



Review

Nursing students' attitudes toward persons who are aged: An integrative review

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To analyze empirical studies from the United States and Canada to gain an understanding on how nursing education affects nursing students' attitudes toward persons who are aged.

Design: An integrative literature review was completed using Garrard's (2011) Matrix Method.

Data Sources: Articles were identified through the electronic database search engines of CINAHL, Pub Med, and Academic Search Complete. Only peer reviewed research articles from 2009 to 2015 were reviewed.

Review Methods: A review matrix was created to abstract information from 11 studies so that synthesis could occur. Information in the columns of the review matrix was used to compare the studies. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 27 item check list was used to help with reporting the findings. Studies were graded using the American Association of Critical Care Nurses' (AACN) level of evidence.

Results: A key finding is student engagement with gerontological content in the classroom or clinical setting results in improving nursing students' attitudes toward persons who are aged.

Conclusions: Several gaps exist in the literature. Further research including longitudinal studies and large scale, multi-site samples would add to the existing knowledge.

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1. Introduction

There has never been a more important time than now to prepare nurses to care for our aging population. With the rapid growth of individuals 65 years of age and older in the United States, the population of healthcare consumers is expected to rise. As this patient population grows in numbers, it becomes vital to have healthcare professionals educated to care for their complex needs. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008) has documented that the aging population in the United States (US) poses one of the greatest challenges for healthcare and nursing education programs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008). According to Mather et al. (2015), the number of Americans age 65 and older was 46 million in 2014. As baby boomers, children born post World War II, turn 65, the number of older adults is expected to double by 2060 (Mather et al., 2015). The exponential increase in the geriatric population will create a significant need for gerontological nursing expertise. Nursing education programs

are challenged to design curricula to prepare nurses for complex healthcare planning, management, and coordination of care for this population.

Aging is a global phenomenon. Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2002) reported that in the near future all countries will face rapid growth in the aging population. Although initially found in industrialized countries, the 21st century has seen an accelerated increase of the aging population in developing countries. In most parts of the world, the population of persons 80 and over is growing faster than any other population (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2002). Profound implications for health care, including increasing global demands for nursing care, come with this rise in persons over 65 years of age.

Accurate predictions can be made about population trends for persons 65 years and older, but what cannot be predicted is how this population will look in the future. Advances in healthcare make it impossible to predict what the future holds for persons who are aging (Jenkins, 2015). The healthcare system supports health promotion and healthy aging, which can lead to major improvements in the health and wellness for persons who are maturing. The 65 year old of yesterday will not be the same as the 65 year old of tomorrow (Jenkins, 2015). To ensure the health and wellness of our aging population, healthcare will need nurses to specialize in gerontology.

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Previous theoretical and empirical works on the attitudes of nursing students toward persons who are aged suggested a negative association between nursing students' attitudes and their lack of interest in pursuing careers in geriatric nursing. As negative attitudes increased, interest in careers in geriatric nursing decreased (Chen et al., 2002; Boswell and Polizzi, 2003; Cozort, 2008). However, it is unclear what similarities exist across theoretical and empirical reports about how nursing students' attitudes change, when they change, and what changes them. A greater understanding of how nursing education in the United States and Canada affects nursing students' attitudes toward persons who are aged could guide future nursing curricula development to stimulate interest in geriatric nursing.

2. Theoretical Framework

Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) provides a framework with which to review literature on the attitudes that prelicensure nursing students develop toward persons who are aged while in nursing school. Experiential learning theory (ELT) is a philosophy of education, which theorizes that knowledge is created and attitudes are developed or reinforced through a transformational learning process that consists of four stages and four basic learning styles (Kolb and Kolb, 2005).

Kolb (1984) posits that learners' employ one of four different learning styles to progress through four stages during the learning process. The basic learning styles employed include diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating. The four stages include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. (Kolb, 1984). Learners must go through all four stages of the learning process for learning to occur. ELT provides a framework for educators to design meaningful experiences that allow students to assimilate new and advanced ideas into their existing beliefs and ideas. In addition to engaging in meaningful experiences, learners must be open to new learning opportunities and willing to set aside any biases. Based on Kolb's (1984) theory, learners reflect on their experiences during and following a concrete experience, conceptualize the experience, and use newly acquired knowledge to solve problems and make decisions. It is during these phases of learning that attitudes will change or be reinforced.

Attitude is a basic construct, which is difficult to define conceptually. Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1) conceptually define attitude as a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". In studying attitudes toward persons who are aged, the aged are the attitudinal objects, which provide the stimuli for eliciting an evaluative response from the attitude.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Aim of Review

The aim of this integrative review was to summarize empirical studies from the United States and Canada to gain an understanding on how nursing education affects nursing students' attitudes toward persons who are aged.

3.2. Design

An integrative literature review was completed using the Matrix Method (Garrard, 2011). The Matrix Method provided both structure and process to the literature review. The steps in the Matrix Methods process involved (1) stating the purpose, (2) screening and selecting the articles to be used, (3) reviewing and appraising the literature, (4) summarizing findings, and (5) drawing conclusions. A master folder with four sub folders was created to provide structure and guide processes 2–5.

3.3. Search Methods

The review of the literature covered a six year period from 2009 to 2015. The articles were identified through the electronic database search engines of CINAHL, Pub Med, and Academic Search Complete. Only peer-reviewed research articles were reviewed. The key search terms for CINAHL were (MH "Students Nursing") AND (MM "Attitude to Aging"), for Pub Med were "Students, nursing"[MeSH] and "Attitude of health personnel"[MeSH] and "Population dynamics"[MeSH], and for Academic Search Complete were DE "NURSING students—attitudes".

3.4. Search Outcomes

The search generated 102 citations. Forty three of the 102 citations were duplicates. An audit trail was kept in a sub folder of the literature review master folder titled paper trail. Information was documented on key words, key sources, electronic bibliographic databases, internet sites, and notes.

The results from the initial search were narrowed using inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included: a) research studies between 2009 and 2015 involving prelicensure, b) baccalaureate nursing students, c) nursing education programs based in the United States or Canada, and d) peer-reviewed articles written in English. The exclusion criteria included dissertations and briefs or commentaries. Of the remaining 59 citations, eleven studies met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.5. Quality Appraisal

An evidence leveling system by American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) was used to appraise the studies (Armola et al., 2009). AACN developed its original grading system in 1993 and revised it in 2009. The evidence-leveling system has six levels of evidence labeled A, B, C, D, E, M. The highest level of evidence is A, which is meta-analysis or meta-syntheses studies and the lowest level of evidence is M, which is manufacturers' recommendations (Armola et al., 2009). Level E studies, theory based evidence from expert opinion or multiple case reports, were not included (see Table 1).

3.6. Data Abstraction

A review matrix was created to abstract information from 11 studies so that synthesis could occur (Garrard, 2011). The studies were organized in ascending order by year of publication. The left side of the matrix was used to list the journal articles. Column topics were chosen after reading the articles, and then each document was read for data abstraction. Column headings included year, journal, theoretical framework, purpose, variables, study design, instrument, population, sample size, results, limitations, level of evidence, and notes. To assist with reporting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 27 item checklist (see Fig. 1 for flow diagram) was used (Vrabel, 2015).

3.7. Synthesis of Information

Information in the columns of the review matrix was used to compare the studies. An initial critical analysis was performed to determine similarities and differences in theoretical framework, purpose, variables, methodology, study samples, and findings. Studies were graded using AACN's level of evidence. The literature was examined for what was missing in the literature on this topic.

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