

Abstract: Empathy can best be broken into two primary forms, cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy (the ability to understand someone else's emotions) and affective empathy (the ability to experience someone else's feelings) have been shown to have large impacts on doctor- and therapist-patient interactions. For this reason, many researchers have studied the empathy of medically-involved personnel such as paramedics, doctors, medical students, as well as the possible ties of empathy to personality characteristics. Interestingly, graduate counseling students have been neglected in this sense: the literature has seemingly no information regarding empathy and this population. This study explores empathy in both medical and counseling students, analyzing personality factors, year in school, and other demographic features, in order to better understand the phenomena of empathy among students in the caring professions and the factors that promote and inhibit their empathy. Previously validated empathy (B-IRI) and personality (Big-Five) scales were used to quantify those constructs, and qualitative interviews of participants with the highest and lowest outlying empathy scores allowed a more-detailed explanation of quantitative results. The findings from this study could be used to inform educational programs for doctors and counselors, particularly in empathy-focused training that highlights this particular trait and helps students develop higher empathy levels.