

## Abstract

**Purpose:** Empathy is one of the most important communication skills in preclinical years. The authors purpose to study how empathy interacts with sociodemographic, academic characteristics and subjective well-being (SWB), comparing two groups of medical (MS) and psychology (PS) undergraduate students.

**Method:** 324 respondents, medical (203) and psychology (121) first-year students completed a self-reported questionnaire which included the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. Empathy scores were computed with complete school years, admission scores, application form option, first time in college, working simultaneously and SWB, comparing group's program. Statistical analysis was used to determine associations between empathy scores and student's characteristics.

**Results:** Internal consistencies of empathy and SWB measures ranged between .72 and .86. MS score lower than PS in all IRI dimensions ( $p < .01$ ). However, first-year MS feel more satisfied with their lives ( $p < .01$ ). No significant correlations were found between academic characteristics and empathy, for both groups. All empathy dimensions were correlated with SWB for MS ( $p < .05$ ). For PS, only the emotional empathy dimensions (personal distress and empathic concern) correlated with SWB ( $p < .05$ ). Women score higher than man in empathy scores and SWB. SWB constitutes a significant predictor of empathy, especially for empathic concern and personal distress dimensions.

**Conclusions:** The authors found support for the interaction between empathy scores and SWB, more evident for MS. The need of expanded investigation and enlargement comparisons, analyzing contextual and personality traits could supply enhanced empathy understanding.