

# Empathy, Dementia Attitudes, and Dementia Pain Attitudes of Nursing Students in Korea

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## Purpose

In Korea, 10% of older adults have dementia, and this percentage is expected to increase very rapidly. Dementia patients are suffering from pain associated with various diseases. Especially, patients with cognitive impairment are difficult to express about pain. Empathy ability correlates with caring for patients with pain, as well as higher sensitivity to pain response. Research on nursing students' attitude toward dementia and pain attitudes in dementia patients is very limited. No studies have examined the associations between empathy and attitude toward dementia and pain attitudes of nursing students. This cross-sectional quantitative study aimed to assess the attitudes toward dementia and pain attitudes in dementia patients of nursing students in Korea and examine associations between empathy, the attitudes toward dementia and pain attitudes of nursing students.

## Methods

A total of 362 nursing students (179 Year 1 and 2 students – no clinical experience and 183 Year 3 and 4 students – clinical experience) completed a questionnaire that included demographic information, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Dementia Attitudes Scale (DAS), and pain attitudes in dementia patients scale. Data analyses included descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and t-tests.

## Results

There were statistically significant differences in attitude toward dementia ( $t=-2.854$   $p=.005$ ) between the Year 1 and 2 students ( $M=87.02$ ,  $SD=12.10$ ) and the Year 3 and 4 students ( $M=90.54$ ,  $SD=11.34$ ). Pain attitudes in dementia patients were significantly lower ( $t= -4.50$   $p<.001$ ) in the Year 1 and 2 students ( $M=27.46$ ,  $SD=2.48$ ) than in that of the Year 3 and 4 students ( $M=28.70$ ,  $SD=2.73$ ). There were no difference in empathy between the two groups (Table 1). For the Year 1 and 2 students, empathy was positively correlated with attitude toward dementia, but the correlation between empathy and pain attitudes was not statistically significant. For Year 3 and 4 students, empathy, attitude toward dementia and pain attitudes were positively correlated, and the correlations were significant (Table 2).

Table 1. Empathy, Dementia Attitudes, and Dementia Pain Attitudes in Patients with Dementia

	(N=362)		t	p
	1 and 2 (no clinical experience)	3 and 4 (clinical experience)		
	n=179	n=183		
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		
PT	17.72±3.55	18.24±3.70	-1.37	.170
FS	18.15±4.71	19.07±4.25	-1.95	.052
EC	18.74±3.86	18.69±3.80	0.10	.914
PD	15.17±4.03	14.94±4.10	0.53	.959
DAS	87.02±12.10	90.54±11.34	-2.85	.005
Dementia Pain Attitudes	27.46±2.48	28.70±2.73	-4.50	<.001

DAS: Dementia Attitude Scale, PT: Perspective Taking, FS: Fantasy, EC: Empathic Concern, PD: Personal Distress

Table 2. Association between Attitude of Pain in Patients with Dementia, Attitude toward Dementia, and Empathy

	(N=362)	
	Year 1 and 2 Dementia Pain Attitude (n=179)	Year 3 and 4 Dementia Pain Attitude (n=183)
DAS	.263 (<.001)	.251 (<.001)
PT_IRI	.061 (.420)	.153 (.0390)
FS_IRI	-.108 (.150)	.186 (.012)
EC_IRI	.012 (.873)	.159 (.031)
PD_IRI	-.069 (.361)	-.028 (.703)

DAS: Dementia Attitude Scale, PT: Perspective Taking, FS: Fantasy, EC: Empathic Concern, PD: Personal Distress

## Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that empathy, attitude toward dementia and pain attitudes in dementia patients are the important care provider attributes that can to be enhanced by nursing students' clinical practicum experience.