

Associations between empathy and personality in allied health sciences 1st year students from ESTSP IPP

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Introduction: The positive impact of the communication skills in the context of health care professions is widely accepted. However little is known about empathy and personality among students in Allied Health Sciences (AHS) programmes.

Objectives: The main aim of this study was to test hypothetical associations between personality dimensions and empathy scores in undergraduate students from different AHS programmes.

Materials and Methods: A sample of 298 students completed the Portuguese version of Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE-spv), which measures domains, such as Compassionate Care and Perspective Taking, and the Portuguese version of NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), which characterizes participants in terms of five personality dimensions: Neuroticism, Extroversion, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness.

Results and Discussion: Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted to ensure adequate psychometric properties of the measures. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Pearson Correlations assessed relationships between personality and empathy. The results confirm positive associations between empathy and agreeableness, extroversion and conscientiousness dimensions. Neuroticism is positively associated with emotional detachment, and openness to experience is associated with perspective taking and compassionate care, but seems to have no influence on emotional detachment. Perspective taking and compassionate care are highly associated with "positive" personality dimensions; the same cannot be said regarding emotional detachment.

Conclusion: The importance of fostering empathy in undergraduate students is continuously emphasized in international recommendations for the core curriculum in health care professions. The results are relevant to understand how empathy and personality in AHS students are associated and how to better train these skills in a holistic way, regarding implications for professional practice. Longitudinal studies to examine these and other variables over time are underway.