difference between the age groups is insignificant [28]. In this case, we can say that this situation welded from the fact that average age of the nurses in the sampling group is higher than the average age of the students and may be due to being working nurses.

In this study, it was determined that female students had a higher ETS score than male students ($p = 0.028$). Akbulut and Sağlam (2010) found that the empathic tendencies of female teachers were higher than male teachers [29]. This finding of our study is similar to the literature. Moreover, Kapıkıran (2009) reported that there is a relationship between empathic tendency and gender, in the study conducted with teacher candidates [30].

In our study, there was no significant difference between ETS score averages according to students' classifications ($p = 0.71$). Likewise, Bekmezci et al. (2015) reported that midwifery students and Mete and Gerçek (2005) stated that nursing students' ETS score averages did not differ according to grade they are in [31, 32]. Sabancıoğulları et al. (2007) score out in their study that the empathic tendencies of students which

were evaluated at the end of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years increase [33]. ($p = 0.001$). This difference can be explained by the fact that the students in the sample group of Sabancıoğulları et al.'s receive an education that based on integrated system.

In our study, it was determined that those who prefer to work as a nurse have a higher ETS score average than those who prefer with different reasons ($p = 0.001$). In the study of Çelik and Çağdaş that conducted with preschool teachers, ETS score averages of teachers that have chosen preferred profession are higher than the ones that have chosen without preferring ($p=0.001$). In addition in the same study, it was stated that emphatic tendencies of teachers who stated that they love their profession are higher than the ones who stated they don't love ($p=0.001$) [34]. Dizer and İyigün (2009) reported that ETS score averages of individuals who preferred nursing are not different than the ones who have chosen because of other reasons. However, Dizer and İyigün showed that ETS score averages of nurses who mostly/every time find that their profession proper for themselves are higher than other groups [28].

Conclusion

The empathic tendencies of the nursing students are moderate and the empathic tendencies of the students are affected by the age, sex, place of living, number of close friends and reasons for choosing the profession. In this study, the result is that marital status, class of education, family type, number of siblings, maternal working status, father working status and graduated high school factors do not affect students' empathic tendencies.

Primary aim in nursing education is the study of professional nursing applications .In addition to learning the knowledge, skills and practices which are specific to the nursing profession, students also need to adopt basic skills such as effective interpersonal relationships, empathy, helping, and counseling skills. For this reason, it is important to increase the effectiveness of courses for higher education students to identify empathic tendencies, interpersonal relationships, empathy and communication skills and to develop these skills [31]. In order to increase this activity; offer of psychodrama, didactics, modeling, art, creativity, communication and other classes as elective classes and addition the curriculum can be beneficial. In order to increase the empathic tendencies of nursing students, it is possible to develop social orientation, to organize the activities aimed at ensuring the integration of the students with each other, and to provide training on empathy and empathic tendency [6]. It may also

contribute that the sharing of study results with students strengthen motivation by increasing awareness.

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