

**OP 22****Emotional Intelligence and Empathy among Nursing Undergraduates at the Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka**

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**Background:** Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability of understanding and managing one's emotions on their own. The ability to understand others' feelings and experiences is defined as empathy. EI and empathy during patient-student nurse communication are critical components in successful caring and understanding of health issues. However, there is a dearth of studies in Sri Lanka on evaluating the relationship between empathy and EI among nursing undergraduates.

**Objectives:** To assess factors associated with EI and empathy, and the relationship between them among nursing undergraduates in the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences (FAHS), Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), Sri Lanka.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out recruiting all nursing undergraduates (n=224) from FAHS, KDU. A pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire, cross-culturally adapted Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test and Toronto Empathy Questionnaire were used to collect demographic data, EI and empathy, respectively. Data were analysed using Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis and Spearman's correlation coefficient tests with SPSS version 25.0.

**Results:** The majority of the participants were females (81.20%) and in the first year (43.7%). The mean (SD) EI was 126.72 ( $\pm 22.35$ ) and the mean Empathy was 42.83 ( $\pm 7.38$ ) in the study population. EI score correlated moderately with empathy score ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.602$ ). There were significant mean differences in EI among religion ( $p = 0.006$ ), year of study ( $p = 0.042$ ), the main reason for selecting nursing ( $p = 0.009$ ), interest in nursing ( $p = 0.031$ ) and satisfaction of nursing undergraduate life ( $p = 0.001$ ). There were significant differences in empathy among the two genders ( $p = 0.003$ ), year of study ( $p < 0.001$ ), main reasons for selecting nursing ( $p = 0.004$ ), various interests in nursing ( $p = 0.025$ ) and satisfaction of nursing undergraduate life ( $p = 0.006$ ).

**Conclusions:** EI is positively correlated with empathy among nursing undergraduates at KDU while factors such as year of study, reason for selecting nursing and satisfaction of nursing undergraduate life affect both attributes.

**Keywords:** *Emotional intelligence, Empathy, Nursing undergraduates, Sri Lanka*