

Attitudes of Elderly Care Students Towards Elderly Individuals

Yaşlı Bakım Öğrencilerinin Yaşlı Bireylere Yönelik Tutumları

Necmettin ÇİFTÇİ¹, Hasan EVCİMEN²

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the attitudes of students studying elderly care towards old people. This descriptive study was conducted with 307 students studying in the elderly care program of two different state universities in the Eastern part of Turkey. Data were collected with the "Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KAOPS)" and "Personal Information Form". The data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 statistical analysis software, and the analysis involved calculating numbers, percentages, means, as well as conducting t-tests and ANOVA tests. The lowest score that the participating elderly care students got from the scale was 53, the highest was 205, and the average score of the scale was 142,47±21,74. A statistically significant difference was determined between students' grades and their subsequent motivation to care for and attitudes towards the elderly ($p<0.05$). The study revealed that the attitudes of students studying elderly care toward elderly individuals were above the median level. Moreover, a significant difference was determined between the students' grades and their desire to care for the elderly in the future and their attitudes towards them.

Keywords: Students, Elderly, Attitude

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, yaşlı bakım programı öğrencilerinin yaşlı bireylere yönelik tutumlarının belirlenmesi amacıyla yapıldı. Araştırma Türkiye'nin Doğusunda bulunan iki farklı devlet üniversitesinin yaşlı bakım programında okuyan 307 öğrenci ile tanımlayıcı tipte yürütülmüştür. Araştırma verileri "Kogan Yaşlılara Karşı Tutum Ölçeği(KYKTÖ)" ve "Kişisel Bilgi Formu" ile toplanmıştır. Veriler SPSS 25.0 programıyla sayı, yüzde, ortalama, t testi ve ANOVA testleri kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmaya katılan yaşlı bakım öğrencilerinin yaşlılara karşı tutum ölçeğinden aldıkları en düşük puan 53, en yüksek puan 205 olup ölçek ortalama puanı ise 142,47±21,74'tür. Öğrencilerin sınıfı ve gelecekte yaşlılara bakım verme isteği ile yaşlılara yönelik tutum arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farkın olduğu saptanmıştır ($p<0.05$). Yaşlı bakım öğrencilerinin yaşlı bireylere yönelik tutumları orta düzeyin üstünde olduğu belirlendi. Ayrıca öğrencilerin sınıfı ve gelecekte yaşlılara bakım verme isteği ile yaşlılara yönelik tutum arasında anlamlı bir farkın olduğu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenciler, Yaşlı, Tutum

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¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Necmettin ÇİFTÇİ, Hemşirelik, Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi, Hemşirelik Bölümü necmettin@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-4713-4212

² Öğr. Gör. Dr. Hasan EVCİMEN, Hemşirelik, Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu Terapi ve Rehabilitasyon Bölümü, hsn_evcimen@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-4352-101X

İletişim / Corresponding Author: Necmettin ÇİFTÇİ
e-posta/e-mail: necmettin2387@hotmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Aging is an inevitable and ongoing process that begins during intrauterine life and continues until death, with its significance varying from person to person. It is a universal phenomenon affecting all living beings, progressing at different rates in each individual, and bringing about irreversible changes to various bodily systems.¹ Aging causes changes in the body, which leads to problems with health and care. In some societies, these problems may mean being dependent on another individual, a decrease in productivity, or can be considered as diseases.²

Developments in the field of basic health services and medicine introduced the following benefits and advantages to humans and prolonged people's life expectancy: better control of chronic diseases, increased emphasis on healthy nutrition and physical activity, early diagnosis of diseases and applying new treatment methods, improved working conditions, decreased fertility rates, improved social and nutritional conditions, development of life-facilitating and protective technologies, taking preventive measures against infectious diseases, and the increased importance of public health services. As life expectancy increases, the elderly population grows rapidly on a global scale.³⁻⁵ There has been a notable rise in the utilization of health services among the elderly population due to the factors such as the significant increase in the worldwide and Turkish elderly populations, the management of chronic diseases, the increased education level of society and the high prevalence of multiple chronic conditions among this demographic group.^{6,7} The increase in the elderly population requires more attention to the health care policies given to this group.⁸

Attitudes towards elderly individuals tend to vary across societies, with a prevailing

tendency towards negativity. These attitudes are influenced by individual and environmental factors such as education, personal beliefs, past experiences, and cultural values associated with aging.^{5,9} Given the projected increase in interactions between younger individuals and the elderly in various societies, whether through caregiving for elderly parents or professional engagements, the attitudes of younger generations towards older individuals will have a profound impact on the lives of the elderly.¹⁰ It is therefore crucial to identify factors that can foster positive attitudes among healthcare professionals who actively engage in caring for the elderly and incorporate them into educational curricula. Providing students with opportunities for clinical observation, training, and research will positively influence their professional attitudes and values.¹¹

Elderly care staff and technicians play an invaluable role in providing care, rehabilitation, and support to elderly individuals, whether they require assistance or not, to help them lead a high-quality life.⁸ Therefore, it is highly significant to make sure that elderly care professionals have positive and humane attitudes towards elderly people in places where institutional care services are provided to increase the quality of health care provided for them. This study was conducted to explore the attitudes of elderly care program students towards elderly individuals.

Research Questions

1. How are the attitudes of nursing students towards elderly care?
2. What factors influence these students' attitudes towards the elderly?

METHODS

Type of Research

The study was conducted as a descriptive design.

Time and Place of the Study

This study was carried out between 01.09.2021 and 31.12.2021 with students studying in the elderly care program of two state universities in the Eastern part of Turkey.

Universe and Sample

The universe included 342 elderly care program students of two different universities in the Eastern part of Turkey. The study aimed to reach the entire universe by not choosing a sample and it was carried out with 307 students. The participation rate of the students in the study was 89.7%.

Data Collection Tools

Sociodemographic Characteristics Questionnaire and Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KAOPS) were employed to collect data. The data were collected through a questionnaire form using the face-to-face interview technique.

Sociodemographic Characteristics Questionnaire

The data collection tool was prepared by the researchers.^{5,9,10} It consists of questions regarding the respondents' gender, grade, parents' educational status, place of residence, family income, and views on elderly care.

Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale

The scale was developed by Kogan¹² and its validity and reliability process in Turkish language was carried out by Küçükgüçlü et al.¹³ It is a 6-point Likert-like scale consisting of 34 items. The responses range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. These categories are scored as 1-7,

respectively, and unanswered item is scored as 4. The items with odd numbers include negative statements, while the items with even numbers contain positive ones. Negative statements were reversed items. The range of scores for the scale is 34 to 238. It is accepted that the higher the score, the higher the positive attitude towards the elderly. Küçükgüçlü et al. (2011) found the Cronbach's alpha value to be 0.89.¹³ In this study, it was calculated as 0.79.

Variables of The Study

The dependent variable is the students' attitudes towards aging, and items such as gender, class year, family type, and the desire to care for elderly individuals constitute the independent variables of the research.

Data Analysis

The SPSS 25.0 statistical data analysis software was used to analyze the data. The data were analyzed using number, percentage, mean, t-test, and ANOVA tests. The data were assessed within the 95% confidence interval, and $p < 0.05$ was accepted as statistically significant.

Ethical Dimension of the Study

Prior to the study, ethical permission was secured from Muş Alparslan University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Approve date-no: 01.07.2021-15949). Permission was obtained from the other institutions as well. The students were included in the study by getting their informed consent before the study. During the conduct of the study, the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki were complied with.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of all the participants, 68.9% were women, 57.6% were first-year students, 50.6% lived in the city center, and 61.9% were living in a nuclear family. 47.1% of the mothers of the students are illiterate and 40.5% of their fathers are primary school graduates. It is seen that 73.2% of the families of the students have middle income. 59.9% of the participants stated that they did not consider the elderly care training sufficient, 75.1% were not living with an elderly person, and 72.8% stated that they wanted to live with an elderly person. 42.4% of the participants expressed that they had given care to the elderly person in the family before, and 85.6% of them stated that they had not received elderly care training before. 45.1% of them stated that they were in contact with the elderly 1-2 times a week. 59.5% of the students stated that they want to care for the elderly person in the future (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Students

Characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Male	95	30.9
Female	212	69.1
Grade		
1 st	177	57.7
2 nd	130	42.3
Place of Residence		
City	155	50.5
Town	73	23.8
Village	79	25.7
Family Type		
Nuclear Family	190	61.9
Extended Family	117	38.1
Educational Status of Mother		
Illiterate	145	47.2
Literate	46	15.0
Primary School	74	24.1
Middle School	33	10.8
University	9	2.9
Educational Status of Father		
Illiterate	33	10.7
Literate	36	11.7
Primary School	124	40.4
Middle School	93	30.3
University	21	6.9

Table 1. (Continued)	N	%
Family Income		
Low	79	25.7
Middle	224	73.0
High	4	1.3
Is the elderly care training sufficient?		
Yes	123	40.1
No	184	59.9
Do/Did you live with an elderly individual?		
Yes	76	24.8
No	231	75.2
Would you like to live with an elderly individual?		
Yes	223	72.6
No	84	27.4
Is care given to an elderly individual in your family?		
Yes	130	42.3
No	177	57.7
Did you get an elderly care training before?		
Yes	44	14.3
No	263	85.7
Frequency of Interaction with elderly?		
Never	14	4.5
Once in a moth	69	22.5
1-2 times in a week	138	45.0
Everyday	86	28.0
Would yo like to give care to an elderly individual in the future?		
Yes	183	59.6
No	31	10.1
No sure	93	30.3

The lowest score that the participating elderly care students got from the scale was 53, the highest score was 205, and the average score of the scale was 142.47 ± 21.74 . It is evident that the attitudes of elderly care students towards the elderly are above medium level (Table 2).

Table 2. Minimum, Maximum, and Average Scores Obtained by Students from Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale

Scale	Minimum	Maximum	X±S.S
KOGAN_TOTAL	53	205	142.47±21.74

There was statistically no significant difference between the genders of the students and their attitudes towards the

elderly ($p>0.05$). It was determined that the mean score of the 1st grade students was higher than the average score of the 2nd grade students and there was a statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$). Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference between the places where the students lived and their attitudes towards the elderly ($p>0.05$). There was no significant relationship between the family types of the students and their attitudes towards the elderly ($p>0.05$). There was no significant difference between the educational status of the parents of the students and their attitudes towards the elderly ($p>0.05$). There is no significant relationship between the income status of the students' families and their total scores from the scale ($p>0.05$). It was determined that the attitude scores of the students who want to care for the elderly in the future were higher than the other students and there was a significant difference ($p<0.05$). It was investigated that there was no significant relationship among whether the participants have stayed with elderly, have taken care of elderly, have taken training on elderly care, how much they interact with elderly, and their attitudes towards elderly ($p>0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of Students' Total Scores from the Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale by Sociodemographic Characteristics

Characteristics	KAOPS X±S.S	Statistical testing and significance
Gender *		
Male	142.31±20.36	t:-0.080
Female	142.54±22.40	p:0.936
Grade *		
1st	147.89±19.59	t:4.854
2nd	135.11±22.44	p:0.000
Place of Residence**		
City	139.40±21.63	
Town	146.06±24.91	F:1.811
Village	145.04±18.16	p:0.146
Family Type*		
Nuclear Family	140.87±21.89	t:-1.506
Extended Family	145.07±21.37	p:0.133
Educational Status of Mother		
Illiterate	143.17±21.18	
Literate	147.25±26.89	
Primary school	140.08±19.43	F:0.917
Middle school	139.07±21.02	t:0.455
University	138.57±22.57	

Table 3. (Continued)	KAOPS X±S.S	Statistical testing and significance
Educational Status of Father		
Illiterate	149.96±20.22	
Literate	137.26±25.16	F:1.336
Primary school	142.68±18.32	t:0.257
Middle school	141.29±21.39	
University	143.47±34.72	
Family Income		
Low	144.96±19.31	F:1.125
Middle	141.81±22.61	t:0.326
High	128.66±8.08	
Is the elderly care training sufficient?		
Yes	145.18±21.98	t:1.639
No	140.66±21.46	p:0.102
Do/Did you live with an elderly individual?		
Yes	144.64±22.42	t:0.919
No	141.75±21.53	p:0.359
Would you like to live with an elderly individual?		
Yes	143.95±23.54	t:1.794
No	138.51±15.47	p:0.07
Is care given to an elderly individual in your family?		
Yes	142.06±24.21	t:-0.259
No	142.77±19.81	p:0.796
Did you get an elderly care training before?		
Yes	136.40±18.78	t:-1.843
No	143.49±22.08	p:0.06
Frequency of Interaction with Elderly		
Never	133.33±15.18	
Once in a month	139.96±18.98	F:1.583
1-2 times in a week	145.13±22.72	t:0.194
Everyday	141.71±22.80	
Would you like to give care to an elderly individual in the future?		
Yes	145.96±22.08	F:5.707
No	133.19±19.56	t:0.04
Not sure	138.71±20.45	

* Independent sample t test ** One Way ANOVA

Sufficient knowledge about elderly individuals among healthcare providers significantly impacts the quality of healthcare services provided to the elderly population.¹⁴ Liu et al. found that there is a relationship between having knowledge about aging and preferring to work with the elderly, and a positive attitude towards them.¹⁵

This study examined attitudes of elderly care students towards the elderly. The findings were discussed regarding the literature. Nevertheless, there are just a few studies on the attitudes of elderly care students towards elderly individuals.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ For this reason, it was also discussed with different groups on the subject.

It was found that the participants' attitudes towards elderly individuals were above the

moderate level in this study. Kavuran and Caner's (2021) study on elderly care students showed that students' attitude scale average scores were at a good level.¹⁸ Can et al. (2019) found that students' attitudes towards ageism were at a moderate level.¹⁶ Güngör and Borazan carried out a study with elderly care and paramedic students and reported that the participants' negative attitudes towards elderly individuals were low and positive attitudes were high.¹⁷ In the study conducted by Singh et al. with health sciences students, it was stated that students have moderate knowledge and positive attitudes towards aging.¹⁹ It was reported in another study that health and administrative staff working in the geriatric center have a positive attitude towards the elderly.²⁰ In the study of Okuyan and Karasu (2020) with elderly care personnel, they revealed that their attitudes towards the elderly were constructive.²¹ A study on nursing students which was carried out in Hong Kong reported that the students' attitudes towards older adults were positive.²² In some other studies similar to the present study, it was determined that attitudes towards the elderly were positive.²³⁻²⁶ Some studies have revealed that students studying in different fields of health studies have negative attitudes towards the elderly.^{2, 27} In another study, it was emphasized that nurses' positive attitudes towards the elderly were at a low level.²⁸ In our study, it can be said that the good attitude towards the elderly is due to the willingness to care for the elderly individual.

No statistically significant difference was found in the present study between the gender of the students and their attitudes towards the elderly. Kavuran and Caner, in their study with elderly care students, stated that there was a statistically significant difference between gender and attitudes towards the elderly.¹⁸ Different studies that are similar to the present study, reported no significant difference between gender and attitudes towards the elderly.^{23, 28-30} On the other hand, some studies have reported that women have more positive attitudes towards older individuals than men.^{21, 24, 31-33} A study on medical students revealed that women

participants had more negative attitudes towards older individuals.³⁴ The cultural structure of Turkish society has different textures. It can be said that this situation is effective in the different results related to gender.

In the present study, it was determined that the average scores of the first-year elderly care students' attitudes towards the elderly were higher than the average scores of the second-year students, and there was a statistically significant difference between the grades. Like the present study, Kavuran and Caner's (2021) study with elderly care students revealed that there was a significant difference between the students' grades and their attitude scores towards the elderly, and unlike the present study, the average attitude scores of the second-year students were higher than the average scores of the first-year students.¹⁸ A study conducted with nursing students, it was determined that first-year students had a more negative attitude towards ageism compared to other grades.³⁵

The present study investigated that the attitude scores of the elderly care students who want to care for the elderly in the future are higher than the other students, and there is a statistically significant difference between the students' desire to care for the elderly and their attitudes towards the elderly. Similarly, Kavuran and Caner's study with elderly care students revealed that there was a significant difference between the desire of working with elderly individuals after graduation and the total average score of the attitude scale towards the elderly.²⁰ In some studies that were conducted with students studying in different programs of health studies, it was concluded that students who want to live or work with the elderly have a high level of positive attitude towards the elderly individuals.^{17, 36, 37} In some studies that were conducted with nursing students, it was stated that nursing students were willing to work with older adults.^{22, 25, 26} In another study, nurses who spent a long time with elderly individuals stated that they had positive behaviors towards them.³⁸ Unlike the present paper, Abreu and

Caldevilla (2015) carried out a study with Portuguese nursing students, and they reported that there was no significant difference between the students' living with elderly people and their average attitude scores towards the elderly.²⁹ Sehen and Xiao (2012) stated that nursing students have little

desire to deal with elderly care.³⁹ Moreover, a study reported that health care providers may prefer to focus on the acute health problems of young individuals as opposed to the chronic health problems of the elderly.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the present study, it was found that the attitudes of elderly care students towards elderly individuals were above the moderate level. It was determined that there was no significant difference between the students' gender, place of residence, family type, parental education and income level, and their attitudes towards the elderly. It was found that there was a significant difference between the students' grades and their desire to care for the elderly in the future and their attitudes towards the elderly.

As a result, the continuing increase in the elderly population puts the elderly care staff/technician even in a more critical position in terms of increasing the health care quality of elderly individuals. For this reason, it is also important to support, develop, and maintain the positive attitudes of the elderly care professionals. It is recommended to provide trainings that will increase the desire to care for elderly individuals. In order for the results to be generalizable, it is recommended that the studies be conducted in different regions and with larger sample groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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