Elder Abuse and Neglect in Selected Asian Countries

Editors
Zulazhar Tahir et al.
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Zulazhar Tahir • Siti Zaharah Jamaluddin
Jal Zabdi Mohd Yusoff • Sridevi Thambapillay
Mohammad Abu Taher • Nur Faizira Abdul Rahman

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Ageism among Healthcare Providers – A Scoping Review

Che Chong Chin, Noran Naqiah Mohd Hairi and Chong Mei Chan

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia’s population of the elderly in 2016 was 2.95 million and it represents 9.3% of the total population. By 2030, Malaysia will be an ageing nation with the elderly constituting more than 15% of the population.¹ The elderly account for 18% of inpatient admissions and 20% of outpatient visits.² The emerging concern of holistic geriatric care warrants multidisciplinary teams comprising geriatricians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others. However, development of such expertise in tandem with retaining skilled staff is a major challenge.³ Geriatric care in the country is still underdeveloped

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and unable to cope with the rapidly increasing demand for specialized services and care.\textsuperscript{4}

Ageism can be defined as ‘any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of age or any assignment of roles in society purely on the basis of age’.\textsuperscript{5} Evidence suggests that an ageist attitude is pervasive within the healthcare setting where the elderly are at their most vulnerable.\textsuperscript{6} Ageism manifests in many forms in healthcare services, including healthcare workers having negative attitudes toward the elderly or the ageing process, engaging in patronizing behaviour, failing to consult the elderly about their preferences for care, and discouraging or restricting access to otherwise-indicated medical interventions.\textsuperscript{7}

Ageism often leads individuals to see older adults as unproductive, depressing and sickly, and to believe that cognitive impairment is a natural consequence of ageing.\textsuperscript{8} Illness or disease may be perceived as the norm for the elderly and thus deemed acceptable for the elderly to suffer from many illnesses without adequate care.\textsuperscript{9}

The quality of healthcare services provided to the older population is strongly influenced by healthcare providers’ attitude towards the elderly.\textsuperscript{10} Negative stereotypes or unfavourable attitudes of healthcare providers toward the elderly could potentially interfere with developing an empathetic and caring relationship with an older adult;\textsuperscript{11} furthermore,


\textsuperscript{5} Traxler AJ, “Let's get gerontologized: Developing a sensitivity to aging, the multipurpose senior center concept: A training manual for practitioners working with the aging”, (Springfield, IL: Illinois Department of Aging, 1980).


\textsuperscript{9} Public Perceptions of Older People and Ageing: A Literature Review", \textit{National Centre for the Protection of Older People}, Ireland, 2009.

\textsuperscript{10} Lagacé et al., 2012; Diego A. Bernardini Zambrini et al., “Attitude toward the elderly among students of health care related studies at the University of Salamanca, Spain”, (2008) 28(2) \textit{Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions} 86–90.

it may result in the elderly being inadequately assessed and thus being omitted from services most appropriate to their needs. Negative stereotypes of the elderly is identified as one of the barriers in retention and recruitment of the older adult healthcare workforce. Many healthcare providers assume that care of older adults is depressing and that older patients are extremely sick, frail, or demented. Consequently, the shortage of professional healthcare workforce in geriatric care is prevalent. Nurses represent the largest workforce in healthcare services. Regrettably, ageism has been permeating into this noble profession. Meiner pointed out that this is because, as negative attitudes about the elderly are generally held by society at large and as nurses are members of society, nurses may have an ageist attitude. Ageism may lead to inappropriate and inaccurate assessment, diagnosis and treatment. Negative ageist attitude in nursing practice has jeopardized the quality of care, resulting in risk of incomplete or substandard care, patient and family dissatisfaction, and poor outcomes. Allowing ageism in nursing practice diminishes this caring profession. Thus, nurses are urged challenge their ageist attitude, and ensure that they treat the elderly holistically with respect, dignity, and equality.

METHODS

Aims

Scoping reviews are useful to systematically and comprehensively map the literature and identify existing evidence. This scoping review aims to map out the state of the existing literature on attitudes among nurses and student nurses toward the elderly.

The scoping review was guided by the framework of Arskely & O’Malley. The writers adopted 5 stages to map the literature: identifying

15 Ibid.
research questions, identifying relevant studies, selecting the studies, charting the data and finally collating, summarizing and reporting the results.

**Research questions**

This scoping review answers the following research questions:
1. What are the nurses and student nurses’ attitude towards the elderly?
2. What instruments were used to measure the nurses and student nurses’ attitude towards the elderly?
3. What are the variables that influence the attitude of nurses and student nurses’ towards the elderly?

**Search methods**

The CINAHL, Journal@Ovid, PubMed, MEDLINE and Science Direct databases were systematically searched for literature published between 2004 and 2015.

The following syntax and limiters were included: (attitude OR perception) AND (old OR elder OR geriatric OR age) AND (people OR patient OR person OR adult) AND ('nurse' OR 'student nurse' OR 'nurse student'). The search was limited to articles written in the English language and published from 2004 onwards. Citation searching and checking of reference lists were also carried out to locate additional relevant papers. An attempt was also made to identify grey literature (unpublished literature, theses and conference proceedings).

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Inclusion criteria for the review were studies that:
- aimed to measure nurses or student nurses or allied health sciences students’ attitude towards the elderly,

Exclusion criteria were studies that were:
- in a non-English language
- abstracts or incomplete reports.

**Search outcome**

The electronic search retrieved 6,765 publications in the English language based on the titles and abstracts of studies. Research articles
were limited from the year 2004 until 2015 in consideration of the currency and relevancy. After the review of titles and abstracts, 6,629 papers were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The search hits were inserted into EndNote X7 and 86 duplicated references were excluded. A total of 55 papers were retrieved and the full texts were assessed for eligibility. The relevance of retrieved literature was matched with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The search and selection process is presented in a PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 12.1). A total of 55 full text articles assessed for eligibility by CC and NH independently and all the papers were included in the scoping review (Table 12.1). Data was extracted using a pre-designed extraction table by CC and NH separately and the differences were reconciled by mutual agreement. The author, year of publication, country, aims of the study, study design, measurement tools, population, sample size and findings are presented in Table 12.1.

The studies selected were conducted in the United States of America (USA) (n=11), United Kingdom (n=3), Canada (n=7), Portugal (n=1), Spain (n=1), Norway (n=1), Netherlands (n=1), Sweden (n=1), Australia (n=1), New Zealand (n=2), Greece (n=2), Ireland (n=1) and a study from Malawi. Several studies were conducted in Asian countries: China (n=1), Taiwan (n=3), Saudi Arabia (n=2), Turkey (n=5), Sri Lanka (n=1), Jordan (n=1), Egypt (n=1), Israel (n=2), India (n=1), Philippines (n=1), Iran (n=1) and Korea (n=1). There were 3 international collaboration surveys: one from Scotland, Sweden and the USA; one from Thailand and Sweden; and one from China and Australia.

Most of the studies (n=31) were cross-sectional surveys, 5 were longitudinal studies, 7 adopted a mixed mode (focus group interviews and cross-sectional), 8 utilized a quasi-experimental design and 5 were qualitative studies.

The population involved in the studies were nurses, nurse teachers, nursing students, medical students and other allied health sciences students including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, social work, nutrition and dentistry.
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Figure 12.1: PRISMA flow diagram for the scoping review process
RESULTS

Attitude of nurses, student nurses and other allied health sciences students towards the elderly

Almost all the studies reported that student nurses possess a positive attitude towards the elderly both in Western and Eastern countries. A systematic review by Liu et al.,\(^{19}\) covered research papers relating to registered nurses and student nurses’ attitude towards the elderly from 2000 till May 2011. Out of 25 papers, 1 study reported negative attitudes and 5 studies reported neutral attitudes.

Liu\(^{20}\) conducted a systematic review comparing the attitude across various healthcare professionals who provide healthcare to the elderly. The final review identified 51 studies from 2000 to 2011. The studies show that attitude towards the elderly and older patients range from neutral to positive among healthcare professionals. The systematic review suggested that medical students and qualified doctors’ attitude towards the elderly have become more positive over time, whereas the students and qualified nurses’ data indicate a trend in the opposite direction with their attitude becoming less positive.

Literature review undertaken by Neville & Dickie\(^{21}\) shows that a total of 32 studies that focus on undergraduate nurses’ attitude, perspectives and perceptions towards the elderly from 2008 to 2013 were included. All of the studies reported positive attitudes with an exception from Spain.\(^{22}\)

In the present literature review, 48 out of 55 studies reported positive attitudes. 6 studies reporting slightly positive and neutral attitudes were reported in a study from the USA.\(^{23}\) The findings from these studies provide an encouraging sign for the nursing profession.

\(^{22}\) Diego A. Bernardini Zambrini et al., “Attitude toward the elderly among students of health care related studies at the University of Salamanca, Spain”, (2008) 28(2) Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions 86–90.