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## Original research article

# Difference in the level of ageist attitudes of nurses and nursing students



Olĝa Kabátová, Andrea Botíková\*, Alena Uričková, Jaroslav Slaný

Trnava University of Trnava, Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Department of Nursing, Trnava, Slovak Republic

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### ABSTRACT

Ageism in nursing is a common phenomenon, which manifests in many ways and negatively affects a patient and her care.

**Goal:** The goal of quantitative analysis is to find the difference between ageist attitudes among nurses and nursing students.

**Methods:** The nonprobability sample contained two groups. One group consisted of 126 nurses and the other group consisted of 94 nursing students. The Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA) was used to quantify the stance and the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used to evaluate the difference between the two groups.

**Results:** Nurses and nursing students had low to intermediate levels of ageist attitudes according to FSA. Nurses showed higher levels of ageist attitudes compared to nursing students as evaluated by Mann-Whitney U-test.

**Conclusion:** Ageism is a part of nursing care and it needs to be eliminated. One way how to achieve this is by early awareness of one's own prejudice.

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## Introduction

During the course of the 20th century, the aging of population became a demographic trend. Demographic aging brought along ageism, age based discrimination, which is associated with stereotyping and prejudice against seniors.

According to ageism, members of certain age group have different characteristics, human traits, and social values [1].

The term ageism was coined by Robert Butler, director of National Institute of Aging, USA in 1969 [2]. There are a few definitions of ageism today. Palmore [3], the author of the most famous definition, describes ageism as “any prejudice or discrimination in favor or against a certain age group. Prejudices are negative stereotypes or negative attitudes towards a certain age group based on these stereotypes. Discrimination is inappropriate behavior towards a member of a certain age group”.

\* Corresponding author at: Trnava University of Trnava, Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Department of Nursing, Univerzitné námestie 1, 818 43 Trnava, Slovak Republic.

E-mail address: [andrea.botikova@truni.sk](mailto:andrea.botikova@truni.sk) (A. Botíková).

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The belief in the dignity and value of every human being, one of the basic attributes of nursing, indicates that a nurse provides nursing care to everyone who is need of such care regardless of his or her religion, race, or age [4]. In spite of this attribute regarding nursing, discrimination is present in the daily practice among providers of nursing care. Nelson [5] states that health care providers will have prejudices against seniors just like towards any other group of individuals, which is rather alarming. In addition, Pokorná [1] states that health care providers practice ageism more often than other groups of people since health care providers who deal with seniors consider their problems to be common and certain signs of aging to be typical for all seniors. Ageism demonstrates as insufficient or, on the contrary, excessive nursing care, which negatively affects the care process, providers, recipients, and relatives of recipients of the care [1]. Becoming aware of one's own prejudices and stereotypes is a way to decrease the presence of ageism in nursing practice. Therefore, nurses need to identify, understand, admit to, and try to avoid the practice of ageism towards seniors, as well as towards themselves [6,7].

The goal of this study was to find difference between the attitude towards ageism among nurses and nursing students.

## Materials and methods

This project used a prospective quantitative study and collected data via questionnaires.

The nonprobability sample contained two groups. One group consisted of 126 nurses and the other group consisted of 94 nursing students. The selection of the sample was intentional. Members of the sample had to meet certain criteria. Nurses had to have sufficient academic qualifications, a full-time job as a nurse, and had to care for seniors. Nursing students had to be enrolled in a full-time form of study program. Despite the fact that the two groups did not have an even distribution, they were comparable.

Data were collected via a standardized questionnaire based on FSA. The Fraboni Scale of Ageism was developed in 1990 and revised by Rubb et al. in 2005. FSA is derived from Butler's definition of ageism and it is intended to quantify attitude towards ageism. FSA evaluates cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of age discrimination. FSA contains 29 items. A respondent can give from 1 to 4 points to each item (Likert scale) and thus express his or her level of agreement with a given statement. Therefore, a respondent can obtain from 29 to 116 points in total. Higher score means greater ageist attitude. FSA evaluates ageism as a multidimensional construct [8]. This study used the first Slovak version of FSA questionnaire. Language validation took place in May 2013, when two independent legal translators translated the original English version of questionnaire into Slovak language. Subsequently, a pilot study took place, which involved 10 nurses and 10 nursing students. It confirmed the questionnaire's validity. Thus, the Slovak version of FSA questionnaire is accurate, easy to understand, reliable, and easy to use.

Data collection took place from August 2013 until January 2014 at two clinics in Trnava county and at Trnava University, in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Work, Department of Nursing in Trnava.

We analyzed data by using descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney *U*-test with the level of significance,  $p = 0.01$ . Analysis was powered by software called SPSS 16.0.

## Results

The results of this study showed that the majority of nurses 82 (65.1%) had moderately positive perceptions of seniors, i.e., almost no ageist attitude. 44 (34.9%) nurses had moderately negative perception of seniors, which classifies as an intermediate level of ageist attitude. Nursing students showed similar results. 61 of them (64.9%) had slightly positive perception of seniors. 33 (35.1%) nursing students had slightly negative perception of seniors. The distribution of nurses and nursing students according to their level of ageist attitude is shown in Table 1.

### Difference between the attitude towards ageism among nurses and nursing students

Alternative hypothesis states that nurses show higher level of ageist attitude compared to nursing students. We used Mann-Whitney *U*-test to test this hypothesis. Table 2 shows the difference between FSA scores of the 2 groups, which is statistically significant at sig. < 0.01 (sig. = 0.008). Nurses had higher mean FSA score than nursing students.

## Discussion

The world population is aging and this trend is expected to continue in next several decades. The elderly use health care more often than younger people and their hospitalization time is also longer compared to younger individuals. Therefore, it is

**Table 1 – Level of ageist attitude among nurses and nursing students (n = 220).**

Ageist stance	Nurses		Nursing students	
	N	%	N	%
None	0	0	0	0
Almost none	82	65.1	61	64.9
Intermediate level	44	34.9	33	35.1
High level	0	0	0	0
Total	126	100	94	100

N, absolute frequency; %, relative frequency.

**Table 2 – Difference between the attitude towards ageism among nurses and nursing students (n = 220).**

Group	N	FSA score	Mann-Whitney U-test	Z	p
Nurses	126	120.28			
Students	94	97.39	4690	-2.643	0.008
Total	220				

N, absolute frequency; p, significance level.

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