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Empathy levels among Canadian paramedic students: a cross sectional survey.

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Background

- Empathy is an important factor in communication between healthcare provider and patient.
- Previous studies have shown that empathy can improve patient care.
- Empathy improves patient satisfaction and buffers healthcare provider burnout.



Objectives

This study aimed to determine the empathy levels displayed by paramedic students towards patients with various medical conditions.



Methods

The Medical Condition Regard Scale (MCRS) was used to measure empathy levels in these students across five medical conditions: physical disability, intellectual disability, suicide attempt, mental health emergency, and substance abuse.

Cross sectional design of a convenience sample of first and second year paramedic students at Fanshawe College

Figure 1. Empathy scores across medical conditions

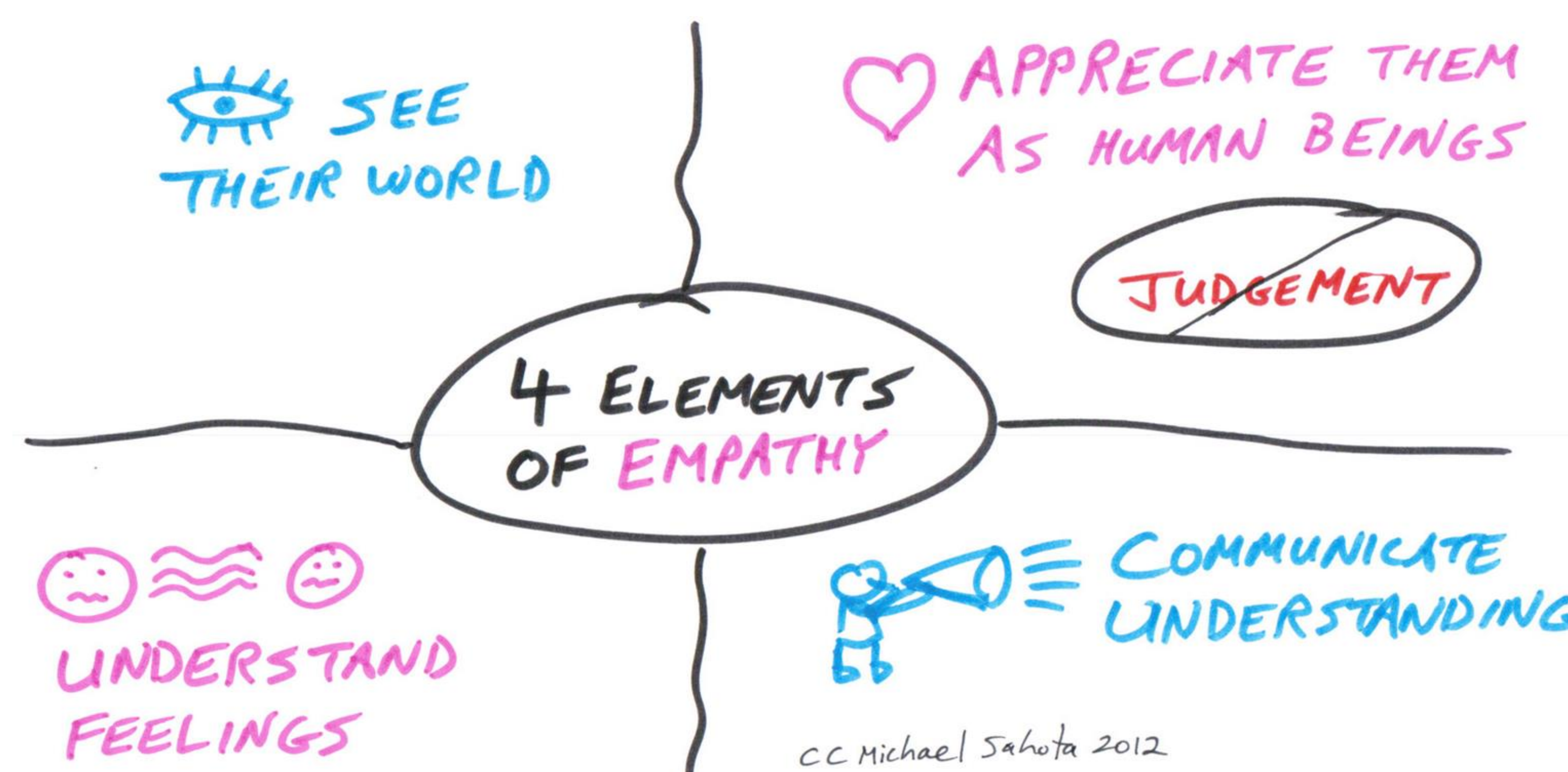
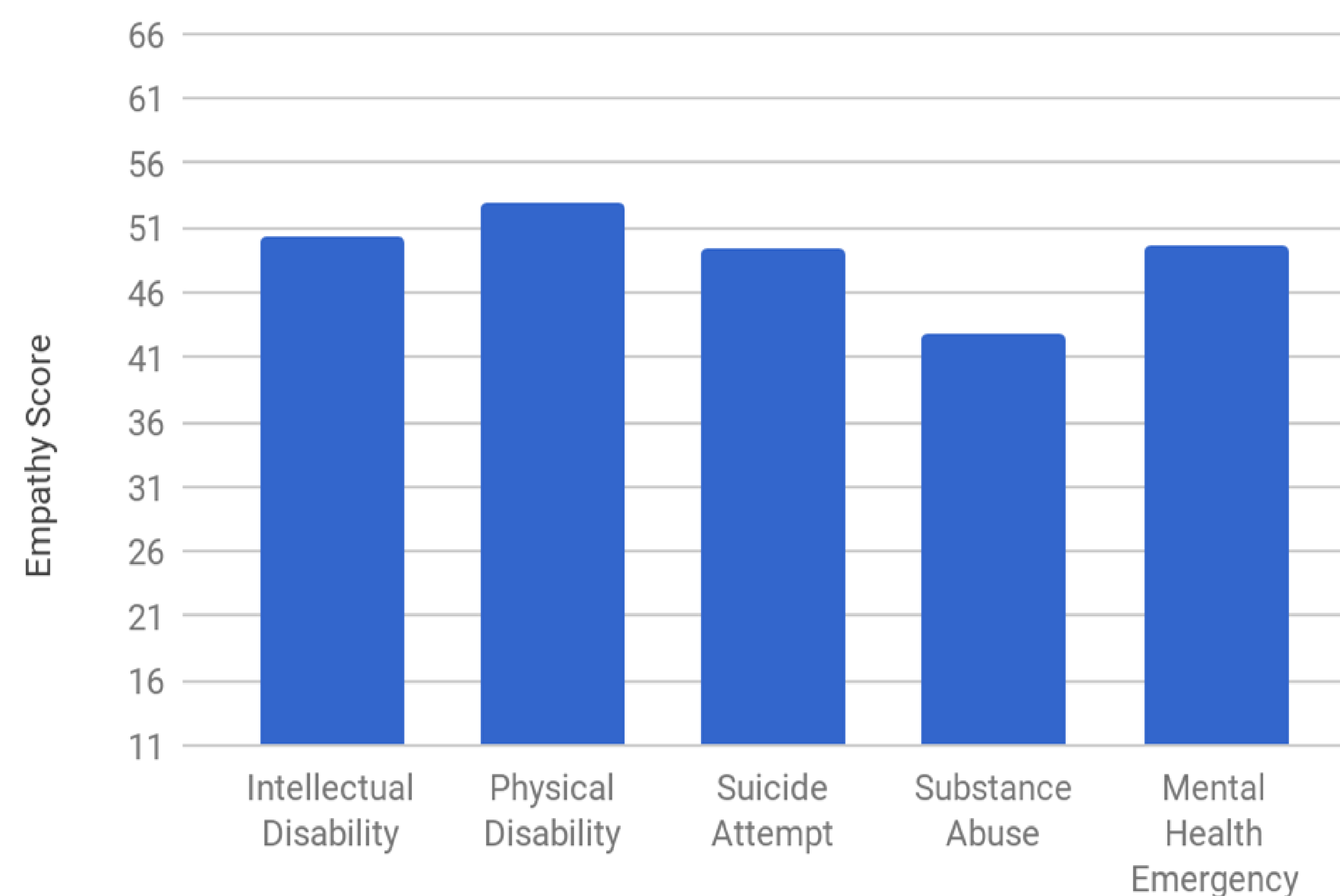
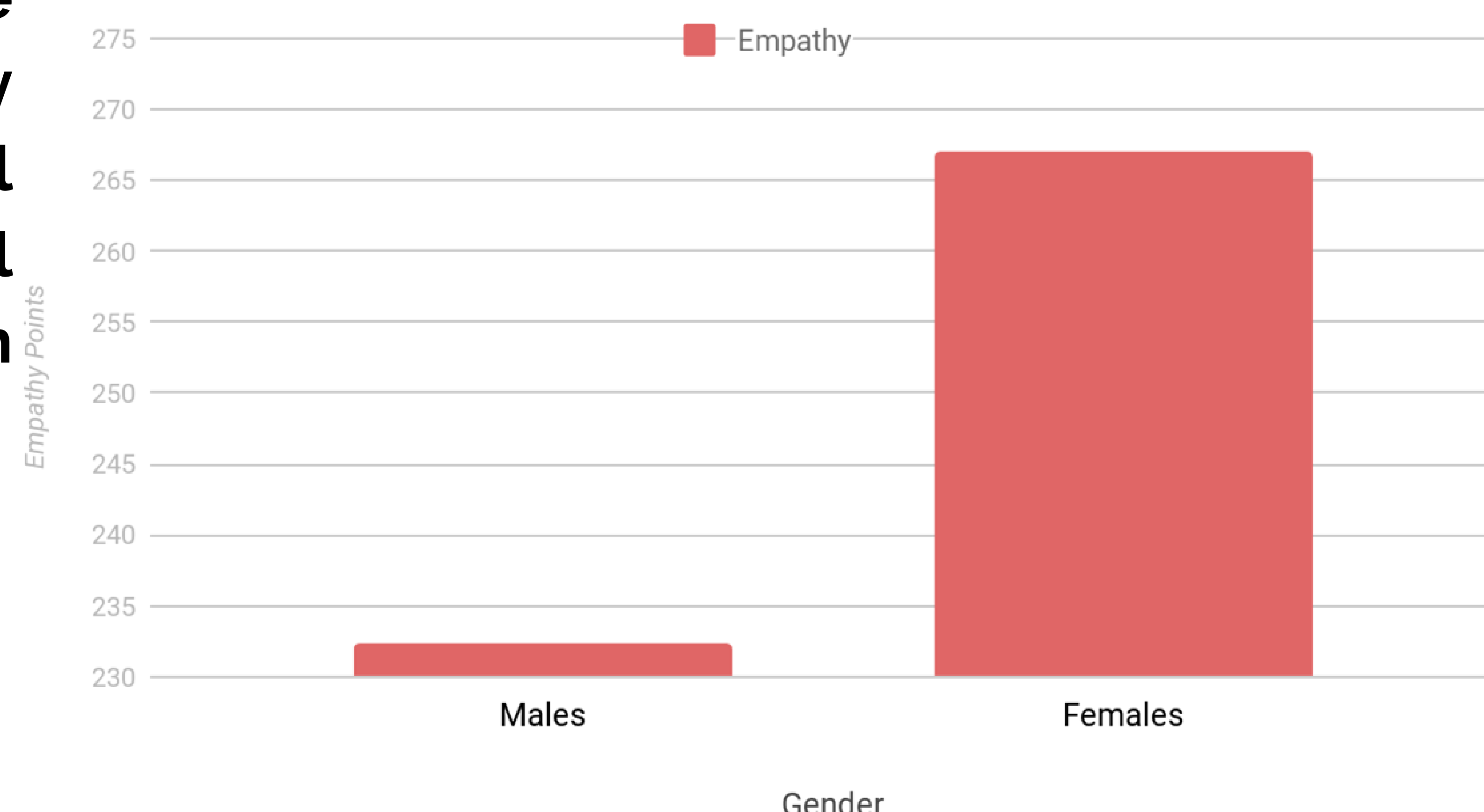


Figure 2. Empathy scores by gender



Results

- 43 students participated in the study; 27 males and 15 females (1 unknown).
- Substance abuse had the lowest mean score (42.88, SD±10.62) (Fig. 1)
- Physical disability had the highest (53.0, SD±7.22).
- Females demonstrated a higher mean empathy score of 266.40 (SD±29.99, p=0.001) and higher mean scores across four of the five medical conditions (Fig. 2)
- First years had a higher mean score (p=0.049).
- There were no significant differences between age groups.



Conclusion

- Paramedic students demonstrated varying levels of empathy toward certain medical conditions.
- Male students are less empathetic than their female peers, and second year students are less empathetic than first years.
- These results are consistent with existing findings in Australian paramedic students.
- Our results suggest that paramedic students may benefit from focused empathy education and training, as self-reported by survey respondents.



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