



Correlation Between Academic Stress And Empathy Decline In Preclinical Alfaisal Medical Students

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is a trait that doctors must possess for quality patient care and interaction. Yet throughout their medical years, some research studies suggest that students experience a decline in their empathy levels. Most studies attribute this decline to the dramatic shift into clinical years and its overall harsh structure. However, in this cross-sectional study, we will investigate the apparent decline of empathy in Alfaisal medical students of pre-clinical years in relation to their academic stress. The results of this study will bridge the gap in literature, better our understanding of the "root" of the erosion of empathy early on in students' medical careers, as well as help improve doctor-patient interaction and quality care.

SIGNIFICANCE

Empathy erosion is a common predicament in the world of medicine today and its detrimental impact on medical students earlier on in life is often overlooked. Many a time, empathy shown by physicians is what gains patient compliance as it reverberates in them a feeling of being acknowledged and valued. Furthermore, the acceptance that doctors receive for being empathetic may contribute in reducing physician burnout as well. In the context of medical students, empathy is a crucial element in their future careers. Therefore, critical factors like stress that may impede its development must be identified so that it may be curbed and necessary lifestyle changes can be applied.

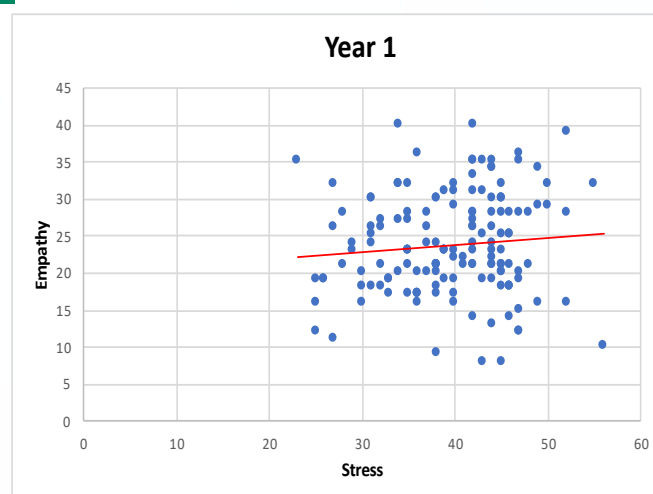


Fig:1 Empathy & Stress in Year 1 students

METHODOLOGY

- A 25-item anonymous survey consisting of *Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale* and *Toronto's Empathy Questionnaire* was distributed.
- Responses were scored on a 5- point Likert scale. Participants were asked how often they felt a certain way.
- The target population included first, second and third-year Alfaisal medical students.



OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the level of empathy in preclinical Alfaisal medical students
- Evaluate the level of academic stress in preclinical Alfaisal medical students
- Investigate the correlation between the academic stress and empathy of students

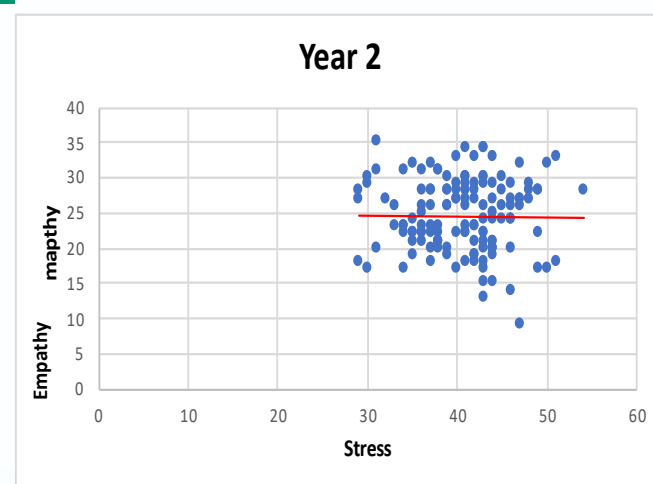


Fig 2: Empathy & Stress in Year 2 students

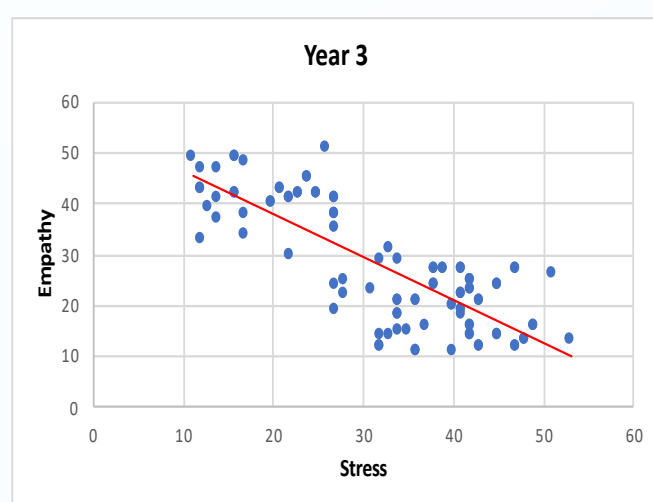


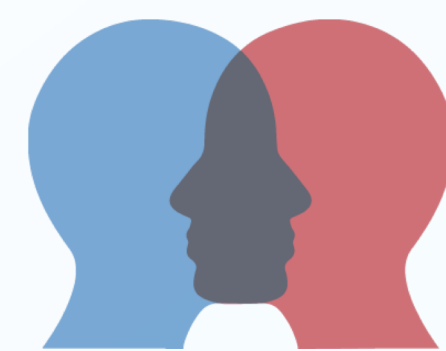
Fig 3: Empathy & Stress in Year 3 students

RESULTS

391 respondents participated. An increase in average stress level was noticed as we approached clinical years. Empathy levels were found to be higher among Year 1 and 2 students when compared to Year 3. Year 1 (152 participants) showed a slight positive correlation between empathy and stress levels ($p=0.244$, $r=0.095$). Year 2 (139 participants) showed a slight negative correlation ($p=0.833$, $r=-0.018$). Moreover, a strong negative correlation was found among Year 3 students (100 participants) ($p=0.001$, $r=-0.801$).

CONCLUSION

Empathy erosion escalates with increase in stress as students' progress to higher years in medical school. It can be deduced that stress disengages students from the real world and hence impedes their capability to comprehend the emotional state of others. This drift can be attributed to the lack of human contact and prolonged hours of studying.



References:

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