

RESEARCH / ARAŞTIRMA

Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Students

Fizyoterapi ve Rehabilitasyon Öğrencilerinde Geriatri Alanında Ekip Çalışmasına Yatkınlık ve Mesleki Bilgi

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study was to evaluate the aptitude for teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics of physiotherapy and rehabilitation students.

Material and Methods: The study included physiotherapy and rehabilitation undergraduate students. Demographic information was recorded, then the Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics Questionnaire, developed by the authors, was completed online. The questionnaire scores were compared between groups of students who had and had not taken a course in geriatric rehabilitation or training on teamwork in geriatrics.

Results: Evaluation was made of 320 students, comprising 281 females and 39 males with a mean age of 21.17 ± 1.57 years. The average score of the Aptitude for Teamwork in the Field of Geriatrics and Vocational Knowledge Questionnaire scores was 103.32 ± 10.63 points. Lessons on geriatric rehabilitation and/or training on teamwork and professional practices in the field of geriatrics were stated to have been taken by 35% of the students. A significant difference was found between the scores of those who had and had not received lessons or training in geriatric rehabilitation ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Training in geriatric rehabilitation is an important part of the education of physiotherapy and rehabilitation students, as they will play an important role in meeting the needs of the increasing elderly population.

Keywords: Students, geriatrics, physiotherapy, rehabilitation.

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, fizyoterapi ve rehabilitasyon öğrencilerinde geriatri alanında ekip çalışmasına yatkınlık ve mesleki bilgi düzeylerini değerlendirmektir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Çalışmaya fizyoterapi ve rehabilitasyon lisans öğrencileri dahil edildi. Demografik bilgiler kaydedildikten sonra yazarlar tarafından geliştirilen Geriatri Alanında Ekip Çalışmasına Yatkınlık ve Mesleki Bilgi Anketi çevrimiçi form vasıtasıyla uygulandı. Geriatrik rehabilitasyon ile ilgili ders veya geriatri alanında ekip çalışmasıyla ilgili eğitim alanlarla almayanların anket skorları karşılaştırıldı.

Bulgular: Yaş ortalaması $21,17 \pm 1,57$ yıl olan 281 kadın ve 39 erkek olmak üzere 320 öğrenci değerlendirildi. Geriatri Alanında Ekip Çalışmasına Yatkınlık ve Mesleki Bilgi Anketi puan ortalamaları $103,32 \pm 10,63$ puan idi. Öğrencilerin %35'i geriatrik rehabilitasyon dersi ve/veya geriatri alanında ekip çalışması ve mesleki uygulamalar konusunda eğitim aldığı belirtilti. Geriatrik rehabilitasyon alanında eğitim veya ders alan ve almayanların puanları arasında anlamlı fark bulundu ($p < 0,05$).

Sonuç: Artan yaşlı nüfusun ihtiyaçlarının karşılanmasında önemli bir rol oynayacakları için geriatrik rehabilitasyon alanında alınacak eğitimler fizyoterapi ve rehabilitasyon öğrencilerinin eğitiminin önemli bir parçasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğrenciler, yaşlılar, fizyoterapi, rehabilitasyon.

1. Introduction

In Turkey, just as throughout the rest of the world, the proportion of the elderly population is increasing due to increased life expectancy and lower birth rates (1). The population aged ≥ 65 years increased by 22.6% between 2017-2022 in Turkey. The percentage of this age group in the total population was 9.9% in 2022, and this rate is predicted to rise to 16.3% by 2040 (2). This increase in the elderly population requires modifications to be made to the education of healthcare personnel to be able to keep up with changing health needs. Although aging is not a disease in itself, many health problems develop in old age and the decrease in functional abilities of individuals causes an increase in the need for healthcare services. Providing qualified healthcare services for the elderly population is extremely important for countries (3, 4). As problems develop in more than one area at the same time in elderly individuals, a multi-faceted approach is required and teamwork that can handle these separate areas at the same time (5).

Teamwork in healthcare is a vital part of patient care. Poor teamwork is an important risk factor for treatment errors and adverse events (6). Teamwork practices in healthcare services are increasing and it is recommended that experts from different fields work together to provide high-quality healthcare services. Better health outcomes at a lower cost can be achieved with teamwork (7). It has also been proposed as an additional learning method to traditional education models in health and social care (8). Training to develop interprofessional teamwork skills can be used as a strategy to overcome team dysfunction. Relevant patient communities have demonstrated that interprofessional experiences during vocational training can increase the likelihood of future professionals working collaboratively. University education should enable future graduates of healthcare programs to work effectively together and share their knowledge to better meet patient needs (9).

As most geriatric individuals with chronic diseases have more than one health problem, their clinical care is more complex for healthcare professionals (10). Considering that chronic diseases and musculoskeletal disorders will increase with the increase in the elderly population, there is a need for more physiotherapists to work in the field of geriatric rehabilitation (11). Physiotherapists are among the healthcare professionals who interact frequently with elderly individuals in the protection and improvement of their health (12). In Turkey, the number of medical schools providing undergraduate education in physiotherapy and rehabilitation has increased rapidly in recent years. This has led to an increase in the number of physiotherapists. The similar increase in the number of physiotherapists and the elderly population suggests that there will also be an increase in the number of physiotherapists working in the field of geriatrics (1). A roadmap should be established to increase the quality of the physiotherapy service provided for the elderly and for the dissemination of teamwork. This can be achieved by evaluating the multidisciplinary teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics of undergraduate students, who are the physiotherapists of the future. With current changes in the understanding of health and the demand for

healthcare services, multidisciplinary teamwork has become necessary in geriatric care (5). The expertise of the interdisciplinary team is essential to be able to design and implement the optimal rehabilitation plan for geriatric patients. However, developing and maintaining skills in team functioning is not a routine part of training for practitioners in geriatric rehabilitation (13). In Turkey, physiotherapy students receive information about the necessity of teamwork and rehabilitation in geriatric individuals as a topic in different lessons. Specific information on this subject is obtained either from the elective lessons related to geriatric rehabilitation or from training courses. Evaluation of students in respect of the importance of teamwork in geriatric rehabilitation and the level of knowledge about the duties of team members can be of guidance for the changes that need to be made. There are studies in the literature that have examined the attitudes of students studying in different health sciences towards teamwork (14). There are also studies examining the attitudes of physiotherapy students towards the elderly (1, 12). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has evaluated the aptitude for multidisciplinary teamwork and professional knowledge of students in the physiotherapy and rehabilitation department, who will play a very important role in geriatric rehabilitation. The aim of this study was to evaluate the aptitude for teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics of physiotherapy and rehabilitation students in Turkey, where there is a rapidly increasing elderly population. It was also aimed to investigate whether there is a difference in this regard between those who had and had not received a course on geriatric rehabilitation and/or those who had and had not received training in teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design and Sample

This descriptive cross-sectional study included students in the Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Department. The study was conducted in the 2021-2022 academic year. Inclusion criteria for the study were being an undergraduate student in the Department of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation and voluntary participation in the study. First-year students were not included because the first-year syllabus consists of education in basic sciences such as anatomy and physiology. Vocational lessons are mostly included from the second year. Therefore, second, third and fourth year students were included in the study, and for second-year students, the questionnaire was completed at the end of the academic year. An online form was created for the study and the link address was sent to the students via social media connections of the authors and by e-mail. At the beginning of the form, there was an introduction that included the purpose of the study and ethical information. For informed consent, all participants marked the option stating that they volunteered to participate in the study before starting to answer the questions. Students from 30 universities in different regions of Turkey participated in the study.

2.2. Instrument

Demographic information was recorded including age, gender, university and year of study. Then the respondents were asked whether they had previously taken a multidisciplinary teamwork and geriatric rehabilitation training course or any lessons related to geriatric rehabilitation. The questionnaire was then completed. With reference to the relevant literature, The Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics Questionnaire was developed by the researchers as a 26-item self-reported form to evaluate the aptitude for teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics (7, 15). Two physiotherapists experienced in the field of geriatric rehabilitation and an assessment and evaluation specialist took part in the development of the scale items. The questionnaire items included statements about the student's level of knowledge about professional practices in geriatric rehabilitation, their knowledge about the roles of other professional groups working in the field, their opinions about the necessity of teamwork in the geriatric field, and their self-confidence about teamwork. Thus, it was aimed to evaluate the knowledge, interests and attitudes of the students about teamwork professional awareness in the field of geriatric rehabilitation. Each item on the questionnaire was scored on a 5-level Likert-type scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=undecided, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree). Reverse scoring was applied to 11 items (4, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 25) which contained negative statements. Higher scores indicate a higher aptitude for teamwork and higher professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Data obtained in the study were analyzed statistically using SPSS 25.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Categorical variables were stated as number (n) and percentage (%) and continuous variables as mean±standard deviation (SD) values. To determine the reliability of the scale, internal consistency was evaluated and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient >0.80 is considered an indicator of high internal consistency (16). The Independent groups t-test was used to compare the scale results of the students who received and did not receive training in multidisciplinary teamwork and geriatric rehabilitation, and who took and did not take a course on geriatric rehabilitation. Post hoc power analysis was performed to calculate the power of the study. In the study, which was completed with 320 participants, the effect size was found to be 0.51 and the power of the study to be 0.99. The level of statistical significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

2.4. Ethical Aspect of the Research

Approval for the study was granted by the University of Health Sciences Gülhane Scientific Research Ethics Committee (decision number: 2021-339, date: 23.09.2021). All the study procedures were in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the study.

3. Results

A total of 326 students studying in physiotherapy and rehabilitation departments in 30 different universities in 6 regions of Turkey (Aegean, Marmara, Central Anatolia, Black Sea, Eastern Anatolia, Mediterranean regions) participated in the study. Of these students, 6 were excluded because they were first-year students. Thus, analysis was made of the data of 320 participants. The mean age of the students was 21.17 ± 1.57 years. The distribution of students in terms of gender and year of study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender and Year in School Information of Participants

		n	%
Gender	Female	281	87.8
	Male	39	12.2
Year at school	Second year	138	43.1
	Third year	139	43.4
	Fourth year	43	13.5

Lessons on geriatric rehabilitation were stated to have been taken by 31.3% of the students, and training on geriatric physiotherapy and rehabilitation with multidisciplinary teamwork in the field of geriatric rehabilitation by 12.8%. It was reported by 208 students (65%) that they had not received any lessons, or training courses related to the subject.

The rates, scores and total score of the answers given to each item of the questionnaire evaluating the aptitude for teamwork and professional knowledge in the geriatric field are shown in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.872.

The highest score among the scale items was the score of item 2, which is related to the fact that creating a rehabilitation plan together with professionals in other fields will minimize treatment-related errors. The lowest score was the score of item 11, which questions the level of knowledge about current developments in the profession in geriatric practice.

A statistically significant difference was found in the total scores between students who had not taken any lessons or training courses on geriatric rehabilitation and those who had taken at least one ($p < 0.001$) (Table 3). No significant difference was seen between groups in respect of the responses to the items 4, 7, 10, 13-22, 26 ($p > 0.05$). These items are mostly related to the necessity of teamwork in terms of elderly health, and work motivation. A significant difference was determined between the groups in respect of the responses given to the items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25 ($p < 0.05$). These items are mostly related to the level of knowledge about the profession in the field of geriatric rehabilitation and the roles of different professional groups and the self-confidence related to teamwork in the field of geriatrics.

Table 2. Responses and scores of the Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics questionnaire

Item	Response rates					Score
	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean (SD)
1.Teamwork improves the quality of healthcare in geriatric patients	0	0	4.4	34.1	61.6	4.57 (0.57)
2.Creating a rehabilitation plan with professionals in other fields minimizes treatment-related errors	0	0	2.2	30.6	67.2	4.65 (0.52)
3.I know which healthcare professional to refer to when I encounter a problem outside of my field in geriatric practice	0.3	3.8	34.7	43.4	17.8	3.74 (0.8)
4.I do not think that working together in different fields will contribute to the health of elderly individuals	45.6	30.3	2.8	10	11.3	3.89 (1.37)
5.In geriatric practice, I think it would be more efficient to make projects from different fields together	0	0.3	4.1	43.4	52.2	4.47 (0.59)
6.I know what the roles of different health science professionals are in geriatric practice	0	4.1	27.8	50.3	17.8	3.81 (0.76)
7.I cannot evaluate the geriatric individual I am interested in from different perspectives and direct them to the relevant health professionals	15.9	46.3	26.9	8.4	2.5	3.64 (0.93)
8.When I meet a geriatric individual in my professional life, I know the evaluations I need to make about my profession	0.3	3.8	35	44.7	16.3	3.72 (0.78)
9.I know the practices that I should do about my profession when I meet a geriatric individual in my professional life	0	5	34.4	43.8	16.9	3.72 (0.79)
10.I know the importance of my profession in geriatric practice	0	0.3	4.4	45.6	49.7	4.44 (0.59)
11.I do not know the current developments about my profession in geriatric practice	4.1	17.8	36.6	34.4	7.2	2.77 (0.96)
12.I am fully aware of the role of my profession in geriatric practice	0	7.8	28.1	45.6	18.4	3.74 (0.84)
13.I do not think that interdisciplinary work in geriatric practice will increase my motivation	30.6	48.8	7.8	7.8	5	3.92 (1.06)
14.The idea of accessing information from other disciplines related to geriatric practice does not seem very interesting to me	18.1	49.4	17.2	11.6	3.8	3.66 (1.02)
15.I am open to working with different disciplines	0	0.3	4.4	49.1	46.3	4.41 (0.59)
16.I do not think that interdisciplinary work will contribute to my professional development	43.4	45.9	4.1	3.8	2.8	4.23 (0.9)
17.I think geriatric individuals should be evaluated by health professionals from different branches	0.6	1.9	6.6	46.3	44.7	4.32 (0.73)
18.I think that I should be in contact with other health professionals in geriatric practice.	0	0.6	3.8	46.3	49.4	4.44 (0.6)
19.I am of the opinion that it is sufficient to only do projects in my field regarding the protection/improvement of health in geriatric individuals	22.5	53.4	13.1	6.6	4.4	3.83 (0.99)
20.When I encounter a problem outside of my field in geriatric practice, I hesitate to contact professionals in other fields	26.3	54.4	14.1	4.7	0.6	4 (0.8)
21.I hesitate when asked for support in my field in geriatric practice	25.6	51.2	16.6	5.6	0.9	3.95 (0.85)
22.I do not think that I will be successful in interdisciplinary work in geriatric practice	27.2	50.3	13.4	8.1	0.9	3.94 (0.9)
23.I am confident about the requirements of my profession in geriatric practice	0	3.1	22.5	56.3	18.1	3.89 (0.72)
24.I find myself sufficient in doing projects/works with different disciplines in geriatric practice	0.3	7.5	37.2	42.5	12.5	3.59 (0.81)
25.I feel inadequate because I do not know the role of other healthcare professionals in geriatric practice	10.9	40.9	30.9	15	2.2	3.43 (0.94)
26.In my professional life, I would like to work in geriatric rehabilitation in places where teamwork is carried out well	0.3	0.6	9.1	34.4	55.6	4.44 (0.71)
Total						103.32 (10.63)

SD= Standart Deviation

Table 3. Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics questionnaire scores of those who received courses or training and those who did not

Receive at least one of the lesson or training in geriatric rehabilitation (n=112)	Not Receive the lesson or training in geriatric rehabilitation (n=208)	p
Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
106.82 (10.68)	101.44 (10.14)	<0.001

SD= Standart Deviation

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to evaluate the tendency to teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics of physiotherapy and rehabilitation students using a self-reported questionnaire. From the results of the study, it was determined that the majority of the students had a high level of teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics. The questionnaire scores of those who had received lessons or training courses on the subject were found to be higher. When the scores of the answers given to the questionnaire items were compared, no difference was found between the groups in respect of the scores of the answers given to items related to the necessity of teamwork in the field of geriatrics. However, the scores of the responses to the items related to occupational knowledge about geriatric rehabilitation, knowledge about the roles of other occupational groups, and self-confidence for teamwork were found to be higher in the group that had taken lessons or training courses.

When the frequently used scales related to teamwork were examined, it was seen that the scales generally evaluated the attitudes of the employees towards teamwork (7). However, no questionnaire could be found which evaluated the tendency to teamwork and professional knowledge in the field of geriatrics of undergraduate students. To be able to undertake effective teamwork, healthcare professionals should have knowledge about their own profession and the roles of other professions, believe in the necessity of teamwork, and have self-confidence in performing teamwork. Therefore, from an examination of the relevant literature, a questionnaire evaluating all these factors was developed for this study. The high Chronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire indicates that the Aptitude for Teamwork and Professional Knowledge in the Field of Geriatrics Questionnaire is reliable.

It has been reported that all healthcare professionals should receive training on teamwork to be able to participate in teamwork effectively (17). In the physiotherapy and rehabilitation syllabus, there is no specific lesson on teamwork, but the importance of teamwork is mentioned in many lessons. Therefore, most of the students obtained high scores from the items related to the necessity of teamwork. Similar to the results of the present study, it has been previously reported that health science and nursing students have a high awareness of and positive attitudes about teamwork (14, 18). However, even if teamwork is known to be necessary, not knowing the roles of other team members and not being aware of professional developments can reduce self-confidence in teamwork. This was shown by the fact that the responses to items 23, 24, and 25 questioning self-confidence about teamwork were different between those who had and had not taken lessons and/or training courses.

To enable effective teamwork, it is recommended that students who are going to be healthcare professionals attend conferences on interdisciplinary teamwork, stay in touch with other team members, and attend training courses where they can learn about their own roles in the team, the roles of other team members and the importance of teamwork (15). In the current study, only 12.8% of the students reported that they had attended a training course on teamwork. The higher scores obtained in the questionnaire by those trained on this subject suggest that training courses on teamwork in the field of geriatrics should be expanded. Ellis et al.

emphasized that creating high-performance teams should be prioritized for services related to geriatric health, and that training on teamwork could be beneficial for improving team performance and treatment outcomes (5). It has been stated that interprofessional training activities for health sciences students are effective in developing attitudes towards teamwork, communication and cooperation in preparation for the application of knowledge and skills (19).

To make the team effective, each team member must value their own contribution (20). In the current study, it was seen that most of the participants responded positively to item 10 on the importance of the profession in geriatric practice. Livingstone et al. revealed that the presence of a physiotherapist in a nursing home is associated with a higher quality of care (21). However, it is possible to improve the quality of care by knowing the evaluations, practices and current developments that physiotherapists should make in the profession. The rate of responses of "strongly agree" rate was low for items 8, 9 and 11 related to this topic. Since those who had taken lesson and/or training courses on this subject had higher scores for these items, it is necessary to include a lesson on geriatrics in the syllabus or to organize training sessions on this subject in order to develop professional knowledge and skills.

It has been stated that not understanding the roles of other members in the team leads to team conflict, and not valuing the contributions of other team members, which reduces the effectiveness of the team (22, 23). Knowing the roles of team members is essential to increase the knowledge of all members and prevent potential errors in patient care (15). In the current study, it was seen that the rate of "strongly agree" responses for items 3 and 6 about awareness about the roles of other team members was low. However, White et al. reported that 58.3% of physiotherapists strongly agree in respect of understanding the roles of other members (15). The significant difference in items 3 and 6 between those who had and had not taken lessons and/or training courses on geriatric rehabilitation and teamwork indicates that lessons or training about the roles of team members is required. That physiotherapy students should take specific elective courses and/or training on geriatrics in undergraduate education can be considered to be a basic requirement for the expanding role of physiotherapists. In addition, it may be beneficial for physiotherapists who will work in the field of geriatrics to take vocational training and/or courses related to geriatrics after graduation.

It has been stated that communication can be one of the most important factors in teamwork (15, 24). In the current study, it was seen that most of the participants responded positively to items 18 and 20 regarding the need to communicate with team members and refraining from communicating with professionals in other fields when faced with an out-of-field problem in geriatric practice. This shows that students have a high awareness of the value of communication in teamwork.

In Turkey, where the elderly population is increasing, the need for physiotherapists, who have an important role in the field of elderly health, is obvious. We believe that the lessons or courses to be given to the physiotherapists who will work in this field to gain competence starting from their undergraduate education will form the basis of a high-quality rehabilitation service. In further studies, it may be useful to examine the effect of the trainings with larger samples.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it was found that physiotherapy and rehabilitation students, a group that will often work with elderly individuals, have good teamwork and professional knowledge levels in the field of geriatrics. In addition, training on geriatric rehabilitation and teamwork should be delivered in order to improve the level of knowledge about professional practices and current developments in the field of geriatrics, the level of knowledge about the roles of other professions, and the self-confidence for teamwork.

6. Contribution to the Field

We believe that determining the level of teamwork and professional knowledge of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation students in the field of geriatrics will guide the education and curriculum studies to be carried out on this subject.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest regarding any person and/or institution.

Authorship Contribution

Concept: SD, NÜY; **Design:** SD, NÜY; **Supervision:** SD, ED, NÜY; **Funding:** SD, ED, NÜY; **Materials:** SD, ED, NÜY; **Data Collection/Processing:** SD, ED; **Analysis/Interpretation:** SD, ED, NÜY; **Literature Review:** SD, ED; **Manuscript Writing:** SD, ED, NÜY; **Critical Review:** SD, ED, NÜY.

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