

Mental health and its influence on empathy in health science students

Rodríguez Nogueira, Óscar; Álvarez del Barrio, Lorena; Leirós Rodríguez, Raquel;

Álvarez Álvarez, María José; Arrate Pinto Carral

Universidad de León, Spain.

Abstract

INTRODUCCIÓN: Over the past decade, there has been an increase in college students experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. Empathy, defined as the intention of the health professional, to remain in the patient's frame of reference, understanding the patient's feelings and demonstrating this understanding, is considered one of the main attributes for carrying out the therapeutic relationship.

OBJETIVOS: To describe the levels of mental health and empathy among the Health Sciences students of the Ponferrada Campus of the University of León. To analyze the influence of mental health on empathy.

METODOLOGÍA: Cross-sectional descriptive study. An ad hoc questionnaire with Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and Global Health Questionnaire - 12 questionnaires were administered to Nursing, Physiotherapy and Podiatry Degrees of the Ponferrada Campus of the University of León.

RESULTADOS: 247 students responded, 168 women (68%). women scored statistically higher ($p < 0.001$) in empathy in the four dimensions of the IRI (fantasy, perspective-taking, empathic concern and personal discomfort). 136 Students (55%) scored compatible with a possible mental disorder on the Global Health Questionnaire - 12. Of these, 107 were women (63.9%) and 29 men (36.1%), with statistically significant differences between the sexes ($p < 0.001$), with women achieving higher scores. The Global Health Questionnaire - 12 correlated statistically significantly with the component "Empathic Concern ($r = 0.3$, $p = 0.0001$) and Personal Distress ($r = 0.4$, $p < 0.001$), with no correlation in either "Fantasy" or "Perspective Taking".

CONCLUSIÓN: More than half of the health sciences students are at risk for poor mental health. This percentage increases in women. Women have greater empathy. Mental health influences the affective dimensions of empathy, so that the worse the mental health, the more personal discomfort and empathic concern can generate relationships with patients, which can alter the quality of the therapeutic relationship and the care administered.

Citation

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Keywords

Mental Health, Empathy, Therapeutic Relationship, Health Science Students.

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