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Attitudes of students of nursing major towards people of geriatric age

Abstract

Introduction. Geriatric age is a natural stage of human ontogenesis, which is usually characterized by a decrease in overall efficiency, increased degradation of mental and physical functions.

Aim. Assessment of attitudes of students of nursing major towards people of geriatric age.

Material and methods. The study covered 202 students of nursing major; a diagnostic survey using own survey questionnaire.

Results. Students declared that they were treating elder people with respect and kindness, they pointed to a positive image of the elderly person, however associated the phenomenon of ageing with disability and diseases. Unfortunately, almost half of the respondents would not like to work with elderly people in the future. Most of the respondents declare helping elderly people – these were younger people as well as people living with seniors. Nearly half of the respondents would not allow their loved ones to be taken to a special facility even if they had a severe illness and most often it related to people who have elderly people in their surroundings.

Conclusions. The majority of respondents shows positive attitudes towards people of geriatric age and points to their positive image, while the majority of respondents associates old age in a negative way. Nearly half of the respondents would not like to work with elderly people in the future. Nearly half of the respondents would not allow a loved person to be taken to a special facility even if they had a severe illness and a significant proportion of respondents help elderly people.

Keywords: old age, geriatric patient, attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of these changes, there are various limitations within the scope of his/her adaptation, locomotion and operation capabilities as well as his/her efficient performance of various social roles [1]. We speak of geriatric age when a person is over 65 years of age. At the end of 2013, the Polish population amounted to 38.5 million, of which about 5.7 million were people aged 65 and over [2]. In the past, old age was associated with a great prestige, great knowledge and experience, and it was respected. Nowadays, the image of the elderly person has changed and is often negative and associated with disability, illness, uselessness, dependence on others and disrespect [3]. These changes may also result in a change of attitudes towards elderly people. Ageism and gerontophobia are increasingly being spoken about, but some studies indicate positive or neutral attitudes towards geriatric-age groups. The living situation of elderly people is in many respects worse than that of young and middle-aged people. There are many reasons for this. The main causes are: loss of social position,

decrease of psychophysical efficiency and social activity, reduction of income, loss of professional roles and loneliness [4]. Nowak defines an attitude as a tendency of man to behave in a certain way towards persons, objects, problems, social groups and also refers to their peculiar evaluation [5].

Negative perception of seniors reflects stereotypical thinking, in which elderly people are seen as: without teeth, physically unattractive, having poor hearing, eyesight, dependent on the help of others. Psychological literature distinguishes two types of prejudices concerning the elderly: malicious and mild prejudices, which differ in the degree of intensity of pejorative features assigned to them. Malicious prejudices are related to the marginalization of the elderly and the conviction that they are socially unattractive and economically inefficient. Mild prejudices, however, are the result of conscious and unaware anxiety and fears of old age, mainly of loss of mental fitness and infirmity [6].

Students of the nursing major will probably have contact with patients of this age group in the future due to the trend towards an ageing population.

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The profession of a nurse requires possessing a large amount of knowledge and mastering many professional skills, but also places ethical requirements, such as kindness, empathy and respect for people of all ages: from the neonatal age to the end of life, on professionals with regard to the attitude towards a healthy person, a person endangered with illness and an ill person.

AIM

The aim of the study was an assessment of the attitudes of nursing students towards geriatric patients.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted among the students of Bachelor's Degree course and Master's Degree course in nursing major at the Medical University of Lublin between January and March 2017. The number of 202 students were studied, including 101 undergraduate students and 101 graduate students. All the surveyed people agreed to fill in the anonymous questionnaires and subject them to research analysis. The research method was a diagnostic survey with the use of own survey questionnaire.

Characteristics of the sample group. The survey involved 202 students of nursing major. Among the respondents, 90.1%, (n=182) were women, whereas 9.9%, (n=20) were men. The sample group included 92 (45.54%) people living in the countryside, and 110 (54.46%) people living in the city. Average age of the respondents was 22.59±2.15 years old, the youngest student was 21 and the oldest 42 years old. Among the respondents, there were 101 (50%) students of undergraduate course and 101 (50%) students of graduate course. Most of the surveyed students did not live with an elderly person 73.76% (n=149), whereas 26.24% (n=53) people declared that they live with an elder person.

RESULTS

Studies showed that as much as 78.22% (n=158) of respondents always treat the elderly with respect, 9.41% (n=19) shows respect for those who are nice, 6.93% (n=14) of respondents treats the elderly as others, unfortunately 1.98% (n=4) of respondents admitted that they do not always show respect for the elderly person, and 3.47% (n=7) of respondents answered that they show respect only towards their family members (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Treating elderly people with respect.

Treating elderly people with respect	Total	
	N	%
Always	158	78.22
Towards family members	7	3.47
Towards nice people	19	9.41
Treating them as others	14	6.93
Not always	4	1.98
Total	202	100

The study shows that the students of Bachelor's degree course are more respectful of elderly people than students of Master's degree course. The differences found were statistically significant (p=0.01) – Table 2.

TABLE 2. Treating elderly people with respect and the level of studies.

Treating elderly people with respect	Level of studies				Total	
	Bachelor's Degree course		Master's Degree course		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Always	89	88.12%	69	68.32%	158	78.22%
Towards family members	2	1.98%	5	4.95%	7	3.47%
Towards nice people	7	6.93%	12	11.88%	19	9.41%
Treating them as others	2	1.98%	12	11.88%	14	6.93%
No	1	0.99%	3	2.97%	4	1.98%
Total	101	100%	101	100%	202	100%
Significance	$\chi^2(3)=13.276, p=0.01^*$					

Treating elderly people with respect did not differentiate students according to their sex, place of residence and the fact of living with an elderly person as far as the statistical importance was concerned.

Students in the 21-22 age group are more respectful of people of geriatric age. The differences studied were statistically significant (p=0.01025) (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Treating elderly people with respect and age of respondents.

Treating elderly people with respect	Age						Total	
	21-22		23-24		25 and more		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Always	103	87.29%	41	66.13%	14	63.64%	158	78.22%
Towards family members	1	0.85%	4	6.45%	2	9.09%	7	3.47%
Towards nice people	10	8.47%	6	9.68%	3	13.64%	19	9.41%
Treating them as others	3	2.54%	9	14.52%	2	9.09%	14	6.93%
No	1	0.85%	2	3.23%	1	4.55%	4	1.98%
Total	118	100%	62	100%	22	100%	202	100%
Significance	$\chi^2(3)=20.023, p=0.01025^*$							

The students answered that they would ask elderly people for advice because of their life experience – 89% (n=180) respondents, while 11% (n=22) of the respondents believed that it is not worth asking elderly people for advice, because they do not understand the current problems.

Students asked about the willingness to take up employment after graduating from university in the ward where elderly people were staying answered that they did not know what kind of ward they wanted to work in – 36.14% (n=73), as many as 48.02% (n=97) of the respondents stated that they did not want to work in such wards and only 15.84% (n=32) of students of nursing major would like to work with the elderly. The results of the study showed that there are no statistical dependencies.

More than a half (50.99%, n=103) of respondents would entrust care of a close elderly person to appropriate institutions only if they were not able to take care of them themselves, 40.59% (n=82) would not allow a close person to be taken to such institution even if they were seriously ill, and only

8.42% (n=17) of respondents would decide to entrust the close ones to such institutions (Table 4).

TABLE 4. Entrusting care of a close elderly person to an appropriate institution.

Entrusting care of a close elderly person to an appropriate institution	Total	
	N	%
No, even if he/she is ill; hiring a person helping with care or for caring	82	40.59%
Only if he/she was so ill that I couldn't take care of him/her myself	103	50.99%
Yes	17	8.42%
Total	202	100%

The intention of entrusting care of a close elderly person did not depend significantly on the age of respondents, their sex, place of residence and level of study (p>0.05).

However, it was shown that students with elderly people in their immediate surroundings would be less willing to entrust the care of their close elderly person to appropriate institutions (p=0.00074) (Table 5).

TABLE 5. Willingness to entrust care of a close elderly person to appropriate institutions and presence of elder people in the immediate vicinity.

Willingness to entrust care of a close elderly person to appropriate institutions	Presence of elderly people in the immediate vicinity				Total	
	Yes		No		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
No, even if he/she is ill; hiring a person helping with care or for caring	76	43.18%	6	23.08%	82	40.59%
Only if he/she was so ill that I couldn't take care of him/ her myself	90	51.14%	13	50.00%	103	50.99%
Yes	10	5.68%	7	26.92%	17	8.42%
Total	176	100%	26	100%	202	100%
Significance	$\chi^2(3)=14.406, p=0.00074^*$					

The conducted study showed that the respondents most often perceive an elderly person as someone having knowledge and experience (75.7%, n=153) and as a senior in the family treated with care and respect (68.3%, n=138). Half of respondents, on the other hand, considers elderly people as people waiting for death (50.5% n=102).

The respondents most often associate old age with disability and diseases (68.3%, n=138), with a large amount of free time (63.9%, n=129) and with loneliness (61.4%, n=124).

The study shows rather benevolent attitude towards the elderly people – 57.43% (n=116), and a definitely friendly attitude towards the elderly people – 36.14% (n=73), whereas 1.48% (n=3) of respondents expresses a rather reluctant attitude towards the elderly people, while none of the respondents expressed a definite reluctance towards elderly people.

As many as 89% (n=180) of respondents declares helping the elderly people and it is manifested in giving up seats in a bus (71.11%, n=128), helping with cleaning and cooking (10%, n=18), doing the shopping (8.89%, n=16), whereas 11% (n=22) of respondents does not help the elderly at all.

It was shown that students living with an elderly person are more eager to help elderly people. The differences shown are statistically significant (p=0.014) (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Helping elderly people and living with an elderly person.

Helping elderly people	Living with an elderly person				Total	
	yes		no		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Yes	52	98.11%	128	85.91%	180	89.11%
No	1	1.89%	21	14.09%	22	10.89%
Total	53	53	149	202	202	100%
Significance	$\chi^2(3)=6.0; p=0.014^*$					

People aged 21-22 help the elderly people more often than people above 23 years of age. The differences shown are statistically significant (p=0.0278) (Table 7).

TABLE 7. Helping elderly people and age of respondents.

Helping elderly people	Age						Total	
	21-22		23-24		25 and more		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Yes	111	94.07%	51	82.26%	18	81.82%	180	89.11%
No	7	5.93%	11	17.74%	4	18.18%	22	10.89%
Total	118	100%	62	100%	22	100%	202	100%
Significance	$\chi^2(3)=7.193; p=0.0278^*$							

DISCUSSION

Students of nursing major, due to the ethical requirements of the profession, should treat all people with respect. People of geriatric age in particular deserve to be helped and shown positive attitudes. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, there are 2 million elderly people living in Poland who need continuous help from others [7].

Results of own studies show the predominance of positive attitudes of students of nursing major towards people of geriatric age – majority of the students (78.22%) always treat the elderly people with respect, part of respondents (3.74%) treats with respect only the elderly people being their family members, some students (9.41%) treat with respect only the people who are nice to them. When it comes to 6.93% of students, they treat the elderly people as all others.

What is statistically significant, students of Bachelor's degree course treat the elderly people with respect more often than the students of Master's degree course, and people aged 21-22 treat the elderly people with respect more often than the older respondents.

A significant proportion (89%) of the students surveyed by me confessed that they would eagerly ask the elderly people for advice because of their life experience.

In studies of Majda, Nawalana and Wojcieszek, who asked people completing the higher education whether the elderly people could be an authority for young people, 88% of respondents replied affirmatively [8]. Study of attitudes of students of Bachelor's degree course on nursing major towards the elderly people conducted by Kołpa et al. showed that most (75%) of respondents positively perceived the elderly people, stressing their life experience and wisdom. Moreover, they also proved that old age was associated by the academic youth with infirmity and solitude [9]. On the other hand, the studies of Świdorska and Kapszewicz show that the students of medicine most often associate old age with illness (69.3%), caring for grandchildren (66.3%) and loneliness (42.7%) [10].

Based on my studies of students of nursing major, predominant is an image of an elderly person as: someone having knowledge and experience (75.7%), senior of family treated with care and respect (68.3%) and a person waiting for death (50.5%). Old age, similarly to the above-mentioned studies, is most often associated with disability and diseases (68.3%), loneliness (61.4%) and large amount of free time (63.9%).

When studying attitudes, of significance is also the presented attitude towards the elderly people. In studies of old age of Świdarska and Kapszewicz, most students of medicine (82%) assessed themselves as having at least a friendly attitude towards the elderly. When it comes to 12.4% of respondents, they assessed their attitude as indifferent, 3.4% as reluctant and 2.2% was not able to assess their attitude. None of the students of medicine did declare their attitude towards the elderly people as definitely reluctant [10]. Own studies of the nursing students' attitudes towards the elderly showed similar results. Most respondents (93.57%) showed at least benevolent attitude towards the elderly people, 4.45% of young people assessed their attitude as indifferent, 1.48% as reluctant, and 0.50% of respondents was not able to assess it. Also in own studies, none of the students defined his/her attitude towards the elderly people as strongly reluctant.

In the studies of the Central Statistical Office, 66.3% of seniors were satisfied with their family situation [11].

In my studies, only 15.84% of students of nursing major showed a desire to work in wards where elderly people are staying, as much as 48.02% of students would not like to work in institutions where the elderly people are staying, and 36.14% has not yet thought about where they would like to work in the future. Slightly different results were obtained by Świdarska and Kapszewicz who studied the medicine students. Only 4.7% of prospective physicians admitted that they would like to become geriatrists in the future, 64.0% of students do not want to be geriatrists, while 31.5% of students do not know what specialization they want to choose [10]. In the studies of Dobrowolska and Jędrzejkiewicz, 61.5% of students of nursing major is willing to work with elderly people in the future [12].

When asked about their willingness to entrust care of a close elderly person to the appropriate institutions, more than a half of my respondents – (50.99%) admitted that they would do so if they were not able to do it by themselves, little less (40.59%) of respondents stated that they would never entrust care of a close elderly person to the appropriate institutions, and only 8.42% students would decide to do this. Students who do not have frequent contacts with elderly people are more likely to be interested in accommodating the elderly in appropriate institutions.

Care for the elderly in their home environment is considered to be the most desirable and effective. It is the solution most often chosen by seniors and perceived by society as the best, it influences longer activity, independence, better well-being and health of elderly people, and it is the cheapest of all [13,14].

My own studies show that most (89%) students of nursing major helps people of geriatric age. Most frequently the help is manifested in: giving up seats in a bus (71.11%), helping with cleaning and cooking (10%), doing the shopping (8.89%). Studies of the Central Statistical Office show that, in the face of problems related e. g. to short-term illness, the need to do some shopping, the elderly people can count on the support of others. If necessary, help would be sought primarily from the immediate family members – spouse or children (approx. 83%).

Every eleventh elderly person would ask for help from his/her extended family and every twenty-fifth person would ask for help from his/her neighbor [11].

CONCLUSIONS

1. Most of the respondents presented positive attitudes towards people of geriatric age, showing respect for them – this was more likely to be true for students in the lower age group as well as for students of Bachelor's degree course rather than for the students of Master's degree course.
2. Among the respondents, a positive image of an elderly person dominated, while the majority of respondents associated old age with negative things.
3. Nearly half of the respondents does not want to work with elderly people in the future.
4. Nearly half of the respondents would not allow a loved one to be taken to the special institution even if he/she was had a severe illness and it was more likely for people who have the elderly in their surroundings.
5. A significant proportion of respondents help elderly people and it is statistically significant that this applies to younger people and people living with the elderly people.

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