



# A Measure of Compassion in Health Care (Nursing) Students

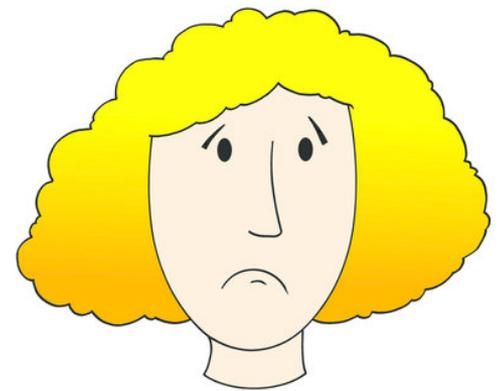
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# Definition



- Compassion comes from the Latin root 'passio', to suffer and the Latin prefix 'com', together literally meaning to suffer together (Kundera, 1999).
- Noticing and responding to feelings of others (Kanov et al, 2006).
- Awareness of others and desire to help, using a non-judgmental approach.
- Deal with another person's distress without internalizing it (Wispe, 1991).

# Background of Compassion

- Associated with the great religious and spiritual traditions of the world (Armstrong, 2011).
- Historically- compassion was equated with personal suffering.
- Thomas Aquinas, 'No one becomes compassionate unless he suffers' (cited in Barasch, 2005, p.13)
- Dalai Lama (Lama & Jinpa, 1995) - inner peace and well-being comes from the development of love, compassion and caring for others.
- Neff (2003 ), has developed the concept of self-compassion and has produced the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003a).



# Why we chose this area



- Seen as core attribute of healthcare (Bramley & Matiti, 2014)
- There need for improved support for compassionate and committed care in the workforce (Francis, 2013).
- Attracting and retaining people who show compassion to work in the health professions
- People who have compassionate attributes are found to have increased job satisfaction and retention (Way & Tracy, 2012)
- Health professionals need to be technically competent and able to demonstrate compassion and empathy in their practice (Department of Health, 2008).

# Measuring compassion

- Measuring compassion is a difficult concept
- Patient's reported believing compassion in learners was partially innate and originated from the heart (Sinclair et al, 2016).
- Compassionate Love Scale - measured prosocial behaviours, intimate relationships and relationship with people in general (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005)
- A shorter scale using this research, had a positive correlation with vocational identity, faith, and empathy (Hwang, Plante, & Lackey, 2008).
- The term 'love' in these studies was felt to be a constraining

# Measuring compassion continued

- ▶ Using the term compassion would have a stronger association with social connectedness than compassionate love would (Pommier, 2011)
- ▶ A short self-report psychometric scale to measure compassion for others(Pommier, 2011) using the constructs established by Neff (2003a)
- ▶ The researchers believed this tool would be suitable to measure compassion in entry-level students enrolled in healthcare





# Purpose of Research

To ascertain how health care students entering tertiary studies at the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec) score on a psychometric scale designed to measure compassion to others.

To follow up the cohort of nurses one year later using the same scale to determine any change in the scores.



# Hypothesis

- Nursing students beginning health care studies at Wintec have compassionate attributes.
- Nursing students one year later have no change in their compassionate attributes.

# Compassion to Others Scale

- The tool used in the study was developed in The University of Texas by Pommier (2011) as part of her PhD dissertation
- A Likert-type scale (1-5) was used for scoring
- The tool contains 24 statements grouped into 6 constructs

# Six Identified Constructs in the Tool

## Positive constructs

### Kindness

– being warm and considerate to other people

### Common humanity

– recognition of the mutual experience of being human and the need to connect with people

### Mindfulness

– identifying the present moment

## Negative constructs

### Indifference

– individual's attention is focused on safety of self over considering distress of others

### Separation

– being remote and detached from others

### Disengagement

– consciously blocking out the suffering of others

# Methodology

- Wintec ethics approval was obtained prior to undertaking this research.
- A pilot study for this research tested the tool for validity and reliability in 2015. There were 112 respondents. The tool was found to be reliable – Cronbach alpha score was 0.84.
- Participants for the first part of this research project self-selected from year one (semester 1) nursing students in 2016 and the same process was used for the second part of the research with students now in their 4<sup>th</sup> semester (year 2 in 2017).
- A Qualtrics survey tool was used to collect data anonymously.
- The participants were directed to complete the online 'Compassion for Others Scale' (Pommier, 2011).
- Data collection took place during a week in May 2016 and a week in July 2017 from the same student cohort.



## Analysis of data

- The Cronbach alpha scores for the 2 studies in were 0.91 in 2016 and 0.92 in 2017.
- The instrument was deemed reliable in this context.
- Student's t-test was used for the analysis.
- The main focus of the data analysis was to compare the scores of the 6 constructs for the same cohort in 2016 and 2017.

# Student Cohort

## Semester 1 - 2016

- 76 out of 150 students responded, a response rate = 51%

## Semester 4 – 2017

- 34 out of 109 students responded, a response rate = 32%

# Table 1.0 Ethnicity of respondents

Ethnicity	Total 2016			Total 2017	
	Number	%		Number	%
<b>NZ Pakeha</b>	49	64%		22	64%
<b>Maori + Pasifika</b>	8	11%		8	24%
<b>Other</b>	19	25%		4	12%
<b>Total</b>	76	100%		34	100%

## Table 2.0 Age distribution of nursing students

Age group	Semester 1 2016	%		Semester 4 2017	%
	Number (N = 76)	%		Number (N = 34)	%
<b>18-25 years</b>	53	70%		26	76%
<b>26-35</b>	12	16%		6	18%
<b>35-45</b>	11	14%		2	6%
<b>46+</b>	-	-		-	-



## Results

- Kindness, Common humanity, Indifference
  - There is no statistical difference between the scores from 2016 and 2017 for the cohort.
  - This means the students had the same score for kindness, common humanity and indifference at the beginning of the programme as they did after 18 months of the study.
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# Results

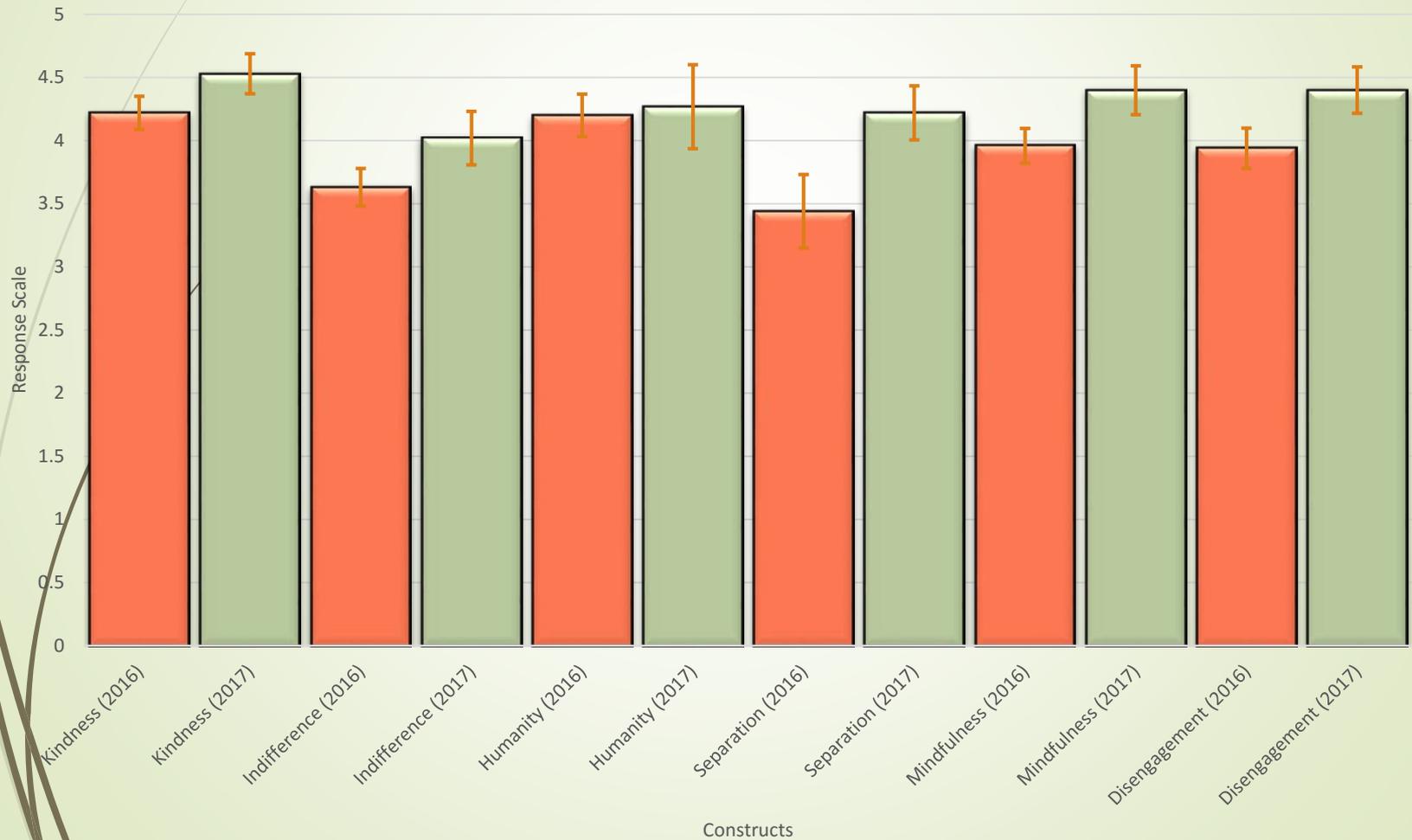
<b>Mindfulness</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Mean responses	3.97	4.40
SD deviation	±0.63	±0.56
Confidence interval – low - high	3.82 4.10	4.21 4.59
<b>Separation</b>		
Mean responses	3.44	4.22
SD deviation	±1.33	±0.62
Confidence interval – low - high	3.15 3.73	4.01 4.43
<b>Disengagement</b>		
Mean responses	3.94	4.40
SD deviation	±0.73	±0.53
Confidence interval – low - high	3.78 4.10	4.22 4.58

**p = 0.02**

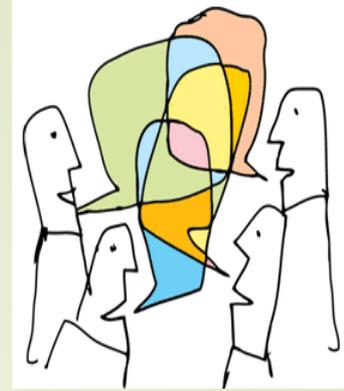
**p < 0.001**

**p = 0.03**

## Confidence intervals for 2016 and 2017



# Discussion



- The hypothesis, that participants involved in studying healthcare at beginner level have compassionate attributes, was supported by the data obtained.
- Students remained compassionate after a year of study however the positive attributes did not increase except in the area of mindfulness – which is a topic taught in semester 3
- Possible reasons for higher scores in separation and disengagement after a year of study may due to the impact of the study programme or educational practices



# Conclusion

- The results indicate that the suitability of the methodology used for obtaining information about compassion was sound.
- The limited number participants possibly had an impact on the reliability of the findings
- The results show that students at Wintec enter study programmes to become health care professional with compassionate attributes.
- This information could be used by educators to strengthen and maintain compassion attributes by maintaining and reinforcing the values, hopes and aspirations that brought the students into the profession.
- Compassion should be monitored in all healthcare related professions as a critical factor in maintaining and preserving this vital aspect of healthcare delivery.



# Limitations

- The researchers are aware that, with any self-report questionnaire, the accuracy of the responses hinges on the participants responding to the questions honestly and not from second person observation e.g. patients
- There is a tendency to respond in a socially acceptable manner rather than according to how one truly feels or behaves. (Passer & Smith, 2009)
- The construct of mindfulness(which increased over the year) might not have been understood in beginning students.

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