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Research paper

Attitudes of Turkish nursing students toward elderly people

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of nursing students towards elderly people.
Methods: The study was carried out in a cross-sectional and descriptive design. The Turkish version of UCLA-GA Scale was used to evaluate attitudes towards older people among 931 students attending four schools of nursing located in Aegean, Mediterranean, Marmara regions and İstanbul in Turkey.
Results: Mean score of UCLA-GA scale was 48.64 ± 5.51 (min: 22, max: 64). Female students were found to have more positive attitudes than male students ($t = 2.709$, $P < 0.05$), those who have an elderly relative than those who do not ($t = 2.671$, $P < 0.05$), those who want to live with an elderly family member than those who do not ($t = 6.374$, $P < 0.05$), and those who want to work at a unit offering care to the elderly after graduation than those who do not ($t = 5.259$, $P < 0.05$).
Conclusion: Positive attitudes towards ageism were affected by variables such as: sex, willingness to live with aged parents after starting a family, work with older people after graduation and whether they had previously or currently lived with an aged relative.

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1. Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, life expectancy increased and birth rates decreased considerably, especially in developed countries [1]. Thus, the rate of elderly individuals in the population is continuously increasing both in Turkey and worldwide [2–8]. According to the official numbers announced by the Turkish Statistical Institute (2012), the population aged over 65 holds 7.7% of the total population. In addition, the results of Address Based Population Registration system showed that (2012) the highest population density of the elderly aged 65 and over was in the Aegean Region (16.5%). Other regions where the elderly population lives more densely are Istanbul (14%), Mediterranean (11.7%) and Eastern Marmara (9.9%) respectively. According to the population projections designed for Turkey, the rate of the elderly in the total population is predicted to reach 10.2% in 2023, to 20.8% in 2050, and to 27.7% in 2075 [1].

Although demographic and sociological change is very fast [7,9,10], developments in geriatrics do not occur at the same rate [7]. Aging is not an illness; however, the growing rates and severity of health problems and decreasing functional abilities are some of the potential life-changing problems of aging [3,7]. These issues may increase older adults' health care needs [10,11]. The attitudes of health care professionals directly influence the quality of health care services provided to older people [4,10,12–14]. Nurses have one of the professions that assume a leading role as providers of care for older adults and can influence the quality of their care [4]. Additionally, attitudes of nursing students, as the candidates of nursing profession, will play an important role in service delivery in the future [4,6]. Students' preconception and prejudice towards older people can affect their future career choice [13]. Several studies have evaluated the students' attitudes towards older people and reported conflicting results. Although some studies have revealed positive attitudes of students towards older people [2,6,8,11,12,15,16], some others have revealed that they have negative attitudes [11,17,18]. Among the negative attitudes about ageing are elements such as illness, impotence, ugliness, retardation in mental functions, mental illness, worthlessness, isolation, poverty and depression [3,7,11,18,19]; while the positive attitudes

include compassion, knowledge, reliability, intelligence, political power, freedom and happiness [3]. However, education has an important role in the development of professional cultures [14–16,20] and has either a positive or a negative impact on the attitudes of health care providers. Studies have also shown that student attitudes about elderly care can be changed in a more positive direction by educators [13,20].

The number of studies on the attitudes of the young regarding ageing is quite limited in Turkey [2,3,10]. Among the first studies on attitudes of nursing students towards elderly people conducted in Turkey were validity and reliability studies of the Turkish version of the scales [3,4,9,10]. Other studies, on the other hand, aimed to determine the attitudes towards the elderly of students studying in one region only [2,6,8,12,19]. Our study reflects the attitudes towards the elderly of the nursing students in the Aegean, Mediterranean, Marmara regions and Istanbul, where the elderly population is the highest in a more comprehensive way.

2. Methods

2.1. Design and sample

The authors conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study. The study population consisted of 1206 nursing students in four schools of nursing located in the Aegean, Mediterranean, Marmara regions and İstanbul in Turkey during the 2011–2012 academic year. These schools were included in the study since they provide undergraduate education in the regions with the highest elderly population in Turkey. As we aimed at reaching all nursing students attending the related schools in the survey, no further sampling was used in our study. Two hundred seventy-five (275) of the students failed to participate owing to such reasons as illness, absenteeism and unwillingness, which left 931 study participants. The resulting answering ratio was 77.2%.

2.2. Procedures

Prior to data collection, an approval was obtained from Koç University School of Nursing Ethics Committee. The schools' administrators provided written approval to conduct the study, as there were no invasive procedures planned for human beings during the study period. The study was performed according to the Helsinki Declaration. Verbal consent was obtained from each student who agreed to participate after they were informed about the study content.

2.3. Instruments

2.3.1. Student Information Form
The form included 18 questions evaluating students' personal and family characteristics (department, class level, age, sex, family type, families' living place, having a ≥ 65 year-old family member, living with a ≥ 65 year-old, and interest in working with older people, etc.).

2.3.2. UCLA-GA Scale
The most frequently used scale assessing attitudes towards the elderly is the University of California Los Angeles Geriatrics Attitude (UCLA-GA) scale consisting of 14 questions reliability and validity of which were proven by Reuben et al. (1998). Validation and reliability of the Turkish version of UCLA-GA scale was conducted by Sahin et al. (2012). The items of the scale were assessed on a 5-point Likert type scale with the options "strongly disagree", "somewhat disagree", "somewhat neutral", "agree", "strongly agree". Participants gave "5" points if they strongly

agreed with the sentences of positive attitude toward the elderly, "4" points if they agreed, "3" points if they were somewhat neutral, "2" points if they somewhat disagreed and "1" point if they strongly disagreed. Sentences of negative attitude were scored with "1" point if they strongly agreed, "2" points if they agreed, "3" points if they were somewhat neutral, "4" points if they somewhat disagreed and "5" points if they strongly disagreed in the reverse order of the above-mentioned. The titles and minimum/maximum scores of the four subscales are as follows "social values (min: 2–max: 10), medical care (min: 4–max: 20), compassion (min: 4–max: 20), resources distribution (min: 4–max: 20)". The total attitude score comprises of a composition of these four scales. The minimum score is 14 while the maximum score is 70 and the higher the score is, the more positive their attitude is [9,21].

2.4. Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed by using SPSS (version 15.0, SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois). General subject characteristics were analyzed with descriptive analysis through frequency, percentage, and means. Student t test was used for categorical variables and $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

Descriptive features of the students can be seen in Table 1. It was found that the mean age of the students was 20.34 ± 1.79, 30% of them were in their 2nd year, a great majority of them consisted of female students (76%) and had immediate families (81.5%), more than half of them (60.2%) wanted to work at a unit providing care for the elderly after graduation, a great majority of them had not taken courses in geriatric nursing (81.5%), 34.4% of them attended a school in the Aegean Region, approximately half of them (49.6%) spent most of their lives in the city and that 47.1% of them lived in dormitories. One-third (32.4%) of the students who had visited a nursing home (41.1%) stated that they made the visit for clinical practices.

It was found that a great majority of the students (84.2%) had an elderly relative, more than half of them (66.6%) had a grandmother and almost half (47.4%) had a grandfather. Around 39.7% of the students stated that they lived with an elderly individual at home; 51.9% of them said they lived with a grandmother, 15.9% with a grandfather and 27.8% with both a grandmother and a grandfather. Average year spent living with their elderly relatives is 9.16 ± 8.26. In brief, 68.6% of the students stated that they wanted to live with aged individuals in the future and 51.2% of those identified the reason to do so was "thinking that aged people are part of the family". We also found that 44.5% believed living in separate houses was more suitable.

Mean score of UCLA-GA scale was 48.64 ± 5.51 (min: 22, max: 64). On the scale, scores for the social values, medical service, compassion and resources distribution sub-dimensions are 6.32 ± 1.56, 11.71 ± 2.36, 15.70 ± 2.73 and 14.90 ± 2.32 respectively.

UCLA-GA scale scores showed that female students had more positive attitudes than male students ($t = 2.709$, $P < 0.05$), those having an elderly relative than those who do not ($t = 2.671$, $P < 0.05$), those willing to live with an elderly family member than those who do not ($t = 6.374$, $P < 0.05$), and those wishing to work at a unit offering care to the elderly after graduation than those who do not ($t = 5.259$, $P < 0.05$) (Table 2). On the other hand, there was not a statistically significant difference between the students' UCLA-GA scale scores as to whether they ever lived with an aged individual in the same house ($P > 0.05$). No statistically significant difference was found between students' grades in terms of their UCLA-GA scores ($P > 0.05$).