



Empathetic Attitudes and Violence Management Skills in Nursing Students: Relationships and Outcomes

Seher Çevik Aktura^{1*}, Hanife Çelik²

¹ Department of Fundamental of Nursing, Faculty of Health Science, Fırat University, Elazığ, Türkiye

seherrcvk@gmail.com,
ror.org/05teb7b63

² Department of Fundamental of Nursing, Health services vocational school, Bingöl University, Bingöl, Türkiye

hanifecelik997@gmail.com,
ror.org/03hx84x94

* Corresponding Author

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Objective: The study aimed to examine the relationship between empathic tendency and violence management competence in clinical practice among nursing students.

Materials and Method: This correlational study was conducted among nursing students enrolled in the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year at a university in the eastern region of Türkiye between March 2024 and June 2024. The study population consisted of nursing students (N=812) enrolled in the spring semester in academic year. The sample size was determined to be 287 students using OpenEpi version 3 "Sample Size Calculation for a Known Population" with an effect size of 80% and a confidence interval of 95%. Data were collected using a personal information form, the Empathic Tendency Scale and the Violence Management Competence Scale for Nursing Students in Clinical Practice.

Results: The study found that the mean score of nursing students on the Clinical Violence Management Skills Scale was 93.72 ± 27.03 (28, 140), while the mean score on the Empathic Tendency Scale was 65.12 ± 8.52 (41, 91). A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the mean score on the Empathic Tendency Scale and both the overall mean score and the sub-dimensions of the Violence Management Competence Scale ($P < 0.001$, $P < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study concluded that nursing students have above-average levels of empathic tendency and violence management competence in clinical practice. It was observed that as students' empathic tendencies increased, their competence in managing violence in clinical settings also improved.

Keywords: Clinical practice, Empathetic tendency, Nursing student, Violence management

1. INTRODUCTION

Empathy is a critical component of effective patient care, supporting trust and communication between healthcare professionals and patients.^{1,2,3} In nursing, empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share a patient's feelings, which promotes compassionate care and improves patient outcomes. Higher levels of empathy in nurses are associated with better patient care and increased job satisfaction.⁴ The promotion of empathy in nursing education is essential to equip students with the skills necessary to deal with patients with complex interactions and emotional challenges.⁵

Workplace violence is a significant issue in nursing, with incidents ranging from verbal abuse

to physical assault. Nursing students are particularly at risk as they are often in vulnerable situations. A survey of nursing students found that they were exposed to various forms of violence, including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual abuse, mainly from patients and their family members. Such experiences can have emotional and psychological consequences, damaging students' self-confidence and affecting their professional identity and self-esteem.^{5,6,7} Therefore, effective management of violence is an important skill that nursing students need to develop. The ability to calmly and effectively manage violent situations can prevent escalation and ensure the safety of both healthcare workers and patients.^{8,9}

Empathic attitudes can influence how nursing students perceive and respond to violent situations. Empathy can help nurses understand the underlying emotions and causes of aggression in patients, thereby de-escalating stressful situations.^{10,11} In addition, an empathic approach may reduce the likelihood of violence by providing a safer and more supportive environment. Structural equation modelling suggests that higher levels of empathy in nurses are associated with greater moral sensitivity and better management of ethical dilemmas.¹² Studies have reported that greater empathy in nursing students leads to better care and higher patient satisfaction.^{10,12}

Empathy, a critical component of nursing, has a significant impact on the quality of patient care and the overall nursing environment. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the empathic attitudes of nursing students, particularly in relation to their ability to manage situations involving violence. Understanding how empathy influences violence management is particularly important given the prevalence of workplace violence among nurses. Given the complex and often stressful environments in which nurses work, empathy and the ability to manage violence are fundamental skills. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between empathic tendencies and violence management competence in clinical practice among nursing students.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Type of study

This study was conducted as a descriptive and correlational study to determine the relationship between the level of empathic tendency and violence management competence in clinical practice among nursing students.

2.2. Place and time of the study

The study was conducted between March 2024 and June 2024 with nursing students who were studying in the spring semester of 2024-2025 in the nursing department of a university in the east of Türkiye.

2.3. Study population and sample

The population of the study consisted of nursing students (N=812) studying in the spring semester of 2024-2025 in the nursing department of a university in eastern Türkiye. As all students were involved in clinical practice during this period, all students were accepted as the population. In the power analysis using OpenEpi Version-3 "Sample Selection with Known Universe", the sample was determined to be 287 students with an effect size of 80% and a confidence interval of 95%. Inclusion criteria: Nursing students aged 18 years or older, studying in the Faculty of Nursing, and without communication problems were included. Exclusion criteria: not volunteering for the study, missing data.

2.4. Data collection

The data of the study were collected using the Personal Information Form, the Empathic Tendency Scale and the Violence Management Competence Scale for Nursing Students in Practice Areas, which included the socio-demographic characteristics of the students and their exposure to violence. These forms were prepared by the researchers using Google Form and sent online to the students, who were contacted via their official email addresses. The questionnaires took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Personal Information Form: This form was designed by the researchers to inquire about the socio-demographic information of the students and their exposure to violence. The form contains a total of 5 questions asking about age, gender, marital status, whether they had ever experienced violence while providing care and the type of violence they had experienced.

Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS): Developed by Dökmen (1988) to measure an individual's emotional sensitivity. The scale contains 20 items related to empathic tendency and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Positive empathic sentences are scored between 1 and 5, while negative empathic sentences are scored by reverse coding (reverse items are added). In Dökmen's (1988) validity and reliability study, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.91. In the present study, the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the

empathic tendency scale was calculated to be 0.85. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 100 and the lowest score is 20. High scores on the scale indicate that individuals have positive empathic abilities.¹³

Violence Management Competence Scale for Nursing Students: The scale was developed by Lu and colleagues in 2021.¹⁴ The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Karabey et al. in 2022 and the Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.88. This scale was developed to help students understand their competencies in experiencing and managing violence in clinical practice and to identify and assess their educational needs. The five-point Likert scale consists of 28 items and four sub-dimensions: "post-incident recovery" (1-10), "violence information management" (11-19), "violence intervention and interaction" (20-25) and "violence intervention" (26-28). The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 28 and the highest score is 140. An increase in the total score indicates an increase in the level of violence management competence of nursing students.¹⁵ In this study, the Cronbach alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.97.

2.5. Data analysis

The data for this research is based on the statistical analysis of the survey results collected through Google Forms. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation), independent samples t-test, ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, correlation analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient were used to evaluate the data.

Table 1.

Sociodemographic characteristics of nursing students and mean scores on the MWVCS and ETS

Sociodemographic Characteristics	N (%)	X±SD (min, max)
Age	287	20.54±2.92 (18, 39)
Gender		
Female	207 (72.1)	
Male	80 (27.9)	
Marital Status		
Single	277 (96.5)	
Married	10 (3.5)	

Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS 23.0 software package, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

2.6. Ethical considerations of the study

Prior to the commencement of the research, the necessary approvals were obtained from the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research and Publication of X University, Health Sciences (E-33117789-044-163245), as well as from the university where the research was conducted. In addition, students participating in the study were given detailed information about the purpose and procedures of the study, and those who agreed to participate were asked to sign an informed consent form. Students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. All of these procedures were carefully followed during the online implementation of the research, and the confidentiality of participants was assured.

3. RESULTS

The study found that the mean age of the nursing students was 20.54 ± 2.92 years, 72.1% were female, 96.5% were single, and 10.5% had experienced violence in nursing, of which 6.3% was psychological violence (Table 1). The mean score of the students on the Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) was 65.12 ± 8.52 , and their mean score on the Violence Management Competence Scale in Clinical Practice was 93.72 ± 27.03 . It was observed that the nursing students' empathic tendency and violence management competence in clinical practice were above the moderate level (Table 1).

Table 1. (Continued)

Previous Experience of Violence While Providing Care	
Yes	30 (10.5)
No	257 (89.5)
Type of Violence Encountered	
Physical	9 (3.1)
Verbal	3 (1)
Psychological	18 (6.3)
ETS*	65.12±8.52 (41, 91)
MWVCS**	93.72±27.03 (28, 140)
Post-Incident Recovery	34.7±10.56 (10, 50)
Violence Knowledge Management	28.62±8.7 (9, 45)
Violence Response and Interaction	20.79±6.35 (6, 30)
Violence Intervention	9.6±3.21 (3, 15)

*ETS: Empathic Tendency Scale **MWVCS: Violence Management Competence Scale for Nursing Students

The study found that female nursing students' mean scores for the sub-dimensions of competence in managing violence in practice, post-incident recovery, managing information about violence, responding to violence and communication were significantly higher than those of male students (Table 2).

Table 2.

Comparison of MWVCS, sub-dimensions and ETS mean scores of nursing students with socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	MWVCS [∞]	Post-Incident Recovery	Violence Information Management	Violence Response and Communication	Violence Intervention	ETS ^β
Gender						
Female	97.33±24.34	36.32±9.42	29.68±8.15	21.57±5.72	9.75±3.04	65.94±8.84
Male	84.38±31.25	30.52±12.15	25.87±9.48	18.78±7.44	9.2±3.6	63.01±7.29
t*/p	3.719/0.000	3.843/0.000	3.165/0.002	3.017/0.003	1.321/0.188	2.636/0.009
Marital Status						
Single	93.74±26.64	34.73±10.46	28.59±8.58	20.78±6.28	9.62±3.16	64.94±8.42
Married	93.3±38.04	33.9±13.56	29.4±12.13	21±8.69	9±4.47	70.2±10.26
U**/p	0.093/0.761	0.002/0.964	0.4/0.527	0.398/0.528	0.316/0.574	1.959/0.162
Previous experience of violence in care						
Yes	88.26±33.86	31.86±12.29	27.43±11.04	20.1±8.33	8.86±4.04	65.63±9.98
No	94.36±26.12	35.03±10.31	28.75±8.4	20.87±6.1	9.68±3.1	65.06±8.36
t*/p	-	-	-0.636/0.529	-0.494/0.624	-1.076/0.29	0.299/0.767
Type of violence experienced						
Physical	81.55±44.94	28.55±17.37	25.88±14.57	19.66±10.13	7.44±5.05	64.88±8.56
Verbal	82.33±49.86	30.66±18.87	25.33±15.17	18±10.81	8.33±5.03	63.66±5.13
Psychological	96.44/24.95	34.61±8.11	29.94±8.34	21.88±7.02	10±3.25	67.27±11.06
KW***/p	0.442/0.802	0.101/0.951	0.354/0.838	0.483/0.785	2.061/0.357	0.58/0.748

*Independent t test, **Man Whitney U, ***Kruskal Wallis, [∞] Nursing Students' Competence in Managing Violence in Practice Scale, ^β Empathy Tendency Scale

The study found a positive but weakly significant relationship between the mean scores of the Empathy Tendency Scale and the total scores and sub-dimension scores of the Competence in Managing Violence in Practice Scale among nursing students (Table 3).

Table 3.

Relationship between nursing students' Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) and mean scores on the Competence in Managing Violence in Practice Scale (MWVCS) and its sub-dimensions

	MWVCS*	Post-Incident Recovery	Violence Information Management	Violence Response and Communication	Violence Intervention
ETS**					
r***/p	0.153/0.01	0.187/0.001	0.125/0.035	0.145/0.014	0.045/0.45

*Nursing Students' Competence in Managing Violence in Practice Scale, **Empathy Tendency Scale, ***Correlation Analysis

4. DISCUSSION

The study found that 10.5% of nursing students had been exposed to violence, and more than half of this was psychological violence. Özdemir et al. reported that a quarter of nursing students were exposed to violence in clinical practice and the most common types of violence were verbal and psychological violence.¹⁶

The study found that nursing students had above-average empathic tendencies and competence in managing violence in practice settings. Studies conducted with Turkish students showed that the empathic tendencies of nursing students were at a medium level, in parallel with our findings.^{17,18,19} Özdemir et al. found that the mean of the violence management competence scale of nursing students in the practice area was 94.0 ± 27.5 (above average).¹⁶ Similar results were reported by Aksoy et al. and Karabey et al.^{15,20}

The study found that female nursing students had better practice violence management skills than male students. In contrast to our findings, Özdemir et al. and Karabey et al. found that the violence management competence of nursing students in the field of practice did not vary according to gender.^{15,16} If women generally have a calmer structure than men, it can be assumed that they have a more positive attitude to violence management. In the study, it was found that the empathic tendency and violence management competence of nursing students in the area of empathic tendency and practice did not change according to marital status, previous experience of violence and the type of violence encountered. In İster and Altınbaş's study, it was found that empathic tendency did not change according to

marital status.²¹ To date, no studies have been found that examined empathic tendencies in nursing students according to the type of violence they encountered and the type of violence they encountered. Aksoy et al. and Karabey et al. reported in their research with nursing students that violence management competence in the field of practice did not change according to the status of previous violence and the type of violence encountered.^{15,20}

The study found that as the empathic tendency of nursing students increased, so did their competence in managing violence in practice. Structural equation modelling by Du et al. showed that higher levels of empathy in nurses were associated with greater moral sensitivity and better management of ethical dilemmas, which may include effective management of violence.¹² Our finding is important because it demonstrates the impact of empathy in managing an important situation such as violence, which can have destructive consequences.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The findings of this study highlight the importance of incorporating empathy development and violence management training into nursing education curricula. Given that nursing students with higher empathic tendencies demonstrated better competence in managing violence, educational programs should emphasize the development of empathic skills alongside traditional clinical competencies. Simulation-based training sessions and reflective practices could be utilized to enhance students' empathic abilities and prepare them for real-life scenarios

involving violence in clinical settings. Additionally, tailored interventions that consider gender differences in violence management may be beneficial, as female students exhibited higher competence in this area.

Healthcare institutions should also provide ongoing support and training for nursing students during their clinical placements. This support could include mentorship programs where experienced nurses model empathetic and effective violence management behaviors. By fostering a supportive environment, nursing students can develop the confidence and skills needed to manage violent situations effectively, thereby improving patient care and safety.

This study opens several avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the underlying mechanisms that link empathic tendency to violence management competence. Investigating how different educational strategies, such as role-playing, simulation, and reflective practices, impact these competencies could provide valuable insights for curriculum development.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that nursing students had above average levels of empathy and violence management competence in practice settings, and as students' empathy increased, so did their violence management competence in practice settings. The relationship between empathy and violence management competence in nursing students is an important area of research with important implications for nursing education and practice. Empathy not only improves patient care, but also provides nursing students with the necessary tools to effectively manage violence in the workplace. It may be recommended to include empathic tendencies in nursing education and violence management competencies in practice settings, to raise awareness of this issue, and to conduct research on a wider and diverse range of topics.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. The data were collected from a single university and through

self-reported surveys, which is a limitation of the research.

Article Information Form

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Authors' Contribution

Seher Çevik Aktura: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Supervision Reviewing and Editing.

Hanife Çelik: Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, Investigation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

Authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The Ethical Aspect of the Study

Prior to the commencement of the research, the necessary approvals were obtained from the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research and Publication of Bingöl University, Health Sciences (E-33117789-044-163245), as well as from the university where the research was conducted. In addition, students participating in the study were given detailed information about the purpose and procedures of the study, and those who agreed to participate were asked to sign an informed consent form. Students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. All of these procedures were carefully followed during the online implementation of the research, and the confidentiality of participants was assured.

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