

Patient Feedback – Impact of Student Gender on Communication Skills

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Background

Literature shows gender differences in communication skills of medical students in self-, peer-, tutor- and simulated patient-evaluation favoring female students. On the other hand patient satisfaction related to the physicians' gender is still controversial. Our focus was on how the student's gender influences the patients' perception of communication skills.

Summary of work

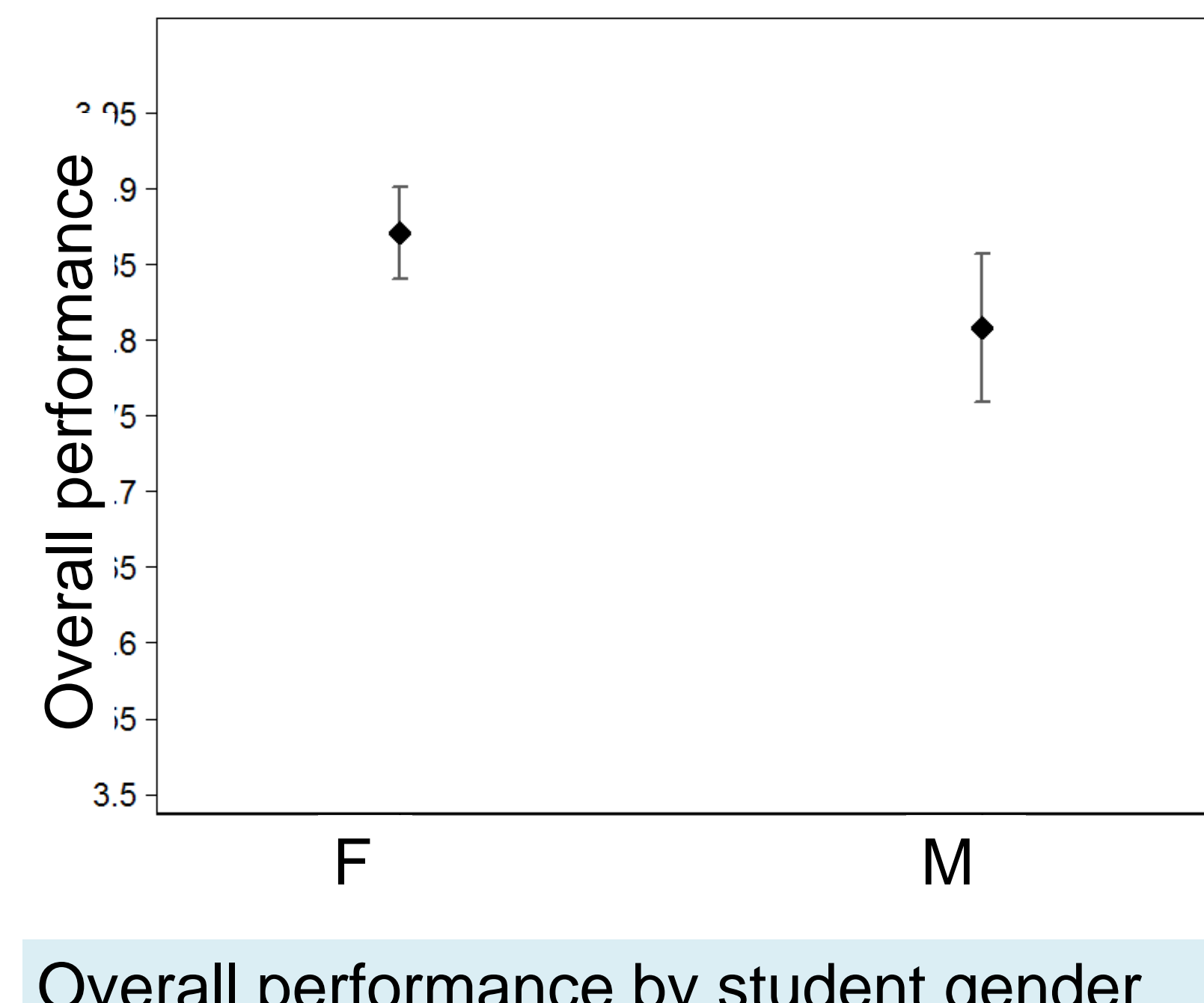
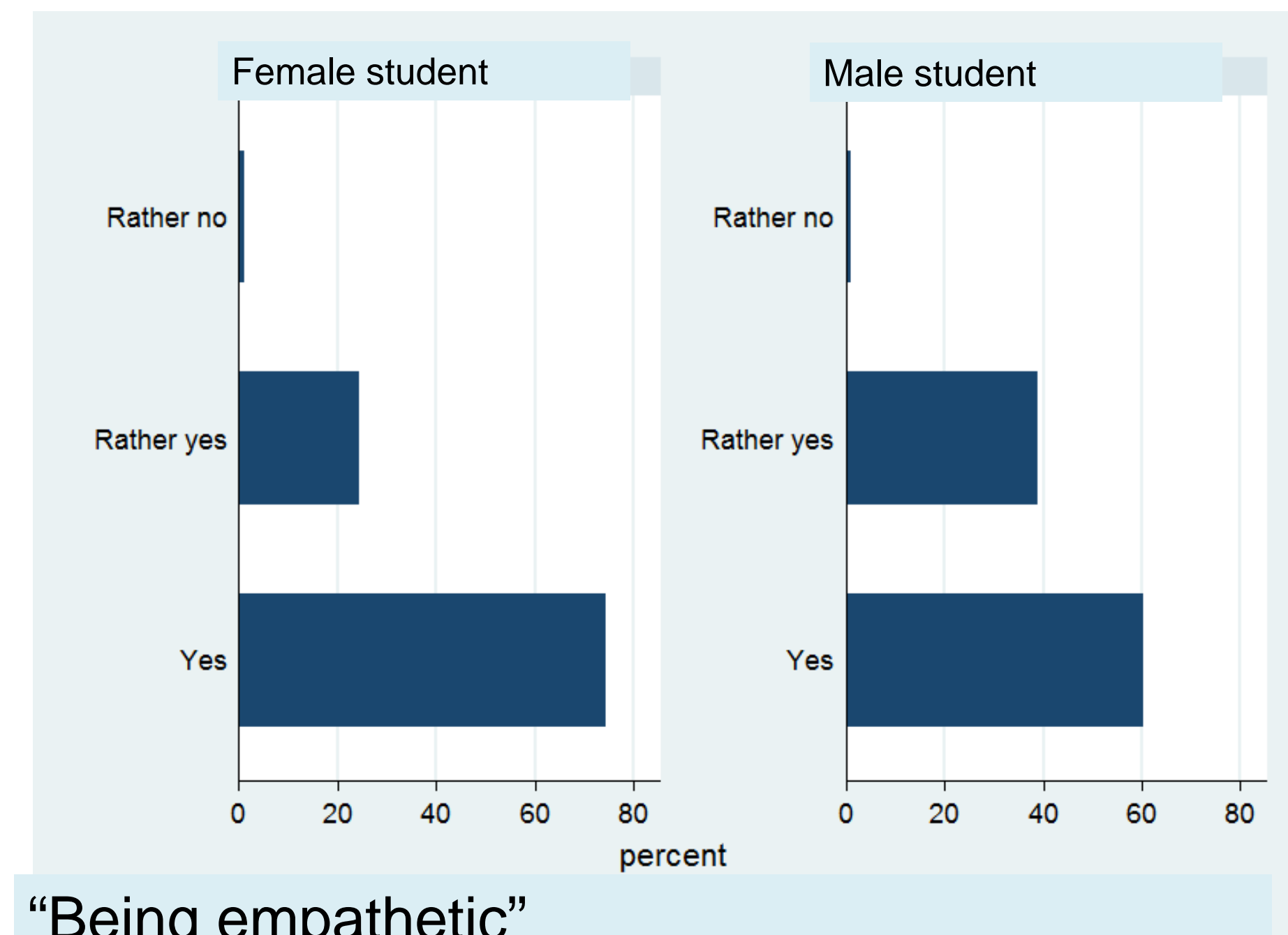
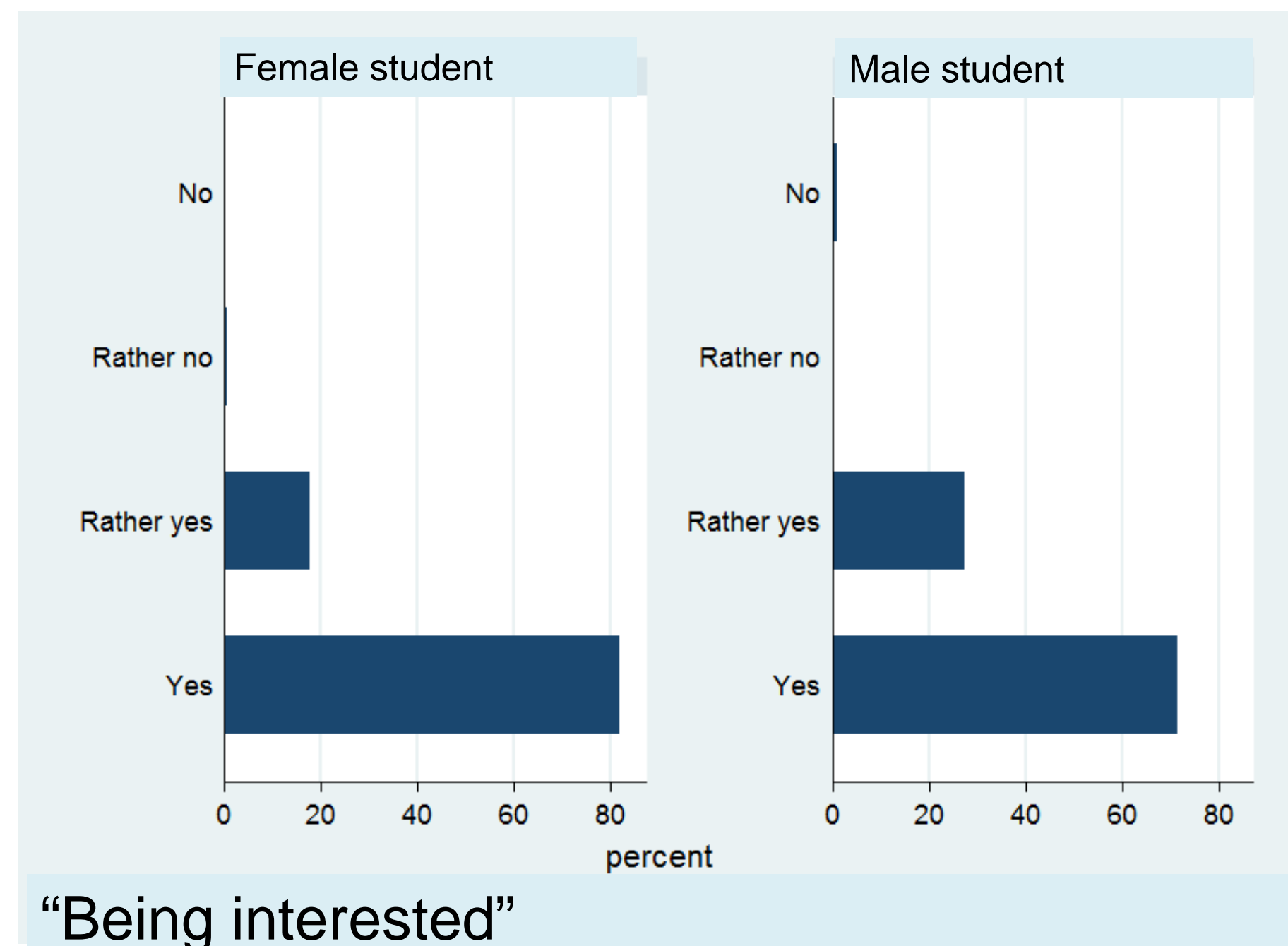
In 2012, all 3rd year medical students of the University of Bern on practical training in a general practice were evaluated on their communication skills by two patients per student. Evaluators were chosen in advance based on examination order. The non-anonymous formalized evaluation took place directly after a consultation, containing 5 questions rated on a 4 point Likert Scale. The questions were developed from the EuroPEP questionnaire that is used for quality testing of general practices in Europe.

Evaluated skills

- Being interested
- Being empathetic
- Being a good listener
- Having enough time
- Creating an atmosphere open to address all issues

Summary of results

272 patients were recruited. Overall, patients ranked students' performance high: 57% of the patients ranked the students highest possible in all 5 categories. **Yet, female students seem to perform significantly better than male students** ($p=0.04$), especially in the category «being interested» ($p=0.05$), and in «being empathetic» ($p=0.02$). The trend was similar also when controlling for patient age and gender.



Conclusions

Female medical students seem to be more competent in some aspects of communication also when evaluated by primary care patients. It remains to be shown how communication skills finally correlate with patient satisfaction. The results support our hypothesis that patients' ranking of communication skills depends on the medical student's gender.

Take-home message



Patients evaluated female students' communication skills better than those of male students in their 3rd year during consultation in a general practice.

References

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