

## The Effect of Geriatric Nursing Course on Determining Attitudes Towards the Elderly

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The study was conducted to define the effects of a geriatric nursing course on nursing students' attitudes towards the elderly.

**Method:** The study was conducted in a quasi-experimental design with second-year students studying in the Department of Nursing of a university. A total of 92 people participated in the study. Data were collected online. SPSS 21 statistical software was used in the analysis of the data.

**Results:** Before taking the geriatric nursing course, 75% of the students stated that old age started over 65 years of age, while 87% stated that they started over 65 years of age after taking the geriatrics course ( $p<0.05$ ). At the same time, it was determined that 27% of the students had difficulty communicating with elderly individuals before taking the geriatric nursing course, while only 17% had difficulty communicating with elderly individuals after taking the geriatrics course ( $p<0.05$ ). It was determined that the average pre-test score of the students taking the geriatric nursing course was  $123.55\pm15.86$ , the average post-test score was  $127.00\pm16.40$ , and the average scores between the pre-test and post-test showed a statistically significant difference ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Geriatric nursing course strengthens students' communication with the elderly. It is recommended to include geriatric nursing courses in all university curriculum in order to increase knowledge skills and positive attitudes towards the elderly in nursing students. Thus, students who start working as nurses can play an active role in improving patient outcomes such as hospital stays, reduced readmission rates, and patient satisfaction in hospitalisations due to old age.

**Keywords:** Nursing students, geriatric nursing, attitude, elderly

### Yaşlılara Yönelik Tutumların Belirlenmesinde Geriatri Hemşireliği Dersinin Etkisi

#### Öz

**Amaç:** Bu çalışma hemşirelik öğrencilerine verilen geriatri hemşireliği dersinin, yaşlılara yönelik tutumu üzerindeki etkilerini belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

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**Yöntem:** Araştırma bir üniversitenin Hemşirelik Bölümü'nde öğrenim gören ikinci sınıf öğrencileriyle yarı deneysel desende gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmaya toplam 92 kişi katıldı. Veriler çevrimiçi olarak toplandı. Verilerin analizinde SPSS 21 istatistik programı kullanıldı.

**Bulgular:** Geriatri hemşireliği dersi almadan önce öğrencilerin %75'i yaşlılığın 65 yaş üstü başladığını ifade ederken geriatri dersini aldıktan sonra %87'si 65 yaş üstü başladığını ifade etmiştir ( $p<0,05$ ). Aynı zamanda geriatri hemşireliği dersi almadan önce öğrencilerin %27'si yaşlı bireylerle iletişim güçlüğü yaşıyorken geriatri dersini aldıktan sonra sadece %17'sinin yaşlı bireylerle iletişim güçlüğü yaşadığı saptanmıştır ( $p<0,05$ ). Geriatri hemşireliği dersi alan öğrencilerin ön-test puan ortalamasının  $123,55\pm 15,86$  son-test puan ortalamasının ise  $127,00\pm 16,40$  olduğu ön-test ile son-test arasındaki puan ortalamalarının istatistiksel olarak anlamlı fark gösterdiği saptanmıştır ( $p<0,05$ ).

**Sonuç:** Geriatri hemşireliği dersi öğrencilerin yaşlılarla iletişimini güçlendirmektedir. Hemşirelik öğrencilerinde bilgi beceriyi ve yaşlılara karşı olumlu tutumu artırmak için tüm üniversite müfredatlarına geriatri hemşireliği dersi konulması önerilmektedir. Böylelikle hemşire olarak çalışmaya başlayan öğrenciler yaşlılığa bağlı yatışlarda; hastanede kalış süresini, yeniden yatış oranlarının azalmasını ve hasta memnuniyeti gibi hasta sonuçlarının iyileştirilmesinde etkin rol oynayabilir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Hemşirelik öğrencileri, geriatri hemşireliği, tutum, yaşlı

## Introduction

Aging is a process with unavoidable chronological and bio-psychosocial dimensions. In general, old age is a concept that is handled chronologically<sup>1</sup>. Considering aging chronologically is not enough to define old age. Many factors, such as environmental influences experienced throughout an individual's life, lifestyle, individual and genetic characteristics, social and cultural factors, affect the process of aging. Therefore, it is necessary to address the concept of old age in all its aspects<sup>2</sup>.

With the decrease in the birth rate, life expectancy has increased, and the proportion of the elderly population in the world has also increased<sup>3</sup>. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that by 2030, one in every six people will be aged 60 or over, and by 2050, the global population aged 60 and over is projected to double<sup>4</sup>. It is reported that the most important change in the age structure will take place in the child-aged balance<sup>5</sup>. This increase in the elderly population brings with it the problem of social burden. The decrease in the social burden is possible by reducing the dependence of the elderly on another person, increasing the quality of life of individuals, and improving health<sup>6</sup>. Reducing the social burden will also be effective in preventing negative attitudes towards the elderly. WHO data indicate that negative or discriminatory attitudes towards the elderly are common<sup>4</sup>. It has also been stated that it negatively affects the physical and mental health of the elderly<sup>7</sup>.

The nursing profession is a professional field rooted in the care of individuals. With the increasing elderly population, the ratio of care provided to the elderly is also rising. Therefore, it is of

paramount importance for nurses to have knowledge about aging and elderly care. Especially with the geriatric nursing course to be given to nursing students during their undergraduate education, it is possible for them to cope with the many elderly and aging problems they will encounter during their professional lives. Students who do not have sufficient theoretical knowledge and experience in elderly care may have difficulties in elderly care, and this may affect their attitudes towards the elderly<sup>1-8</sup>. In the literature, there are a limited number of studies on determining attitudes towards the elderly, and there are no studies looking at this attitude before and after the geriatric nursing course. This study was conducted to determine the effects of the geriatric nursing course given to nursing students on their attitudes towards the elderly.

Research Hypotheses:

1. Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): Geriatrics nursing course does not affect the attitude levels of nursing students towards the elderly.
2. Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): Geriatrics nursing course affects the attitude levels of nursing students towards the elderly.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Type of Research**

The research was conducted quasi-experimentally with a single-group pre-test and post-test design.

### **Place and Time of Research**

The research was carried out within the scope of the Geriatrics Nursing Course (theoretical 3 hours per week) conducted online through Google Classroom between April and May 2023, when hybrid education was started due to the earthquake, in the spring semester with the second-year students of the nursing department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a private university in the 2022-2023 academic year.

### **Population and Sample of the Research**

The population of the study consisted of 92 students studying in the second grade in the nursing department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a private university. No sample selection was made in the study; all students agreed to participate in the study and filled out the forms completely. In this case, the participation rate in the research is 100%. Inclusion criteria: Accepting to participate in the study; being in the second grade; taking the geriatric nursing course; attending the course. Exclusion criteria from the study: Wanting to withdraw from the research and not completing either the pre-test or post-test forms.

## **Data Collection Tools**

In the data collection process, both a "Personal Information Form" and the "Kogan Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KOPS)" were utilized. The data were collected online by sending the questionnaire prepared through the Google Form to the e-mails of the students before and after the educational session.

### ***Personal Information Form***

The personal information form consists of a total of nine questions, including students' socio-demographic and age-related views.

### ***Kogan Attitudes Toward Old People Scale***

The scale was developed by Nathan Kogan in 1961<sup>9</sup>. The validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Duyan and Gelbal (2013); Kılıç and Adıbelli (2011); Küçükgüçlü and colleagues (2011)<sup>10-12</sup>. In this study, the scale developed by Küçükgüçlü and colleagues was preferred due to its higher validity and reliability. The scale is a six-point Likert type and consists of 34 items. The score range is 34-238. High scores indicate positive attitude and low scores indicate negative attitude. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale is 0.89<sup>12</sup>. In this study, it is 0.84.

## **Procedure**

The geriatrics nursing course is carried out as a theoretical course of 3 hours per week within the scope of in-field elective courses in the spring semester of the 2nd grade in the nursing department. This course aims to gain knowledge and attitude towards the protection and development of elderly health and rehabilitation services. In the course content, "the definition and classification of old age, demographic changes related to old age, changes in system functions and nursing care in the elderly, elderly neglect, abuse and ethics, communication with elderly patients, health and social services offered to elderly individuals, institutions and organizations that care for the elderly" were included. The courses were held as a hybrid due to the natural disaster experienced. The geriatric nursing course was carried out with active teaching methods such as lecturing, question-answer, discussion and video sampling by the instructor, and literature review and presentation by the students. Students have participated in each live course at a high rate. Course records were uploaded to the university's software system so that the students could repeat the courses in cases where they could not attend the courses. In the videos uploaded, the participation status of the students who could not participate was monitored.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed in the IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0 program. Number, percentage, average and standard deviation were used to present the descriptive characteristics. Normal distribution was examined with the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The data were not normally distributed. In comparing non-normally distributed data, the Mann-Whitney U test was used for

independent binary parameters, the MacNemar test for dependent, nominal, binary parameters, and the Wilcoxon signed rank test for dependent, numerical parameters.

### Ethical Issues

Ethics Committee approval dated 04.11.2022 and numbered 2022-16-45 was obtained from Gelisim University Ethics Committee. The research was conducted by the guidelines related to the Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights. The students who participated in the study were informed in writing about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their information, and their written consent was obtained.

### Results

62% of the students stated that they lived with women, 70.7% with nuclear families and 21.7% with the elderly. It was determined that the attitude levels of female students towards the elderly increased after taking geriatrics course ( $p < 0.001$ ), and similarly, the attitude levels of male students towards the elderly increased after taking geriatrics course ( $p < 0.001$ ). While the KOPS pre-test average score of the students with nuclear family type was  $124.61 \pm 15.70$ , the KOPS post-test average score increased to  $128.41 \pm 17.29$  after taking the geriatrics course ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no difference between the KOPS pre-test and post-test average scores of students with large families ( $p > 0.05$ ). There was no difference between the KOPS pre-test and post-test average scores of the students who stated that they lived with elderly individuals ( $p > 0.05$ ). Likewise, there is no difference between the average KOPS pre-test and post-test scores of the students who stated that they did not live with the elderly individual ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Comparison of students' introductory characteristics and KOPS pre-test and post-test scores

Characteristics		n	%	Pre-test Average $\pm$ SD	Post-test Average $\pm$ SD	$\beta$ Z/p
Gender	Female	57	62.0	123.02 $\pm$ 15.08	126.77 $\pm$ 15.85	$\beta$ -6.568 / p=0.000** $\beta$ -5.161/ p=0.000 **
	Male	35	38.0	124.43 $\pm$ 17.24	127.37 $\pm$ 17.50	
$^{\dagger}$ U/p				$^{\dagger}$ 994.500/p=0,981	$^{\dagger}$ 989.00/p=0.945	
Family type	Nuclear	65	70.7	124.61 $\pm$ 15.70	128.41 $\pm$ 17.29	$\beta$ -1.999 /p=0.046* $\beta$ -0,841/p=0.400
	Large	27	29.3	121.00 $\pm$ 16.25	123.59 $\pm$ 13.77	
$^{\dagger}$ U/p				$^{\dagger}$ 826.500/p=0.662	$^{\dagger}$ 768.500/p=0.349	
Status of cohabitation with the elderly individual	Yes	20	21,7	122.20 $\pm$ 20.67	127.15 $\pm$ 17.29	$\beta$ -0.971/p=0.332
	No	72	78,3	123.93 $\pm$ 14.40	126.96 $\pm$ 16.28	$\beta$ -1.809/p=0.070
$^{\dagger}$ U/p				$^{\dagger}$ 675.500/p=673	$^{\dagger}$ 698.00/p=0.835	

$\beta$  Mann-Whitney Test,  $^{\dagger}$ Wilcoxon signed rank test, Sd: Standard Deviation, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.001$

When the answers given by the students to the KOPS pre-test to the questions about the knowledge and attitudes about old age are examined; 75% know at what age old age begins, 57.6% want to live at home with the elderly individuals, and 70.7% do not have difficulty in communicating with elderly individuals. 63% of the students stated that they were willing to care for elderly individuals in the future, 82.6% stated that elderly people were neglected by their families, and 91.3% stated that the value given to the elderly differed from society to society (Table 2).

Before taking the geriatrics course, while 75% of the students stated that old age started over the age of 65, and after taking the geriatrics course 87% of the students stated that old age started over the age of 65, and it was determined that the increase made a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ). At the same time, it was determined that 27% of the students had difficulty communicating with elderly individuals before taking the geriatrics course, while only 17% had difficulty communicating with elderly individuals after taking the geriatrics course ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no significant difference between the KOPS pre-test and post-test comparisons of the answers given by the students to the other questions about their knowledge and attitudes towards old age ( $p > 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Pre-test and post-test comparison of students' answers to questions about their knowledge and attitudes towards old age

Characteristics	Pre-test		Post-test		p
	n (%)		n (%)		
At what age does old age begin?	<b>46-64 years old</b>	<b>65 years and over</b>	<b>46-64 years old</b>	<b>65 years and over</b>	<b>0.027<sup>#*</sup></b>
	23 (25.0)	69 (75)	12 (13.0)	80 (87.0)	
Desire to live at home with an elderly individual	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	0,169 <sup>#</sup>
	53 (57.6)	39 (42.4)	61 (66.3)	31 (33.7)	
Difficulty in communicating with elderly individuals	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>0.031<sup>#*</sup></b>
	27 (29.3)	65 (70.7)	17 (18.5)	75 (81.5)	
Willingness to care for elderly individuals in the future	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	0.248 <sup>#</sup>
	58 (63.0)	34 (37.0)	65 (70.7)	27 (29.3)	
Do you think old people are neglected by their families?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	1.000 <sup>#</sup>
	76 (82.6)	16 (17.4)	77 (83.7)	15 (16.3)	
Do you think the value given to the elderly is different from society to society?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	0.687 <sup>#</sup>
	84 (91.3)	8 (8.7)	86 (93.5)	6 (6.5)	

<sup>#</sup>McNemar Test, \* $p < 0.05$

In the study, it was determined that there was a statistically significant relationship between the students' KOPS pre-test and KOPS post-test total score averages ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** KOPS pre-test and post-test result averages of students

Scale	Pre-test	Post-test	Z	p
	Average±SD	Average±SD		
KOPS	123.55±15.86	127.00±16.40	-2,124	0.034*

<sup>†</sup>Wilcoxon signed rank test, Sd: Standart Deviation, \* $p < .005$

## Discussion

With advancing age, the functional capacities of the elderly decrease and their chronic diseases increase. The prolongation of the expected life span and the increase in the elderly population lead to the need for more health services for the elderly. Geriatric nursing courses given to nursing students can positively affect the attitude towards the elderly and increase the quality and effectiveness of health services offered to the elderly. This research aims to reveal the difference between the attitudes of nursing students taking geriatric nursing courses towards the elderly before and after education.

In the research, it was observed that, before the KOPS pre-test, students provided predominantly positive responses to questions regarding knowledge and attitudes about old age. In studies examining how geriatric nursing course affects the attitude towards the elderly in our country, it has been observed that students mostly give positive answers to similar questions and their attitudes towards the elderly are positive<sup>13-16</sup>. This situation can be attributed to the cultural characteristics in our country. In our culture, respect for the elderly and not offending the elderly is an attitude taught to the child from a young age in the family environment. This attitude also positively affects the perspective of young people on the elderly in our country. For this reason, in the results of the research, it is thought that the attitudes of the students towards old age were high before the KOPS pre-test. At the same time, it was observed that the rate of students who stated that old age started over the age of 65 before taking the geriatric nursing course increased by 12% after taking the geriatric nursing course, while the percentage of the students with communication difficulties with elderly individuals decreased by 10.8% after taking the geriatrics course ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results show that geriatrics courses positively affect defining the elderly individual and the attitude towards them. In the research, students were asked a single question about knowledge and their attitudes towards the elderly were examined. The number of correct answers given to the knowledge question expressing defining the elderly individual increased after taking the geriatric nursing course. Geriatric nursing course also increases students' knowledge about the elderly. Strengthening the communication of new young generations with the elderly will also positively affect the attitude towards the elderly. In the study, it was found that geriatric nursing course strengthens communication with the elderly. Including the subject

of communication with the elderly patient in the geriatric nursing course content will be useful to improve the attitude towards the elderly.

In the questions related to attitudes towards aging, it was determined that the willingness to live with elderly individuals and the willingness to provide care to elderly individuals in the future increased by 8.7% and 7.7%, respectively, after taking geriatrics courses, but this increase did not show a statistically significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ). Studies in our country have found that more than half of the students want to work with the elderly after graduation<sup>15,16</sup>. Only 5.1% of nursing students in a public hospital in Sri Lanka were found to want to work with the elderly<sup>17</sup>. In Taiwan, it has been determined that nursing students have neutral or somewhat positive attitudes towards working with older adults<sup>18</sup>. Due to the increase in the elderly population and the number of elderly people in need of care globally, the willingness of nurses to care for elderly individuals in the future is an important issue to consider. When the results of the studies conducted in our country are compared with the studies conducted in other countries, it is seen that our nursing students are willing to care for the elderly. Geriatric nursing course increases the rate of willingness to care for elderly individuals in the future. The lack of a significant difference in the study may be due to the fact that the geriatric nursing course was given as a hybrid due to a natural disaster. The fact that the education given in improving the attitude towards the elderly is face-to-face and supported by practices will increase the attitudes of the students.

In the study, it was determined that there was a significant difference between the average scores of attitude towards the elderly in the pre-test and post-test evaluations of the students taking the geriatric nursing course ( $p < 0.05$ ). Geriatric nursing course positively affects students' attitudes towards old age<sup>13,19,20</sup>. In the evaluation made before and after the training by giving lessons, group work, videos, and case studies to nursing students in the course content, it was determined that there were significant improvements in the Kogan attitudes toward old people scale<sup>21</sup>. It has been determined that simulation-based holistic training given to physiotherapy trainees increases their positive attitude towards the elderly<sup>22</sup>. Studies in our country and other countries suggest that geriatric nursing courses increase attitudes towards old age in students. The results of the research are in line with the results of the study in the literature.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As a result, the geriatric nursing course given to nursing students positively affects their attitude towards the elderly. The geriatrics course strengthens students' communication with the elderly. The fact that the cultural structure in our country strengthens the attitude towards the elderly, and the addition of the geriatric nursing course as a compulsory course to the curriculum of nursing departments, will increase the positive attitudes towards the elderly and increase the quality of health care to be provided to the elderly. It is important to include in the content of geriatric nursing courses planning that will increase students' desire to work with the elderly and clinical applications to enhance elderly care. Nurses' care for the elderly is affected by their

attitudes. The development of nursing students with knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes towards the elderly can play an active role in improving patient outcomes such as hospitalisation due to old age, decreased hospitalisation rates, and patient satisfaction.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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### **Author Contributions**

Plan, design: MR, GY; Materials, methods and data collection: MR, GY; Data analysis and interpretations: MR, GY; Spelling and corrections: MR, GY.

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