

Nursing students' attitudes towards ageism and influencing factors

Neslihan Duman Kirmaci¹, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Samsun 55200, Turkey 

Zeliha Koç, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Samsun 55200, Turkey.

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Abstract

This descriptive and cross-sectional study aims to determine the attitudes of nursing students toward ageism and influencing factors. The study was carried out between March 18 and April 8, 2023, with the participation of 209 students who were studying in the nursing department of the Faculty of Health Sciences of a university and volunteered to participate. The data were collected by the researchers using the questionnaire form prepared in line with the literature and the Ageism Attitude Scale (AAS). Arithmetic mean, Standard deviation, median and frequency (percent) values, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, and Spearman correlation analysis were used to evaluate the data. In this study, it can be stated that students have a positive attitude towards ageism in line with the scores they receive from the AAS. In line with the findings obtained from the study, it is recommended to organize scientific activities and ensure the participation of students to increase students' awareness of ageism and to ensure that they gain a positive attitude.

Keywords: Ageism; attitude; elderly; nurse; student.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Neslihan DUMAN KIRMACI, PhD, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Graduate Education Institute, Samsun 55200, Turkey.
E-mail address: neslihandumankirmaci@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Due to the prolongation of life expectancy due to technological developments in the field of health and the increase in the elderly population, applications for elderly individuals, who are important buyers of the health sector, are increasing day by day [1,2]. Old age is a period of life that brings physiological and psycho-social changes [1,3]. Depending on the progression of age, the number of chronic diseases in elderly individuals also increases. Due to the weakening of the senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, the perception ability of elderly individuals may also decrease and cognitive functions may deteriorate [3-5]. In addition, with aging, the functional independence of individuals may be restricted. In this regard, elderly individuals may experience inadequacy in performing daily life activities and may become dependent on other individuals [6].

The perception of aging in individuals and society can also bring along a problem such as ageism [3, 7,8]. The concept of ageism was first defined by Gerontologist Robert Butler [9]. Butler used ageism as an ideology that can turn into action, such as racial discrimination and gender discrimination [10]. Ageism is the interpretation of inadequacies, limitations, and negative changes that occur with aging [6]. Ageism can be defined as different attitudes, prejudices, behaviors, and institutional arrangements shown to elderly individuals due to their age [10,11]. Attitudes such as fear of death, the value given to economic efficiency and productivity, the importance given to youth, and beauty may cause ageism [12].

Some studies reported that ageism is mostly applied in the field of health services and by young individuals [13-15]. It is stated that the negative attitudes of individuals toward elderly individuals may cause neglect of the elderly and/or negative discrimination against the elderly [16-18]. It is reported that in occupational groups whose field of study is human, negative attitudes toward the elderly are likely to be reflected in the professional practices of individuals [1]. Therefore, it is considered that it is significant to determine the attitudes and thoughts of students studying in the field of health toward elderly individuals [19,20].

1.1. Purpose of the study

This study aimed to determine the attitudes of nursing students toward ageism and the factors affecting it. The study sought answers to the following questions:

- What is the level of ageism attitudes of nursing students?
- What are the factors associated with the ageism attitude of nursing students?

2. Materials and Methods

This descriptive study was conducted between 18 March and 8 April 2023 with the participation of students studying in the nursing department of a university.

2.1. Participants

Non-probability sampling method was used in the study. In the study, using the "G. Power-3.1.9.2" software, the number of samples to represent the universe was calculated as 192 students with a 95% confidence interval and 5% error margin [21]. Considering the data loss, the data collection process was completed when 209 students were reached. The study included students aged 18 and over, male or female, who agreed to participate in the study.

2.2. Data collection tools

The study data were collected using the Ageism Attitude Scale, which is a 12-question questionnaire that determines the students' thoughts on ageism and their sociodemographic. The study was conducted voluntarily and verbally informed consent was obtained from the students.

2.2.1. Ageism Attitude Scale

The Ageism Attitude Scale (AAS) is a 5-point Likert-type measurement tool developed by Vefikuluçay Yılmaz and Terzioğlu in 2008 to measure the attitude of individuals against ageism [4]. Consisting of 23 items in total, AAS has 3 sub-dimensions: Limiting the Life of the Elderly, Positive Ageism, and Negative Ageism. The score that can be taken from the scale varies between 23 and 115. The higher scores indicate a positive attitude towards ageism and the lower scores indicate a negative attitude towards ageism. In the study of Vefikuluçay Yılmaz and Terzioğlu [4], the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as 0.80.

2.3. Data collection

The study data were collected by face-to-face interview method with the students. It is explained to the students that the decision on whether to participate in the study or not belongs entirely to them, their names would not be written on the questionnaire form, and the data to be collected would only be used within the scope of this study. Data collection was completed in approximately 10 minutes for each student.

2.4. Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 package software. The normality of the quantitative data was examined with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Percentage calculation, Kruskal Wallis test, and Mann Whitney U test were used to evaluate the data. The results were presented with frequency, percentage, median, minimum, and maximum values. The significance level was taken as $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

The findings regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the students and their thoughts toward elderly individuals are presented in Table I.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF FINDINGS ON NURSING STUDENTS' SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND THOUGHTS
TOWARDS ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

Demographics			
Age	$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$ 21.19 ± 2.60*	Median (Min-Max) ** 21(18-41) **	
		n	%
Gender	Female	174	83.3
	Male	35	16.7
Grade	1St Grade	40	19.1
	2Nd Grade	52	24.9
	3Rd Grade	35	16.7
	4Th Grade	82	39.2
Administrative division	Province	97	46.4
	Town	88	42.1
	Village	24	11.5
Family Type	Nuclear family	172	82.3
	Extended family	33	15.8
	Fragmented family,	4	1.9
Defining old age***	Wisdom	37	17.7
	Loneliness	59	28.2
	Weakness	59	28.2
	Need for care	88	42.1

	Experience	109	52.2
	Uselessness	5	2.4
	Mercy	59	28.2
	Rest	72	34.4
	Be reliable	28	13.4
	Happiness	25	12.0
	Disease	84	40.2
	Exclusion	11	5.3
	Death	65	31.1
The presence of elderly individuals in need of care around	Yes	126	60.3
	No	83	39.7
Sharing a home with an elderly person	Yes	124	59.3
	No	85	40.7
If the answer is yes, how long did they share the same house with an elderly individual (n=124)	Less than 1 year	37	17.7
	1-2	12	5.7
	3-4 years	16	7.7
	5 years and more	59	28.2
Wanting to share the same house with an elderly individual	Yes	120	57.4
	No	89	42.6
If the answer is yes, the reasons for wanting to share the same house with the elderly individual (n=120)	Living together makes one happy	48	23.0
	It should be lived according to beliefs	8	3.8
	Cultural characteristics are suitable for living with the elderly person	23	11.0
	He/she thinks he/she can help at home	1	.5
	Family ties are strong	38	18.2
	Other	2	1.0
Reasons for not wanting to share the same house with the elderly individual	Not wanting to take responsibility spiritually	45	21.5
	Thinking that it will be difficult financially	3	1.4
	Thinking that there is no place to stay at home	7	3.3
	Thinking that it will reduce the quality of life	13	6.2
	Thinking that family relationships will be adversely affected	18	8.6
	Other	3	1.4

*Mean \pm Standard deviation = $\bar{X} \pm SS$, **Median (Minimum - Maximum) ***Since there are multiple responses, N=209 exceeds the sample volume.

It was determined that 83.3% of the students were female, 39.2% were 4th grade, 46.4% lived in the province, and 82.3% had a nuclear family structure. It was determined that 52.2% of the students defined old age as an experience, 60.3% of them had an elderly individual in need of care where they

lived, 59.3% shared the same house with an elderly individual, 57.4% wanted to share the same house with the elderly individual, 23% stated the reason for wanting to share the same house with the elderly as "living together makes me happy", and 21.5% did not want to share the same house with the elderly individual because they did not want to take moral responsibility. The mean age of the students was 21.19±2.60 years (Table I).

The data on the total mean score of the AAS and its sub-dimensions used to determine the ageism attitude level of the students in this study and the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient are presented in Table II.

TABLE II
TOTAL MEAN SCORE OF AAS AND SUB-DIMENSIONS AND CRONBACH'S ALPHA RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS

Sub-Dimensions	$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient
Limiting the Life of the Elderly	36.39± 4.83	0.75
Positive Ageism	27.95± 5.58	0.85
Negative Ageism	18.52± 3.27	0.53
AAS Total	82.88± 9.49	0.79

The mean score of the Limiting the Life of the Elderly sub-dimension of the scale was 36.39±4.83, the mean score of the Positive Ageism sub-dimension was 27.95±5.58, the mean score of the Negative Ageism sub-dimension was 18.52±3.27, and the total mean score of the scale was 82.88±9.49. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient was determined as 0.75 for the Life of the Elderly sub-dimension, 0.85 for the Positive Ageism sub-dimension, 0.53 for the Negative Ageism sub-dimension, and 0.79 for the overall scale (Table II).

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF AAS TOTAL AND SUB-DIMENSION SCORES ACCORDING TO NURSING STUDENTS' SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND OPINIONS TOWARD ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

Characteristics		Limiting the Life of the Elderly	Positive Ageism	Negative Ageism	AAS Total
		$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$	$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$	$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$	$\bar{X} \pm SS^*$
Gender					
	Female	36.68± 4.76	27.94± 5.45	18.74± 3.23	83.37± 9.25
	Male	34.94± 4.99	28.00± 6.26	17.45± 3.27	80.40± 10.42
	Test value	U= -1.636	U= -.172	U= -2.235	U= -1.203
	P value	p=0.102	p=0.863	p< 0.025	p=0.229
Grade					
	1St Grade	35.65± 5.44	27.30± 6.20	18.05± 3.69	81.00± 9.76
	2Nd Grade	34.65± 4.3	27.80± 5.76	18.48± 3.15	80.94± 9.58
	3Rd Grade	36.80± 4.45	29.20± 4.73	17.82± 2.87	83.82± 8.00
	4Th Grade	37.69± 4.65	27.84± 5.50	19.08± 3.24	84.62± 9.66
	Test value	2= 16.814	2= 3.419	2= 5.795	2= 6.762
	P value	p< 0.001	p=0.331	p=0.122	p=0.080
Administrative division					
	Province	35.85± 5.01	27.34± 5.70	18.93± 3.42	82.13± 9.76
	Town	37.04± 4.91	28.78± 5.33	18.22± 2.95	84.05± 9.25
	Village	36.20± 3.51	27.41± 5.79	17.95± 3.66	81.58± 9.17
	Test value	2= 3.365	2= 4.693	2= 4.237	2= 4.277
	P value	p=0.186	p=0.096	p=0.120	p=0.118
Family Type					
	Nuclear family	36.48± 4.78	28.01± 5.41	18.56± 3.17	83.06± 8.95

	Extended family	36.60± 4.49	28.09± 6.11	18.57± 3.69	83.27± 10.48
	Fragmented family,	31.00± 7.70	24.50± 8.66	16.25± 3.59	71.75± 18.46
	Test value	2= 1.916	2= .767	21.118	21.468
	P value	p=0.384	p=0.681	p=0.572	p=0.480
The presence of elderly individuals in need of care around					
	Yes	36.50± 4.83	27.86± 5.45	18.39± 3.10	82.76± 9.16
	No	36.24± 4.86	28.09± 5.80	18.72± 3.51	83.06± 10.04
	Test value	U= -.431	U= -.592	U= -.304	U= -.302
	P value	p=0.666	p=0.554	p=0.761	p=0.763
Sharing the same house with an elderly individual					
	Yes	36.54± 4.77	27.54± 6.30	18.79± 3.41	82.87± 9.84
	No	36.18± 4.93	28.56± 4.28	18.14± 3.03	82.89± 9.02
	Test value	U= -.611	U= -.909	U=-1.186	U= -.075
	P value	p=0.541	p=0.364	p=0.236	p=0.941
How long did they share the same house with the elderly individual?					
	Less than 1 year	35.51± 4.86	27.27± 5.70	18.51± 3.19	81.29± 8.59
	1-2 years	38.50± 4.12	28.25± 3.98	18.83± 3.73	85.58± 7.44
	3-4 years	35.06± 3.45	27.43± 6.64	20.00± 2.78	82.50± 8.15
	5 years and more	37.01± 5.16	27.47± 7.03	18.62± 3.63	83.11± 11.48
	Test value	2= 6.238	2= .126	2= 4.658	2= 2.080
	P value	p=0.101	p=0.989	p=0.199	p=0.556
Wanting to share the same house with an elderly individual					
	Yes	37.15± 5.07	29.28± 5.12	19.13± 3.22	85.56± 9.68
	No	35.38± 4.32	26.16± 5.70	17.70± 3.17	79.25± 7.95
	Test value	U= -3.179	U= -4.314	U= -3.211	U= -5.137
	P value	p< 0.001	p< 0.000	p< 0.001	p< 0.000

U: Mann-Whitney U test statistics. 2: Kruskal Wallis test statistics. *Mean ± Standard deviation = $\bar{X} \pm SS$.

The comparison of students' sociodemographic characteristics, opinions toward elderly individuals, and AAS total and sub-dimension scores are presented in Table III. It was determined that the negative ageism sub-dimension score differed according to the gender variable ($p < 0.025$, $U = -2.235$), the limiting the life of the elderly sub-dimension score differed according to the grade variable ($p < 0.001$, $2 = 16.814$), and the total and sub-dimension scores of the scale differed according to the variable of wanting to share the same house with the elderly person ($p < 0.000$, $U = -5.137$; $p < 0.001$, $U = -3.179$; $p < 0.000$, $U = -4.314$; $p < 0.001$, $U = -3.211$) (Table III).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study, which was conducted to examine the factors related to the attitudes of students studying in the nursing department of a university towards ageism, were discussed in line with the literature.

In this study, the AAS total score was determined as 82.88 ± 9.49 , and the sub-dimension scores of Limiting the Life of the Elderly, Positive Ageism, and Negative ageism were determined as 36.39 ± 4.83 , 27.95 ± 5.58 , 18.52 ± 3.27 , respectively. In line with the score, they receive from the AAS, it can be stated that the students have a positive attitude towards ageism. The AAS total score was found to be 85.18 ± 7.99 in the study of Yardimci [21] 85.09 ± 9.53 in the study of Can et al. [1] and 70.39 ± 9.15 in the study of Hendekçi and Altay [12]. In human-oriented occupational groups such as nursing, the attitude toward the elderly may reflect positively or negatively on professional practices [1]. In addition,

the student's definition of old age with expressions such as experience and compassion indicates that they have positive thoughts toward elderly individuals.

It was found that the mean scores of the total and sub-dimensions of the AAS differed according to students' sociodemographic characteristics, the class they studied, and their thoughts and attitudes towards the elderly ($p < 0,05$). In their study examining the attitudes of physiotherapy and nursing students towards ageism, Can et al. [1] reported that the AAS score differs according to the department studied, gender, number of siblings, family type, mother and father education level, and wanting to live with mother/father when starting a family. In the study conducted by Yardimci [21] to determine the attitudes of nursing students towards ageism, it was determined that the ageism attitude scores of the students showed a statistically significant difference according to their gender, mother's employment status, and their willingness to serve the elderly after graduation.

5. Conclusion

Although the factors affecting positive and negative attitudes towards ageism differ according to the studies, it is considered that social, cultural, religious, and spiritual characteristics and upbringing may affect this situation. In this study, the total AAS score of the students was found to be 82.88 ± 9.49 . It was found that the mean scores of the total and sub-dimensions of the AAS differed according to students' sociodemographic characteristics the class they studied, and their thoughts and attitudes towards the elderly individuals ($p < 0.05$).

In line with the findings obtained from the study, organizing scientific activities to increase the awareness of nursing students about ageism and enable them to gain positive attitudes, and planning activities where nursing students can be together with elderly individuals is recommended.

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