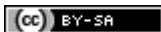


## Gender Differences in Empathy: A Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies in Early Adulthood in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to critically review gender differences in empathy among early adults in Indonesia, considering the influencing factors. **Method:** A systematic literature review identified relevant articles using predefined keywords through comprehensive Indonesian and international database searches. Inclusion criteria required articles to be published between 2015 and 2025 in reputable journals, involve Indonesian early adult participants, and explicitly address gender-related differences in empathy. **Results:** Based on the screening results, 12 articles met the specified criteria. After the analysis, no consistent results were found regarding gender differences in empathy, but there were consistent patterns. The research results indicate that significant differences between men and women can vary depending on the sample involved, the education pursued, and the family background. **Novelty:** This study maps context-specific empathy differences based on gender within Indonesian culture. It also highlights empathy during early adulthood – a transitional life stage still underexplored in local research, especially from a gender perspective.

## INTRODUCTION

Empathy is the ability of a person to understand and feel the emotions of others; in this case, empathy plays a vital role in social interactions and the formation of healthy interpersonal relationships [1]. This ability allows individuals to respond appropriately to the feelings and needs of others, thereby supporting harmony in society. Empathy is not only limited to emotional responses but also includes the cognitive ability to take the perspective of others [2]. In the context of daily life, empathy serves as the foundation for the emergence of prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and providing emotional support [3]. Interestingly, although empathy is a fundamental aspect of social relationships, not all individuals express empathy in the same way. Gender is one of the factors believed to influence how empathy is perceived and demonstrated in daily life [4].

Differences in understanding and expressing empathy between genders are complex and have significant implications in various social and professional contexts. Research shows that women tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy than men, particularly in affective empathy [5],[6]. This difference is often linked to traditional gender roles, where women are expected to be more emotionally responsive and nurturing. However, these differences are not solely innate but are shaped by societal expectations and motivations [4].

Notably, while women report higher empathy in self-assessments, physiological measures like EEG do not always support these claims. For example, Pang et al. (2023)

found no significant gender differences in neural responses to emotional stimuli, suggesting that societal stereotypes may influence self-reported empathy levels. Similarly, McDonald & Kanske highlight how gender differences in empathy and prosocial behavior can shape interpersonal relationships and social dynamics [6]. This discrepancy underscores the importance of integrating both subjective and objective measures when studying empathy to obtain a more accurate understanding of gender differences [7].

These disparities can lead to real-world challenges. In professional settings, male leaders with lower empathy may struggle to connect with emotionally sensitive team members, potentially causing dissatisfaction and reduced productivity [8]. Conversely, highly empathetic female professionals such as doctors may experience emotional exhaustion or burnout due to the demands of their roles [9]. In adolescence, parenting styles and peer support significantly impact the development of empathy, with women generally showing higher levels than men [10].

Gender differences in empathetic behavior have become a widely researched topic in recent years. In general, many studies show that women report higher levels of empathy than men. This aligns with research conducted by Löffler and Greitemeyer (2023), which found that women rate themselves higher in empathy capacity than men. However, these differences may be influenced by motivation and traditional gender orientation. This means that gender differences in empathy not only reflect innate abilities but are also influenced by how tasks or situations are framed and socially motivated, as well as the prevailing gender stereotypes in society [11]. Thus, social and cultural contexts play an important role in shaping the different expressions of empathy between men and women [12].

However, findings regarding gender differences in empathy are not always consistent. Research by Pang et al used questionnaires and electroencephalography (EEG) measurements to assess empathy abilities in a large sample. The results indicate that although women reported higher empathy scores in the questionnaire, EEG measurements did not support a significant difference between genders in empathetic responses to painful facial expressions [13]. This suggests that the reported differences may be influenced by social factors such as the desire to conform to gender stereotypes [13]. These findings highlight the importance of using various measurement methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of empathy. Thus, future research needs to consider both subjective reports and physiological measures to uncover the complexities of gender differences in empathy [14].

In addition, other factors, such as parenting style, also play an essential role in influencing gender differences in empathy [15]. Research by Ramadhanti et al found that democratic parenting styles and peer social support are fundamental in developing empathy in adolescents [16]. Overall, parenting style and peer social support influence empathy by 71.9%. The average empathy of females is higher than that of males, with a mean difference of 1.43 and a significance of 0.005, indicating a significant difference [17].

Thus, it can be concluded that women tend to show higher levels of empathy compared to men [18].

Although many studies have explored gender differences in empathy, the diverse results reflect the complexity of this topic. Some studies highlight the role of biological factors, while others emphasize the influence of social and cultural factors in shaping empathetic behavior [19]. However, the inconsistent findings from previous research indicate that there is no definitive conclusion regarding the extent and manner in which gender influences empathetic behavior [20]. Therefore, a comprehensive literature review is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of how gender influences empathetic behavior and the factors contributing to these differences [21]. This research aims to review the latest literature on gender differences in empathetic behavior, focusing on the factors that influence these differences and their implications in various social contexts. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the dynamics of gender differences in empathy, in concert with opening up opportunities for more appropriate applications in social and clinical contexts.

## RESEARCH METHOD

A systematic literature review was undertaken to enhance understanding of gender differences in empathy. Related academic literature was retrieved through an extensive search across Indonesian and international databases, including but not limited to Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, Taylor&Francis Online, and GARUDA. Literature research was conducted utilizing a combination of specific term descriptors, including "empathy differences", "gender differences and empathy", "sex differences and empathy", "empathy and gender", and "empathy and sex", to refine the search for relevant studies. The paper had to have been published between 2015 and 2025 in a reputable journal to be eligible for inclusion. It also had to examine gender-based differences in empathy within the Indonesian context explicitly.

Following the initial collection of 400 scientific papers that met the criteria, researchers conducted a manual screening process to eliminate duplicates and irrelevant studies. This meticulous selection process resulted in a final set of 12 articles. Among these, three were published in 2020, two in 2021, and two in 2024. The remaining articles were published in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022, and 2023, with one article released each year. These procedures are illustrated in Figure 1 using the PRISMA chart [22].

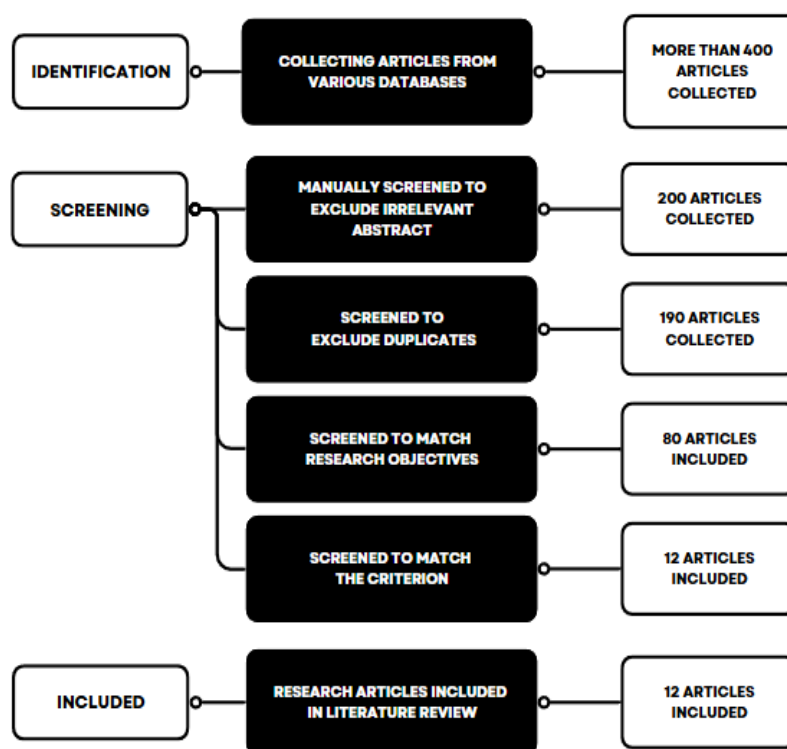


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart of the searching process

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

After screening several identified journals, the researchers successfully identified 12 articles that met the established criteria. The criteria include quantitative research conducted in Indonesia with Indonesian citizen subjects and focusing on individuals within the early adulthood age range. In addition, the selected articles are publications released between 2015 and 2025. The list of articles that met these criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the literature review

| No. | Article Title  | Year | Research Methods | Participants   | Research Location | Results   |
|-----|--|------|------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| 1.  | <i>Empati Mahasiswa Kedokteran Laki-Laki dan Mahasiswa Kedokteran Perempuan di Universitas X</i><br>(Empathy of Male and | 2016 | Quantitative     | 255 active medical students (male and female) from Universitas X | Indonesia         | Male medical students exhibited lower empathy scores compared to female medical students.<br><br>A significant difference in empathy levels was found ( $t = 2.070$ , $p =$ |

|    |  |      |              |   |           |  |
|----|--|------|--------------|---|-----------|--|
|    | Female Medical Students at University X)   |      |              |   |           | 0.024 < 0.05), indicating that female students had higher empathy than male students.  |
| 2. | Adolescent Empathy Concerning Parenting Style and Peer Social Support Based on Gender Differences  | 2024 | Quantitative | 176 students from SMA 11 Jambi City                           | Indonesia | <p>Women scored higher in empathy than men, with a mean difference of 1.43 and a significance of 0.005, indicating a significant difference.</p> <p>Overall, parenting styles and peer social support together influence empathy by 71.9%.</p>   |
| 3. | <i>Empati Sebagai Prediktor terhadap Forgiveness pada Mahasiswa di Kota Makassar</i> (Empathy as a Predictor of Forgiveness among Students in Makassar City) | 2024 | Quantitative | 874 university students from Makassar City, aged 18-25 years. | Indonesia | <p>Women are more dominant in showing higher levels of empathy than men.</p> <p>Empathy was found to be a significant predictor of student forgiveness, with a significance value of 0.000 (<math>p &lt; 0.05</math>) and a contribution value of 0.76. The study concluded that empathy contributes 7.6% to the ability to forgive.</p> |
| 4. | <i>Gambaran Empati Generasi Millennial di Pekanbaru</i> (The Picture of Millennial Empathy in Pekanbaru)   | 2021 | Quantitative | 145 participants from the Millennial Generation in Pekanbaru  | Indonesia | <p>No significant differences in empathy scores were observed based on gender, spare time activities, or language.</p> <p>Significant differences in empathy scores were</p>   |

|    |  |      |              |   |           |  |
|----|--|------|--------------|---|-----------|--|
|    |  |      |              |   |           | found between different age ranges (significance score = 0.014, $p < 0.05$ ), with the highest average score in the 25-29 age group.   |
| 5. | Hubungan Empati Dengan Forgiveness Anak Korban Perceraian Pada Masa Dewasa Awal<br><br>( <i>The Relationship Between Empathy and Forgiveness in Children of Divorce in Early Adulthood</i> ) | 2022 | Quantitative | 100 children of divorce victims in early adulthood                  | Indonesia | The study shows that the level of empathy is also related to a high level of forgiveness, especially among female participants who are victims of divorce in early adulthood.<br><br>A significant positive relationship was found between empathy and forgiveness, with a calculated $r$ value of 0.447 and $p = 0.000$ ( $p < 0.05$ ).   |
| 6. | Perbandingan Sikap Empati Mahasiswa Sebagai Calon Konselor Berdasarkan Analisis Gender<br><br>(Comparison of Empathy Attitudes of Students as Future Counselors Based on Gender Analysis)    | 2020 | Quantitative | 120 students from the Guidance and Counseling program at IAIN Kudus | Indonesia | The study found differences in empathy levels between male and female participants, with 32% of females and 42% of males showing good affective empathy.<br><br>For cognitive empathy, 79% of females and 80% of males were categorized as having good empathy.<br><br>The results suggest that gender stereotypes may influence empathy levels, with females generally exhibiting |

|    |  |      |              |  |           |   |
|----|--|------|--------------|--|-----------|---|
|    |  |      |              |  |           | higher levels of empathy due to their nurturing and interpersonal orientation.  |
| 7. | <i>Perbedaan Empati Kognitif dan Empati Afektif pada Remaja Laki-Laki dan Perempuan</i><br>(Differences in Cognitive Empathy and Affective Empathy in Male and Female Adolescents) | 2017 | Quantitative | 51 students from Makassar University                             | Indonesia | <p>The study found significant differences in cognitive and affective empathy between male and female adolescents, with female students exhibiting higher levels of empathy in both cognitive and affective aspects.</p> <p>The mean scores indicated that female adolescents had a higher empathy level compared to male adolescents.</p>                                  |
| 8. | Differences in Empathy Level Between Junior and Senior Residents at the Faculty of Medicine, Diponegoro University   | 2021 | Quantitative | 99 residents from the Faculty of Medicine, Diponegoro University | Indonesia | <p>The study did not find a significant difference in empathy levels between junior and senior residents in the context of gender, with a p-value of 0.501 indicating no statistical significance.</p> <p>The average empathy score for male and female junior residents is <math>89.43 \pm 7.76</math>, while for senior residents, it is <math>88.37 \pm 7.25</math>.</p> |
| 9. | Emotional Intelligence Competencies of Three   | 2018 | Quantitative | 1,313 Indonesian participants, including                         | Indonesia | Significant differences were observed in total EQ and various scales,   |

|     |   |      |              |  |           |   |
|-----|---|------|--------------|--|-----------|---|
|     | Different Ethnic Groups in Indonesia  |      |              | 479<br>Javanese, 404 Bataks, and 430 Minangkabau, aged 18-45 years |           | with the Batak scoring the highest in intrapersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood, while the Minangkabau scored the lowest in most measures.<br><br>The findings indicate that ethnic values influence the development of competencies, with the Minangkabau identified as the group least developed in terms of social, emotional, and empathy skills. Meanwhile, gender does not have an impact.                   |
| 10. | Exploring Empathy Among Eastern, Central, and Western Indonesia Counseling Students | 2020 | Quantitative | 577 counseling students from various universities in Indonesia     | Indonesia | The study found significant differences in empathy levels among counseling students from Eastern, Central, and Western Indonesia, with Western Indonesian students scoring the highest.<br><br>However, no significant differences in empathy levels were found between male and female students.<br><br>The results indicated that cultural factors may influence empathy development, emphasizing the importance of understanding these |

|     |   |      |              |   |           |  |
|-----|---|------|--------------|---|-----------|--|
|     |   |      |              |   |           | differences in counselor education.  |
| 11. | Relationship Between Empathy and Motivation in Undergraduate Medical Students   | 2020 | Quantitative | 1,061 undergraduate medical students from years 1-5 at the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia | Indonesia | Most female students show high intrinsic and controlled motivation, which is consistently linked to empathy scores.<br><br>The study concluded that the type of motivation significantly affects the level of empathy, highlighting the need for a supportive educational environment to foster both empathy and motivation among medical students.  |
| 12. | <i>Hubungan antara Empati dengan Perilaku Altruisme pada Mahasiswa Fakultas Kesehatan Masyarakat Universitas Nusa Cendana</i><br><br>(The Relationship Between Empathy and Altruism Behavior in Public Health Students Nusa Cendana University) | 2023 | Quantitative | 50 active students from the Faculty of Public Health at Universitas Nusa Cendana Kupang               | Indonesia | The study found a significant positive relationship between empathy and altruistic behavior, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.423 and a p-value of 0.0223 (p < 0.05).<br><br>The findings indicate that higher levels of empathy are associated with increased altruistic behavior among students, highlighting the importance of fostering empathy to enhance altruism in a social context. In this case, the gender difference is not very significant. |

Through this screening process, researchers can ensure that the literature used in this study is of good quality, highly relevant, and consistent with the focus and objectives of the research. Thus, the selected articles are expected to provide a strong foundation for analyzing gender differences in empathy among early adults in Indonesia. It also supports a deeper understanding of the differing dynamics within the local social and cultural context.

### ***Discussion***

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of gender differences in empathy among Indonesian participants. The researchers analyzed twelve studies and found no consistent results regarding gender differences in empathy, but a persistent pattern emerged. The results indicate that significant differences between men and women can vary depending on the sample involved, education level, and family background.

Most studies analyzed reported that women had significantly higher levels of empathy compared to men, while fewer studies found no stark differences in empathy levels between genders. For instance, Natalia et al stated that females tend to dominate in empathy, though the difference was not significant if gender does not influence an individual's empathy [23]. This consistent pattern suggests that Indonesian culture may reinforce and support the development of empathetic behavior in women [24]. Traditional gender roles assign Indonesian women responsibility for most domestic duties, enabling them to become more attuned to the needs and emotions of others [25]. These traditional gender roles remain accepted and internalized by Indonesian women despite modernization [26]. Conversely, conventional Indonesian gender roles also contribute to lower empathy levels in men. These roles often restrict men from expressing calm emotions or behaviors and assertively communicating their feelings [27]. In social contexts, such behaviors influence how Indonesian men exhibit lower empathy toward others, reflecting the broad impact of traditional gender role expectations on interpersonal interactions [28].

Villadangos et al contribute to this discourse by focusing on affective empathy and exploring the roots of empathy differences. Their explanations highlight the role of socialization disparities, such as cultural expectations that men are raised to exhibit emotional strength and rigidity, while women are nurtured to be more attuned to others' emotions. Societal stereotypes further perpetuate these differences; for instance, men are often expected to approach social issues rationally, whereas women are anticipated to respond emotionally. Supporting this perspective, Nurdin and Fakhri argue that stereotypes significantly influence empathy development, with individuals internalizing societal expectations over time. Balducci echoes these findings, emphasizing that the gradual internalization of gender stereotypes shapes individuals' specific skills and personality traits [29], [30].

The observed gender differences are mainly attributed to cultural gender roles [31]. Women often exhibit greater sensitivity to social stimuli and emotional signals and more attention-oriented qualities from an early age. Social learning and cultural values

significantly determine social behavior and empathy between genders. Additionally, women tend to be externally oriented (focused on others), while men are more internally oriented (focused on themselves).

As the smallest societal unit, the family exerts a significant cultural influence on individuals [32]. Even within the same Indonesian ethnic background, variations in family parenting styles can play a crucial role in shaping empathy development. In this context, parents and older family members hold vital roles in instilling Indonesian values in children. However, Dewi et al highlight the dominance of age- and status-based authority hierarchies in Indonesian society, which promote polite and obedient behavior toward elders or higher-status individuals [33]. These hierarchies may reduce empathy toward those of lower social status, reflecting the impact of such social norms on intrapersonal relationships [34]. This aligns with Ramadhani's research, which found that positive family relationships positively influence a child's empathy development [35].

Beyond traditional Indonesian cultural values, an individual's education is a significant factor in understanding variations in empathy levels. Haryanto and Hadiati's study revealed no considerable empathy differences between male and female medical students at Diponegoro University [36]. This might be due to a lack of humanities courses or specialized training to enhance empathy [37], particularly toward patients. Furthermore, Findyartini et al. emphasize intrinsic and controlled motivation as key components in improving empathy among medical students at the University of Indonesia [38]. These findings underscore the importance of creating supportive educational environments to nurture empathy in medical training programs. Additionally, fostering greater empathy allows individuals to enhance empathic communication skills, which are vital for effective interpersonal interactions. Such skills bridge emotional gaps and strengthen understanding, making them essential in personal and professional relationships [39]. Through empathy, students can also comprehend the feelings of those who cause harm, such as guilt or distress over unpleasant actions [40].

Experience and age also influence empathy. Schieman and Van Gundy [41] posit a link between empathy and age, where life experiences shape one's empathy. This suggests that empathy levels can change over time and be influenced by era and individual experiences. According to a study by Natalia et al, an investigation into leisure activities revealed that individuals who allocated time to socializing or engaging in recreational activities with friends exhibited elevated levels of empathy [42]. The findings indicated that empathy scores were notably higher among participants who preferred social interactions with friends compared to those who devoted their leisure time to social media usage. Although this suggests that participation in social gatherings correlates with enhanced empathy, the observed difference did not reach statistical significance.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This systematic review reveals that although gender differences in empathy among early adults in Indonesia are often reported, the findings

remain inconsistent. However, the recurring pattern shows that women generally exhibit higher levels of empathy than men. This difference is caused by biological factors and significantly influenced by cultural norms, traditional gender roles, family upbringing, and educational environment. This analysis emphasizes that empathy is a dynamic construct influenced by various socio-cultural and contextual factors rather than an innate gender trait. **Implication** : The findings from this review have important implications for educational, clinical, and social practices in Indonesia. In education, especially in health and counseling programs, there is a need to incorporate empathy development interventions sensitive to gender and cultural norms. Understanding the development of empathy among genders can enhance communication and patient care. Socially, this insight contributes to a broader discussion on gender equality and emotional intelligence, encouraging a deeper understanding of the emotional capacities of men and women. **Limitation** : This study is limited to quantitative articles published between 2015 and 2025 and focuses solely on early adults in Indonesia. The exclusion of qualitative studies and other age groups may limit the depth and generalizability of the conclusions. Additionally, many included studies rely on self-report measures, which can be influenced by social desirability and gender stereotypes. **Future Research** : Future research should consider a mixed-methods approach that combines both subjective and objective measures (e.g., physiological indicators, behavioral observations) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of empathy., Additionally, longitudinal studies can explore how empathy develops over time across different genders., It is also essential to examine the development of empathy in various regions and ethnic groups in Indonesia, considering the vast cultural diversity in this country.

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