

**Nursing Education Research Conference 2020**  
**Effect of Structured Empathy Education on Empathy Competency of Undergraduate Nursing Interns: A Quasi-Experimental Study**

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**Background:** Empathy is a crucial element in building a positive relationship between nurses and patients. Recent research indicates that the empathy level of nursing students declines as they progress through their nursing studies or practice with more clinical experience. A number of teaching strategies have been used to improve nursing students' empathy competence level. However, little is known about how best to teach empathy to senior nursing students.

**Purpose:** To implement a structured empathy educational program as developed from the Delphi technique, as well as to evaluate its effects on empathy competence among undergraduate nursing interns.

**Methods:** This was a quasi-experimental study. A convenient sample of 118 undergraduate nursing interns was recruited from an affiliated teaching hospital in Wuhan, Central Part of China between Jan 2018 to Mar 2018, who were assigned to either the intervention or the control group based on their own choice. Participants in the intervention group had received a 2-week, 12-hour structured empathy educational program (each week 2 sessions, each session 3 hours). The Jefferson Scale of Empathy-Health Providers (JSE-HPs) was used to assess students' empathy competence level before and after the intervention.

**Results:** Independent samples t-test showed the scores of empathy competence level in the intervention group were significantly higher than those in the control group ( $127.65 \pm 13.81$  vs.  $114.62 \pm 13.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) after the intervention. Three domains of empathy competence level were also higher after the two weeks' training in the intervention group than the control group, including perspective taking ( $12.81 \pm 1.83$  vs.  $11.31 \pm 2.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), compassionate care ( $45.21 \pm 5.11$  vs.  $41.53 \pm 5.26$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and standing in the patient's shoes ( $50.60 \pm 6.12$  vs.  $44.38 \pm 7.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** This modified empathy training could improve the empathy competence of undergraduate nursing interns, which may provide a validated paradigm for empathy training in other nursing schools. Further studies on longitudinal changes in empathy performance and transference to clinical performance are suggested.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Empathy training, Nursing education and Undergraduate nursing interns

**Abstract Summary:**

We examined the effects of a designed structured empathy educational program of undergraduate nursing interns on their empathy competence. The results showed a positive influence on their empathy competence, which fills the gaps in this field and provides a validated paradigm for empathy training in other nursing schools.

### **References:**

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Zhang is an Associate Professor at the School of Health of Wuhan University, Wuhan, China. The main research areas include the theoretical construction of nursing, management of chronic disease and health services, continuous nursing and empathic nursing. Dr. Zhang has published around 50 articles within the past 5 years and received funding from the Health Commission of Hubei Province, Florida Association of Neonatal Nurse Practitioner (FANNP), and Wuhan University Research Funding for Intelligent Scholars.

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