Student Attitudes toward Older Adults

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Student Attitudes toward Older Adults

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• Purpose
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• Discussion
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Background

- Aging of the American population
- By 2050, about one fifth of the population will be age 65 or older
- Illnesses increase with old age; almost half of all hospital visits are made by people 65 years or older.
• Not enough people trained in geriatrics in the U.S.

• Geriatric nursing lacks appeal to many nurses and students
Background: Ageism

- Many people have negative attitudes toward aging and the aged.
- One theory is the terror management theory (TMT)
- Ageism is present at all levels of society, in the U.S. and other countries
- Older adults seen as physically or mentally deficient
Associated Factors

- Younger age
- Male gender
- Lack of experience with older adults
What has been done?

- Integration of gerontology material into curriculum
- Dedicated gerontology courses
- Instructors in both classroom and clinical setting
- Exposure to well elders
Purpose of Study

- Determine the attitudes of nursing students toward older adults and if they change over the course of the nursing program.
Methods

• HSIRB approval obtained
• Pre-test post-test single group design
  o Beginning of sophomore semester (T1)
  o End of sophomore semester (T2)
  o End of program (T3)
• Kogan’s Old People scale (KOP)
• Demographic questionnaire
Sample

- **T1 and T2**
  - n=40
  - 75% female (n=30)
  - 80% under 25 years of age
  - Most had prior experience with older adults
  - 87.5% Caucasian

- **T3**
  - n=35
  - 80% female (n=28)
  - 86% under 25 years of age (n=30)
  - Most had prior experience with older adults
  - 94.3% Caucasian
Results

KOP scores throughout study (whole cohort)

Scores

T1

T3

KOP positive

KOP negative
Results, cont.

KOP scores throughout the study (10 students)

Scores

KOP positive
KOP negative

0 20 40 60 80 100 120
T1 T2 T3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>99.3</td>
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Blue line: KOP positive
Red line: KOP negative
Discussion

• Results consistent with previous research

• Higher scores on negative items consistent with Kogan’s original research
Limitations

• Not all participants paired (only T1 and T2)
• Change in class composition
• Sampling issues
• The scale: old, may be outdated
Implications/Recommendations

• More research needed on factors affecting attitudes toward older adults
• Increased emphasis on gerontology education
• Gerontology education should be integrated throughout curriculum
• Aging specialists as faculty
Conclusion

• Increase in older adult population
• Negative attitudes toward older adults in society
• Great need for geriatric-educated health practitioners
• Increase in positive attitudes through education
• Necessity of gerontology-oriented, integrated nursing curricula.
A final thought...

“Who will care for a segment of society to which almost everyone will someday belong?”

(Ryan & McCauley, 2005, p. 6)
References


