An Examination of the Association Between Empathy as a Disposition and Adherence to Covid-19 Safety Guidelines

Feuerman, Mandy (School: American Heritage School of Boca Delray)

The purpose of this project was to understand how empathy as a stable personality trait relates to adherence to Covid-19 safety guidelines. Empathy was measured along the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which consists of four sections with separate scores for each. These sections were perspective taking, empathic concern, personal distress, and fantasy. The hypothesis was that there will be a positive association between empathy as measured by the IRI and adherence to Covid-19 safety guidelines. A survey including all the questions on the IRI as well as questions about adherence to safety guidelines was responded to by 142 students between the ages of 14 and 18. The empathy subscores and empathy averages were calculated for each participant. The participants were given a guideline score based on the guidelines they indicated following and the extent to which they followed them. The data were then analyzed in Microsoft Excel with the data analysis toolpak. According to the analysis, there was a moderate positive association between average empathy score and guideline score, with a correlation coefficient of .44. The r-square was 20%, indicating that 20% of the variability regarding following of safety guidelines can be accounted for by empathy average. With a p-value of .006, the data can be found to be statistically significant. The data can be applied to public health messaging, as it should be stressed to less empathetic people that the pandemic is an emergency and that safety guidelines are about self-preservation as much as they are about helping others.

Awards Won: