

Determinants of undergraduate nursing students' care willingness towards the elderly in China: Attitudes, gratitude and knowledge



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ABSTRACT

Background: An aging population has become a serious problem in China. Improving the nursing students' care willingness is a critical way to solve this dilemma. Few studies reveal the relationship between the knowledge, care willingness, attitude towards the elderly and gratitude. This research has found that the attitude towards the elderly, the knowledge about aging, and gratitude showed correlation with care willingness.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among knowledge about aging, care willingness, attitude towards the elderly and gratitude.

Design: A cross-sectional descriptive design has been used.

Methods: From November to December 2015, a total of 382 undergraduate nursing students in China completed the questionnaires. The response rate was 95.5%. Four questionnaires including Care Willingness to the Elderly Scale (CW), Kogan's Attitudes towards Old People scale (KAOP), the Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ), and the Gratitude Scale. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to explore the relationship among those variables in this study.

Results: For Chinese nursing students, the care willingness of elderly was in medium-high level. Their attitude towards the elderly and gratitude were at the medium degree, while the knowledge about aging was at a lower level. The attitude towards older people, knowledge about aging, and gratitude were significantly correlated with care willingness. The knowledge about aging has no relationship with the attitude. Gratitude plays a mediation role between the knowledge about aging and care willingness. The experience of caring the elderly could lead to a positive impact in care willingness.

Conclusions: The nursing students' knowledge about aging had a direct influence on their care willingness. Gratitude plays a mediating role between the knowledge about aging and care willingness to the elderly.

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1. Introduction

With the trend of aging population, many social problems like social care systems and the increasing caring demands has been aroused by the public concern in the world (WHO, 2011). The study (Kinsella and He, 2009) shows that the elderly who aged 65 years and above is increasing with the speed of 870,000 monthly. WHO (2000) reports that the elderly who lived in developing countries account for over 60% (590 million) in the world in 1995, and it will be increased to 1.2 billion in 2025. The reductions of mortality from infectious disease

and the changes of demographic will be found (United Nations, 2012). The situation may be more serious in China. According to the Chinese Elderly Health Guideline (Chinese elderly health guideline, 2015), the elderly aged 60 years and above increased from 178 million in 2011 to 221 million in 2015. The rate will increase from 13.3% to 16%, and increasing at an average of 0.54% each year. Therefore, the country must provide more resources to meet the demands such as older peoples' healthcare need. However, there are only 20,000 nursing staffs with the professional old-age qualification in China (Yin, 2014). Besides, there are many problems with those nursing staffs. For instance, poorly educated, work under high-intensity, lower professional technology level, and psychological stress (Cao, 2015). Hence, it is necessary to cultivate more highly educated and professional nursing personnel in elderly caring such as undergraduate nursing students. However, Shen and Xiao (2012) found that nursing students express little desire to engage in elderly care. Most of nursing students thought that the job

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has no challenge and is repetitive, easy, and depressing (Gould et al., 2013; Carlson, 2013a, 2013b). Therefore, it is essential to know the care willingness of student nurses in China.

2. Background

Aging of population has become an increasingly serious problem in the world, especially in China. In fact, China has 1.37 billion populations, and the population is aging rapidly. Therefore, gerontological nursing is essential to solve this problem. Gerontological nursing has been developed in China (Hao et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a growing number of nursing schools have set this subject. Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine was the first school that set gerontological nursing in 2010. Those gerontological nursing students have learned the knowledge about elder people and have the experience as volunteer to care the elderly in nursing home. Although these students could alleviate the demand of the aged-care, most of the students would go to the hospital rather than to the nursing home. One reason they took into account is that the hospital's salary is higher than that in nursing home. What's more, they thought that the elderly was very unclean, and it is difficult to communicate with the elderly. Carlson and Idvall (2015) found that the characters like age, gender, and previous work experiences as health care assistants won't significantly affect students' care willingness to the elderly. In this study, the relationship between demographic characteristics of undergraduate nursing students and their care willingness to the elderly will be explored.

The result is the same as Bleijenberg et al.'s (2012) and King et al.'s (2013) studies which show that negative attitudes towards older people are ubiquitous, and the negative attitude would affect the quality of care. This conclusion has been previously described by Hanson (2014). Some nursing students were optimistic for the elderly (King et al., 2013), but they still won't care for the elderly. The nursing students would not consider to act as gerontological nurses when they graduated (Happell, 2002; Liu et al., 2013). The elderly is always regarded as a burden for young adults (Dahlke and Phinney, 2008), which causes shortage of relevant health workforce. Therefore, it is important to know Chinese nursing students' attitude towards the elderly. In this study, The Kogan's Attitudes towards Old People scale (KAOP) (Kogan, 1961) with a good reliability and validity in the world has been used to measure this aspect among the undergraduate nursing students.

For nursing students, it's very important to learn the knowledge about aging. They could deal with various relevant aging problems by using those knowledge. In China, a study (Zhou et al., 2015) showed that nursing students knew little aging knowledge, which has been gradually aroused the educator's attention. Without the sufficient theoretical knowledge and experience in caring for the elderly, the nursing students will be less desirable to go for elderly care (Shen and Xiao, 2012). Besides, Liu et al. (2013) found that preference to work with older people and learning more knowledge of aging are associated with positive attitudes towards older people.

Gratitude is regarded as a response to value (Highfield, 2001). It was first proposed as a positive feeling after someone offered his selfless love and help to others (Wood et al., 2008). After years of improving the concept of gratitude constantly, it was defined as a trait, a behavior, a feeling, and a moral virtue to express thankfulness (Gulliford et al., 2013). A man could be affected by the gratitude, which could cause a good behavior such as caring for vulnerable groups (Fries et al., 2013). Nursing students could develop their awareness of truly person-centered care with practice gratitude (Fournier and Sheehan, 2015). The major finding of Allan L J's study (Allan et al., 2014) showed that gratitude could promote positive attitudes towards the elderly. In China, the behavior of gratitude to the elderly is called filial piety. Most of nursing students were affected by these moral standards. Therefore, they would contribute themselves to care for the elderly.

Above all, five hypotheses were proposed as followed:

- H1.** : A positive attitude towards the elderly would lead to a high level of care willingness.
- H2.** : A better knowledge of aging would lead to positive attitude towards the elderly.
- H3.** : A better knowledge of aging would lead to a high level of care willingness.
- H4.** : A better knowledge has positive correlation with students' gratitude.
- H5.** : Gratitude would have positive influence on nursing students' willingness to care the elderly.

2.1. Hypothesized Model

According to the background, the model is made up by four aspects, which includes the Knowledge about aging (KA), attitude towards the elderly (KAOP), care willingness (CW) and gratitude. This hypothesized model is showed in Fig.1.

3. Methods

3.1. Design and Sample

A cross-sectional design was used in this survey. The researchers used cluster sampling and choose participants from a nursing school in Tianjin, China. A total of 400 undergraduate nursing students were enrolled in this survey. They came from two types of nursing specialty which are common nursing and gerontological nursing, and both of them have 200 undergraduate nursing students.

3.2. Instruments

There were a series of information to compose demographic questionnaire which include age, gender, and main living location. The respondents were asked whether they have the experience of caring or living with the elderly or the situation of being cared by grandparents in childhood or not. Besides, joining the aging training or elderly welfare's activities and the frequency of these relevant activities were also asked in this part.

The nursing students' care willingness (CW) to the elderly was measured by five items with a 5-point Likert scale, which was designed by the researchers to evaluate nursing students' level of caring for the elderly: 'If given the chance, I am willing to care for the elderly', 'No matter whether the elderly is my kinsfolk, I am still willing to take care for

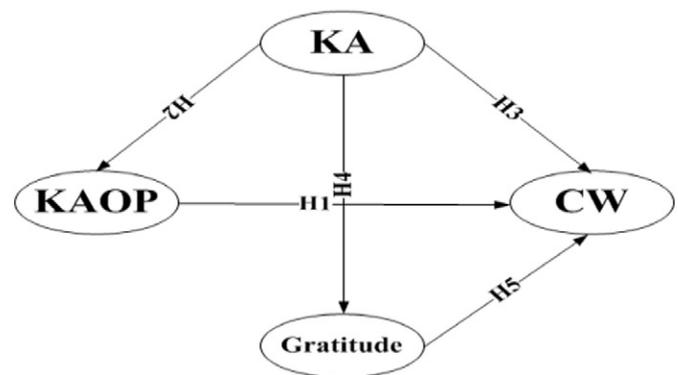


Fig. 1. The hypothesized model of structural relations among KA (Knowledge about aging), KAOP (Kogan's Attitudes towards Older People), CW (Care willingness to the elderly) and gratitude.

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