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## ELDERLY AGEISM IN HEALTHCARE AND NURSING

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### Review

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### Abstract

In parallel with the global aging of the world population, the elderly population in our country is also increasing. Ageism is defined as a multidimensional term that includes different attitudes, prejudices, behaviors, and actions shown to a person only because of his or her age. Ageism is formed by the positive and negative attitudes of individuals in society. However, in most societies, aging and the changes that occur with aging are generally viewed negatively. The negative attitudes of individuals in society towards the elderly also affect the quality of health care offered to them. Nurses are the most interacting with elderly individuals in health care. For this reason, nurses' attitudes and behaviors regarding ageism are important factors affecting the quality of care.

**Key Words:** Ageism, Health care, Nurse

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## Özet

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Dünya nüfusunun küresel olarak yaşlanmasına paralel olarak ülkemizde de yaşlı nüfus artmaktadır. Yaşlı ayrımcılığı, bir kişiye yalnızca yaşı nedeniyle gösterilen farklı tavır, önyargı, davranış ve eylemleri içinde barındıran çok boyutlu bir terim olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Yaşlı ayrımcılığını toplumdaki bireylerin olumlu ve olumsuz tutumları ile oluşmaktadır. Ancak toplumların çoğunda yaşlılık ve yaşlanmayla birlikte ortaya çıkan değişiklikler genelde olumsuz karşılanmaktadır. Toplumdaki bireylerin yaşlılara karşı olumsuz tutumları onlara sunulan sağlık bakım kalitesinde etkilemektedir. Sağlık bakımında yaşlı bireylerle en çok etkileşimde olan hemşirelerdir. Bu sebeple hemşirelerin yaşlı ayrımcılığına ilişkin tutum ve davranışları bakım kalitesini etkileyen önemli bir unsurdur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hemşire, Sağlık bakımı, Yaşlı ayrımcılığı

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## 1. Introduction

Aging is a process that occurs in all living things, causes regression in functions, is affected by hereditary and environmental factors, and continues from fertilization to the end of life. (Karadakovan, 2014). Aging is generally defined in different ways as chronological, biological, psychological, sociological and social aging. However, the most used definition is chronological aging, that is, the definition of aging based on calendar age. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers individuals aged 65 and over to be elderly. (World Health Organization, 1998).

The increase in the average life expectancy in the last century has led to an increase in the proportion of the elderly population in the world. When we look at the world, individuals aged 60 and over constitute the age group that increases rapidly when compared to other age groups. Between 1970 and 2025, the number of elderly people in the world is estimated to be 694 million (22.3%). Thus, it is estimated that the number of individuals over the age of 60 will be 1.2 billion in 2025, 1.3 billion in 2040, and 2 billion in 2050, including 80% of developing countries. Individuals aged 60 and older living in developing countries in 2002 were approximately 400 million. By 2025, this number is predicted to rise to approximately 840 million. (WHO, 2002).

With the increase in the elderly population in the world, problems such as nutrition, accommodation, job opportunities, income generation and health expenditures have begun to

be experienced in societies. As a result of increasing dependence on others with aging, physical, mental, cognitive and economic problems occur in individuals. The socio-cultural structure of the society, changes in attitudes and behaviors, the perception of individuals and society about aging are reflected in the services offered to the elderly and cause various problems. As a result of all these, it changes the perspective of individuals on aging. The change in the perspective of individuals in the society is reflected in the attitudes and behaviors in all processes, especially in interaction with the elderly. In this case, we encounter ageism. (Yılmaz Vefikuluçay & Terzioğlu, 2010).

## **2. Ageism**

Aging is perceived by society and individuals as a bad condition that should be avoided and equivalent to diseases (Macnicol, 2006). Ageism was first defined in 1969 by Robert Butler, president of the American National Institute on Aging. According to Butler, “older discrimination is a type of ideology that can translate into action, such as racial discrimination and gender discrimination. (Butler, 1969). When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are many different definitions of ageism (Akdemir et al., 2007; Çilingiroğlu & Demirel, 2004; Macnicol, 2006; Palmore, 1999). Today, the definition made by Palmore is used more frequently. Palmore defined ageism as “attitudes and behaviors that express prejudice towards older people”. In addition, Palmore states that ageism is one of the types of “discrimination” that ranks third after racial and gender discrimination (Palmore, 1999).

Ageism is a multidimensional situation that includes different attitudes, prejudices, behaviors and actions shown to a person just because of his or her age. For this reason, when examining the data on ageism, positive and negative attitudes are considered together. These positive and negative attitudes are decisive in the development of ageism (Çilingiroğlu & Demirel, 2004). According to Palmore, elements such as compassion, wisdom, reliability, freedom and happiness are positive attitudes towards ageism; Items such as illness, uselessness, lack of sexual life, decline in mental functions, isolation, poverty and depression include negative attitudes (Palmore, 1999).

There are various factors that play a role in the emergence of ageism in society. These factors are listed as follows (Çilingiroğlu & Demirel, 2004; Yılmaz Vefikuluçay & Terzioğlu, 2010).

1. Fear of death, perceiving death and old age as synonyms,

2. The importance given to bodily beauty and sexuality, economic efficiency and productivity,  
3. As a result of the fact that most of the researches are conducted in institutions such as nursing homes, nursing homes or hospitals, it can be considered that the society perceives the elderly as in need of constant care (Çilingiroğlu & Demirel, 2004).

### **3. Elderly Ageism in Healthcare**

Elderly people apply to health services due to the increase in their health care needs. Health services are provided in a multidisciplinary manner with a team of many health professionals such as physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers and dieticians. Attitudes of health professionals towards the elderly are one of the important factors affecting the course of health care provided to elderly individuals (Yılmaz Vefikuluçay & Terzioğlu, 2010). Considering that the health problems experienced by the elderly in the society are in the normal process of old age, may cause the elderly individuals not to be treated effectively (Özdemir & Bilgili, 2014).

Prejudices towards the elderly can be reflected in health services as follows:

- Health personnel do not receive adequate training on elderly care.
- Older individuals are given less preventive care than younger individuals.
- Health screenings of elderly individuals are performed less frequently.
- Treatment interventions for older people are hampered.
- Health personnel do not inform, thinking that elderly individuals have difficulties in understanding and learning.
- The histories of the elderly individuals are taken from their relatives at the diagnosis stage and their relatives are informed about their health status instead of the elderly individual (Akdemir et al., 2007; Yılmaz Vefikuluçay & Terzioğlu, 2010).

Nurses are the occupational group with which elderly individuals interact the most in the health care services process (Mezey et al., 2005; Rice, 2001). The roles and responsibilities of nurses with regard to the elderly were defined by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) in 1992. According to the definition, among the responsibilities of nurses towards the elderly are helping the elderly individual to maintain their independence, increasing the quality of life, supporting the elderly to maintain their own care, reducing the incidence of chronic diseases and minimizing the loss of function due to aging (ICN, 1993).

Nurses' attitudes towards ageism are among the factors that affect the fulfillment of roles and responsibilities defined by ICN (Yılmaz Vefikuluçay & Terzioğlu, 2010).

In order for nurses to develop positive attitudes towards the elderly:

- Nursing education programs should include information on aging and the aging process,
- Nurses should be supported to participate in courses, seminars and certificate programs on aging and the aging process,
- Issues related to geriatric nursing should be included in postgraduate education programs,
- The roles and responsibilities of the nurse who cares for the elderly person should be determined with written protocols (Emiroğlu, 2006).

There are some practices that nurses should perform in order to eliminate negative attitudes towards the elderly in society and family life. One of these practices is educating family members and society on the fact that aging is a natural process and the changes that can occur during this period. As a result of these trainings, it is thought that individuals can better understand the changes seen in the aging process and have more positive attitudes towards older individuals. Another practice that nurses should do is to include the elderly individual and other members of the family in the care process. In this way, the elderly individual will be able to think that he has a say in making decisions about himself, and the family members participating in the care will feel that they are competent in the care of the elderly individual and display more positive attitudes with the feeling of being useful. (Magnusson & Hanson, 2005).

#### **4. Conclusion**

With the increasing rate of the elderly population, problems related to aging are emerging. This situation affects the perspective of the elderly and old age in societies. Today, in many societies, elderly individuals are exposed to discrimination. The reason for this discrimination is due to the negative attitudes of the society towards aging, old age and elderly individuals. This negative attitude affects the health care services of elderly individuals. Negative prejudices, values, beliefs and attitudes of nurses towards elderly individuals are also reflected in the quality of care given to elderly individuals. For this reason, nurses' attitudes towards ageism constitute an important factor that directs patient care and affects the quality of care. In order to

change these attitudes of health professionals, it is extremely important to integrate information about aging and the aging process into nursing education programs at universities. Courses, seminars, etc. on issues related to aging and aging for nurses working in the field. participation should be provided. Due to the role of education and counseling among the responsibilities of nursing, it is necessary to carry out studies to eliminate negative prejudices for the old age period, which is an inevitable part of life. Moreover, nurses are also responsible for eradicating ageism.

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### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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