



## Review

## Undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults and perceptions of working with older adults: An analysis of measurement instruments



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## SUMMARY

**Background:** An undergraduate nurse's attitude toward older adults or their perception of working with older adults can influence the quality of care provided and their career choice, respectively. As such, it is important to conduct research that contributes to the evaluation of attitudes and perceptions. In the conduct of comprehensive and rigorous research, it is necessary to make the right choice of an instrument to measure outcomes. The identification of a valid and reliable instrument to suit a specific research question is a complex process.

**Objective:** In order to deal with this complexity, this paper reviews instruments that have been used to measure undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults and their perceptions of working with older adults.

**Data Sources:** Data were sourced from Medline, CINAHL, Healthsource/Academic Edition, PsycINFO and PubMed for the years 2008–2013.

**Results:** Eight readily available instruments were identified and their characteristics analyzed for their purpose, number of items, design, reliability and validity. The strengths and weaknesses of each of the instruments and recent use are also discussed.

**Conclusion:** The choice of a suitable instrument is likely to be critical to the testing of intervention strategies such as curriculum activities, which target attitude improvements to enhance the quality and effectiveness of nursing care provided to older adults.

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## Introduction

If an undergraduate nurse has a poor attitude toward older adults, this can seriously impact on the care provided and the ability to staff an aged care workforce (Flood and Clark, 2009). Such a concern will be magnified in the coming decades given the aging of the population. Globally, the proportion of people aged over 60 years will increase from 11% to 22% between 2000 and 2050 (World Health Organization, 2012). Aligned with this increase will be a greater demand for nursing care because older adults have more hospitalization days and use the largest portion of health services (Gilje et al., 2007; Institute of Medicine, 2008). It is necessary for those involved in nursing education to determine undergraduate attitudes toward older adults and their perceptions of working with older adults. A review of 32 studies of undergraduate nurses attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people found that these are positive in the majority, but through the detailed analysis of the limitations of the reviewed studies, it was determined that researchers should be more discriminant with their selection of measurement instruments (Neville and Dickie, 2014). Within Neville and Dickie's review were nine studies that used a variety

of measurement instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of educational strategies such as course work and clinical practicum activities developed to improve attitudes and perceptions. Once again, it was found that the intervention positively changed student attitudes and perceptions in the majority of the studies. However, it was determined that a methodological weakness of these studies was the lack of a strong rationale for the chosen measurement instrument. Therefore, the aim of this review is to describe and analyze the properties of the instruments that are available to assess undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults and their perceptions of working with older adults.

Attitude is defined as "a settled opinion or way of thinking; behaviour reflecting this" and perception as "an interpretation or impression based on one's understanding of something" (The Oxford Dictionary, 1999). In the context of this paper, this means that the attitude of an undergraduate nurse can influence how they think about and behave towards an older adult. A fundamental part of nursing practice is the development of a relationship with the care recipient that is built on trust, strong communication, common goals and collaboration. All of this can be markedly influenced in either a positive or negative way by one's attitude. So it is vitally important to identify and evaluate the attitudes undergraduate nurses have toward older adults and understand their perceptions of work in the field of gerontological nursing so that they can be prepared for competent and professional nursing practice.

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For nursing to be credible as a profession, it must have a strong evidence base developed from research that is conceptually and methodologically sound. For quantitative studies, this involves the choice of an instrument/s to measure variables. Rigorous research uses psychometrically sound instruments that have been tested for reliability and validity. Currently, there are no reviews of the instruments available to measure undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults and their perceptions of working with older adults. This review addresses this need and will be of great benefit to researchers in this area.

## Method

The search strategy involved peer-reviewed, English language, research studies (2008–2013) to identify what instruments have been in recent use. Databases included Medline, CINAHL, Healthsource/Academic Edition, PsycINFO and PubMed. The search syntax and limiters were as follows: (aged care OR nursing homes OR care homes OR elderly) AND (undergraduate nurse OR nursing student) AND (attitudes OR perspectives OR perceptions OR views OR thoughts OR values). Yielded and reviewed papers are detailed in Table 1. Inclusion criteria were quantitative studies. Qualitative studies and systematic reviews were excluded. A hand search of the reference lists of the 40 retrieved papers was conducted to determine if there were other relevant papers that fitted the inclusion criteria. Three studies were extracted using the reference list hand search with two found suitable as outlined in Table 1. The original papers describing the development of the instruments were sourced and included in this review. Instruments that measured related concepts, for example, perspectives and perceptions were included to demonstrate the necessity for conceptual clarity. Overall, eight instruments were analyzed for purpose, number of items, design, sample size (and if sample included undergraduate nurses), validity and reliability information. Validity reflects the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure and reliability is concerned with the amount of error inherent in the instrument (Polit and Beck, 2004).

## Results

Since 2008, eight original instruments were identified from the 42 relevant publications. Of these, seven instruments have been used to measure undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults and one for perceptions of working with older adults. Characteristics of each of these are detailed in Table 2, and each instrument will be discussed in detail.

### Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale

The most commonly used scale to measure undergraduate nurses' attitude toward older people is the Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale (KATOP) (Kogan, 1961). It was developed to assess attitudes toward older people with respect to both norms and individual differences. Initially, a set of items expressing negative sentiments about

older adults was constructed, and then a second set of items was then devised, the content of which was the reverse of the first set resulting in matched positive–negative paired statements. Some of the items were adapted from other scales that determined attitudes toward other minority groups (e.g., different ethnic backgrounds) by the simple substitution of the “old people” referent. Other statements were derived from Kogan and other intuitions regarding stereotypes and feelings about old people in North American society in the 1960s. Initial testing was undertaken with three samples of college undergraduates enrolled in introductory classes in psychology. Two male samples ( $n = 128$  and  $186$ ) were obtained from Northeastern University and one sample ( $n = 168$ , 87 males and 81 females) was obtained from Boston University. The result was a 34-item scale (17 positive statements + 17 negative statements). It is a self-administered, summed Likert scale with six response categories for all of the items: “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “slightly disagree,” “slightly agree,” “agree” and “strongly agree.” These categories are scored 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, respectively, with a score of 4 assigned in the rare case of failure to respond to an item. Scores on the negative statements are reversed scored with a possible total ranging between 34 and 204. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude with 102 registering as a neutral attitude.

The KATOP has been in consistent use since its development over 50 years ago. In recent times, although it has been criticized for not being reflective of current societal contexts such as changed views toward aging, advancing medical technologies and social and community environments (King et al., 2013; Rodgers and Gilmour, 2011; Runkawatt et al., 2013). Despite these criticisms, a number of translated versions of the KATOP have been developed and tested with undergraduate nurses in different cultural contexts. To date, these have been for Sweden (Soderhamn et al., 2000), China (Yen et al., 2009), Italy (Matarese et al., 2013), Greece (Lambrinou et al., 2005) and two from Turkey (Erdemir et al., 2011; Kucukguclu et al., 2011).

Studies that have used the KATOP have been primarily of two kinds. Predominantly, it has been cross-sectional studies to assess undergraduate nurse attitudes toward older adults (Ayoglu et al., 2013; Bleijenberg et al., 2012; Erdemir et al., 2011; Kucukguclu et al., 2011; Lambrinou et al., 2009; Matarese et al., 2013; Runkawatt et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2009, 2010; Yen et al., 2009; Zverev, 2013). Second, the KATOP has been used to test the impact of curriculum activities on attitudes (Holroyd et al., 2009; King et al., 2013; Rodgers and Gilmour, 2011). In these studies, the KATOP was reported to have reliably detected attitude change.

### Revised Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale

In 1999, Hilt and Lipschultz undertook a revision of Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale (RKATOP) in response to criticism that the original scale was too long and that the statements were stereotypes, and by answering the survey, respondents would be verifying those stereotypes. Therefore, their purpose was to test a revised and shortened Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People scale. This was done with three key occupational groups in television news—general managers, news directors and

**Table 1**  
Strategy for literature search and process of rejection and acceptance of papers for inclusion in the literature review.

Database	Total number of papers reviewed	Number following title and abstract review	Duplicates removed	Papers retrieved and examined	Papers that fit inclusion criteria
CINAHL	9	9	0	9	9
Medline	4	4	0	4	4
PubMed	646	24	7	17	17
PsycINFO	1	0	0	0	0
Healthsource/Academic Edition	78	10	0	10	10
Hand Search	0	0	0	3	2
Total	738	47	7	43	42

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