

Title: A Path to Healing: Exploring the Psychological Burden of Cancer Patients from a Student Perspective

Author: Konstantinos Vlogiaris
Supervisor: Dr Sidra Afzal

Affiliation: University of Sunderland
Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing
School of Psychology



INTRODUCTION

Psychological burdens of cancer includes:

- Depression (Mitchell et al., 2011)
- Anxiety (Grassi et al., 2017)
- Trauma/PTSD (Mehnert et al., 2018)
- Fear of cancer recurrence
- Social isolation
- Existential distress
- Financial strain
- Stigma and help-seeking difficulties
- Psychology students remain underrepresented
- Research suggests that females have higher empathy and more positive attitudes than males (Christov-Moore et al., 2014).
- Findings are mixed for knowledge

RESULTS

Gender significantly influenced the combined dependent variables:

- knowledge
- attitudes
- Empathy
- Pillais Trace = .108
- $F(3,74) = 2.98$
- $p = .037$
- No significant gender difference in knowledge $F(1,76) = 1.89, p = .17$
- Female students reported significantly more positive attitudes $F(1,76) = 4.80, p = .032$
- Female students also reported significantly higher empathy scores $F(1,76) = 5.71, p = .019$
- Measures indicated good reliability

DISCUSSION

- Knowledge may be shaped similarly through education and online health information.
- Emotional and evaluative engagement with patient suffering may differ by gender.
 - Empathy and attitudes may be influenced by:
 - Biological factors
 - Socialisation (Oakley, 1972)
 - Cognitive schemas (Bartlett, 1932)
 - Masculinity norms (Gough & Novikova, 2020)
- Female students may demonstrate stronger affective empathy, recognise distress more easily, hold more supportive attitudes, and engage more emotionally with patient suffering. In contrast, male students may place greater emphasis on emotional control, show cognitive distancing, experience stronger influence from masculinity norms, and interpret distress differently.
- Psychology education may benefit from more experiential and empathy-focused approaches, including serious games, avatar simulations, immersive learning, and experiential training to help students develop stronger emotional understanding and applied interpersonal skills.
- Future psycho-oncology may increasingly involve AI-driven distress detection, digital phenotyping, epigenetic biofeedback, neurotechnology, immersive interventions, psychoneuroimmunology, and personalised psychosocial care.

OBJECTIVE

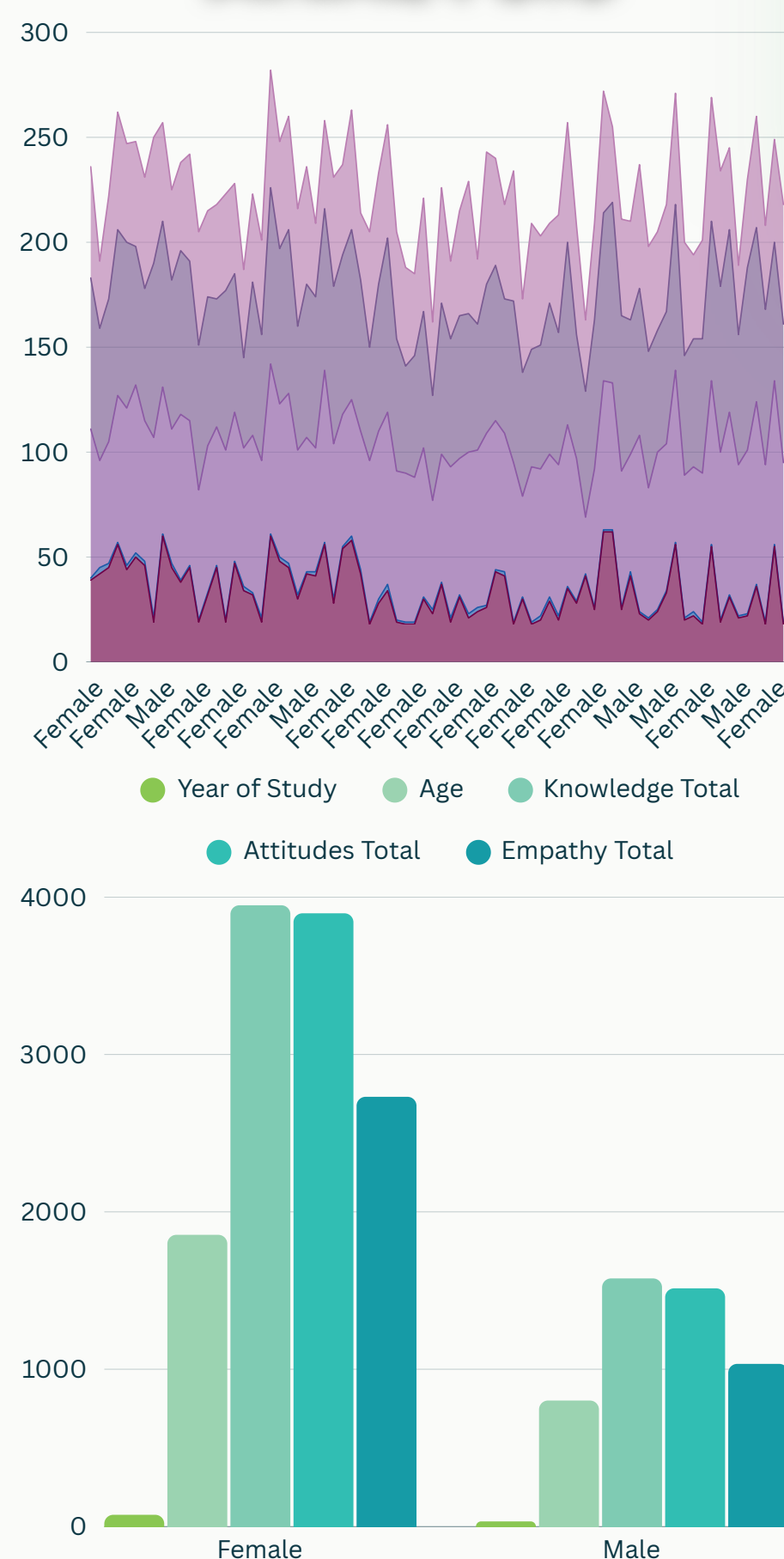
To examine whether gender influences psychology students:

- knowledge
- attitudes
- empathy toward the psychological burden experienced by cancer patients.

METHODOLOGY

- Quantitative
- Cross-sectional
- Quasi-experimental
- Between-subjects design
- One-way MANOVA
- N = 78 psychology students
- 55 females
- 23 males
- Age range: 18-62
- cancer risk factor knowledge
- symptom recognition
- help-seeking attitudes
- gender susceptibility beliefs
- age susceptibility beliefs
- 16-item empathy scale
- (Kala et al., 2023; Spreng et al., 2009)

ANALYSIS



CONCLUSION

- Cancer is complex and multidimensional
- Health and illness are shaped by biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977)
- Gender differences exist between psychology students
- Mental health should be provided holistically
- Human experience is not linear
- Pain, suffering, trauma, and adversity are normal aspects of life
- Existential meaning and hope may act as psychological antidotes
- Healing takes time and practice, but is achievable

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