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SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARD ELDERLY PEOPLE: SAMLE OF ANKARA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Although respecting the elderly people and devotion to them is one of the fundamental social rules in Turkey, this fact is being affected by the regional and traditional conducts. Considering the demographic changes, attitude towards the elderly people turns into an important status.

This work was planned in order to determine the attitudes of the university students towards the elderly people was and conducted on the Ankara University Department of Social Work students. In the research, the attitudes were measured with the attitude scale developed by Kogan (1961) and t-test was applied to determine the differences between genders.

The result of the research revealed that; the elderly people need more compassion and trust compared to anyone else; even though there are minor exceptions, most of the elderly people are found to be sympathetic; individuals grow in experience as they age and that it is hard to make the elderly feel sincere. Additionally, the results show that female students have more positive attitudes towards the elderly people than the male students ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: Old age, discrimination against the elderly, attitude, university students

Introduction

Prevention of sicknesses and providing diagnosis and therapy in early stage with the developed active diagnosis and therapy methods, causes decrease in infant deaths and the fertility rate along with the development of preventive health services, and the developing dietary habit, results in increase of expected average life span (Konak and Çiğdem, 2005; Bahar et al. 2009). Old age is a relative concept and can show differences from one society to another and time; it is natural, inevitable and an applicable process to all humanity. This status in general is a period where one experiences the following: decline in; one's physical and cognitive functions, health, fertility, income, reputation, roles and statuses, independence, social entourage, spouses and close relations, social life and social support (Kocataş et al. 2004; Bahar et al. 2009; Yılmaz and Özkan, 2010).

In our current day, the tendency in the decline of the population growth rate and increase of the expected average life span is causing in an increase of the old age population in the general population and thus our world drives into a process of elderly growth in demography (Çilingiroğlu and Demirel, 2004; DPT, 2007; Danış, 2008). The effects of this demographic change, which is also called as the ageing of the population, are observed in different ways in the societies. The socio-cultural structure of the society, changes in the attitudes and manners and the perception of elderliness of the individuals and society affects the services provided to the elderly people and causes several problems. Amongst these problems one can observe the discrimination against the elderly people which especially occurs during the advanced ages (Yılmaz and Özkan, 2010). The term of discrimination against the elderly people refers to the prejudice via attitudes and manners towards the elderly people. In general, it is based on a chronological conceptualization; emphasizes the incapability, limits and negative changes as one gets older and older (Çilingiroğlu and Demirel, 2004).

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When one speaks of “the old” in the society, the following thoughts come to the mind: one in need of care, experiencing gait disturbance, closed to change, unhappy, alone and having weak social relations. By overlooking the positive aspects of old age such as wisdom and experience, a constant emphasis is made on the negative parts and many elderly people are considered to be irrelevant to asses while they experience an active and healthy old age. Under the stereotype judgements of the societies, an individual may have fears such as decline of health, decline of control and independence or becoming an outcast off the society. The facts that the elderly people indigenize the negative features which the society attributes, and the fear of becoming dependent to other people on the execution of their fundamental functions and supplying their needs by losing their independence, affects their quality of life in a negative way (DPT, 2007). In addition to this, discrimination against the elderly is not a universal but a cultural phenomenon. The positive attitudes towards the elderly declines as the modernization level rises in a society. The West does not perceive death as a natural phenomenon of the life cycle, whereas the East considers life and death as a continuum; hence the old ages are considered as “the peak of life”. On the other hand, the western societies do not esteem the individuals after retirement as productive in terms of economy and perceives them as a financial burden.

When analyzing the stereotypes of the elderly and elderliness in Turkey; although respect to the elderly, giving value to their words and protect seems to be a traditional and constant expectation, in time the status of the elderly in the society and reputation is changing. Urbanization, rise of migrations and industrialization, economic difficulties, employment of women, change in the social life and the transition from the paternalistic family structure to nuclear family (modern) structure have been important reasons of change in the family structures, especially in big metropolises. In this state, becoming an outcast from the society causes depression on the elderly individual who is experiencing lack of productivity, emotion of uselessness, decline in mental functions, less attention to the environment, delay in response to new occurrences or not responding at all, short-term memory impairment, resentfulness, egocentric attitudes, skepticism from time to time, dependent on other in order to continue their daily lives (Akdemir et al. 2007; DPT, 2007; Bahar et al. 2009).

Today, the discriminative attitudes towards the elderly are shown mostly by the youths. Although there are studies showing university students having negative attitudes towards the elderly, there are also studies showing students having positive attitudes towards the elderly people (Çilingiroğlu and Demirel 2004; Akdemir et al. 2007; Yılmaz and Özkan 2010). In order the society to gain an equalitarian perspective of the discrimination against the elderly and to develop its thoughts, behaviors and attitudes; the youth needs to have a positive feeling about the elderly individuals. Van Dussen and Weaver in their work (2009) revealed that the young people, who are communicating with the elderly via friendship or voluntarily studies, are more willing to work in the senior care services. In this work which aims to find out the attitudes of the university students towards the elderly people, resulted that the more developing positive, respectful and tolerant attitudes and manners towards the elderly and aging; the more the young people be helpful in their future professional lives to the elderly people in delivering service.

Method

In this work, a quantitative methodology was adopted which used a questionnaire form that was developed by utilizing the previous studies.

Study Group

In the academic year of 2016-17, by adopting complete inventory method, 270 students from the Ankara University Faculty of Health Sciences Department of Social Work were interviewed. The ages of the students under the scope of this research are varying from 18 to 27 (21.81 ± 2.29).

Data Acquisition Tools

In collecting the research material, in order to determine the attitudes of the students toward the elderly, the Attitudes toward Old People Scale developed by Kogan (1961) was used. The scale is an adaptation work developed by performing legitimacy and reliability analyses.

Data Acquisition Process

In the first stage of the research, the scale was evaluated where it was applied to 100 students; structure legitimacy and reliability analyses were conducted. In order to control the structure legitimacy of the scale, the Varimax Principal Components Analysis was used, which is a factor analysis technique.

Table 1. Factor and item analysis results based on the attitudes of the university students toward the elderly

	Total Item Correlation	Factor Load Value
It would be better if most of the elderly lived in places where the young also lived	.356	.324
Most of the elderly live as they wish and cannot change R	.345	.317
Most of the elderly are not different from anybody; understanding them is as easy as understanding the young	.340	.407
There is something different with most of the elderly: it is difficult to understand what makes them restless/tick R	.313	.400
Most of the elderly can adopt themselves to the changes required by the conditions	.335	.287
Most of the elderly tend to let their houses untidy and unkempt R	.349	.422
. Most of the elderly can keep their houses clean and tidy	.374	.477
. It is foolish to say that wisdom comes by old age R	.343	.435
. People grow wiser with coming of old age	.344	.464
. It is quite relaxing to be with the elderly	.394	.505
. Most of the elderly bore others by talking about 'good old days' R	.375	.343
. One of the most interesting and entertaining qualities of most elderly people is to tell about their past experiences	.514	.627
. Most of the elderly spend too much time mix into other people's business (stick their noses) and giving unsought advice	.317	.306
. Most of the elderly tend to keep their opinions to themselves and give advice only when asked R	.359	.323
. You can be sure to find a nice atmosphere if there is a sufficient number of elderly people in your neighborhood	.308	.420
. There are a few exceptions, but in general most old people are pretty much alike	.460	.582
. It is evident that most old people are very different from one another	.331	.428
. Most of the elderly have a clean and tidy personal appearance	.344	.334
. Most of the elderly are irritable, grouchy and unpleasant R	.497	.588
. Most of the elderly are cheerful, agreeable and good humored	.470	.588
. Most of the elderly need as much love and reassurance as other people	.370	.368
Eigenvalue: 4.193	Variance: %55.32	Alpha:.784

As a result of the analysis, the questions were determined that measures the same and different structure; whether the questions remained under a single structure were analyzed via item factor load value. In the factor analysis, the load values remained below 0.30 are left off the scale. For the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach Alpha was calculated which is a coefficient of internal consistency. In addition to this, the discernment power of the questions on distinguishing the positive and negative attitudes was measured by item analysis. With this purpose, the correlation between item scores was calculated.

The following sentences were left off the questionnaire due to having factor load values less than 0.30: "1. It would be better if most of the elderly lived with their coevals in the same place **R**", "7. Most of the elderly prefer to get retired as soon as entitled to it or their children are able to look after them **R**", "8. Most of the elderly would like continue to work as long as possible rather than be dependent on anybody", "13. The elderly have too much power in business life and politics **R**", "14. The elderly should have power in business life and politics **R**", "19. Most of the elderly spend too much time mix into other people's business (stick their noses) and giving unsought advice **R**", "20. Most of the elderly tend to keep their opinions to themselves and give advice only when asked", "22. When you think about it, old people have the same faults as anybody else", "27. Most of the elderly should take care of their personal appearance; they are too untidy **R**", "31. Most of the elderly constantly complaining about the behavior of the younger generation **R**", "32. Most of the elderly rarely complaining about

the behavior of the younger generation”, “33. Most of the elderly need more love and reassurance as other people R”, and thus renewed.

In order to determine the attitudes of the young toward the elderly, the factor load values of the 22 items inside the scale vary between 0.31 – 0.63; item total correlation vary between 0.31 – 0.49. The alpha calculated regarding the reliability of the scale is 0.78, whereas the variance is 55.3% (Table 1).

Analysis of the Data

The findings of the research were gathered in a database by using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 16.0. The arithmetic and logical process ability of the software provided categorization and scaling of the information. All necessary arithmetic means were calculated for each question and t-test was applied to test the differences based on gender.

Findings

When taking the average scores into account, the young were observed to agree more on the following sentences: “Most of the elderly need as much love and reassurance as other people” ($\bar{X}=3.98\pm 1.12$), “There are a few exceptions, but in general most old people are pretty much alike” ($\bar{X}=3.96\pm 1.54$), “People grow wiser with coming of old age” ($\bar{X}=3.83\pm 1.09$), “Most of the elderly live as they wish and cannot change” ($\bar{X}=3.75\pm 1.02$). Female students, compared to male students, think that the elderly needs more love and faith than anyone else and most of the elderly are quite sympathetic ($p<0.01$, $p<0.05$).

Amongst the people who agree more on the following sentences, female average scores are higher than male average scores and the difference was found to be statistically considerable: “You can be sure to find a nice atmosphere if there is a sufficient number of elderly people in your neighborhood” ($p<0.001$), “It is evident that most old people are very different from one another” ($p<0.01$) and “Most of the elderly can keep their houses clean and tidy” ($p<0.05$) (Table - 2).

Although it is statistically not considerable; it was found that male students agree more on the following attributes than female students: when conditions require, the elderly people have an ability to adapt to the new conditions; wisdom cannot be acquired through age; individuals get experienced as they age; most of the elderly are annoying, uneasy and unsympathetic (Table 2).

Table 2. Attitudes of the students towards the elderly based on gender and T-Test results

	Gender	n	\bar{X}	S	t
2. It would be better if most of the elderly lived in places where the young also lived	Female	106	3.14	1.02	.502
	Male	164	3.07	1.04	
	Total	270	3.11	1.03	
3. Most of the elderly live as they wish and cannot change	Female	106	3.75	.97	.000
	Male	164	3.75	1.06	
	Total	270	3.75	1.02	
4. Most of the elderly are not different from anybody; understanding them is as easy as understanding the young	Female	106	3.45	1.22	1.582
	Male	164	3.22	1.19	
	Total	270	3.33	1.21	
5. There is something different with most of the elderly: it is difficult to understand what makes them restless/tick	Female	106	3.26	2.86	.159
	Male	164	3.22	1.18	
	Total	270	3.24	2.20	
6. Most of the elderly can adopt themselves to the changes required by the conditions	Female	106	3.07	1.12	.941
	Male	164	3.19	1.13	
	Total	270	3.13	1.12	
9. Most of the elderly tend to let their houses untidy and unkempt	Female	106	3.85	2.85	1.294
	Male	164	3.51	1.18	
	Total	270	3.68	2.19	
10. Most of the elderly can keep their houses clean and tidy	Female	106	3.67	.95	1.945*
	Male	164	3.42	1.15	
	Total	270	3.54	1.06	
11. It is foolish to say that wisdom comes by old age	Female	106	3.34	1.29	1.169
	Male	164	3.51	1.25	
	Total	270	3.42	1.27	
12. People grow wiser with coming of old age	Female	106	3.79	1.12	.640
	Male	164	3.87	1.05	
	Total	270	3.83	1.09	
16. It is quite relaxing to be with the elderly	Female	106	3.44	1.07	.390
	Male	164	3.39	1.02	
	Total	270	3.41	1.04	
17. Most of the elderly bore others by talking about 'good old days'	Female	106	3.11	1.27	.605
	Male	164	3.19	1.22	
	Total	270	3.15	1.25	
18. One of the most interesting and entertaining qualities of most elderly people is to tell about their past experiences	Female	106	3.80	1.14	1.551
	Male	164	3.58	1.18	
	Total	270	3.69	1.16	
21. Most of the elderly spend too much time mix into other people's business (stick their noses) and giving unsought advice	Female	106	3.35	1.11	1.154
	Male	164	3.19	1.07	
	Total	270	3.28	1.09	
23. Most of the elderly tend to keep their opinions to themselves and give advice only when asked	Female	106	3.47	1.16	.366
	Male	164	3.42	1.21	
	Total	270	3.44	1.18	
24. You can be sure to find a nice atmosphere if there is a sufficient number of elderly people in your neighborhood	Female	106	3.42	1.02	3.353*
	Male	164	3.14	1.19	
	Total	270	3.28	1.12	
25. There are a few exceptions, but in general most old people are pretty much alike	Female	106	4.25	1.87	2.089*
	Male	164	3.67	1.04	
	Total	270	3.96	1.54	
26. It is evident that most old people are very different from one another	Female	106	3.57	1.15	3.176*
	Male	164	3.32	1.21	
	Total	270	3.44	1.19	
28. Most of the elderly have a clean and tidy personal appearance	Female	106	3.37	1.00	1.729
	Male	164	3.28	1.08	
	Total	270	3.32	1.04	
29. Most of the elderly are irritable, grouchy and unpleasant	Female	106	3.38	1.11	.731
	Male	164	3.48	1.17	
	Total	270	3.43	1.14	
30. Most of the elderly are cheerful, agreeable and good humored	Female	106	3.49	1.01	.362
	Male	164	3.45	1.01	
	Total	270	3.47	1.01	
34. Most of the elderly need as much love and reassurance as other people	Female	106	4.16	.96	2.659*
	Male	164	3.80	1.24	
	Total	270	3.98	1.12	

*p<0.05

**p<0.01

***p<0.001

Table 3. T-Test results of the general views based on gender

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	S	t
Comments	Female	150	76.94	11.19	2.037*
	Male	150	74.24	10.91	
	Total	300	75.61	11.12	

*p<0.05

Generally, when observing the views of the students on the elderly individuals, female students were found to have more positive attitudes towards the elderly, compared to the male students. According to the t-test results, the score difference between the male and female students are statistically considerable ($p<0.05$) (Table 3).

Discussion

In our world today, in most of the societies the elderly individuals are facing discrimination. Discrimination against the old is defined only as the different attitude, prejudiced action and institutional regulations toward a person due to the age. This discrimination arises due to the negative attitudes of the family members and society itself towards the elderly individuals and aging. States like senility, labefaction, unhealthiness, derogation, tired and functional stress are seen as bad or even that one should avoid. Factors like urbanization, transition from extended families to nuclear families, employment of women, economic difficulties, migration to metropolises and its burdens causes the elderly people who are a fundamental part of their family and who has a voice in the family, are considered today as a burden. Failing to adapt to the swiftly changing world, technology and pace of the new life causes the opinions on the elderly to turn to negative. In the societies where youngness, dynamism and physical appearance are highly valued, elderly people are living more and more alone, struggle more with economic and health problems, isolated more from the society and experience decline in self-esteem (Prudent and Tan, 2002; Akdemir et al. 2007; Erden Akıand Özer, 2009; Vefikuluçay Yılmaz and Terzioğlu, 2010).

Nevertheless, especially the support, trust, compassion and care provided by the family is highly effective for the elderly, to accept old age, to observe oneself still as a loved, respected and important person in the society, and to experience a healthy, happy and satisfying old age period by coping with the problems of this period (DPT, 2007).

The studies in the literature shows the young people who have constant communication with the elderly individuals in their families have more positive attitudes toward them (Kogan, 1961; Lee, 2009).

In the works of Cherry and Palmore (2008) which is aiming on the evaluations of the elderly on the old age period stated, females compared to males have more positive opinions. Similarly the findings of the work of Rupp et al. (2005) have been found supportive of the above results; males were expressed to be more discriminative than females towards the elderly. Lee (2009) on the other hand found that, the scores of male students on negative attitudes are higher than female students and detected that the positive attitude scores and average scores on the discrimination towards the elderly were not different.

The attitudes of the young people reflect the values and judgments of a society. By remaining insensitive to the concept of elderliness, the young people today have prejudgments towards the elderly (Kogan, 1961). To prevent the isolation from society and subjectivity to violence of the elderly, the young people must be guided to show positive emotions and good will towards the elderly (Lee, 2009). Gorelik et al. (2000) revealed that the attitudes of the university students towards the elderly are affected by the quality of the communication with the elderly in the family, whereas female students care more with the elderly in the family and depending on this fact they have more tendency to select a profession that is concerned with elderliness in the future compared to male students.

According to the study of Prudent and Tan (2002), most of the students described the elderly as unhappy, unproductive, sick, stubborn/rigid, conservative, pessimistic, unbearable, intolerant and problematic. Likewise, Özdemir's study (2009) found that most of the students of the nursing school perceive elderliness with the following concepts: illness, compassion, weakness, loneliness, dependent, servitude and wisdom. Yılmaz and Özkan (2010) stated that the students of the nursing school have positive attitudes towards the elderly, and as the students age older, based on the maturing level, they show more and more positive attitudes toward the elderly.

The works of Kimuna et al. (2005) on the perception of the university students of the elderly individuals and elderliness suggests, most of the students think that the physical strength of elderly individuals decline due to age; the service programs for the elderly are fruitful and as one ages the person has more money. Even though the study revealed that there is a rising tendency of awareness and sensibility of the students towards the elderly rights, their attitudes towards the elderly have not changed. Therefore spending more time for the young with the elderly must be supported. Activities like visiting nursing homes, voluntary work, sharing knowledge, skills and

resources with the elderly will contribute the youth to develop positive attitudes toward the elderly. In addition to this, for sharing the accumulation of knowledge, including the elderly to the schooling system will lead to more harmony with the society (DPT, 2007).

Intervention to maximize the coping and problem solving skills of the elderly is the most fundamental and vital extends of the gerontological social work. (Duyan et al., 2005). The targets of this strengthening process contains, in parallel to the gerontological social work, to alter the environment in order to remove social pressures that effects the power, participation, social awareness and lives of the individuals (Kam, 1996). Hence, preparing courses and programs in the universities on the topics of gerontology is important for the youth who will work in the fields of social work, sociology, psychology and health and nursing services; in order to achieve knowledge and awareness of gerontology.

Conclusion

The young people under the scope of the research mostly think that the elderly people needs more love and trust compared to an ordinary person; most of the elderly are sympathetic; individuals gain experience as they age. In addition to this, it was observed that female students agree more to these views than the male students. The female average scores are higher than male scores for the following sentences: “You can be sure to find a nice atmosphere if there is a sufficient number of elderly people in your neighborhood”, “It is evident that most old people are very different from one another” and “Most of the elderly can keep their houses clean and tidy” ($p<0.05$).

The rapid growth of the elderly population in Turkey, as in other societies as well, necessitates to priorly determine and provide for the requirements of this group. The services to be provided to the elderly should support to the extent of physical, psychological and social health and easy access. Therefore in order to ensure welfare of the elderly, certain fundamental and universal criteria must be improved, such as; appropriate housing conditions and apparatus, sufficient and healthy nutrition, providing health and clothing needs, establishing healthy family communication; and sufficient income and rational management of economic resources.

The education programs in the fields of health and social nursing do not cover working with individuals; but covers more the topics of the categorization of business management, clinical issues and nursing statuses. An education provided on these topics leads to the end where the professionals see the patients or applicants not as individuals in the future. Targets on education should cover; along with the improvement of the social nursing of the elderly; initiatives on changing the thoughts, emotions and behaviors about the elderly.

In the practices of social work, the teaching program module on the elderly is argued to be contributing to the evaluation of the elderly, improvement of the knowledge on intervention and especially the young university students to develop positive attitudes towards the elderly.

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