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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ATTITUDES OF NURSING STUDENTS TOWARDS OLDER PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMPATHIC TENDENCY IN SINOP HAVING THE OLDEST POPULATION IN TURKEY.

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#### Abstract

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to determine the empathic tendencies, attitudes of nursing students towards older people and related factors.

**Methods:** This descriptive study was performed with 180 nursing students who accepted to participate in the study in Sinop University, Nursing Department during the 2014-2015 academic year. Student Identification Form, Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) and Kogan's attitude towards older people scale (KAOP) were used in order to collect data. Percentage distribution and t-test, Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis test were used to analyze the data.

**Results:** Of all participants, 84.4% of them were female and the mean age was  $21.68 \pm 2.18$ . The mean ETS score of students was  $66.07 \pm 24.44$  and the mean KAOP scale score of students was  $124.32 \pm 42.99$ . It was found that nursing students had positive attitudes towards older individuals and their empathic tendency was above the moderate level. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the empathic tendency of students who had positive attitudes towards older people ( $81.26 \pm 12.38$ ) compared to the empathic tendency of students who had negative attitudes towards older people ( $40.46 \pm 12.38$ ) ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Conclusively empathic tendency level is very important in order to improve the positive old age perception.

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#### Introduction:-

Old age period is the life stage in which the importance of the therapeutic relationships increases, there are structural and functional alterations and thus dependence on others increases (Adigüzel et al., 2011; Soyuer et al., 2010). Individuals who are 65 years old or older are demographically classified as older individuals. There is a demographical alteration throughout the world and societies are increasingly aging (World Population Ageing, 2013). According to Turkey Statistical Institute data, the proportion of old population (65 years old or older) to total population has increased up to 8% and it is estimated that Turkey will have a very old population by 2023 (TUIK, 2014). Besides, it has been concluded that Sinop province has the oldest population in Turkey (17.6%) (TUIK, 2014).

This structural alteration in societies will require the improvement of various services towards older individuals. Health care is one of the most important services which can be given to older individuals and attitudes of health professionals affect the quality of health services. In this process, particularly nurses have key roles (Adıbelli et al., 2013; Kulakçı, 2010). Empathy, which is one of the professional nursing approaches. Empathy is established in order to determine the needs of older people, and it has an important role in the older health care (Yiğitbaş et al., 2013; Gümüş et al., 2012). Old age period brings various problems which should be addressed psychologically,

socially, culturally and economically (Kurt et al., 2010). It is very important that nurses have effective communication skills in order to solve the problems during the health care of old people. Since communication skills of older people decrease, they may not express themselves efficiently and they may sometimes need assistance. Nurses can know the requirements of patients and what patients need by understanding the feelings and thoughts via establishing empathy with them. An old individual is special in a sense that interventions to his/her life should not be based on his/her statements but they should rather be directly intervened on the basis of your views. In this regard, having emphatic skills and establishing a proper communication are very crucial for health professionals (Kulakçı 2010; Kulakçı and Emiroğlu, 2012). The positive relationship between the empathy and prosocial behaviors (helping) has been proved and empathy and empathic tendency are determined one of the main steps of therapeutic relationships (Dizer and İyigün, 2009; Metin, 2015; Yiğitbaş et al., 2013). In literature, it has also been specified that patient satisfaction and the physical, mental and social status of a patient positively affect the health of a patient (Metin, 2015). Empathy is the way to say someone that 'I understand you and I give you an importance' particularly when the oral communications is not possible or it is insufficient. This relaxes the patient and it leads them to feel secure.

Old age is generally a period when old people cannot express themselves and their needs in a proper way and thus they can experience various problems. Therefore, it is very crucial to have positive attitudes towards them. In this regard, it is important to have positive old age perception and high empathic tendency level in order to improve health care quality given to old people. Old age related views of not only graduated nurses but also nursing students who will perform this profession in the near future, are very important in terms of their attitudes towards old people. Furthermore, their education about old age period and their knowledge about the life of old people will be very beneficial for them to empathize with old people. Determination of empathic tendency of nursing students and their attitudes towards old people will provide an opportunity to organize the curriculum and this will positively affect the choice and performance of newly graduated nurses. The aim of this study is to determine the empathic tendencies and attitudes of nursing students towards older individuals and related factors.

### **Methods:-**

This descriptive study was performed with nursing students who accepted to participate in this study in Sinop University, School of Health, Nursing Department during the 2014-2015 academic year. The universe of the study was composed of 339 nursing students. The aim was to reach all of the students and finally, we worked with 1., 2., 3. or 4. grade 180 nursing students who could be reached and who accepted to participate in the study during the time period when the study was performed.

### **Data Collection:-**

Student Identification Form, Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) and Kogan's attitude towards older people scale (KAOP) were used in order to collect data.

### **Student Identification Form:-**

Student Identification Form was prepared in line with literature and it was composed of questions related to sociodemographic features of participants (Kulakçı, 2010; Metin, 2015; Yiğitbaş et al., 2013). In this form, there were identifying questions such as age, gender, marital status, family structures and the academic year of the students in their studies.

### **Kogan's Attitude Towards Older People (KAOP) Scale:-**

KAOP scale was developed by Nathan Kogan in 1961, its reliability and validity studies were performed by Erdemir et al. (2010) and Ugurlu et al. (2011) and it was specified that this scale can be used to evaluate the attitudes towards old people in Turkey (Erdemir et al., 2010; Kogan, 1961; Ugurlu et al., 2011). This scale is composed of 34 items which are related to old individuals. Of all items, 17 of them expressed negative thoughts about older people and the remaining 17 items had positive expressions about old people. The scale is six point-Likert-type scale. The scoring is the inverse of this system when there are negative expressions related to older people. Negative and positive scores of items can be calculated separately or summed scores can also be obtained. The maximum score of the scale is 204 and the lowest score of the scale is 34. The score of 102 exhibits the neutral attitude towards older people whereas higher scores means the attitudes towards old people are positive and lower scores shows the negative attitudes towards old individuals (Erdemir et al., 2010; Ugurlu et al., 2011).

**Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS):-**

ETS was developed by Dökmen (1988) in order to measure the empathy potentials of individuals during their daily life. It is a Likert-type scale, it is composed of 20 questions and each question is scored from 1 to 5. The maximum score of the scale is 100 and the lowest score of the scale is 20. Total score expresses the empathic tendency of participants. High scores show high empathic tendency and low scores mean low empathic tendency (Dökmen, 1988).

**Statistical Analysis:-**

Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Release 21.0 programs were used in data analyses and  $p < 0.05$  was accepted as statistical significance for all tests and scales. All data were expressed using descriptive statistics such as mean $\pm$ SD, numbers and percentages. In order to compare the data, Student's t-test, Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis tests were used.

**The Ethical Aspects of the Study:-**

Ethics committee approval was received from Sinop University Ethics Board. Both oral and written consents of participants were obtained. Furthermore, the permissions were also obtained from the institution where the study was performed.

**Results:-**

Of all participants, 84.4% of them were female and the mean age was  $21.68 \pm 2.18$ . Demographical features of nursing students can be seen in Table 1. Majority of nursing students (48.3%) stated that they chose nursing profession voluntarily and they specified that this profession was appropriate to them. Of all students, 43.9% of them stated that empathy was important in nursing profession, 43.3% of them claimed that they had empathy skills, and 53.3% of them stated that they did not receive any training about empathy. Furthermore, 52.8% of nursing students stated that they had relatives older than 65 years old, 71.7% of them specified that they wanted to deal with older individuals and 69.4% of them stated that they provided health care to old people.

**Table 1. Descriptive features of the students.**

Descriptive features		n	%
Age	18-21 years old	121	67.2
	22-29 years old	59	32.8
Gender	Female	152	84.4
	Male	28	15.6
Class	1. grade	74	41.1
	2. grade	52	28.9
	3. grade	33	18.3
	4. grade	21	11.7
Place of residence	Student hostel	111	61.7
	with family	32	17.8
	with friends	37	20.6
Country	Center of the province	80	44.4
	District	68	37.8
	Village	32	17.8
Total		180	100

The mean ETS score of students was  $66.07 \pm 24.44$  and KAOP scale scores of students were between 40 and 104 and the mean of the scale was  $124.32 \pm 42.99$ . Majority of students had positive attitudes towards old age period and their empathic tendency was above the moderate level (Table 2).

**Table 2. Mean scores of empathic tendency and KAOP scales.**

	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	Median	Min	Max
<b>KAOP Scale</b>	$124.32 \pm 42.99$	120.00	40	204
<b>Empathic Tendency Scale</b>	$66.07 \pm 24.44$	69.00	20	100

When the empathic tendency scale scores and the scores of attitudes towards old people were compared to each other according to their age, gender, academic year, the status of having old relatives and the status of receiving the geriatric nursing lecture, the scores of female nursing students, students who had old relatives in their family and students who had the geriatric nursing lecture were higher compared to other students ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3. Comparison of mean scores of empathic tendency and attitudes towards older people according to demographic features of nursing students.**

		Empathic Tendency Scale	KAOP Scale
		$\bar{X} \pm SS$	$\bar{X} \pm SS$
Age	18-21 years old	60.17 $\pm$ 14.04	106.12 $\pm$ 11.24
	22-29 years old	67.01 $\pm$ 16.14	118.13 $\pm$ 9.18
		U*:1635 p: 0.132	U*:1224 p: 0.067
Gender	Female	85.12 $\pm$ 18.10	151.22 $\pm$ 18.11
	Male	52.07 $\pm$ 12.08	130.14 $\pm$ 22.12
		U*:835 <b>p: 0.000***</b>	U*:787 <b>p: 0.000***</b>
Class	1. grade	68.12 $\pm$ 12.01	109.03 $\pm$ 21.12
	2. grade	72.18 $\pm$ 18.04	132.25 $\pm$ 18.11
	3. grade	76.11 $\pm$ 9.12	104.24 $\pm$ 17.01
	4. grade	84.01 $\pm$ 16.21	125.32 $\pm$ 7.24
		KW**: $18.116$ p: 0.140	KW**: $62.231$ p: 0.125
The status of having Geriatric Nursing lecture	Yes	86.12 $\pm$ 7.11	180.18 $\pm$ 16.01
	No	63.45 $\pm$ 12.13	130.14 $\pm$ 8.11
		U*:1715 <b>p: 0.001***</b>	U*:987 <b>p: 0.000***</b>
The status of having old people in the family	Yes	85.12 $\pm$ 8.25	166.08 $\pm$ 12.11
	No	73.09 $\pm$ 7.12	139.17 $\pm$ 6.25
		U*:835 <b>p:0.001***</b>	U*:787 <b>p: 0.000***</b>

\*Mann Whitney U test, \*\* Kruskal Wallis test, \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$

Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the empathic tendency of students who had positive attitudes towards older people (81.26  $\pm$  12.38) compared to the empathic tendency of students who had negative attitudes towards older people (40.46  $\pm$  12.38) ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Comparison of mean empathic tendency scores according to the attitudes of nursing students towards older people.**

	Attitude Towards Older People		t*	p
	Positive	Negative		
	$\bar{X} \pm SS$	$\bar{X} \pm SS$		
<b>Empathic Tendency Scale</b>	81.26 $\pm$ 12.38	40.46 $\pm$ 12.38	-18.362	<b>0.000**</b>

\*Independence Samples t Test, \*\* $p < 0.05$

**Discussion:-**

In this study, it was determined that nursing students had empathic tendency levels above the moderate level ( $66.07 \pm 24.44$ ) and our findings are in line with results of various studies (Akıncı and Akgün, 2011; Avcı et al., 2013; Öz, 1998). In literature, it is specified that empathy is one of the main skills of nursing profession, all nurses should have the empathy skill and empathy is very important in the therapeutic patient-nurse relationship (Çam, 1995; Reynolds and Scott, 2000; Williams and Stickle, 2010). Empathic tendency is the empathy potential of an individual during the daily life and empathic tendency levels of nurses should be improved because it is very important to increase the health care quality and it is crucial for patients to feel secure (Altınoluk, 2014).

In our study, it was determined that majority of students had positive attitude towards old people ( $124.32 \pm 42.99$ ). Furthermore, female students, students who had an experience of living with old people and students who had geriatric nursing lecture had significantly higher scores of Kogan's Attitudes towards Older People (KAOP) scale compared to others. It is believed that courses in the curriculum contribute to the attitudes of nursing students towards old individuals. However, living with old individuals facilitates to understand old people and it contributes to develop positive attitudes towards them (Yılmaz and Özkan, 2010).

When the attitudes of students towards old people and their empathic tendency were compared to each other, it was found that empathic tendency levels of students who had positive attitudes towards old people were significantly higher compared to empathic tendency levels of students who had negative attitudes towards old people ( $p < 0.05$ ). Having positive attitudes towards old people is parallel to have high empathic tendency levels during the health care of old people. Empathy is a capacity of an individual to understand thoughts and feelings of others from their perspective and convey it to others. Therefore, high empathic tendency facilitates to understand old people and their feelings. Nurse candidates who try to understand the situations of old individuals can have more positive attitudes towards them. Empathic tendency leads to establish prosocial relationships and develop positive attitudes (Metin, 2015).

**Conclusion:-**

Conclusively, it has been determined that nursing students generally have positive attitudes towards older individuals, and their empathic tendency levels are above the moderate level. It has also been stated that empathic tendency level is very important in order to improve the positive old age perception of students.

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**Conflict of Interest:-**

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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