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Empathy in nursing professionals of the services of a clinic in Metropolitan Lima

Empatía en profesionales de enfermería de los servicios de una clínica en Lima Metropolitana

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is one of the qualities that healthcare professionals must possess, as it allows them to improve their relationship with patients and, in turn, the care they provide. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the level of empathy among nursing professionals working in a clinic in Metropolitan Lima. This is a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study with a population of 102 nursing professionals who completed a questionnaire on sociodemographic aspects and the Jefferson Medical Empathy Scale. The results show that 26,5 % (n=27) have a low level of empathy, 25,5 % (n=26) have a moderately low level, 24,5 % (n=25) have a moderately high level, and 23,5 % (n=24) have a high level of empathy. In conclusion, training for nurses must be improved, as this will enable them to provide quality, humanized care to patients.

Keywords: Empathy; Nursing Care; Patients; Mental Health.

RESUMEN

La empatía es una de las cualidades que debe poseer los profesionales de salud, que les permite mejorar su relación con el paciente y a su vez los cuidados a realizar, por ello el objetivo de estudio es determinar la empatía en profesionales de enfermería de los servicios de una clínica de Lima Metropolitana. Es un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo-transversal, con una población de 102 profesionales de enfermería que desarrollaron un cuestionario de aspectos sociodemográficos y la Escala de Empatía Médica de Jefferson. En sus resultados, observamos que el 26,5 %(n=27) tienen un nivel bajo de empatía, 25,5 %(n=26) nivel moderado bajo, 24,5 %(n=25) nivel moderado alto y 23,5 %(n=24) nivel alto de empatía. En conclusión, se debe mejorar las capacitaciones en los enfermeros, dado que permitirá realizar cuidados de calidad y humanizados en el paciente.

Palabras clave: Empatía; Cuidados de Enfermería; Pacientes; Salud Mental.

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is a basic principle of quality for healthcare professions, given that they are exposed to stressful and emotionally intense situations in the workplace, which makes them more vulnerable to problems of work-

related stress and emotional exhaustion, which has led to alterations in their physical and emotional state. [1]

It is difficult for nurses to establish empathetic communication with patients in busy and stressful work environments, where opportunities to deal with patients are not optimal. [2]

The lack or low levels of empathy depend on several reasons involving the conditions surrounding the nurse; the most important are the number of healthcare users with whom this professional has to deal, the lack of adequate time due to the high workload, the therapeutic approach, the training culture in health faculties, and the lack of training in empathy. [2,3]

However, empathy is closely related to the nursing care process and has an important role to play in establishing a positive relationship between the nurse and the patient, as well as in providing favorable nursing care. [4] Nevertheless, nurses who demonstrate understanding of their patients' experiences of illness will see their relationship improve. Empathy is the essence of all nurse-patient interactions and should be seen as an important clinical indicator for providing high-quality nursing care. [5,6]

In addition to having positive consequences for the patient, empathy is associated with factors such as respect, social behavior, ethical reasoning, and a positive attitude toward patients, the ability to obtain a good medical history, and the promotion of clinical outcomes. Furthermore, the greater the nurse's capacity for empathy, the fewer medication errors, the greater the patient satisfaction, and the greater the adherence to treatment. [7,8]

Therefore, patients who encounter more empathetic behavior experience less anxiety, better self-concept, and less depression and hostility. Empathetic behaviors also have positive effects on nurses, including providing more effective care and experiencing less mental stress and job burnout. On the other hand, if empathy is low in a professional relationship with a patient, it can disrupt diagnosis, treatment, and patient care. [9,10]

In a study conducted in Iran with 112 nursing participants, the results showed that nursing professionals working in mental health, emergency, and intensive care units have high and medium levels of empathy. The study concluded that nursing professionals tend to have high levels of empathy when they interact closely with patients. [11]

In a study conducted in China with 539 participating nurses, the results showed that the participants had high levels of empathy and tended to experience low levels of work-related stress. The study concluded that being in constant communication and having strategies to reduce stress enabled nurses to provide adequate care to patients. [12]

In a study conducted in Spain with 338 nursing professionals, the results showed that 51 % of nursing professionals had high empathy for the humanized care they provided. The study concluded that cognitive empathy, emotional intelligence, and stress management improved nurses' mood and the quality of their care. [13]

Therefore, the research objective is to determine empathy in nursing professionals working in a clinic in Metropolitan Lima.

METHOD
Research type and design
The study is quantitative in nature and uses a descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental methodology. [14]

Population
The total population consists of 102 nurses working in the services of a clinic in Metropolitan Lima.

Inclusion Criteria
- Participants who have worked at the clinic for more than three months.
- Participants who work in the emergency and hospitalization areas
- Participants who have voluntarily agreed to participate in the study

Technique and Instrument
The technique used was a survey covering sociodemographic aspects and the Jefferson Empathy Scale (JES) data collection instrument.

The JEPSI instrument comprises 20 items grouped into 3 dimensions: perspective taking (10 items), caring compassion (7 items), and ability to put oneself in the patient's place (3 items). The responses will have two significant frames on a Likert scale for each of the items: if you disagree, the score is 0, and if you agree, the score is 7, with a score ranging from 20 to 140. A score between 20 and 83 refers to low empathy, between 84 and 91 refers to low moderate empathy, between 92 and 97 refers to high moderate empathy, and between 98 and 140 refers to high empathy. [15,16]

The instrument was validated using the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test, which yielded a coefficient of 0,815 (KMO > 0,8), and Bartlett's sphericity test yielded significant results (Approx. X^2 = 7767,213; gl = 160 Sig.= 0,000).

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, obtaining a score of 0,625 (α > 0,6)

for the 20 items of the instrument, which allows us to determine that the instrument is reliable.

Place and Application of the Instrument

Prior coordination was carried out with each nursing professional so that they could complete the questionnaire for the research, in addition to providing them with information so that they had the necessary knowledge of what was being covered in the research.
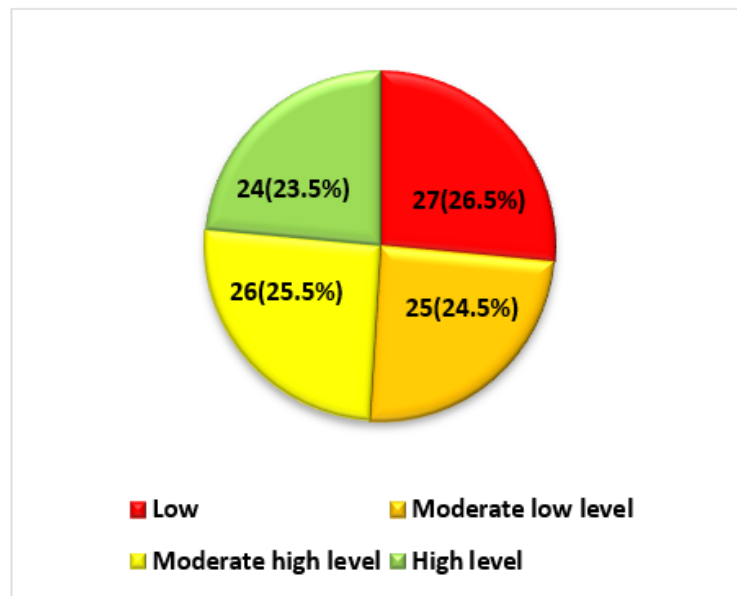
RESULTS

Figure 1. Empathy in nursing professionals in the services of a clinic in Metropolitan Lima

In figure 1, we can see that 26,5 % of nursing professionals have a low level of empathy, 24,5 % have a moderate-low level of empathy, 25,5 % have a moderate-high level of empathy, and 23,5 % have a high level of empathy.
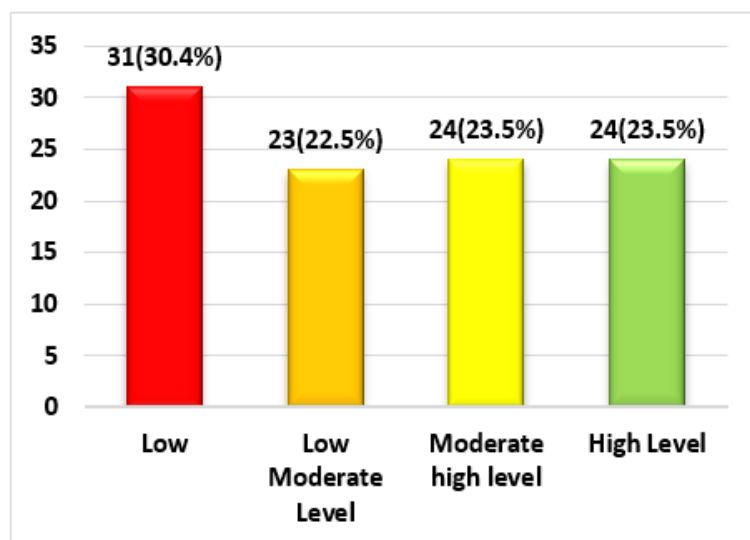

Figure 2. Empathy in nursing professionals in terms of perspective-taking in the services of a clinic in Metropolitan Lima

In figure 2, we can see that, with regard to the perspective-taking dimension, 30,4 % of nursing professionals have a low level of empathy, 22,5 % have a moderately low level, 23,5 % have a moderately high level, and 23,5 % have a high level of empathy.
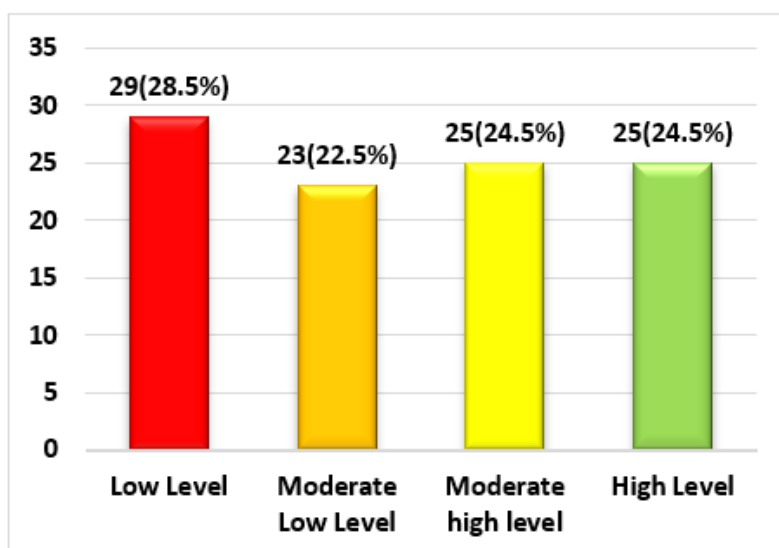
Figure 3. Empathy in nursing professionals in terms of compassionate care in a clinic in Metropolitan Lima

In figure 3, we can see that, with regard to the dimension of caring with compassion, 28,5 % of nursing professionals have a low level of empathy, 22,5 % have a moderately low level, 24,5 % have a moderately high level, and 24,5 % have a high level of empathy.
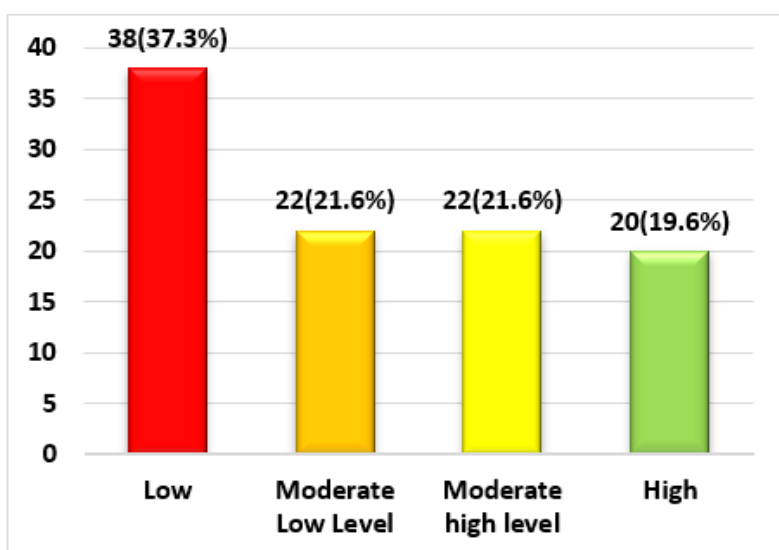

Figure 4. Empathy among nursing professionals in terms of their ability to empathize with patients at a clinic in Metropolitan Lima

In figure 4, we can see that, with regard to the dimension of ability to put oneself in the patient's place, 37,3 % of nursing professionals have a low level of empathy, 21,6 % have a moderately low level, 21,6 % have a moderately high level, and 19,6 % have a high level of empathy.

DISCUSSION

This research topic seeks to identify the relationship between nurses' empathy and patients, given that empathy improves the quality of patient care, making the nurse-patient relationship more meaningful and generating trust in the patient.

As for the level of empathy among nurses, a low level predominated. We interpret this as meaning that during the coronavirus pandemic, patient saturation and demand rates have affected the well-being of all healthcare professionals, especially nurses, given that environmental factors can influence the empathy of nursing professionals. However, understanding the role of empathy is particularly important in geographical contexts where professionals have to meet everyday social needs with limited resources, which creates greater stress for them, as is the case in many public health institutions in Latin American countries.

In terms of its dimensions, professionals have low empathy. We can interpret this as meaning that, given the difficult situation caused by the pandemic, the care to be provided due to the high demand from patients is compromised, although nurses who show high empathy generate empathic skills which, as a protective measure against physical and mental exhaustion resulting from the workload, Thanks to this process, personal relationships and communication with patients are not compromised. However, empathy during care in the midst of the pandemic has been of great help to nursing professionals, as empathic abilities improved learning and the ability to promote community skills in nurses, thus allowing for better patient care.

The results were obtained in the midst of the pandemic, where the number of patients treated and the extreme care situation to prevent infection must have influenced these results, in addition to separating patients from their families due to health safety measures.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that continuous training should be provided to nursing professionals, as this will enable them to provide more humane and, in turn, higher quality care.

It is concluded that strategies should be sought to minimize work overload among nursing professionals so that they can improve the quality of patient care.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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