

# Assessment of Empathic Ability and Factors Affecting Empathetic Behavior Regarding Care of Patients with Mental Illness Among Staff Nurses Working in the Selected Government Psychiatric Hospitals, Kolkata

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## ABSTRACT

A descriptive study was carried out to assess the empathic ability and factors affecting empathetic behavior regarding care of patients with mental illness among staff nurses working in the selected Government psychiatric hospitals, Kolkata. Health Belief Model of Rosenstoch and Becker (1975) were adopted as a conceptual framework. 96 staff nurses were selected by convenience sampling from Pavlov Mental Hospital, Kolakata-46 and Lumbini Park Mental Hospital, Kolkata-39. Paper/pencil test was used for data collection. The study findings based on descriptive and inferential statistical revealed that male staff nurses had high empathic ability than female staff nurses (M = 20%, F = 16%) and factors affecting empathetic behavior revealed that 53% had high level emotional exhaustion, 53 % had high level of depersonalization and 4% high level personal accomplishment. Calculated 'r' for empathic ability with depersonalization is 0.232 and the related 't' values of is 2.29 at df (95); which is significantly associated. There were significant associations between level of empathic ability and type of family (10.8527) and number of family members (14.2415) at df (1)/<0.05 level. Recommendations for future studies are large sample size, replicated with professional and paramedical staff, on specific age groups of

student nurses and staff nurses, in different settings.

**Key words:** Empathic ability and Factors affecting empathic behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Generally empathy defined as the ability to assume another individual's perspective and share perceived or reactionary emotion. Empathy among health workers is associated with superior worker-patient relationships; which ensure greater patient well-being and reduced symptom severity. In empathy-induced situations, treatment improves. Importantly, mental health workers are often unaware of the restrictions in their empathic proficiency and thus may not fully employ empathy as a tool for improving patient health, safety and prognosis. In fact, among physicians, empathic behavior towards the mentally ill may be declining, due in part to high work demands and levels of "burnout". Conceivably, by increasing empathy among health workers, it will be possible to blunt the negative consequences of mental health indictment, and ultimately enhance the

standard of life of individuals with mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

Ahn S et al.<sup>2</sup> conducted a cross-sectional study on factors influencing mental health nurses in providing person-centered care 166 staff nurses working in the psychiatric hospitals of Korea in 2022 to identify the factors affecting mental health nurses in performing humanized care to patients. Online questionnaire on moral sensitivity, attitudes toward people with mental illness and person-centered care were used for data collection from participants. And related t-test and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used. Results revealed that moral sensitivity was a significant factor correlating with the provision and perception of person-centered care. The predictor variables for the provision and perception of person-centered care ( $R^2 = 0.247$ ) were moral sensitivity ( $\beta = 0.33$ ), having a professional qualification ( $\beta = 0.19$ ) and marital status ( $\beta = 0.18$ ).

Patrick P<sup>3</sup> conducted a descriptive study to assess the empathic ability among 90 staff nurses towards psychiatric clients of NIMHANS, Bangalore in March 2006. Result revealed that overall mean empathy score obtained by staff nurses was 99.66 and median score was 99.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research Approach:** Quantitative research approach

**Research Design:** Descriptive research design

**Research Setting:** Pavlov Mental Hospital, Kolkata and Lumbini Park Mental Hospital, Kolkata

## RESULTS

**Table 1 Frequency and percentage distribution of staff nurses in terms of their level of empathic ability n=96 (M 41+F55)**

Level of empathic ability	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)	Male(41)	Female (55)
Below average	79 (M = 33, F=46)	82%	80%	84%
High	9 (M =8, F=9)	18%	20%	16%

(i) M= Male, F= Female, (ii) Below average empathy  $\leq 45$ , high empathy  $>45$

**Sampling Technique:** Non-probability consecutive sampling technique

**Sample Size:** 96 no. of staff nurses

**Description of the tool:** Tool I: Semi-structured questionnaire on demographic data

Tool II: Standardized TEQ scale by Spreng et al.

Tool III: Standardized Maslach burnout inventory scale by Maslach C et al.

**Data collection method:**

Paper and pencil test

**Plan of data analysis:** Descriptive & inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

## STATISTICAL METHODS

The data obtained from the subjects were tabulated and analyzed in terms of the objectives of the study using descriptive and inferential statistics. The result showed that Depending on the obtained scores of empathic ability the mean, median and standard deviation are 39.27, 39 and 5.27. The related 't' values of calculated correlation coefficient was 2.29\* where table value of t (95) was 1.6610 that indicates statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance. There was a significant association with the selected demographic variable type of family and number of family members 10.8527 and 14.2415 at df (1) are significant at less than 0.05 level.

Table 1 shows that 79 staff nurses (M=33, F=46) had below average level of empathic ability and 17 staff nurses (M=8, F=9) had high level of empathic ability. 80% male staff nurses had below average level empathic

ability where as 84% female had. And 20% male staff nurses had high empathic ability where as 16% female had. So, it can be concluded that, male staff nurses had high level of empathic ability

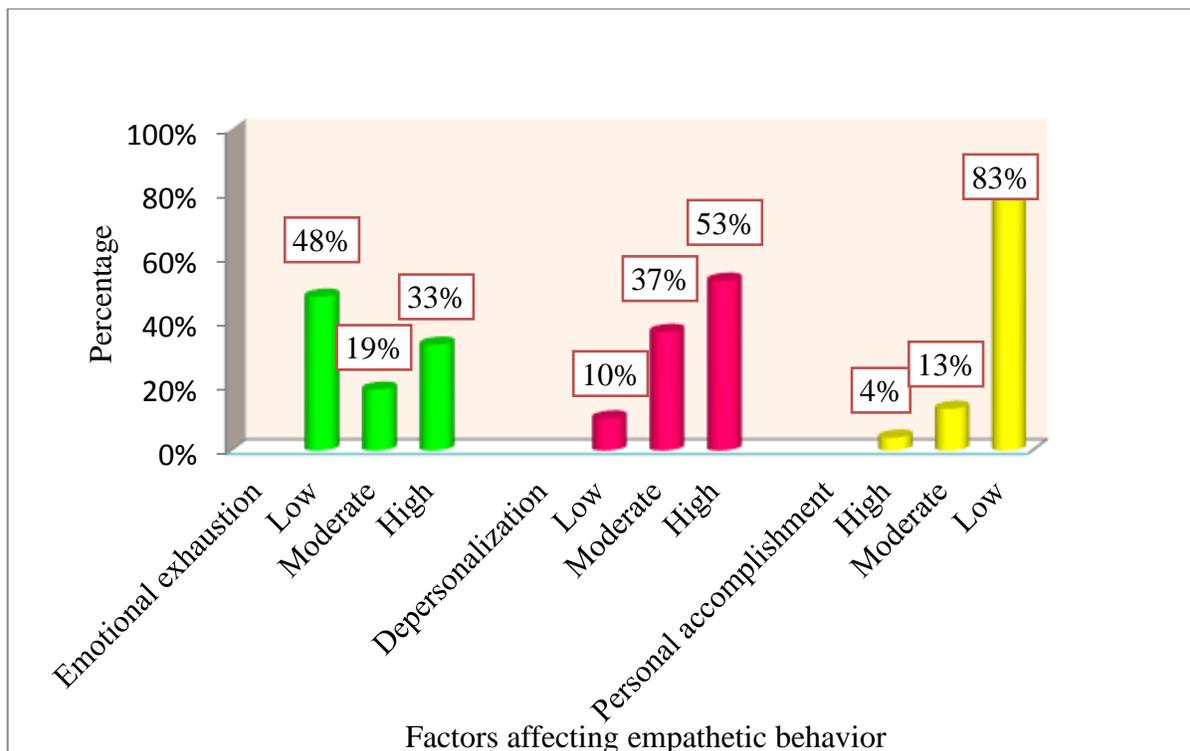


Figure 1 clustered cylinder column diagram showing area wise factors affecting empathetic behavior of the participants

Figure 1 shows that 48 % of them had low level, 19% had moderate level and 33% had high level of emotional exhaustion. 53 % of them had high level, 37% had moderate and 10% had low level of depersonalization affecting empathetic behavior. The participants who had high level of emotional

exhaustion and depersonalization, they had low level of empathic ability. And 83 % of staff nurses had low level of personal accomplishment which causes also low level of empathic ability in the participants, 13% had moderate level and 4% high level of personal accomplishment.

Table 2 Mean score wise ranking of factors affecting empathetic behavior of participated staff nurses on section A emotional exhaustion domain n= 96

Sl no	Item	Total mean Score	Rank
1.1.	I feel emotionally drained by my work.	2.53	6 <sup>th</sup>
1.2.	Working with people all day long requires a great deal of effort.	4.23	2 <sup>nd</sup>
1.3.	I feel like my work is breaking me down.	2.56	4 <sup>th</sup>
1.4.	I feel frustrated by my work.	2.54	5 <sup>th</sup>
1.5.	I feel I work too hard at my job	4.26	1 <sup>st</sup>
1.6.	It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people.	2.86	3 <sup>rd</sup>
1.7.	I feel like I'm at the end of my tether	2.35	7 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 shows that for item no 1.5 of section A (Working too hard at job) the participants had highest mean score i.e, 4.26 ranked first. Item no 1.7 (Feeling at the end of tether) they had lowest mean score 2.35 and ranked 7<sup>th</sup>. So, it can be concluded that these items 1.2

(working with people long requiring a great deal of effort), 1.6 (Stressing too much to work in direct contact with people) of emotional exhaustion domain are affecting more the empathetic behavior of the staff nurses.

**Table 3 Mean score wise ranking of factors affecting empathetic behavior among participated staff nurses on section B depersonalization domain n= 96**

Sl no	Item	Total mean Score	Rank
2.1	I feel I deal with my team/ colleagues impersonally, as if they are objects.	2.26	7 <sup>th</sup>
2.2	I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at work	4.14	1 <sup>st</sup>
2.3	I have the impression that my team/ colleagues make me responsible for some of their problems.	2.91	3 <sup>rd</sup>
2.4	I am at the end of my patience at the end of my work day.	2.70	4 <sup>th</sup>
2.5	I really don't care about what happens to some of my team/ colleagues.	2.34	6 <sup>th</sup>
2.6	I have become more insensitive to people in the workplace.	3.17	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2.7	I'm afraid that this job is making me uncaring.	2.60	5 <sup>th</sup>

Table 3 represents for that item no 2.2 of section B (Feeling tired when get up in the morning to face another working day) the participants had highest mean score i.e. 4.14 and item no 2.5 (I really don't care about what happens to some of the team/

colleagues) they had lowest mean score 2.34. So, it can be concluded that item no 2.2, 2.6 (Becoming more insensitive to people in the workplace) of depersonalization domain were affecting the staff nurses empathetic behavior mostly.

**Table 4 Mean score wise ranking of factors affecting empathetic behavior of the participants on section C personal accomplishment domain n= 96**

Sl No	Item	Total mean Score	Rank
3.1	I accomplish many worthwhile things in this job.	5.56	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3.2	I feel full of energy	5.42	4 <sup>th</sup>
3.3	I am easily able to understand what my team/colleagues feel.	5.43	3 <sup>rd</sup>
3.4	I look after my team/colleagues problems very effectively.	5.34	8 <sup>th</sup>
3.5	In my work, I handle emotional problems very calmly.	5.37	5 <sup>th</sup>
3.6	Through my work, I feel that I have a positive influence on people.	5.35	7 <sup>th</sup>
3.7	I am easily able to create a relaxed atmosphere with my team/colleagues.	5.36	6 <sup>th</sup>
3.8	I feel refreshed when I have been close to my team/ colleagues at work.	5.7	1 <sup>st</sup>

Table 4 shows that for item no 3.8 (Feeling refreshed when being closed to the team/ colleagues at work) of section C the participants had the highest mean score 5.7 got 1<sup>st</sup> ranked and item no 3.4 (Looking after the team/colleagues problems very effectively) they had lowest mean score 5.34 got 8<sup>th</sup> rank. Hence it can be concluded that item no 3.8, 3.1 (accomplishing many worthwhile things in this job) and 3.3 of personal accomplishment domain were affecting staff nurses empathetic behavior more than the others items from this domain.

## DISCUSSION

79 staff nurses (M=80%, F=84%) had below average empathic ability and 17 staff nurses (M=20%, F=16%) had high level of empathic ability. So, it can be concluded that, male staff nurses had high level of empathic ability. According to Sathaporn K et al.<sup>4</sup> conducted a study on factors associated with the improvement of the empathy levels among medical students in 2020. They found that there was female 56.2% and reported 57.1% below-average level of empathy with a median score of 44. The gender average of proportions of below- average level of

empathy among male and female participants was 66.3% and 50.4% respectively.

33% had high level and 19% had moderate level and of emotional exhaustion.

53 % of them had high level, 37% had moderate level of depersonalization.

4% high level and 13% had moderate level of personal accomplishment. So, it concluded that high level of personal accomplishment indicates that low level of factors affecting empathetic behavior.

Lasebikan OV. et al.<sup>5</sup> (2012) conducted a study on Burnout among nurses in a Nigerian general hospital: Prevalence and associated factors, they identified that high level of burnout in 39.1% of the respondents in the area of emotional exhaustion (EE), 29.2% in the area of depersonalization and 40.0% in the area of reduced personal accomplishment.

Depending on the obtained scores of empathic ability the mean, median and standard deviation are 39.27, 39 and 5.27; and depending on obtained scores of factors affecting empathetic behavior, section A (emotional exhaustion) are 21.34, 18 and 11.76; section B (depersonalization) are 20.13, 13.5 and 14.72; and section C (personal accomplishment) are 43.56, 45 and 5.72 respectively. Correlation coefficients between empathic ability and factors affecting empathetic behavior in 3 domains are 0.147, 0.232 which are weak and 0.032 that gives interpretation of moderate positive associations respectively. And the related 't' value are 1.44, 2.29\* and 0.31 that indicated there is significant association between level of empathic ability and depersonalization.

Sanchez RD et al.<sup>6</sup> conducted a descriptive study on empathy, burnout and attitudes towards mental illness among 750 Spanish mental health nurses in 2019. They found positive correlation between empathy and emotional exhaustion ( $r= 0.204$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), depersonalization ( $r= 0.179$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and with the personal accomplishment dimension of

burnout a negative relation was observed ( $r= -0.072$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). These results mean that high empathy is associated with the high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In this present study the calculated chi square values for type of family and number of family members 10.8527 and 14.2415 respectively at df (1) and  $<0.05$  level; which are significantly associated.

In this present study, it is evident that the calculated chi square values between level of empathic ability with type of family and number of family member are 10.8527 and 14.2415 at df (1) and  $<0.05$  level; which are significant.

## **CONCLUSION**

From this study, it is shown that male staff nurses had high empathic ability than female staff nurses. The participants' empathic ability with factors affecting empathetic behavior in three domains (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment) had positive weak associations and directly proportional. Further it can be interpreted that in factors affecting empathetic behavior, high level of personal accomplishments indicates high empathic ability of staff nurses. As empathic ability among staff nurses and factors affecting empathetic behavior (depersonalization) are significantly associated, it is concluded that if the staff nurses became depersonalized by keeping aside others' aspects and be more emotionally stable that they can provide patients care more empathetically. As level of empathic ability and the selected demographic variables like type of family and number of family member are significantly associated, so it can be concluded that nuclear families and with a more number of family members the staff nurses have more empathic ability.

## **Declaration by Authors**

**Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was

taken from the concerned authorities of the office and informed consent was obtained from the samples.

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