



How empathetic the students in higher education at Hooghly district are?

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Abstract

Empathy is the mental ability to recognize or feel another people's good or bad experiences similar with them. The researcher considered empathy as an important life skill during the study. Present study directed to investigate the existing status of empathy among the students in higher education at Hooghly district in terms of various socio-demographic variables. Cross-sectional survey method was implemented among 129 participants with the help of 'The Toronto Empathy' questionnaire. Major findings conceded that gender, habitat was found significant at 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$). Father's occupation and medium of instruction had showed variation on empathy at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). Further, the researcher concluded that empathy as an important life skill can be developed through proper life skills education.

Keywords: empathy, life skills education, higher education, mental satisfaction, wellbeing

Introduction

Empathy is one of the most essential life-skill among the whole life skills as directed by WHO. Though the term Empathy was first introduced by Titchener over hundred years ago as the synonym of German word 'Einfühlung' (Wispe, 1986). Generally, empathy means feel in that way how other people feels. Empathy is the ability to depict what life is like for another person, even in an unfamiliar situation for us (Yasmin, 2018) [25]. It enables us to do proactive works for others' wellbeing, understand and accept others who are not very close to us. According to The World Health Organization (WHO) Life Skills as "Life Skills are 'living skills' or abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable us to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". Two important terms in this definition that is 'Adaptive' and 'Positive Behavior' implies that a person looking forward in the difficult situations to find the solution of the problem and adjust properly with the changeable situations with flexible approach. Empathy, a positive behavior or attitude towards others' difficult phenomena to solve their problem and live life in positive and healthy manner.

The concept between sympathy and empathy often leads to misconception among peoples. Basically, being sympathetic as feel for others and being empathetic is feeling like others. According to Eisenberg *et al.* (1991) [6], sympathy as "a vicarious emotional reaction based on the apprehension of another's emotional state or situation, which involves feelings of sorrow or concern for the other" and in the other hand empathy as "The act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing, and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person" (Barker, 2008) [2]. Eventually, most discussed thing regarding this area 'Is empathy a cognitive response or the affective response?'. So many definitions of cognitive empathy and affective empathy were given by Researchers, Psychologists and Educators. According to Hogan (1969) [10] cognitive empathy is "The act of constructing for oneself another's mental state." According to Van der Welle (2011) cognitive empathy as "A basically passive process of information gathering". But Affective

empathy is our own unconscious motivation to react automatically towards others' emotional state. According to Decety & Lamm (2006) [5] Affective empathy defined as "A sense of similarity between the feelings one experiences and those expressed by others". According to Eisenberg *et al.* (2006) affective empathy as "An affective response that stems from the comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, which is identical or very similar to the other's emotion, or what would be expected to feel". Instead of that many researchers said about the true empathy or the automated empathy (staub, 1987) [21], capability to understand, recognize and feel others' feelings automatically, experiencing the actual condition or mental state of others and tried to solve their problems.

In present day context in India, a huge number of people are there and a huge diversity between peoples observed there. The education system regarded as the national strength. Since childhood to adolescence is the best time gain new knowledges and adopt with the changeable environment. In that meanwhile time the learner studied in school and most of the time spent in school then they go to higher education. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of the primary and secondary schools is to acquire some soft skills in learners. The learners going through the process of higher education becomes the responsible citizens of tomorrow. National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore has the community of mental health unit provided Life Skills Education and training in India. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) adopted life skills education as an integral part of secondary education curriculum.

Life skills are the essential skills to deal with the real-life problems consistently. In that sense 'Empathy' treated as one of the major life-skill. Life skills education as well as training and interventions helps the higher education students to think critically in achieving the predetermined goals. Hence, it is needed that higher education must frame their curriculum with make the life skills education as integral part of higher education curriculum. Being Empathetic to another is the key to make and manage

healthy relationships and social bondage and it is very important in the present-day context. In this present study the researcher tried to investigate the status of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district, West Bengal, India.

Literature Review

Ratka, A. (2018) ^[16] conducted a research study to investigate the correlation between empathy and affective skills. Result showed that the empathetic students had more affective skills like they are more capable to develop and show positive affective behaviors and attitudes. Many academic articles showed and proven that the positive relation exists between empathy and persons' affective domain and many soft skills hidden in empathy. Papageorgiou *et al.* (2018) ^[14] studied on "Does medical students' empathy change during their 5-year MBBS degree?". Research article aimed to find whether medical students' empathy changed during their 5-year MBBS degree. The medical student version of the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE) was used to collect data. Study implied that no differences in empathy scores according to the students' age though female students always scored greater than male students in every year and It was observed that good empathy score in the first year, suddenly decreased in the third year and surprisingly increased in the fourth and the final year. Another research tried to examine the correlation between General Practitioner perception of delivered empathy and patient-perceived empathy and results revealed that a low correlation ($r = 0.06$) was found between empathy score of General Practitioner and patient-perceived empathy score (Hermans *et al.* 2018) ^[9]. Jenkins, A. C. (2019) ^[11] in her study investigated that how, being empathetic balances between quality of life and duration of life of other peoples. Researcher implemented three experiments as the method of the study. Experiments highlighted that there was difference between empathy's influences on urge to reduce others' suffering and proactive behavior to saving another person's life. Ahrweiler *et al.* (2014) ^[11] were conducted a qualitative short survey research with an open-ended question – "What educational content in the course of your studies and/or your specialist training had a positive or negative effect on your empathy?". Six various themes were emerged through the study. Researches of that study concluded empathy had close relation with stress and well-being and that varied from person to person. Quiet Similar objective was found in another study that correlation between residential wellbeing and empathy, positive association was found between wellbeing and empathy (Shanafelt *et. al.*, 2005) ^[18].

Problem Statement

After reviewing some related study made on same entity the researcher found that there are no major studies available particularly in this area for higher education students. A wide knowledge gap is noticed in the different demographic variables and their relation and effect upon empathy among students those are currently studied on higher education institution at Hooghly district. Hence, the research formulated the following research question based on the current knowledge gap –

1. What is the existing status of Empathy among the students at higher education in terms of various socio-

demographic variables?

Keeping the research question on mind the problem of the study stated as – "*Empathy among the students in Higher Education at Hooghly District*" to find out the answer of the current research question.

Delimitations

Study had many delimitations because of lack of proper infrastructure, money and manpower. Present study was delimited in the following grounds –

1. The study was delimited with-in 8 higher education institutions at Hooghly district.
2. Students those were studied on under-graduation and Post-graduation, only they included in the study as the study population.
3. Study conducted with 129 sample units.
4. The study was delimited to only 6 independent demographic variables viz. gender, medium of instruction, Habitat, father's occupation, Present studying class, and Number of siblings.
5. Total 8 higher education institution selected randomly for collection of samples.

Objectives

Objectives of the study were based on aforesaid research question and delimitations framed and stated as-

1. To investigate the present status of empathy among the students in higher education at Hooghly district.
2. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their gender.
3. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their habitat.
4. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their present studying class.
5. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their father's occupation.
6. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their Medium of Instruction.
7. To examine the difference of empathy among the higher education students at Hooghly district with respect to their number of siblings.

Hypotheses

Following null hypotheses were framed as per the objectives –

- H₀₁** Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when gender is concerned.
- H₀₂** Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when habitat is concerned.
- H₀₃** Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when present studying class is concerned.
- H₀₄** Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when father's occupation is concerned.
- H₀₅** Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when medium of

instruction is concerned.

H₀₆ Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when number of siblings is concerned.

Methodology

For fulfillment of entire research and considerable outcomes a cross-sectional survey method designed and implemented by the researcher. Simple random sampling procedure used to collect data with the help of ‘How empathetic are you?’ Questionnaire as a data collection tool (The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, TEQ by Spreng et. al. 2009) [19]. Entire students of higher education those who are currently pursuing under graduation and post-graduation course in higher education institutions at Hooghly district. Total sample size consisted of 129. In this present study the researcher considered empathy as the dependent variable and wanted to examine the effect of different demographic factors viz, gender, habitat, present class, father’s occupation, present class and medium of instruction (independent factors) upon empathy.

Analyses

Researcher collected the raw data individually and tabulated the data in a fresh excel spreadsheet. Several steps were taken to ensure and maintain the data quality by the researcher. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0 was used to reduce the chances of error. Following tables and graphical representations was used display the nature of distribution of data and clarify the analysis.

Table 1: Distribution of Empathy among the students at Higher Education at Hooghly district based on Mean score and standard deviation.

Independent Variables	Category	Number of students	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	Male	52	44.12	8.389
	Female	77	48.38	6.362
Habitat	Rural	62	44.68	1.085
	Urban	27	47.41	1.111
	Semi- Urban	40	49.23	0.944
Present Class	PG	74	47.01	7.130
	UG	55	46.18	8.046
Medium of Instruction	Bengali	102	45.82	7.606
	English	27	49.81	6.343
Number of siblings	None	30	48.43	5.302
	One	55	47.25	7.079
	More than One	44	44.70	8.925
Father’s Occupation	Cultivation	50	44.28	1.106
	Govt. Employee	16	48.44	1.615
	Retired Govt. Employee	25	50.08	1.060
	Business	21	47.19	1.449
	Daily Labor	17	46.29	2.283

Female students (n=77) found greater mean score (mean=48.38, std=6.362) in empathy compared to their male counterpart (n=52, mean=44.12, std=8.389). Semi-Urban students (n=40) were better (mean=49.23, std=0.944)

Than urban (n=27, mean=47.41, std=1.111) and rural (n=62, mean=44.68, std=1.085) students. Students currently studying in Post-graduation (n=74, mean=47.01, std= 7.130) course showed greater mean score than Undergraduate students (n= 55, mean= 46.18, std= 8.046). Students had no siblings (n=30, mean=48.43, std=5.302) found to have higher empathy than students had one siblings (n=55, mean=47.25, std=7.079) and more than one siblings (n= 44, mean=44.70, std=8.925). Students from English medium (n=27, mean=49.81, std=6.343) were reported with better empathy than that of Bengali (n=102, mean=45.82, std=7.606). On the basis of father’s occupation of the participants the mean score and standard deviation were displayed as 1) Cultivation, n=50, mean=44.28, std=1.106, 2) Govt. Employee, n=16, mean=48.44, std=1.615, 3) Retired Govt. Employee, n=25, mean=50.08, std=1.060, 4) Business, n=21, mean=47.19, std=1.449, 5) Daily Labor, n= 17, mean=46.29, std=2.283.

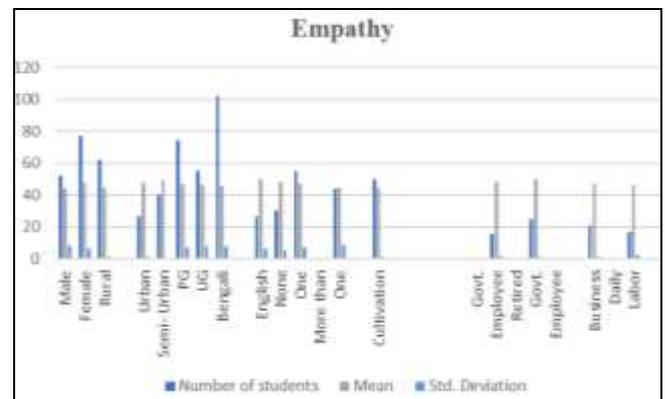


Fig 1: Distribution of Empathy among the students at Higher Education at Hooghly district based on Mean score and standard deviation.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁ Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when gender is concerned.

Table 2: Representing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H₀₁.

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
Gender	Male	52	44.12	8.389	3.277	127	4.261	.001	1.300	S*
	Female	77	48.38	6.362						

The computed value of independent sample t-test observed from table 2, comparing the empathy mean scores of male and female students found a statistically significant difference between two groups [t = 3.277, P<0.01]. The mean score of male students was found significantly lower than their female counterpart therefore the null hypothesis 1 is rejected. Hence, mean score of Empathy differ significantly among higher education students when gender is concerned and the found differences cannot be attributed to any chance factor.

H₀₂ Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when habitat is concerned.

Table 3: Displaying the One-way ANOVA based on H02.

One-way ANOVA						
Empathy Score						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remarks
Between Groups	521.950	2	260.975	4.903	0.009	*S P<0.01
Within Groups	6707.042	126	53.230			
Total	7228.992	128				

The computed value of one-way ANOVA observed from table 3, comparing the empathy mean scores in relation to their habitat. A statistically significant difference among three groups [F =4.903, P<0.01] were found. Hence, the null hypothesis 2 is rejected. Mean score of Empathy significantly differ among higher education students when habitat is concerned and the found differences cannot be attributed to any chance factor.

H03 Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when present studying class is concerned.

Table 4: Representing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H03.

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
Present Class	PG	74	47.01	7.130	0.620	127	0.832	.536	1.341	NS* P>0.05
	UG	55	46.18	8.046						

The computed value of independent sample t-test observed from table 4, comparing the empathy mean scores of Post-graduation and Graduation students did not found significant difference between two groups [t = 0.620, P>0.05] statistically. The mean score of PG students was found higher than UG students, but did not found statistically significant, therefore the null hypothesis 3 is retained. Hence, mean score of Empathy did not significantly differ among higher education students when present studying class is concerned and the found differences can be attributed to any chance factor.

H04 Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when father’s occupation is concerned.

Table 5: Displaying the One-way ANOVA based on H04.

One-way ANOVA						
Empathy Score						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remarks
Between Groups	634.367	4	158.592	2.982	0.022	*S P<0.05
Within Groups	6594.625	124	53.182			
Total	7228.992	128				

The computed value of one-way ANOVA observed from table 5, comparing the empathy mean scores in relation to their father’s occupation. A statistically significant difference among five groups [F =2.982, P<0.05] were found. Hence, the null hypothesis 4 is rejected. Mean score of Empathy significantly differ among higher education students when father’s occupation is concerned and the found differences cannot be attributed to any chance factor.

H05 Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ

among higher education students when medium of instruction is concerned.

Table 6: Representing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H05.

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
Medium of Instruction	Bengali	102	45.82	7.606	2.504	127	3.991	0.014	1.594	S* P<0.05
	English	27	49.81	6.343						

The computed value of independent sample t-test observed from table 6, comparing the empathy mean scores of Bengali medium and English medium students found a statistically significant difference between two groups [t = 2.504, P<0.05]. The mean score of English medium students was found significantly higher than Bengali medium students, therefore the null hypothesis 5 is rejected. Hence, mean score of Empathy differ significantly among higher education students when medium of instruction is concerned and the found differences cannot be attributed to any chance factor.

H06 Mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when number of siblings is concerned.

Table 7: Displaying the One-way ANOVA based on H06.

One-way ANOVA						
Empathy Score						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remarks
Between Groups	282.030	2	141.015	2.585	0.082	*NS P>0.05
Within Groups	6946.962	126	55.135			
Total	7228.992	128				

Table 7 showed that the computed value of one-way ANOVA comparing the empathy mean scores of students in relation to their siblings count, there were no statistically significant difference found among three groups [F = 2.585, P>0.05]. Hence, the null hypothesis 6 is retained and mean score of Empathy do not significantly differ among higher education students when number of siblings is concerned so that the found differences can be attributed to any chance factor.

Major Findings

- The mean score of female students was found significantly higher than their male counterpart.
- Analysis showed that the students belonging from Semi-urban areas were more empathetic than rural and urban areas.
- There was no significant difference found between Post graduation and Undergraduate students statistically, but Post graduation students displayed greater mean score.
- A lot of variation observed on empathy when father’s occupation of students was examined, and significant differences were found on mean scores.
- English medium students reported with greater mean score than Bengali medium students and the differences were statistically significant.
- No significant variation was found on empathy, when students siblings count was concerned.

Discussion and Conclusion

Today, the world has been going through a globalization era. Every country is busy to competing with each-other as well as the peoples in present. Only academic knowledge is not enough to survive in this globe rather than every individual had to learn some soft skills. Students, currently studying in higher education are the future of a country. Along with higher education, students must acquire some skills that will help them to move the country forward, in the present and future. Human jealousy and competitive attitude towards people are a feature of the current world. Under such circumstances, a skill like empathy can play an important role. It has already been said that empathy is the feeling with others. A person is not always able to solve all his/her problems and not everyone is able to maintain healthy relationships with others therefore the practice of life skills is very relevant today.

The current research article is particularly helpful in understanding empathy. Statistical analysis of the study revealed mean score of female students was found significantly higher than their male counterpart. Similar result was found in another research article related to empathy that Females had higher scores as compared with their counterparts and women demonstrate a stronger ability inferring others' emotional states (Park et. al, 2014; Ruther et al., 2008; Schulte-Ruther et al., 2008; Leggiadro, 2018) ^[15, 12]. It was observed that father's occupation of students had lot of variation on empathy. Thus, no handful study was found that considered father's occupation as an independent variable. English medium students reported with greater mean score than Bengali medium students and the differences were statistically significant and Post-graduation students showed better mean score than undergraduate students (Park et. al, 2014) ^[15] but no statistical significance was found.

Being empathetic had a greater impact on people's satisfaction (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006) ^[22]. Empathy is an important factor to promote mental wellbeing and peace, emotional intelligence also had a positive correlation with empathy (Stanley & Bhuvanewari, 2016) ^[20]. Essential Life skills as well as empathy must improve through Life skills intervention (Ching, Ni, & Lee, 2017) ^[3] and educational institutions must incorporate life skills education in their curriculum (Monfared and Nejad, 2016) ^[13]. As higher education is the backbone of nation, the students studying in higher education institutions must need proper life skills education and training to develop co-operative behavior, effective communication, healthy relationships and genuine leadership qualities. The researcher considered empathy as an important life skill during the study. The researcher concluded that empathy as an important life skill can be developed through life skill education as well as life skills interventions. Lack of proper infrastructure, money and manpower were a big constraint to look at every aspect of empathy in this current research article, still there is a scope for further research in this area.

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