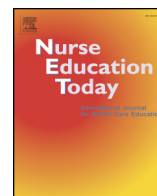




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Review

The evaluation of undergraduate nurses' attitudes, perspectives and perceptions toward older people

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SUMMARY

Objectives: This literature review was undertaken to evaluate undergraduate nurses' attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people. The objectives were to (1) identify if undergraduate nurses hold positive or negative attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people, and (2) determine if positive attitudes, perspectives and perceptions can be established, maintained and improved with curriculum activities.

Design: Literature review.

Data sources: For the period 2008–2013, the literature search included an electronic database search (Medline, CINAHL, Healthsource/Academic Edition, PsycINFO and PubMed) and a hand search of reference lists of the papers included.

Results and conclusions: The analysis of 32 studies revealed that undergraduate nurses' attitudes, perspectives and perceptions are positive and it is recommended that this be the starting point for the development of curriculum activities and future research to maintain and improve this result. Finally, the limitations of recent studies are identified and a research agenda for future studies is proposed.

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Introduction

Nurses are key health professionals involved in the frontline care of older people. This fundamental role has even more significance as the crisis of the global ageing population looms. The World Health Organization (2012) predicted that the proportion of people aged over 60 years will increase from 11% to 22% between 2000 and 2050. Aligned with this increase in the ageing population will be a greater demand for nursing care (Plonczynski et al., 2007). The reasons for this are older adults have more hospitalisation days (Gilje et al., 2007) and use the largest portion of health services (Institute of Medicine, 2008).

Undergraduate nurses' attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people is of international interest to the nursing profession, governments and service providers due to the shortage of qualified nurses (Auerbach et al., 2013) and an even greater shortage of nurses interested in gerontology as a specialty (Neville et al., 2014). Additionally, one's attitude, perspective or perception can impact on the quality of care (Flood and Clark, 2009). Negativity can reduce an older person's sense of wellbeing and recovery whereas positivity has the likelihood of ensuring better health outcomes (Levy et al., 1999).

Attitudes, perspectives and perceptions have been a topic of interest for many years with studies coming from across the world (King et al., 2013). For the purpose of this review the key terms are defined as: attitude – a settled opinion or way of thinking; behaviour reflecting this; perspective – a mental view of the relative importance of things; and, perception – an interpretation or impression based on one's understanding of something (The Oxford Dictionary, 1999).

The aim of this paper was to evaluate the attitudes and perspectives of undergraduate nurses toward older people and perceptions of working with older people by synthesizing findings from recently published individual papers. Two research questions were addressed: (1) What type of attitudes and perspectives do undergraduate nurses hold toward older people and what are their perceptions of working with older people? (2) Is it possible for positive attitudes, perspectives and perceptions to be established, maintained and improved with curriculum activities? Each of these questions will be answered before proposing a research agenda for future studies to advance the identified issues.

Methods

The search strategy involved peer-reviewed, English language, research studies (2008–2013). Databases included Medline, CINAHL, Healthsource/Academic Edition, PsycINFO and PubMed. The search

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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	Reduction following title and abstract review	Duplicates removed	Papers retrieved and examined	Papers that fit inclusion criteria
CINAHL	4	1	0	4	4
Medline	4	2	0	2	2
PubMed	646	24	7	18	16
PsycINFO	1	0	0	0	0
Healthsource/Academic Edition	78	9	0	10	8
Hand search	5	0	0	5	2
Total	738	36	7	39	32

syntax and limiters were (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. Both authors were involved in the literature search, study selection and data extraction. Inclusion criteria were both qualitative and quantitative studies. The authors conducted a hand search of the reference lists of the 39 retrieved papers to determine if there were other relevant papers that fitted the inclusion criteria. Five studies were extracted using the reference list hand search with two found suitable as outlined in Table 1. Studies were excluded if they focused on perceptions or attitudes toward a career in gerontology. Overall, we discuss 32 studies.

Results

There have been two recent reviews in this area but one (Koh, 2012) lacked conceptual clarity by mixing the terms of attitudes, perspectives and perceptions, and the other (Liu et al., 2013) being a systematic review, excluded qualitative studies. However, in consideration of the scope, strengths and limitations of Koh (2012) and Liu et al. (2013), we determined that at least a five year review period would be appropriate to inform our questions. In reviewing this literature, we encountered a number of problems. The first was there was often no definition of the concepts of attitude, perspective and perception and these were interchanged throughout individual papers. The second issue was the intertwining examination of attitudes, perspectives and perceptions of nursing the older person in both the general and specialist gerontological fields. Lastly, with the reporting of attitudes, perspectives and perceptions there was a mix of studies which included an intervention, for example, a curriculum activity, and its effects and other studies that did not. Therefore, as can be seen in Table 2, we have refined this area of interest by categorising our results as Part A) research that tested the impact of curriculum activity on attitudes, perspectives and perceptions, Part B (i) research that studied attitudes, Part B (ii) research that studied perspectives and, Part B (iii) research that studied perceptions. Also included in Table 2 are methodological details and findings to aid in an overall critique of the studies. Nine instruments were used to measure the attitudes, perspectives and perceptions of undergraduate nurses. Kogans' Attitudes Toward Old People scale (Kogan, 1961) in its' pure, translated or revised form was the most popular choice. Table 3 outlines the psychometric properties of the different instruments used by the authors of the studies reviewed in this paper.

Discussion

In relation to the first research question, it can be seen from Table 2 that in the majority of studies reported, undergraduate nurses hold positive attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people. One exception was Bernardini Zambrini et al. (2008) who found nursing students held the least positive attitudes in a group of health science students. This study used the Aging Semantic Differential (Rosencranz and McNevin, 1969) and considered scores lower than 4 as indicating positive attitudes. Nursing

scored an average of 4.31 for all the Aging Semantic Differential variables and it was suggested that societal and personal influences and the lack of exposure to older people could be the reasons for this finding. Another exception was Xiao et al. (2013) which had mixed results where Australian students demonstrated a significantly higher level of prejudice and separation compared with Chinese students. Interestingly, Australian students had significantly higher levels of appreciation and agreement with the statement 'Elderly people live mostly independently' than did the Chinese students. Xiao et al. (2013) postulated that this may have been a reflection of the different cultural backgrounds. Placing these two studies aside, overall it is a pleasing outcome given the common notion that undergraduate nurses may have negative attitudes, perspectives or perceptions (Liu et al., 2013). What this means is the starting point has been established for ongoing work to maintain and improve these positive attitudes and perspectives toward older people and perceptions of working with older people.

Findings from the studies listed in Table 2 will be discussed further to answer the second research question – is it possible for positive attitudes, perspectives and perceptions to be established, maintained and improved with curriculum activities? In order to simplify this complex topic for knowledge translation applicability, the discussion will focus on the factors of personal experiences, gender, age, culture, gerontological nursing theory and clinical placements. Evidence-based curriculum activities from Part A of Table 2 have been matched to these factors to assist in the establishment, maintenance and improvement of positive attitudes, perspectives and perceptions.

Personal experiences with older people whether it is within families, communities or in the workplace can be linked to either positive or negative attitudes, perspectives and perceptions toward older people. For Celik et al. (2010), a lack of understanding about the ageing process and poor experiences with ageing family members had a negative influence. This was attributed to witnessing the decline of older people living in the home and the burden of family caregivers. Whereas, Rejeh et al. (2011) determined that a history of caring within the family had a positive influence. Evers et al. (2011) found positive experiences with older people in the students' personal lives where they saw older people as 'normal' and felt they should receive equal treatment was contrasted with feeling sorry for older people in the clinical environment and frustrating to work with. Quite a few researchers found that work experience with the older person seemed to be a positive influence (Chen and Walsh, 2009; Evers et al., 2011; Goncalves et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2008; Holroyd et al., 2009; Runkawatt et al., 2013; Swanlund and Kujath, 2012; Xiao et al., 2013). Personal and work experiences may be improved by targeting educational activities where positive socialisation experiences with older people occur. Walsh et al. (2008) and Chen and Walsh (2009) successfully used an art activity delivered as a creative-bonding intervention and a friendly visit where students were encouraged to use better interpersonal communication skills and memorabilia to enhance their interactions with older people thereby producing a positive impact on attitudes.

Gender and age were also identified as influencing factors. Overall, males were less positive than females (Bernardini Zambrini et al., 2008; Pan et al., 2009; Usta et al., 2012). A reason offered by the researchers was culturally based, where men are not expected to be the

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