

## Introduction

- “Empathy” is complex and abstract.
- Though there is a consensus that empathic behavior is a vital element in clinical practice there are varying opinions on how empathy develops throughout health professional training<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Studies reporting an improvement or decline of empathy might be inappropriate since there are varying definitions of “empathy”<sup>3</sup>.
- This research study conducted a systematic review to gather literature and extract qualitative data that will provide this insight.
- **Significance:** This will help us understand how health professionals can maintain and develop empathetic behaviors throughout their education and practice.
- **Hypothesis:** Definitions of empathy will be similar but will vary in semantic definitions, significance and meaning. Perspectives on how empathy is utilized in clinical practice will revolve around themes such as “compassion,” “sympathy,” and “thoughtfulness.”

## Aims and Objectives

**Aim 1:** To understand how “empathy” is defined and conceptualized in different health care professional training.

**Aim 2:** To explore the differing perspectives of empathy as it is applied in clinical practice.

## Methods

### Systematic Review

5 electronic databases: PubMed, EMBASE, Cochrane Library, and CINAHL.

- Keywords: Empathy, Sympathy, Caring, Kindness, Medical Students, Nursing Students, Physicians, Nurses, Perspective, Outlook, Insight, Viewpoints, Thoughts, and Opinions.

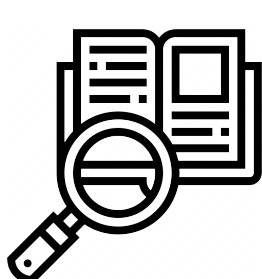
**Inclusion:** Literature focusing on focusing on “empathy,” medical education, allied health education and training, and clinical practice; published in the last 10 years.

**Exclusion:** Literature not pertaining to medical education, nursing education, the clinical practice of physicians and nurses; non-US setting



Screened for inclusion based on titles/abstracts, and then full text, by two independent reviewers

- Disagreements were solved by discussion among the two reviewers



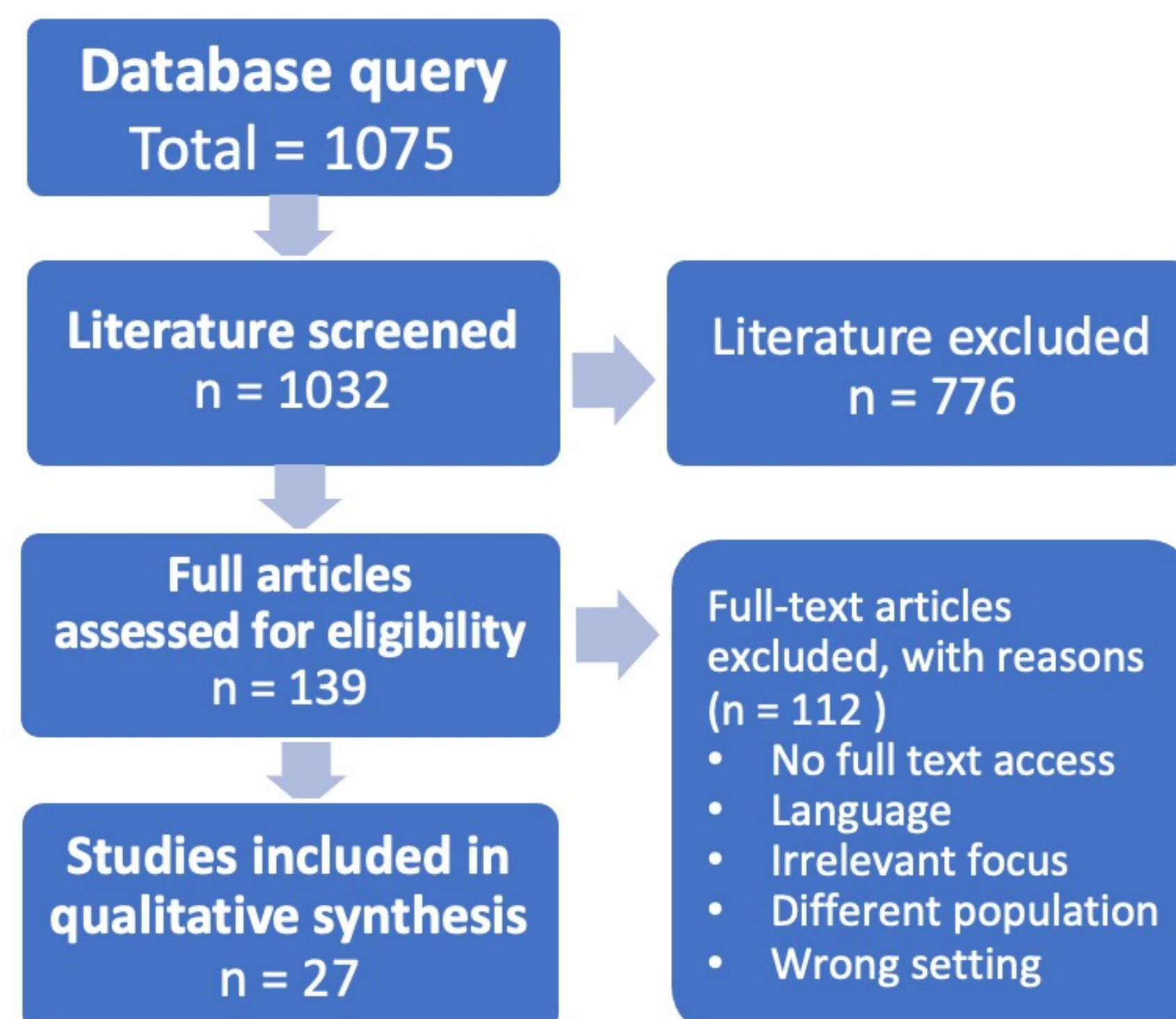
Qualitative data were extracted.



Quality assessment was conducted by using the Joanna Briggs Institute Checklist

- Analysis: compare and contrast data extracted

Figure 1: Flow diagram showing the study selection process.



## Results

|                                       | N (% of total) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Population</b>                     |                |
| Medical students                      | 16 (59.3%)     |
| Nursing students                      | 8 (29.6%)      |
| Physician Assistant students          | 1 (3.7%)       |
| Physical Therapy students             | 1 (3.7%)       |
| Dental students                       | 1 (3.7%)       |
| <b>Empathy defined</b>                |                |
| Mentioned but not defined             | 14 (51.9%)     |
| Provided definition of “empathy”      | 13 (48.1%)     |
| Mentioned but not defined             |                |
| <b>Methods used to assess empathy</b> |                |
| Cross-sectional study                 | 13 (48.1%)     |
| Patient surveys                       | 2 (7.4%)       |
| Student surveys                       | 9 (33.3%)      |
| Faculty surveys                       | 2 (7.4%)       |
| Prospective cohort study              | 5 (18.5%)      |
| Systematic review                     | 3 (11.1%)      |
| Focus group                           | 2 (7.4%)       |
| Meta-analysis                         | 2 (7.4%)       |
| Literature review                     | 2 (7.4%)       |

Table 1: Main characteristics of the 27 retrieves.

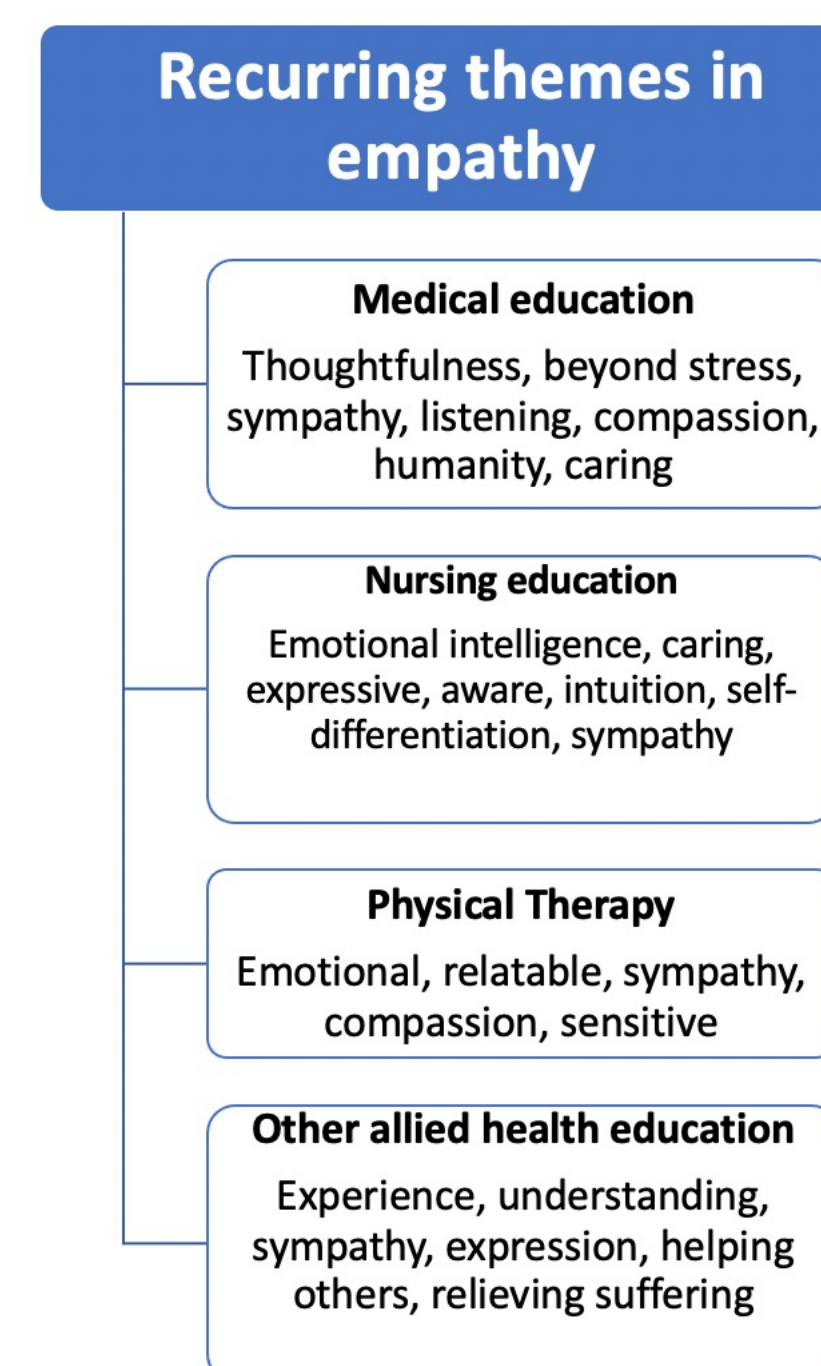


Figure 2: Diagram showing recurring themes in empathy in different health care professions

## Conclusions

- While “empathy” can be uniquely defined, it was defined similarly, regardless of the health care student population.
- The conceptualization of empathy does not vary widely in practice among different health care professions.

- The medical student curriculum are more accustomed to integrating “empathy” via teachings of ethics and classroom simulations, while nursing and other allied health training are more conducive for “empathy training” via clinical setting.
- There seems to be more opportunity to develop or improve empathy among health medical students than other students in health care. Reasons include the longer length of training, curriculum requirements.
- When looking into empathy based on the students’ perspectives, it is also important to consider what the patients and/or other observers consider is empathy in order to have a more holistic understanding of empathy in the healthcare setting.
- Further research is required to demonstrate the best way to allow students to further cultivate empathetic behaviors throughout training.

## Limitations

1. The subjectivity inherent in systematic review, in conjunction to the abstract nature of the topic in focus “empathy.”
2. Limited number (2) of reviewers.
3. Only peer-reviewed articles selected

## References

1. Wundrich M, Schwartz C, Feige B, Lemper D, Nissen C, Voderholzer U. Empathy training in medical students—a randomized controlled trial. *Med Teach*. 2017;39(10):1096-1098. doi: 10.1080/0142159X.2017.1355451.
2. Neumann M, Edelhauser F, Tauschel D, et al. Empathy decline and its reasons: A systematic review of studies with medical students and residents. *Academic Medicine*. 2011;86(8):996-1009. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e318221e615.
3. Colliver JA, Conlee MJ, Verhulst SJ, Dorsey JK. Reports of the decline of empathy during medical education are greatly exaggerated: A reexamination of the research. *Academic Medicine*. 2010;85(4):588-593. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181d281dc.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my mentor, Dr. Stephen Loftus, and to Dennise Batino, for assisting in the selection process.