How well do medical students express empathy?

Sun Kim¹, A Ra Cho¹, Yera Hur²

¹ Department of Medical Education, The Catholic University of Korea College of Medicine ² Department of Medical Education, Konyang University College of Medicine, Korea

Objective

Empathy is an important trait of a physician and a key element in the physicianpatient relationship. This study examined 4 overarching topics;

- 1) What are medical students' pencil-and-paper empathy rating test results?
- 2) Are there difference in the ability to express empathy by genders?
- 3) Are there difference in the ability to express empathy by school systems?
- 4) Are there difference in the ability to express empathy by academic levels?

Methods

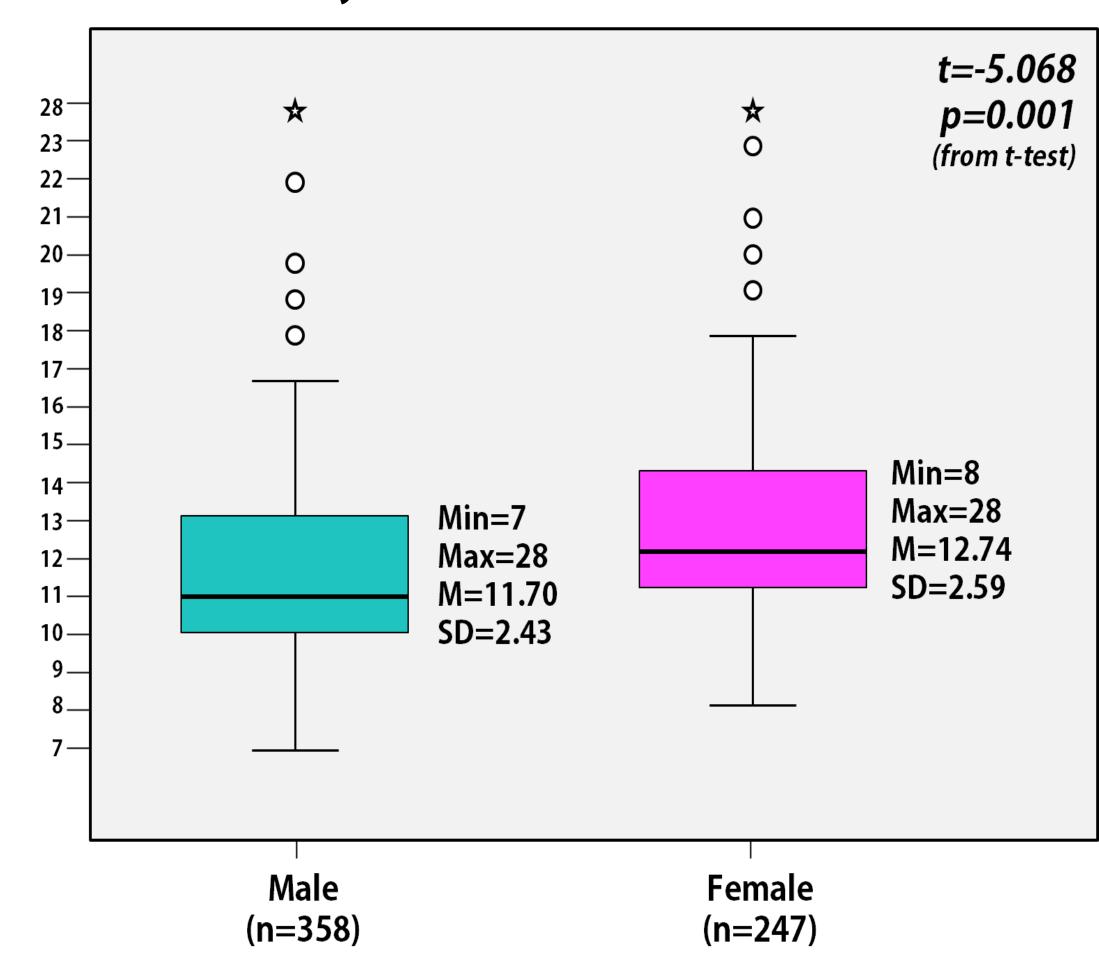
Medical student empathy was measured by the modified Pencil-and-Paper Empathy Rating Test of Winefield & Chur-Hansen (2001). Medical students took about 15 minutes to complete the scale, and it was then scored by one of two trained evaluators (coding rules=0 to 4-point scale, total score=40). The subjects comprised 605 medical students (medical school=205, medical college=400). The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, t-test, and one-way ANOVA using SPSS version 21.0 (IBM Corp.).

Results

1. Medical Students' Empathy Expression Scores

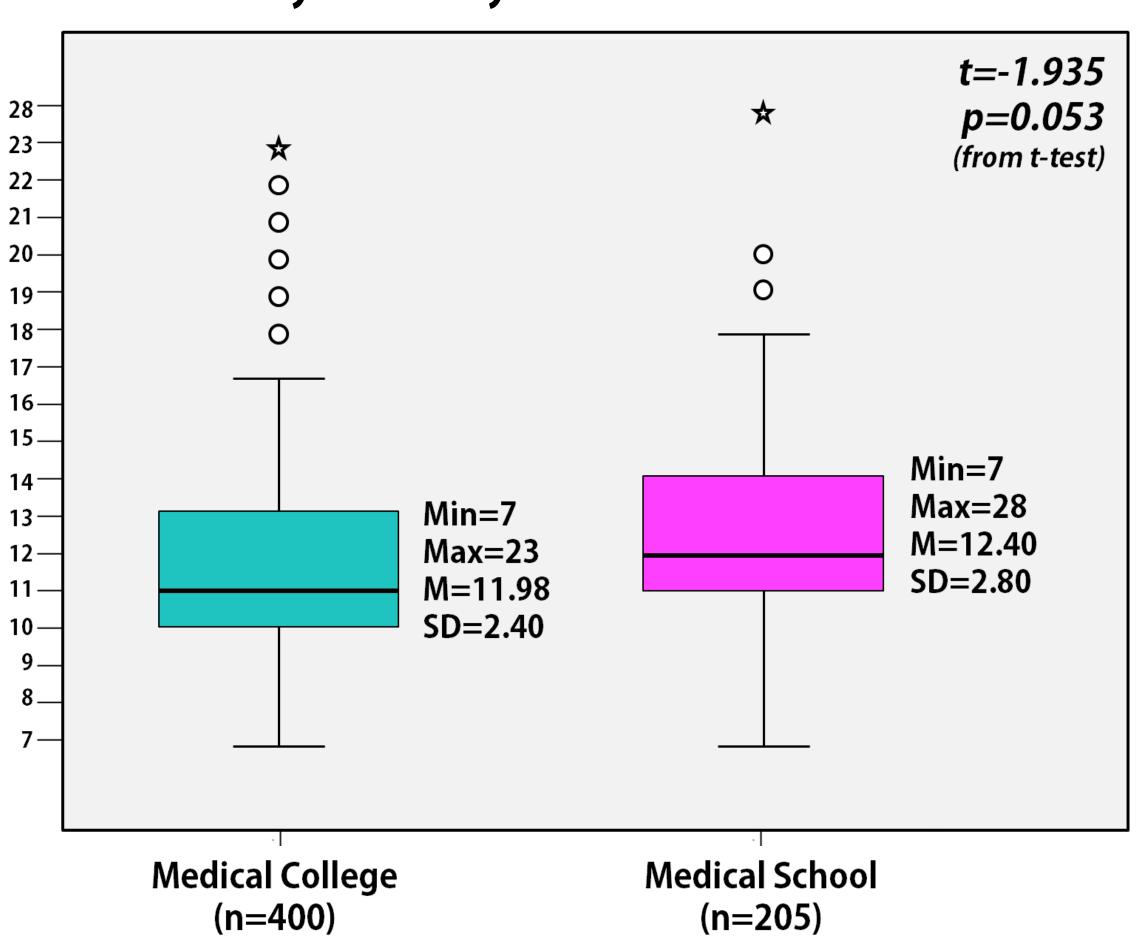
Casa	Response Scales					Maan	CD	Scala Coding rules	
Case	0	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD	Scale Coding rules	
1	2	454	126	23	_	1.28	0.53	0=	Aggressive or derogatory response
	(0.3)	(75.0)	(20.8)	(3.8)					
2	33	259	272	41		1.53	0.70		
	(5.5)	(42.8)	(45.0)	(6.8)	-	1.55			
3	2	488	96	19		1.22	0.49		Non-empathetic: does not acknowledge feeling or content of trigger; includes advice, reassurance, closed question
	(0.3)	(80.7)	(15.9)	(3.1)	_	1.22	0.49	1_	
4	5	508	83	9		1.16	0.42	1-	
4	(8.0)	(84.0)	(13.7)	(1.5)	_	1.10	0.42		
5	5	511	78	11		1.16	0.43		Partially acceptable: open-ended question or response that acknowledges feeling or content of trigger
	(8.0)	(84.5)	(12.9)	(1.8)	_	1.10	0.43	2=	
6	1	499	94	11		1.19	0.44	2-	
	(0.2)	(82.5)	(15.5)	(1.8)	_	1.19	0.44		
7	27	431	126	21		1.23 0.58	0.58	3=	Interchangeable/empathetic: acknowledges both the feeling and the content of the trigger
	(4.5)	(71.2)	(20.8)	(3.5)	_	1.20	0.30		
8	3	530	66	6		1.12	0.37	3-	
0	(0.5)	(87.6)	(10.9)	(1.0)	_	1.12	0.37		
9	5	553	43	4		1.08	0.32	4=	Facilitative: reflects but also adds deeper feeling and meaning to the trigger statement in a way that encourages self-exploration
	(8.0)	(91.4)	(7.1)	(0.7)	_	1.00			
10	3	519	68	15		1.16	0.44	4-	
	(0.5)	(85.8)	(11.2)	(2.5)	_	1.10	U.44 		chat encourages sen exploration
Total	86	4752	1052	160		12.13	2.55	Adapted from Winefield HR, Chur-Hansen A. Evaluating the outcome of communication skill teaching for entry-level medical students: does knowledge of empathy increase? Med Educ 2000; 34: 90-94.	
	(1.4)	(78.6)	(17.4)	(2.6)	-				

2. Difference by Genders

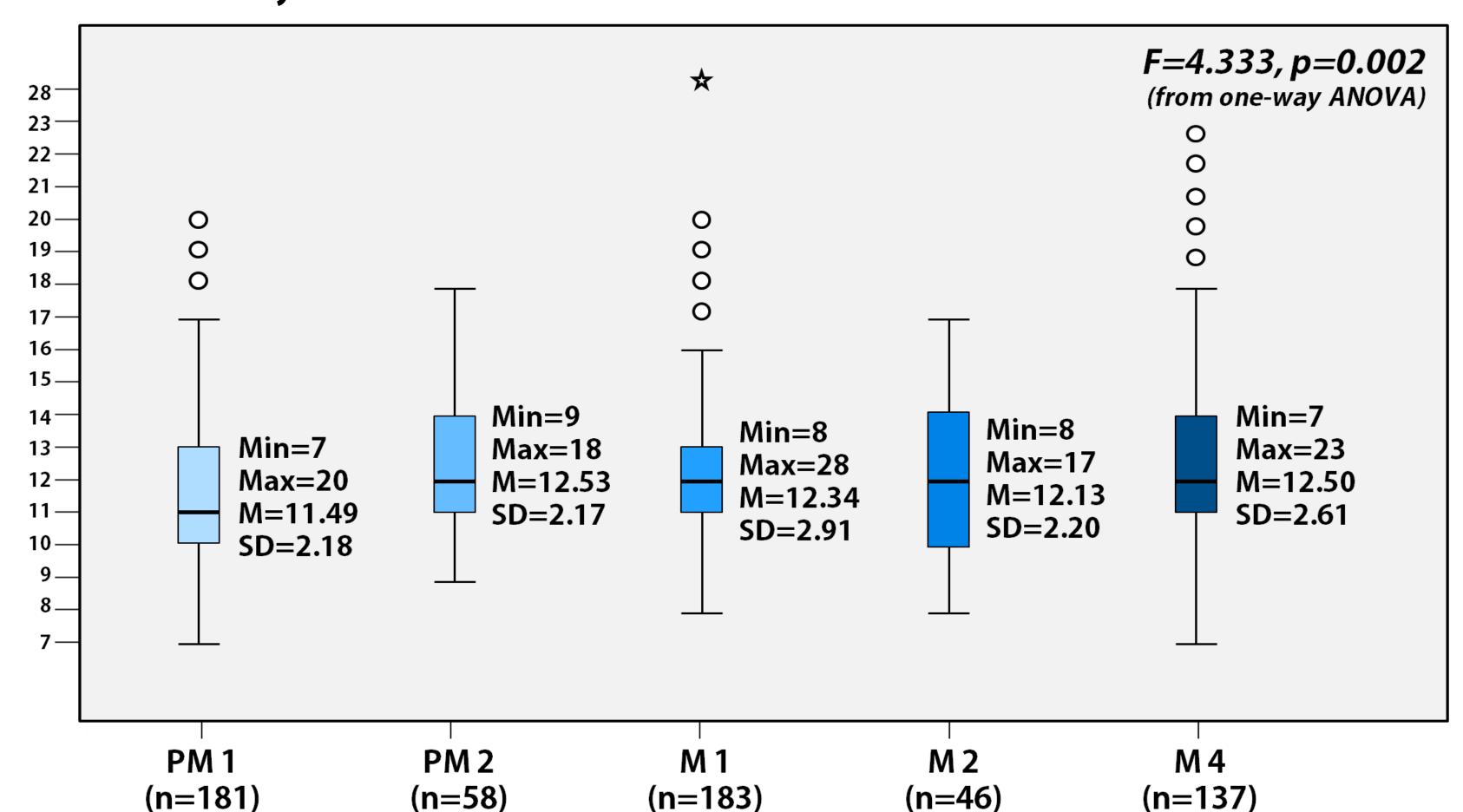


Data are expressed as number (%).

3. Difference by School Systems



4. Difference by Academic Levels



Discussion/conclusion

Even if they recognize the importance of empathy but cannot express it with words or deeds, they cannot be regarded to have sufficient capabilities for that. Though the students' skills to express empathy did differ slightly by school system, academic level, and gender. most of them were found to be "non-empathetic". Our results suggest that practical training in expressing empathy should be included in medical education and that an empathy training program must be focused on changes in behavior.