

## SAĞLIK YÜKSEKOKULU ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN YAŞLI AYRIMCILIĞINA İLİŞKİN TUTUMLARININ BELİRLENMESİ

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### Öz

Araştırma, çalışma hayatında yaşlılara yönelik sağlık hizmetinde görev yapacak olan hemşirelik ve fizyoterapi bölümü öğrencilerinin yaşlı ayrımcılığına ilişkin tutumlarının belirlenmesi amacıyla tanımlayıcı olarak yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini bir sağlık yüksekokulunda okuyan, araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden ve çalışmanın yapıldığı tarihlerde okulda bulunan 261 öğrenci oluşturdu. Veri toplama aracı olarak Kişisel Bilgi Formu ve Yaşlı Ayrımcılığı Tutum Ölçeği (YATÖ) kullanıldı. Veriler SPSS 16.0 paket programında tanımlayıcı istatistikler, Student t testi, Mann Whitney U, ANOVA ve Kruskal Wallis testleriyle değerlendirildi. Araştırma kapsamına alınan öğrencilerin yaş ortalaması  $20.69 \pm 2.03$ 'dür. Katılımcıların %52.5'i hemşirelik bölümü öğrencileridir. Öğrencilerin YATÖ toplam puan ortalaması  $82.28 \pm 8.55$  olduğu, yaşının yaşamını sınırlama boyutundan  $32.75 \pm 4.28$ , yaşlıya yönelik olumlu ayrımcılık boyutundan  $29.24 \pm 4.47$ , yaşlıya yönelik olumsuz ayrımcılık boyutundan  $17.29 \pm 3.26$  puan aldıkları bulunmuştur. Sağlık Yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin yaşlı ayrımcılığına ilişkin olumlu bir tutuma sahip olduğu saptandı. Çalışma hayatlarında yaşlı bireylerle çalışacak olan öğrencilere eğitimlerinin başından itibaren yaşlılık ve yaşlı ayrımcılığı ile ilgili eğitim ve danışmanlık programlarının hazırlanması önerilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fizyoterapi Öğrencisi, Hemşirelik Öğrencisi, Yaşlı Ayrımcılığı, Yaşlılık.

## AN IDENTIFICATION OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE SCHOOL OF HEALTH STUDENTS TOWARDS AGEISM

### Abstract

The study was carried out in a determinative manner to identify the attitudes of nursing and physiotherapy students that are going to give healthcare service in their work lives towards ageism. The sample of the study was constituted by 261 school of health students that agreed to take part in the study and remained in the school in the span of the study. As the data collection tool Personal Information Form and Ageism Attitude Scale was used. The data was evaluated using in SPSS 16.0 package program, the descriptive statistics Student t test, Mann Whitney U, ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis tests. The average of age of the students involved in the study is  $20.69 \pm 2.03$ . 52.5% of them are nursing students. It has been found that the Ageism Attitude Scale total grade average of the students is  $82.28 \pm 8.55$  and they received  $32.75 \pm 4.28$  in terms of limiting the life of senior citizens,  $29.24 \pm 4.47$  in terms of positive ageism,  $17.29 \pm 3.26$  in terms of negative ageism. It has been determined that school of health students have a positive attitude regarding ageism. Preparing education and consultation programs on agedness and ageism for the students that are to work with senior citizens in their work lives was recommended.

**Keywords:** Physiotherapy Student, Nursing Student, Ageism, Agedness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of the twentieth century, with the increase in life expectation and the decrease in birth rates, the rate of the old age population in the total population has risen worldwide, particularly in developed countries (1). Factors such as developments in science, medicine and technology, the decrease in the young population and birth rates, the increase in awareness of healthy living, the development of preventive and therapeutic methods have formed the basis of the aging of the society (2). Whereas the average length of life at the beginning of the 2000s was 66 years, this span is expected to have been increased tenfold by the year 2050 (3). The aging rate continues to increase in developed and developing societies. While 12% of the world's total population accounts for the people at 65 and above, it is expected that this rate will have risen by over 22% by 2050 (4). When we look at Europe, while elderly individuals constitute approximately 19% of the total population, it is expected to exceed 30% in 2060 (5). In our country, when the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) for the year 2020 are examined, it is seen that this rate is 9.5%, and it is predicted that this rate will reach 11% in 2025 (6). TSI 2016 data determined the life expectancy at birth as 75.3 years for men and 80.7 years for women (7). In this respect, it is expected that the elderly population in Turkey will gain importance in terms of social, demographic and economic aspects.

Agedness is an individual's losing their physical and spiritual powers gradually and irreversibly. Depending on an individual's hereditary properties, diet, environmental conditions and cultural endeavors, aging can differ from individual to individual (8).

Socially, perception of an individual as aged is defined as that individual's loss of certain roles and status (9). The position and dignity of the aged person in the society changes constantly and agedness is attributed various meanings (10). Increasing disability and greater dependence on others is also seen as a process of decline in vital activities, productivity, competence, individuality and independence (11). The aging period might be perceived differently in various societies, as well. While respecting the senior citizens, following their advices and conserving them is a traditional expectancy in Turkish culture, the status of senior citizens in the society is changing in our day. Especially in big cities, urbanization, immigrations, economic hardships, participation of women in the work life and switching from the male-dominated family structure to nuclear family have led to substantial changes. The sociocultural structure of the society, the point of view of individuals and society reflect on the services provided to aged people (10). Besides, problems await old people in areas like social support provided by the family and immediate surroundings, compliance with the process of aging, sufficient income and accommodation, as well. As a social result of senior citizens confronting problems of this sort, the concept of ageism emerges (12).

Ageism as a term was first used in 1969 by Robert Butler, Director of American National Agedness Institute. Gerontologist Robert Butler has defined ageism as discrimination against aged people, a type of realizable ideology such as racism and sexism while Palmore defines it as a term that identifies the prejudices towards aged individuals by means of attitudes and behaviours. Ageism is a multidimensional term that includes the different behaviors, prejudices, attitudes and actions towards individuals solely because of their ages (13). Thus, while examining the data relating to ageism, the positive and negative attitudes should be handled together (14).

The studies devoted to the determination of the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and society towards ageism show that ageism is more frequent in work-family life, social-sexual life and healthcare systems. Moreover, it is stressed out that the physiological, mental and psychological reasons that stem from aging are the reasons for ageism (13). In the literature, it is a known fact that especially the younger population act discriminatively towards aged individuals in the developing world. Just as some of the studies show that university students have negative attitudes towards old individuals (15-17), some others show that students have positive attitudes towards aged people (18-21).

It is stated that aged people are subjected to discrimination in all aspects of healthcare services (10). Students studying in the field of health also work with elderly individuals throughout their education life. Negative attitudes towards the elderly will be reflected in the interaction and the care given, thus the quality of health services will decrease. It is important to determine the attitudes of young people who will work in the field of health, especially those who may encounter older individuals, towards ageism. It can be ensured that young people develop positive, tolerant, respectful attitudes and behaviors towards the elderly and old age, by adding relevant courses to their curriculum to change their negative attitudes, and by raising awareness that they will experience these processes in their future lives. This way, the provision of service to old people in the work lives of students will be facilitated. In this direction, the research was carried out to determine the attitudes of nursing and physiotherapy students, who will work in the health service for the elderly, towards ageism.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

### 2.1. Universe and Sample of the Study

The universe of the study that is of descriptive quality was constituted by 329 nursing and physiotherapy students that attend a school of health in the academic year 2015 – 2016. There are two departments in the school of health, namely nursing and physiotherapy. In the study, it was aimed to reach the whole universe, not choosing the sample. However, 261 students (participation rate: 79%, 52.5% nursing, 47.5% physiotherapy) who accepted the study and were at the school between November 2015 and January 2016, when the research was conducted, were included in the study.

#### Data Collection Tools

As the data collection tool, a Personal Information Form that included the socio-demographic features of the students and Ageism Attitude Scale (AAS) were used.

*The Personal Information Form*, there are questions regarding the age, sex, grade, high school, birthplace, grow-up place, family income, family type, education status of parents of students and questions devoted to aged people and working with them. The form was created by the researchers by scanning the literature (10,13,19-21).

*Ageism Attitude Scale (AAS)*: It was developed and tested on validity and reliability by Vefikuluçay (2008). The scale, consisting of 23 items is of quintet likert type including choices as “Totally Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Indecisive”, “Agree” and “Totally Agree”. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of the scale was 0.80, and it was determined as 0.70 in this study. There are positive and negative attitude statements in the scale. Positive attitude statements are graded as 5= Totally agree, 4= Agree, 3= Indecisive, 2= Disagree, 1= Totally disagree. Negative statements, on the other hand, are graded in the reverse way of the statements above. The minimum grade that can be obtained from the scale is “23” and the maximum grade is “115”. As the grade increases, the positive attitudes towards ageism goes upwards. The scale is made up of three dimensions which are:

1. *Limiting the Life of the Aged*: Is the society’s beliefs and perceptions relating with limiting the social life of the old individual. The maximum grade that can be received from this dimension is “45” and the minimum is “9”.

2. *Positive Ageism Towards the Aged*: Is the society’s positive beliefs and perceptions towards the aged individual. The maximum grade that can be received from this dimension is “40” and the minimum is “8”.

3. *Negative Ageism Towards the Aged*: Is the society’s negative beliefs and perceptions towards the aged individual. The maximum grade that can be received from this dimension is “30” and the minimum is “6” (13).

### 2.3. Implementation

Before the commencement of the study, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Committee on Human Research Publication and Ethics ((Ref; 2015/06-534), consent was taken from the institution, written and oral consent was taken from the students after they were informed about the purpose of the study. The data was collected out of lesson hours in classroom. After the questionnaires were filled in by the students, the forms were collected back by the researchers. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of information shared.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

Shapiro Wilk test for normality control and Levene test for homogeneity control of variances used. The descriptive statistics in SPSS 16.0 package program, Student t test, Mann Whitney U, ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for the data analysis. Statistical significance level was accepted as  $p < 0.05$  in data analysis.

#### 2.5. Limitation of the Study

The limitations of the study can be that the students were not at school during the data collection period, there were students who did not agree to participate in the research, the data were based on self-report, and the study was carried out only in one health school in Turkey. It cannot be generalized to Turkey.

### 3. FINDINGS

The grades the students that took part in the study relating to the Ageism Attitude Scale and its sub dimensions are given in Table 1. The total grade received from the scale is  $82.28 \pm 8.54$ .

**Table 1. The AAS grades of school of health students (n=261)**

Scales	Avrg. $\pm$ ss	Min-max
Limiting the life of the aged	35.73 $\pm$ 4.40	20.00 - 45.00
Positive discrimination towards the aged	29.25 $\pm$ 4.47	14.00 - 39.00
Negative discrimination towards the aged	17.29 $\pm$ 3.27	8.00 - 25.00
Ageism Attitude Scale	82.28 $\pm$ 8.54	53.00 - 103.00

The age average of the students that participated in the study is  $20.7 \pm 2.03$  years. It has been revealed that of the students 73.2% are females; 52.5% are nursing students, 38.5% are 1. graders; 61.2% are graduates of anatolian/science/super high schools; 66.8% were born in a province; 65.9% lived in a province throughout their primary education; 71.6% spent most of their lives in a province.

When the descriptive characteristics of the students and the mean scores of the AAS and its sub-dimensions were examined, it was found that there was no significant difference between the age, the sub-dimensions of the scale and the total mean score ( $p > 0.05$ ).

A significant difference was found between gender and the mean score of limiting the life of the elderly, which is one of the sub-dimensions of AAS ( $p < 0.05$ ). The grade averages of females was revealed to be higher than those of males. A significant difference was found between the negative discrimination against the elderly, which is one of the AAS and its sub-dimensions, and the department where the students study ( $p < 0.05$ ). The scores of the students in the physiotherapy department were determined to be higher.

A significant relationship was found between the grade the students and the mean score of negative discrimination towards the elderly, one of the sub-dimensions of AAS. ( $p < 0.05$ ). The grade average of the students that are attending their senior year is higher than that of other students. A meaningful relationship between the high school they graduated from, place of birth, place of residence during primary school and longest time and the grades received from AAS and its sub dimensions was not found ( $p > 0.05$ ).

It was detected that of the participants, 73.5% were from provinces, 82.2% had a nuclear family, 59.1% had one sibling, 51.7% currently stayed in a dormitory, 52.2% had a balanced family income; 30.3% had a mother with elementary education, 62.8% had a housewife mother, 34.9% had a university-graduate father, 37.9% had a father who was self employed.

A meaningful statistical relationship between the AAS and its sub dimensions and the family types of the students, the current place of residence of the students, and the number of siblings of students was not found ( $p>0.05$ ). A meaningful difference between where the students are from and positive ageism towards the aged, which is among the subdimensions of the AAS, was detected ( $p<0.05$ ). The negative ageism towards the aged average grades of the students who are from rural and the positive ageism towards the aged average grades of the students who are from towns were found out to be higher than the others.

Of the students, 44.8% reported that they lived with an old person; 21.5% they had lived with an old person for 0-1 year; 23% reported that they lived only with their grandmother; 53.6% reported that their grandmother and grandfather lived alone in their own houses; 40.6% reported that they would prefer to live with their parents in the future; 63.9% reported that they would prefer to live with their parents for physical and economical reasons; 38.5% reported that they did not prefer to live with their parents in order not to disturb their lives. 58.2% of the students stated that they would like to work with aged people when they graduated; 35.6% of them remarked that they wanted to work with aged people for they are in greater need of physical and psychological support and 12.3% reported that they did not want to work with the elderly since they are difficult to communicate.

When the relationship between the grade averages of AAS total and sub dimensions and the opinions of the students on living with old individual(s) was examined, a statistically meaningful difference between wanting to live with the mother/father or both after graduating from university and starting a family and positive ageism towards the aged and negative ageism towards the aged, which are AAS sub dimensions, leaps to the eye ( $p<0.05$ ). The positive ageism towards the aged grade of the students that want to live with parents is high. On the other hand, the negative ageism grade of the students who do not want to live with parents is high. A statistically meaningful difference between the other variables of students' opinions on living with an old person/old people and AAS total and sub dimension grade averages was not found ( $p>0.05$ ). A significant difference between AAS total and sub dimension grade averages and students' wanting to work with old people after graduation was detected ( $p<0.05$ ). The AAS total and sub dimension grade averages of the students that want to work with old people after they graduate was higher. However, a statistically meaningless relationship of students' thinking of not working after graduation was detected ( $p>0.05$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Ageism accounts for the sum of the good and bad attitudes, prejudices, movements, actions and behaviors towards the individuals of a certain age group. Aging has come to be perceived as equal to regression, being in a bad situation, sickness (10). Senior citizens, usually due to their increasing health problems and their inability to produce, may be regarded by the community as a burden and a dependent group. In the same breath, the negative attitudes and false beliefs towards aging reduces the efficiency and quality of the service provided for the aged individuals.

In this study, it was determined that the students had a positive attitude towards the elderly. In studies conducted with students studying in the field of health such as nursing, elderly care and medicine, it was found that students had positive attitudes towards the elderly (13,18,21,22). Despite today's lifestyle, respect for the elderly still maintains its importance in our culture. In our study, students' positive attitudes towards the elderly; It may be due to their upbringing in a culture that values the elderly, the Turkish family and society structure, and the education they received at the university.

Similar to the literature, no significant difference was found between demographic characteristics, age, scale sub-dimensions and total score averages (22,23). It is thought that the close age range of university students prevents the emergence of difference according to the age variable.

In this study, a meaningful difference between the grade average of limiting the life of the aged, which is among the sub dimensions of AAS, and gender as found. There are studies in the literature that report that there are no differences among genders on attitude towards the aged people (13,24,25) as well as those that report that there are such differences (21-23). In the study of Can et al. (2020), the mean score of the sub-dimension of limiting the life of the elderly and the mean AAS score of women were found to be higher than that of men. Kurtkapan (2019) found that female participants had a more positive attitude than men. Köse Tosunöz and Güngör (2021) also obtained similar results. Our study conclusion may be related with the motherhood role and instinct of women. In addition, it can be said that the role of caring for the elderly in gender roles and the differences in the upbringing of girls and boys affect this situation.

Negative discrimination towards the elderly and the total score of the scale were found to be significantly higher in physiotherapy department students. It is possible to say that students have more positive attitudes towards the elderly and old age. Similar results to our findings were obtained in a study conducted with the students of nursing and physical therapy and rehabilitation departments (22). Unlike our findings, Köse Tosunöz and Güngör (2021) included nursing and elderly care students in their studies and found that nursing students had lower negative beliefs and perceptions towards the elderly. The findings of Yazıcı et al., who included nursing, physiotherapy and aged care students in their study, were similar. Considering the trainings and clinical practices given in the departments, it is thought that the students of the physiotherapy department may have encountered more elderly individuals.

In studies, the fact that as the level of education increases, the attitudes of students towards older people become more positive (13,18,22,26,27). In this study, as well, it was found out that fourth-grade students had a more positive approach towards the old people than lower grade students. Our research findings are parallel with the literature. This result leads to think that the education and the clinical practices contribute to the students in a positive way, affecting their thoughts about old people positively.

No correlation was found between the high school they graduated from, the place of birth, the place where they received education, and the scores of the scale and scale sub-dimensions. The results support the literature (21,23). This situation suggests that the main culture in the society is similarly effective in all education units.

In our study, it was determined that family type, current place of residence and number of siblings did not affect age discrimination. There are studies in the literature with similar results (20,23). Although the family type of the students, the place where they live and the number of siblings differ, it can be thought that they have gone through similar socialization processes.

In the consequence of our study, the negative ageism grade averages of the students from rural areas and the positive ageism grade averages of the students from towns were higher than the others. The results were similar in the study of Yeşilot, Demirci and Öztunç (2020) (28). This difference is associated with the fact that there is more communication and sharing with older people in smaller places of habitation.

Among the participants, those who want to live with their parents have a positive discrimination score for the elderly, and those who do not want to have a negative discrimination score for the elderly. Findings supporting the results of our study were found in the literature (21,23,29). In addition, there are studies that have determined that wanting to live with their parents

in the future has no effect on ageism (17). In line with our findings, it is thought that the value of the bond between family and child in our culture is still preserved today.

In our study, it was determined that the status and duration of students' living with the elderly/elderly had no effect on ageism. Sönmez Sarı and Yıldırım Gürkan (2022) obtained similar results in their studies. Unlike our findings, Dikmen and Yıldız (2022) found that students living in the same house with their grandparents and students living with elderly people for more than 5 years exhibited higher positive attitudes in their study with elderly care technician students. It can be thought that this difference is due to the fact that the students in our study lived with the elderly person for a shorter period of time.

In our study, the scale total and sub-dimension mean scores of the students who wanted to work with the elderly after graduation were higher. In the literature, Yeşilot et al. (2020) found that students who want to work with elderly individuals have positive attitudes towards the elderly in terms of positive discrimination, negative discrimination towards the elderly and total scale scores (28). In the study of Altay and Aydın (2015); it has been determined that they have positive attitudes towards the elderly in terms of positive discrimination and total scale score (27). Sönmez Sarı and Yıldırım Gürkan (2022) found that students who want to work with the elderly have more positive attitudes towards the elderly (30). At the same time, the reasons why students want to work with older individuals are also similar. Although students do not have sufficient experience with older individuals, their willingness to care for them may be due to their existing positive attitudes.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Considering the increasing elderly population in the world and in our country, it is necessary to develop training programs in order to protect and increase the existing positive perceptions and attitudes of nursing and physiotherapy students, who will be among the health professionals of the future and who will encounter older individuals more, and to have positive experiences with elderly individuals. Opportunities should be created for older individuals to have positive experiences. During their clinical training, it should be ensured that they experience this encounter more. Introducing the units where elderly individuals receive health care services to students more intensively and ensuring that students spend a longer time in these units will positively affect health care. In addition, it is recommended to carry out larger studies to determine the perceptions and attitudes of physiotherapy department students towards ageism. Introducing the units where elderly individuals receive health care services to students more intensively and ensuring that students spend a longer time in these units will positively affect health care. Thus, while increasing the quality of care, psychosocial support can be provided to elderly individuals. In terms of young individuals, aging anxiety can also be reduced. It has been observed that studies on ageism are generally conducted with students studying in the departments of nursing, medicine and elderly care. In this sense, it is recommended to carry out larger studies to determine the perceptions and attitudes of all individuals who work or will work in areas that serve elderly individuals, such as the physiotherapy department, towards ageism.

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