

ATTITUDES OF ALMAJMAAH UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS TOWARD OLDER PEOPLE'S CARE

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study was to investigate attitudes of Saudi Arabia nursing students towards care for older people and, their intention and willingness to provide care for this population in the future. Nursing students at a Saudi Arabian university were sampled for the study. A cross section of the students (n = 250) completed the modified Kogan's 'Attitudes towards Older People Scale' (1960) and data was analysed using SPSS (v.20). Findings indicate that nursing students have positive attitudes towards older people and that these positive attitudes are influenced by the Saudi socio-cultural context that promotes extended family structure with one or more older persons in most family units. Despite these positive attitudes, Saudi nursing students are unwilling to choose professional care of older people as a career path. Since this reluctance could be influenced by the dearth of educational content that improve students' knowledge about the care needs of older people, the study recommends the establishment of educational programmes within nursing curriculum that promote a better understanding of older people's care needs and thus enhance the value of caring for older people professionally.*

KEYWORDS: Attitudes, Saudi Arabia, Nursing, Older People

INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this project was an assignment that required developing a business case for care home services for older clients with dementia. This task prompted an interest in care for older people, generally, and the desire to specifically understand the state of nursing care for older people and the attitudes of student nurses to caring for older people in Saudi Arabia.

The ageing population is gradually becoming a global reality. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that in most developed countries, the proportion of the population that is above the age of 65 is on the increase (WHO, 2007) and current projections indicate that the ageing of populations will continue into the foreseeable future as people live longer due to advances in medical technology and public health knowledge (Watson, Atkinson & Egerton, 2008). It is argued that globally, about 870,000 people cross the 65 year mark to join the older population (Kinsella & He, 2008). As a consequence of this demographic change, Kinsella and He (2008) estimate that by 2030, approximately 28% of the population of Western Europe and 21% of the population of the United States will be over 65 years of age. The number of older people in Saudi Arabia is also growing and according to the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health (MoH, 2012) 2.73% of the current population is 65 years and above. This is projected to increase to approximately 7% before 2030 (MoH, 2012).

Without doubt, an ageing population presents various challenges for any country's health and social care system as ageing is often accompanied by a variety of chronic diseases that require long term care and support. The need for sufficient long term care and the increasing costs of achieving such care is becoming a source of concern for almost every modern society

(Muangpaisana, Intalapaprona & Assantachaia, 2008). Nurses constitute the largest group of healthcare professionals and in most cases they are directly responsible for caring for older people. The knowledge and attitudes of nurses towards care for older people, therefore, significantly determine the quality and safety of care received by this population in any society (Pulido-Martos, Augusto-Landa, & Lopez-Zafra, 2012).

Consequently, nurses' attitudes towards older people have been the focus of many studies, and have been explored by many researchers in recent years, with the objective of understanding how to improve nurses' attitudes towards older people (Hawk, 2001; Nolan, Brown, Davies & Keady, 2001; Soderham, Linden-Crona & Gustavsson, 2001; Lookinland, Linton & Lavender, 2002; Hweidi & Al-Hassan, 2005 and Zakari, 2005). According to Herdman (2002) there is a decrease in the number of nurses who are interested in providing care for the older population. Jacelon (2002) argues that nursing students tend to develop negative attitudes towards caring for older people, and that this influences their behaviours towards older patients. However, McKinlay & Cowan (2003), in a survey of 173 nursing students across the United Kingdom (UK), report that nursing students displayed positive intentions towards working with older patients. They also found some evidence to suggest that knowledge and experience might influence nurses' views and attitudes towards caring for older patients.

Hweidi & Al-Hssan (2005) suggest that the attitudes towards older patient could be affected by gender and that male nurses tend to be more willing to care for older people than female nurses. According to these authors, such attitudes include respect, appreciation and sympathy towards older patients. However, in line with McKinlay & Cowan (2003), Hweidi and Al-Hssan (2005) also suggest that knowledge can influence nursing students' attitudes towards and willingness to care for older people. Hweidi and Al-Hssan (2005) contend that education is an effective strategy to improve positive attitudes towards older people. As such, there are suggestions that if gerontological nursing is inculcated into basic nursing education and if it is made engaging enough to attract more nurses, the field of geriatric nursing could see further development which would help to further promote positive attitudes and willingness to care for the older people population (Koren, 2008).

Unfortunately, because most of these studies and reports relate to Western societies, especially the United States of America and European countries, their findings may only be relevant to Western cultures. While the nursing profession is similar across countries, the differences in the socio-cultural context in each country means that attitudes, behaviours and perspectives vary across cultures (Liu, Norman & While, 2013). Moreover, the general perceptions of older people in the population and a society's attitudes to this population have been argued to influence nursing students' attitudes. After all, nursing students are a part of their society and would share the same attitudes and beliefs (Jacelon, 2002). As part of the global body of nurses, it is pertinent, therefore, to investigate the attitudes of Saudi Arabian nursing students and their willingness to care for older people in the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, given the increasing proportion of older people in the population and changing work-life patterns in the country.

Traditionally, caring for older people in Saudi Arabia is principally based on an Islamic culture that emphasises the significance of meeting the increasing needs of older people in the family not only as an obligation to the family, but also to the Islamic faith (Al-Sadhan, 2001). Being a traditional Islamic society, this religious obligation has become entrenched in the Saudi socio-cultural psyche. As a result, Saudis respect older people in general, whether they are parents, relatives or just members of the society. Older people are treated with kindness, empathy and affection (Al-Modeer, Hassanien & Jabloun, 2013) and older people live in the homes of their

children who provide all the care they need until their deaths. This is not usually considered to be a burden or a difficulty, as the average Saudi adult understands that caring for one's aged and fragile parents is a duty and obligation that must be passed down from one generation to the next. They understand that by caring for their aged relatives, they can expect their own children to also care for them, when they too become older (Al-Modeer, Hassanien & Jabloun, 2013).

However, in recent times, the ability of Saudi Arabians to guarantee high quality of care for their older population is facing some significant challenges. First, older people are traditionally cared for at home by women who are expected to stay at home to care for both the children and the older people. However, with an increasing number of women receiving university education and taking up formal jobs, the responsibility to care for older people is becoming a lesser priority for them than was previously the case (Sadi & Al-Ghazali, 2010). Another factor is the lack of healthcare providers including nurses who are enthusiastic about working as carers for older people (Al- Sadhan, 2001). As Zakari (2005) argued, the unwillingness of healthcare providers, especially nurses, to work in caring for the older population can be attributed to the lack of education of nurses about the needs of older people. For example, neither gerontology nor geriatric studies are yet recognized as nursing specialties in Saudi Arabia (Zakari, et al., 2009).

While studies like McKinlay & Cowan, (2003) report the positive attitudes and willingness of nursing students to provide care for older people in Western countries like the UK, Zakari (2005) found that caring for older people is in fact an unpopular specialty for several clinical professions, especially the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia. The author also suggests that knowledge about older people and their care needs is minimal and insufficiently addressed among Saudi nursing students, given the lack of specific educational content or practical experience to promote such knowledge and skills during their nursing programme. This argument was further strengthened in Zakari, et al (2009). However, a brief overview of the history of nursing education in Saudi Arabia will perhaps highlight how the tradition of same-sex only, gender-segregated higher education system in the Kingdom may have affected the current state of knowledge on and attitudes towards nursing care for older people (Baki, 2004).

History of Nursing Education in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a traditional Islamic society where free mixing of both sexes even for educational purposes is discouraged. This gender-segregated education culture means that nursing education for males and females in the Kingdom have evolved separately.

The first educational institution for health education was established in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia for educating boys in 1958, as an agreement between the Saudi Ministry of Health (MoH) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Fifteen students were enrolled at that time. However, the only major programme offered was 'Health Inspection'. By 1960 two nursing schools for girls were opened. By the late 1970s the nursing schools were transferred into nursing institutions and their number reached 25 schools throughout the Saudi Arabian Kingdom (Baki, 2004).

Nursing education is supervised by both the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Higher Education (MHE). The Ministry of Health supervises the health institutions and intermediate colleges for male and female students. The Ministry of Higher Education supervises Bachelors' and Masters' degrees in Nursing Science for male students. In 1973 a higher degree programme

in nursing was established at King Saud University in Riyadh, under the Applied Medical Science Division, and a department for nursing education for females was also established. In 1987 a graduate programme for female nursing students began to offer Bachelors' and Masters' degrees. Also in 1987 a department for female nursing students was started in Dammam at King Faisal University offering Bachelor's degrees in nursing. In 1988 a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing was commenced at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah (King Abdul Aziz University, 2001). Since then there have been nursing graduates practicing in different health care settings in Saudi Arabia. However, the segregated curriculum and the lack of focus on gerontology seem to affect the knowledge of nursing students about the care needs of older people, and consequently, their attitudes and willingness to work in the care of older people (Sadi & Al-Ghazali, 2010).

The Changing Culture of Care for Older People in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia and in other Eastern cultures, older people are given special attention which is motivated by religious and cultural reasons (Alshahri, 2002). In Saudi Arabia ageing is an admired status, and older people are treated with great respect within the family. Age has a religious significance, as religious teachings emphasise that older people have contributed positively to the society in raising their children, so, it is the responsibility of the children who are now adults to respect and care for these older persons. Al-Shahri (2002) added that older people in Saudi Arabia, beside the admiration they receive from the family, are accorded special social standing, for example, it is expected that everyone in the family stands up when an older person enters a room or any other location. They are expected to start eating before other members of the family during family meals. It is also not acceptable to address older people by their first name, instead terms such 'my uncle' or my 'grandmother' are preferred and this has to be said politely and with a respectful voice. Smoking or chewing gum by teenagers and young adults in the presence of older people in the family is frowned upon as it is considered a sign of disrespect. It is usual that the family takes care of their older ones; therefore older patients do not expect any change in the way they are treated even if they are moved from the family home to hospital. (Al-Shahri, 2002)

Traditionally, while women take care of the children and older people at home, men had to look for jobs to sustain their family. This might involve the men moving away long distances from their families in search of a better life. The men also go to colleges and universities to a far greater extent than women. Despite recent changes, the number of women who go to universities or undertake higher education is still less than men, which is shown when a comparison is made in an average Saudi family (Al-Shahri, 2002).

However, Saudi Arabia has undergone huge socio-economic changes since the discovery of oil in 1939. This has resulted in many Saudis moving from rural and farming communities into large urban communities in the cities in search of better economic and social lives (Al-Turaki, 2007). Modern city life dictates some changes in the family structure and this has affected the care of older and vulnerable people such as the disabled, leading to situations where some of them have had to care for themselves (Qurati, 2001).

Moreover, these socio-economic changes now necessitate that the care for older people needs no longer need to be based on the traditional family care, there is the increasing need to undertake care in nursing and community care homes and other establishments. As such, there is now a remarkable increase in the number of care homes in Saudi Arabia (Al-Modeer, Hassanien & Jabloun, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to educate the new generations of nurses

so that they have the understanding, willingness and the capability to care for older people. This will actually be positive for these young nurses. On graduation, nurses can combine the foundation of inherited values and family traditions with new nursing practices in order to develop better insight into understanding older people and their health and social care needs.

Project Significance

Ageing population is a global reality and for most developed countries, the financial and human cost of caring for older people is apparently on a steep increase (WHO, 2008). For most of these countries, one could argue that enough attention was not paid to the demographic reality of an ageing population, until the costs of healthcare, for example, began to skyrocket and cause for concern (Drennan et al., 2004). However, for Saudi Arabia, the increase in the population of older people is still in its early stages. With the relatively low population of older people, the time to get it right with quality care for older people in the healthcare system is now. Nurses play frontline roles in the care for older people and their attitudes, perceptions, behaviour and knowledge about older people's care is, therefore, very important not only for the quality and safety of care, but also the cost of care (Liu, Norman & While, 2013). Thus, by investigating the attitudes of nursing students towards care for older people, this study intends to provide baseline evidence that could influence how nursing students are trained in order to promote a better knowledge and positive attitudes towards care for older people. The nursing students of today will constitute the major share of professional nurses in the near future, providing them with the right education, orientation and practice experience now, could significantly influence the quality and safety of care that older people population receive in years to come.

Project Aims and Objectives

The aims for this project are:

1. To explore the attitudes of undergraduate Saudi Arabian nursing students toward care for older people.
2. To examine the willingness of nursing students at one Saudi Arabian University to care for older people in their future careers

The objectives are:

- To investigate nursing students attitudes towards older people in Saudi Arabia
- To understand what factors influence the attitudes of nursing students towards caring for older people
- To identify possible factors that could increase the appeal of nursing older people to nursing students as a future career option

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focused on articles reporting studies of the perceptions and attitudes specifically of nursing students, but also qualified nurses and other health related students' attitudes and their willingness to work in the care of older people in the future, in order to create a better context. As Jacelon (2002) and Drennan et al., (2004) rightly argued, nurses play an important and significant role in health care delivery. Nurses are important in providing both personal and physical care as well as emotional support for older adults in homes, hospitals and other facilities. Given the ageing population in most developed countries, there is a growing global demand for nurses who have the knowledge, capacity and commitment to provide effective and quality care for older people in different care settings (Koren et. al, 2008). However, the quality of care provided for the elderly is directly associated with the attitudes of the nurses, physicians, medical and nursing students who care for them (Hewidi & Al-Obeisat, 2006; Jacelon, 2002).

Consequently, there have been numerous studies on nurses' attitudes towards older people in recent years. Some studies suggest that nursing students do have a tendency to be positive in their attitudes towards the older adult, and their care (Ryan & McCauley, 2004; McKinlay & Cowan, 2003), while other studies report negative attitudes towards older adults (Aud *et. al*, 2006; Happell, 2002).

Recently, Liu, Norman and While (2013) examined international research related to registered nurses and student nurses' attitudes towards older people and the various factors that influence these, such as, educational environment and sociocultural experiences. After a systematic literature review of 25 selected published papers, the authors report that attitudes towards older people were inconsistent, with positive, negative and neutral attitudes among registered and student nurses observed. They also reported that attitudes were become slightly less positive since 2000. However, suggesting that their findings are not conclusive, Liu *et al* (2013) recommended further studies in this regard with specific focus on nursing students' attitudes and perceptions to older adults, a gap that this study intends to fill.

Negative attitudes of nursing students towards older peoples' care were reported in several studies across different countries. According to a study carried out in Finland (Hirvonen *et. al*, 2004), nursing students were hesitant to choose care of older people as a career. This study raises an important question about why these nursing students were not interested in caring for older people. The purpose of the Finnish study was to assess the attitudes of the nursing students towards older people at two stages of their nursing education. The first stage was during their first year of study period, and the second was at the end of their study to find if there had been any change in attitude or perception. The results of the study suggest that students' attitudes towards older adults were positive in both periods. The sampled students were positive in their respect and appreciation of older people; however, their hesitation about working in the care of older people as a career path remained. The authors suggested that the unwillingness of the sampled students to choose care of older people as professional path even towards the end of their nursing education could indicate that the nursing education did not expose students to an environment that promotes understanding of the ageing process and the care needs of older people. However, the study did not clearly highlight other factors that could have contributed towards the nursing students attitudes.

Nolan *et.al*, (2002) in a cross sectional survey of 718 nursing students and 855 qualified nurses to assess their knowledge of ageing and the older population in the United Kingdom. The

results of the survey indicated that students who showed positive attitudes towards older people, generally at the beginning of their training, did not display negative attitudes to working with this group, but qualified nurses demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the ageing demography in UK. In Israel, another study was carried by Topaz & Doron (2013) to explore the knowledge of nurses about ageing and to assess their attitudes towards older people. These authors hypothesised that nurses have poor knowledge about ageing consequently, negative attitudes towards care of older people. The aim of the study was to understand if the poor knowledge about ageing and the older population influenced nursing students' willingness to work in the care of older people. The study findings indicate that student nurses did not have any strong positive or negative attitudes to older people. They also did not seem to have actively considered care of older people as a career possibility. Although the authors did not clearly consider this but compared to other Western countries and also Arab countries, the apparent 'neutral' attitude of Israeli student nurses to older people might be a consequence of their limited knowledge of the older population, and maybe, low exposure to the older population. Perhaps, in agreement with this inference, the study did recommend that nurse educators widen the scope and content of the gerontology education that students receive in order to promote a better understanding of, ageing, the older population and their care needs.

Bernardini *et.al* (2008) investigated the attitudes of 472 final year pre-graduate students from seven healthcare disciplines – nursing, medicine, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, dentistry and social work towards older people in Spain. Data collected using a validated version of Age Semantic Differential (ASD) questionnaire indicated that 54% of the students showed positive attitudes towards older people. However, nursing students showed less positive attitudes towards older people than the rest of the students. The study raised the importance of continuous interaction between the students and healthy older people that may influence and change negative attitudes of nursing students toward older people, and consequently, positively influence their willingness to care for older people. In the same regard, Kim *et.al* (2004) suggested that it is essential to introduce educational strategies for the nursing students. Such strategies should emphasise, the concept of positive/healthy ageing to address and perhaps counter negative stereotypes often held about ageing and older people.

Further, Hughes *et al.*, (2008) suggest that several factors such as, education, ethnicity, culture, personality traits, spirituality, past experience and clinical experiences, all affect attitudes towards older people and the willingness of nursing students to care for them. The authors suggest that the differences in these underlying factors could be responsible for the mixed attitudes towards and willingness to provide nursing care for older people reported in various studies.

Two studies in Jordan investigated attitudes of nursing students towards older people and if this translated to their willingness to provide nursing care for this population or not. The first study, (Hweidi & Al-Hassan, 2005) included 200 nursing students in an acute care setting and found that though participants have positive attitudes towards older people, this does not necessarily translate to willingness to provide care for them. The authors suggested that more efforts were needed to make the best of the positive attitudes towards older people in order to enhance the quality of care older people received in the country. The second study (Hweidi & Al-Obeisat, 2006) however found that attitudes to older people amongst nursing students in another part of the country was only marginally positive, further emphasising the need to promote a more positive perception of older people through educational strategies, such as placement and interaction with healthy older people

Cultural competency has also been suggested to influence attitudes towards older people and several studies have sought to assess the relationship between the cultural competences of the nursing students and their attitudes towards care of older people (Beard, *et al.*, 2004). Their study examined the demography, relationships between the attitudes of 41 female first year nursing students towards old people and students' cultural competence skills. Beard *et al.*'s (2004) study reported that 58% of the participants showed positive attitudes towards old people. The study concluded that there was a strong association between cultural competence and nurses' attitudes towards old people. However, the limitation of this study was its sample comprised of only female nurse students. This indicates that more studies in this area including both genders of students are needed to be able to generalize such findings as differences in attitudes and cultural competence may arise if both male and female nurses are considered. For the current study, demographic factors such as age, gender, education and religiosity may be examined to see if they play a role in attitudes towards older people.

Some studies did report a correlation between religious views and the attitudes of the nursing students towards old peoples' care (for example, Zakari, 2005). These studies criticised the negative attitudes towards older people, as it was expected that religious people would have concerns about the spiritual and social needs of others. The Zakari (2005) study provided no explanation for the negative attitudes but assumed that these attitudes should be positive. This may imply that the religious influence on people may differ from culture to culture and from one society to another.

Ryan & McCauley (2004) carried out a study in Ireland to survey and report the attitudes of undergraduate, junior and senior nursing students towards older people. The study used two different instruments, Kogan's Scale and Facts on Ageing Quiz 1 (FAQ 1). The result of the study indicated positive attitudes towards the older people in all groups of students and found no significant difference between these groups. Perhaps, in support of Hirvonen *et al.* (2004), the Ryan & McCauley (2004) study shows that length of nursing education does not affect students' attitudes to care of older people.

Other studies have explored the relationship between the attitudes of the nursing students and their intention to care for older people. In Norway, working conditions and work satisfaction were essential factors affecting the choice of working with older people as a career path for nursing students (Bergland & Laerum, 2002). Investigating why nursing students did not want to choose a career in gerontology after their graduation, and what changes these students would expect, for them to consider working in this nursing field, Bergland and Laerum (2002) found that work satisfaction, working conditions and a strong interest in care of older people were major factors that affect nursing students' choice as regards care of older people.

Koren *et al.* (2008) suggested that due to the ageing population, and the associated increased demands for health care by this population, teaching gerontology to all nursing students should become a very important consideration for nursing educators. They conducted a study of 200 students to investigate whether this goal could be effectively achieved. The results of the study emphasise the need for identifying students' desire to learn more about supportive resources for older people and their caregivers. Although, the Bergland and Laerum (2002) and Koren *et al.* (2008) studies are not generalisable to every society, given the impact that sociocultural contexts have on exposure to, and perception and attitudes towards the older population. Nevertheless, these studies provide a baseline understanding that subsequent studies could build upon.

Moreover, some studies have explored the impact of clinical placements on nurses' attitudes and their intention and willingness to care for older people (Brown, *et.al*, 2008a; Tovin *et. al*, 2002). Brown *et.al* (2008b) described the significance of clinical placement experiences in informing student nurses' perception of gerontological nursing. They suggest that the nursing curriculum and placements priorities and experiences have to be strategically oriented towards giving students positive experiences in the care of older people.

According to Brown *et al* (2008a; 2008b) nursing student do not always enter the nursing education with negative attitudes towards working with older people, but during training students can develop these negative attitudes. They argue that if the students were exposed to or experienced 'enriched' environments of high standards of care with positive staff roles they could be more likely to develop positive views and attitudes towards older people. Brown *et al* (2008a) indicate that negative experiences during clinical placements in nursing homes can influence students' views about working with and caring for the older persons. The study explored the role of nursing educators in increasing the positive attitudes of the nursing students towards older people and concluded that learning in a rich environment that promotes exposure to positive ageing and role models effective care for older people, could positively influence students' attitudes towards care for older people.

Miller (2004), in an editorial, highlighted the importance of developing and implementing educational interventions and programmes to promote positive attitudes and willingness to work with older people. Some studies have examined different types of educational programmes which could positively influence the attitudes of the nursing students towards care of older people, such as clinical practice that promotes exposure to and emphasis of positive ageing, to counter the prevalent negative perceptions of ageing and older people. Miller (2004) suggested that the social and emotional issues of ageing have to be included in gerontology studies with the aim of improving students' understanding of the ageing process and its implications. Coffey (2005) suggested the need to evaluate the academic and clinical levels of the students when teaching gerontology. The author argued for the use of an assessment portfolio in clinical practice within the curriculum of gerontological nursing, in order to promote a link between theory and evidence-based practice using reflective and critical thinking to challenge and develop the practice of gerontological nursing.

To strengthen the argument for education, studies have significant indicated the role of nursing educators in changing attitudes of the students and promoting positive clinical experience in gerontological care (Bergland & Laerum, 2002).

However, despite the growing body of evidence on nursing students' attitudes towards older people, much of the research have been undertaken in Western cultures, especially the United States of America and Europe. Given the significant differences in culture and suggestions that culture plays a significant role in students' attitudes, it is difficult to transfer the current body of evidence to an Arabic society like Saudi Arabia. Currently, very few studies have explored the attitudes of nursing students towards and their willingness to care for older adults.

Zakari (2005)'s study of 506 nursing students revealed that little is known about the nursing students' knowledge, attitudes, intention and willingness to care for older people. The results indicated that students hold positive attitudes towards older people, but they lacked knowledge of the ageing process. The study found moderate intentions to work with older people amongst the students. However, the study did not explore the influence of clinical placements and clinical experiences with older people among nursing students. Moreover, in a subsequent

study, Zakari (2009) reported that nursing students displayed a relatively strong belief that older people deserved the best possible care and had highly positive attitudes towards older people, due to religious sentiments. However, the study found that despite professing willingness to work in care of older people, knowledge about care for older people and the ageing process was relatively low amongst the respondents. In yet another study, Alsenany's (2010) report that while nursing students displayed positive attitudes towards older people, they are unwilling to choose care of older people as a career path. This combination of highly positive attitudes towards older people and a hesitation to provide nursing care for them seem to be slightly different from what is reported in other cultures and deserves a better insight. Moreover, the increasing influence of Western cultures on the Saudi society, as argued by Alsenany (2010) could hold some potential consequences for nursing students' attitudes and perceptions generally, as such, investigating nursing students' and willingness to care for older people would be filling an important gap in knowledge.

There is still conflicting evidence about nursing students' attitudes towards and their willingness to care for older people. Within the current body of literature, some studies suggest that nursing students tend to have positive attitudes towards older people and are willing to provide older adults with nursing care (McKinlay & Cowan, 2003; Zakari, 2005; Hwiedi & Al-Obeisat, 2006), however, other studies indicate negative attitudes of nursing students and hesitation to care for older people (Hoffman, 2000; Soderhaman, 2001; Herdman, 2002). In addition, there is suggestions that the experience of clinical placements in nursing homes for the older people could promote positive or negative attitudes (Hoffman, 2000; Tovin *et.al*, 2002; Brown *et. al*, 2008a; 2008b). Despite this contention, there is a growing consensus that gerontology nursing education could promote positive attitudes towards older people (Hoffman 2000). In this regard, some studies have emphasised the need for developing gerontology within the nursing curriculum with the introduction of teaching strategies that promote a better understanding of the ageing process and strategies for effective care (Bergland & Laerum, 2002).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings and results of the survey questionnaire. The study was concerned with investigating the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students towards older people in Saudi Arabia and their willingness and intention to care for older people. From the total population of 250 undergraduate nursing students, 238 (95%) completed the questionnaire. The high participation rate could possibly be due to the fact that questionnaires were distributed to students in class to be completed and handed back within a short period of time.

The results of this study are presented with the aid of various descriptive statistics and tables below and sub-divided into three main parts:

Part 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Part 2: Attitudes towards older people

Part 3: Willingness to care for the older people

Characteristics of Participants

The characteristics of the participating nursing students' including gender, age, education, marital status, religion and interaction with older people are described below:

Age, gender, marital status and number of children

The average age of the participants was 21 years and this was comprised of 145 males and 93 females. Interestingly, the ratio of males to females in the participants reflects the gender distribution in the target population as females constitute approximately 40% of the general nursing student population of the University. As shown in Table 1

Table 4.1 shows that the majority of the participants were 21 years and below, and single 84.5% (n= 201). Only 14.3% (n=37) of the sample population were married.

Table 1: Marital status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	201	84.5
Married	34	14.3
Divorced	2	0.8
Widowed	1	0.4
Total	238	100.0

Table 2 demonstrates that the majority of students (87.8%) did not have children while 12% had between one and four children.

Table 2: Number of children

Number of Children	Frequency	Percent
None	209	87.8
1.00	20	8.4
2.00	4	1.7
3.00	3	1.3
4 or more	2	.8
Total	238	100.0

Stage of University Educational Level

The students were at different levels in their studies, but the entire target population are undertaking a four year Bachelor's degree in nursing. Table 3 shows the distribution of students in the sample across the degree programme. From the larger proportion of students (55.5%) in the first and second years compared to 44.6% in years three and four, it appears that there is a gradual increase in the population of people taking nursing education.

Table 3: Stage of University Education Level

Stage of University Educational level	Frequency	Percent
First year	70	29.4
Second year	62	26.1
Third year	58	24.4
Fourth year	48	20.2
Total	238	100.0

Religious devotion and older people care

In Saudi Arabia, Islam is the dominant religion and all the participants were Muslims. Interestingly however, as can be seen in Table 4 below, more than half of the sample (51.6%) considered themselves as 'fairly religious', while almost a fourth (9.9%) considered themselves as 'not-religious'. Only 6.7% of the population considered themselves to be 'very religious'.

Table 4: Religiosity

Religiosity	Frequency	Percent
Very Religious	16	6.7
Religious	74	31.3
Fairly Religious	123	51.6
Not Religious	24	9.9
Missing	1	0.4
Total	238	100

As shown in table 5, 10.5 % (n= 25) did not agree that there is a relationship between caring for older people and their religious beliefs, while 87.4 % (n=208) did agree. 0.4% (n=1) did not answer these questions, this did not affect the quality of the response, though, given the relatively small proportion of the non-responses. Moreover, given the traditionally sensitive nature of religion it is a positive for the study that almost all the sample answered these questions.

Table 5: Association between Religious Beliefs & Caring for Older People

Association between caring for older people and Religious beliefs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	208	87.4
No	25	10.5
Undecided	3	1.3
Total	236	99.2
System missing	2	.8
Total	238	100.0

Interaction with older people

As shown in Table 6, most of the participants live in a house with at least one older family member 73.9 (n=176). This is an interesting statistic as it demonstrates that most of the nursing students spend time with older people as part of their everyday lives, even if they had not been responsible for caring for these older people.

Table 6: Living with Older People at Home

Older People at Home	Frequency	Percent
One Person	74	31.1
Two Persons	102	42.9
Missing	62	26.1
Total	238	100

As can be seen in Table 7, more than 80% of the participants have some sort of contact with an older person, at least, once a month. This may also indicate an increasing population of older people in the country.

Table 7: Contact with People over 60years

Contact with Older People	Frequency	Percent
Daily	48	20.2
Twice a week	15	6.3
Weekly	51	21.4
Monthly	78	32.8
Never	40	16.8
Missing	6	2.5
Total	238	100

Table 8 shows that 42.2 % (n=101) of the participants have cared for older people at home. This may indicate that participants have some contacts with and possibly, experience caring for older people outside their professional/educational experience.

Table 8: Care for Older People

Care for Older People	Frequency	Percent
Yes	101	42.4
No	133	55.9
Missing	4	1.7
Total	238	100

As seen in the summary of respondents' characteristics below (Table 9), the age of the participants ranged from 19 to 30, with a mean age of 21.45. More than half of the respondents are in first or second year of their study, single, without children and in the middle to high socio-economic class in the society. More related to the study, more than half (Mean 2.65, SD

0.75) of the sampled population did not consider themselves religious, while most (Mean 3.20, SD 1.37) had an older adult living with them at home and are thus, exposed to and have to care for an older person, informally. Summed together, this characteristics indicate that the sampled population are generally exposed to older people for extended time and have had time to form opinions and perspectives about this population.

Table 9: Summary of the Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristics	N=	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	238	19	30	21.45	2.188
University Educational level	238	1.00	4.00	2.3529	1.10685
Marital Status	238	1.00	4.00	1.1723	.43057
Number of children	238	1.00	5.00	1.1891	.60411
Religiosity	237	1.00	4.00	2.6540	.75248
Religiosity and work	236	1.00	3.00	1.1314	.37432
Socio-economic status	238	1.00	5.00	2.6681	1.02866
Are there people over 60 at home?	236	1.00	2.00	1.2542	.43636
Number of people over 60 at home	176	1.00	2.00	1.5795	.49504
Contact with people age 60 or over	232	1.00	5.00	3.2026	1.37302
Cared for people over 60	234	1.00	2.00	1.5684	.49636

The purpose of Part 1 of the study was to present the demographic characteristics of the participating nursing students and to identify whether a relationship could be established between the demographic characteristic of these students, their attitudes towards older people and their willingness to care for them in accordance with the aim of this study. This section identified that the population of first and second year students is greater than the population in the higher classes which might imply that more students are taking up nursing education. It also shows that the majority of the students do agree that there is a relationship between the religion and caring for older people.

Attitudes towards Older People

The measurement of attitudes toward older people has been advanced as a critical step in preparation and assessment of care providers to older people. In Saudi Arabia, like most of the world, there is a growing older population with wide ranging health care needs. One of the main challenges in this area is providing competent nurses who are capable, willing and prepared to work with older people. Therefore, as one of the objectives of the study, understanding the attitudes of nursing students towards older people is very important, as it can be assessed if their attitudes might encourage them to consider the care of older people as future careers. Kogan's Attitudes towards Older People Scale (ATOP) was developed by Kogan in 1961. The ATOP is a 34-item Likert type scale with 17 matched positive and negative statements. An example of negative - positive item pair is "most older people tend to let their

homes become shabby and unattractive” and “older people can generally be counted on to maintain a clean attractive home”.

The scale has been subjected to some criticisms, for example, McLafferty (2007) suggested that the scale measures societal attitudes but does not take into account the particular context in which nurses meet older people (McLafferty, 2007). Also, Lawsaki and Jones (2008) highlight the diverse nature of older people’s life and that neither positive nor negative images can reveal the ambiguous nature of people’s attitudes, views, and experiences of ageing. Nevertheless, the scale has been used extensively to measure attitudes towards older people across a range of professional groups (Gallagher et.al, 2006). The ATOP in this project was scored on a 5-point Likert scale: 5: strongly agree (highly positive), 4: agree (slightly positive), 3: neutral, 2: disagree (slightly negative), 1: strongly disagree (strongly negative). The negative statements were reverse scores, so that higher scores were attributed to more positive attitudes.

Table 10 shows the results of the students’ attitudes towards older people. Ranging from the lower bound of 1 and upper bound of 5 of the Likert scale, the categories in Table 10 show all 34 attitudes (both the positive and negative) and the calculated mean scores and standard deviation of the nursing students' attitudes towards older people. The average mean score of 2.98 with Standard deviation of 1.7 indicate that on average, the sampled nursing students have positive attitudes towards older people. Given that the majority of the students were not married and still leaving with their parents (Table 6), where they have regular contact with older members of the family (Table 4.7), their family status might be an influence on these students’ attitudes towards the elderly.

Table 10 indicates that Saudi nursing students have positive attitudes towards older people. However, these attitudes may be influenced by the fact that the majority of these young students grew up and still live in a home that housed their grandparents. They might have been socialised into seeing older people generally as grandparents, and as such, these positive attitudes might be an extension of their perceptions and attitudes towards their grandparents.

Table 10: Attitudes to Older People Measured on ATOP Scale

Items on the ATOP Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Lived with people their own age	238	1	5	2.66	1.759
Lived with younger people	238	1	5	3.24	1.814
Hard to figure out	238	1	5	2.60	1.766
Easy to understand	238	1	5	3.38	1.733
Unable to change	238	1	5	2.52	1.627
Capable of new adjustment	238	1	5	3.66	1.640
Prefer to quit work	238	1	5	2.66	1.698
Homes become messy	238	1	5	3.38	1.784
Maintain homes clean	238	1	5	2.66	1.674
Foolish that wisdom comes with age	238	1	5	3.36	1.734
People grow wiser	238	1	5	2.43	1.721
Make uncomfortable	238	1	5	2.79	1.813
Very easy to be with	238	1	5	2.50	1.678
Talking old days are boring	238	1	5	3.51	1.713
Past experiences are interesting	238	1	5	2.67	1.746
Spend praying much time	238	1	5	2.66	1.569

Respect others' privacy	238	1	5	2.71	1.750
Eliminate irritating faults	238	1	5	3.21	1.741
Same faults	238	1	5	2.45	1.611
Did not live in it	238	1	5	3.34	1.805
Nice neighbourhood	238	1	5	2.59	1.656
People over 60 are the same	238	1	5	3.53	1.703
People over 60 are different	238	1	5	2.54	1.725
Untidy in personal appearance	238	1	5	3.61	1.667
Clean in personal appearance	238	1	5	2.69	1.703
Irritable and unpleasant	238	1	5	3.69	1.697
Cheerful and good humoured	238	1	5	2.49	1.681
Constantly complaining young generation	238	1	5	3.74	1.630
Seldom complaining young generation	238	1	5	2.50	1.673
Excessive demands for love	238	1	5	3.36	1.730
Need the same amount of love	238	1	5	2.34	1.54

Willingness to care for Older People

The results of this part of the questionnaire survey revealed that the Saudi nursing students do not have positive attitudes towards caring for the elderly and are unwilling to provide nursing care for older people, professionally. Although these nursing students show positive attitudes towards the elderly, they did not demonstrate willingness or intentions to take care of the older people, as can be seen from the mean and standard deviation scores in Table 11. This indicates that the sampled nursing students' positive attitudes towards older people is not correlated with the intention and willingness to provider nursing care for the older population.

Table 11: Willingness to Care for Older People

Willingness to care for older people	N=	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
They are easy to care for	238	1	5	2.00	1.769
It is more rewarding to give care to them	238	1	5	2.24	1.743
It is not hard to teach them	238	1	5	2.77	1.784
It will help me to care for	238	1	5	2.75	1.842
It is difficult	238	1	5	2.99	1.786
It is emotionally uplifting and productive	238	1	5	2.78	1.799
It is rewarding	238	1	5	3.18	1.734
They are friendly	238	1	5	2.11	1.713
It is well- paying field	238	1	5	3.32	1.635
Desire to work in new field	238	1	5	2.73	1.752
The opportunity for advancement	238	1	5	2.49	1.691
Plan to work as long as possible	238	1	5	2.74	1.617
Be quite content to remain working	238	1	5	2.65	1.696
Under no circumstances will I voluntarily stop working	238	1	5	2.54	1.695
	238	1	5	2.45	1.690

Summary

This section provided the demographics of the sample of nursing students for the study. Most of the participants are young, still in their early twenties, unmarried, without children and still living with parents in their family home. The demographic information also indicates that there were more male nursing students than females and greater numbers in the first and second years, compared to the third and fourth years. While this does not constitute any empirical evidence, it does anecdotally show that more people might be taking up nursing education in this country. Moreover, a large proportion of the participants consider themselves as 'fairly religious' and 'not religious', with some indicating that religious beliefs have no association with caring for older people. This finding might be of interest, considering that most arguments about traditional Saudi care for older people is built on the religious requirements to care for older people coupled with the assumed religiosity of most people.

Results from the Kogan's ATOP indicate that most of the participants have strongly positive attitudes towards older people. Despite these positive attitudes towards older people, very few of the participants were willing to provide nursing care for older people, professionally. Perhaps, the positive attitudes towards older people are influenced by the fact that most of the students grew up and still live in family homes with elder members of the family. This indicates that there is necessarily no association between attitudes towards and willingness to care for, older people among Saudi nursing students.

DISCUSSION

The focus of the project was to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students toward older people's care at a College of Nursing in Saudi Arabia.

The survey used in this study achieved significantly high response rate (95.2%). Although, there seems to be a higher than average response rate from Saudi nursing students to relevant studies, for example, Alsenany's (2010) study which involved 566 Saudi female nursing students, had a response rate of 74%. However, the average response rates for similar studies in the literature vary significantly. Cook et al., (2000) in a meta-analysis of responses to survey suggested 55.6% is the average response rate for nursing students, while in another analysis, Dommeyer et.al, (2004) reported 75% average response rate. Compared to these averages, therefore, this study achieved a relatively high response rate. The high response rate could have been influenced by the fact that a large population of students were addressed in class, just before their normal lectures and invited to participate in the study. This approach ensured that a large sample size could be reached at once with the same information.

The findings will be discussed under the following three sub-headings:

- Demographic characteristics
- Attitudes towards older people
- Intention and willingness to care for older people

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information shows that the majority of the participating students are single (84.5%) and without children (87%), this is expected, considering that they are mostly in their early twenties and still in University. However, this could affect their socialisation and thus attitudes towards older people (Alsenany, 2010). Traditionally, teenagers and young adults live with their parents in the family house until they get married, except if for any reason, like securing a job, they have to move out of the city where their family resides. Living with an extended family, which often includes one or more, older people could potentially influence these students' attitudes towards older people (Al-Sadhan, 2001). The results indicate that most of the participants come in contact with older people at least once a month. Also, being nursing students, without children and living with older members of the family, the participants might be expected by other members of the family to employ their nursing skills in relating to and/or caring for the older members of the family. Also, it could be argued that after some time, the students' attitudes towards older people generally could become an extension of their attitudes to the older member of their family; especially in a culture that emphasises respect and admiration for the older population. While there is no empirical evidence, anecdotally, one could assume that this combination of family status and cultural expectations could influence nursing students' attitudes towards older people.

Another interesting piece of demographic information is the perceived religiosity of the sample. Saudi Arabia is a traditional and conservative Islamic society, as such it has often been argued that people's attitudes towards older people could be a result of religious requirements to respect and care for older people. In fact, studies by Zakari (2005), Hweidi and Al-Obeisat (2006) found a correlation between religiosity and attitudes towards older people. Hughes *et al* (2008) also suggest that factors such as culture and spirituality influence people's worldview generally, and so, could influence perceptions about, attitudes towards and intentions to care for older people. However, in this study more than 60% of participants considered themselves as 'fairly religious' or 'not religious' and less than 10% considered themselves as 'very religious', despite the generally positive attitudes towards older people. The findings of this study differ from previous studies as they do not support any relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards older people. This perhaps calls for a deeper understanding of how the changing social, economic and cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia - as with other parts of the globe - is affecting people's attitudes, perceptions and worldview in the country.

Attitudes towards older people

In Saudi Arabia nursing students grow up in a family framework. Cultural foundations in Saudi Arabia place a premium on caring personally for one's family, and nursing students are connected in the cultural and family framework (Al-Sadhan, 2001). From that perspective, they had positive attitudes in terms of getting to know older people. This is consistent with the previous studies by Al-senany (2010) and Zakari (2005), which claim that the Saudi family concept, culture, religion and norms has influenced the attitudes of the young nursing students towards older people to be positive, and that is supported by the findings of this project. However, as mentioned above, this study's findings indicate that the effect of religion might not be as strong as these other studies suggested. Even participants that perceived themselves as not religious still indicated a positive attitude towards older people.

Socialisation issues such as cultural norms and social expectations could be significant influences on personal values and by extension, attitudes to older people in the family and

society (Kim, Son & Algase, 2004). Given the traditional communal living in Saudi that emphasises sharing, living together as a big family in a 'family house' and communal support system, the Saudi culture could be a stronger influence on the students' attitudes than previous studies have suggested. There was a relatively large proportion of the sample who did not consider themselves religious, despite the significant positive attitudes towards older people, could help strengthen this contention.

However, it is pertinent to acknowledge that some studies, for example, Alsenanay (2010) did suggest that home conditions, such as having to care for or spend time with grandparents living with the family could induce positive attitudes towards older people in general, especially if the experience is pleasant. In the same vein, Obeisat (2006) also indicate that in Jordan, where the same extended family structure prevails, nursing students have significantly positive attitudes towards older people. It is apparent that the extended family system influences attitudes towards older people, however, it might be necessary, in future studies to establish if this effect is an inherent quality of the extended family system or a gradual 'normalisation' of religious requirements in a traditionally religious society.

Also, as Topaz and Doron (2013) suggested, knowledge of ageing could also affect the attitudes of nursing students to older people. Also, following a group of nursing students through their education, Bleijenberg et al. (2012) found that students' attitudes towards older people changed from negative to neutral after three years of nursing education. While this study did not directly investigate the effect of knowledge on attitudes, one could infer from this study's findings that since most of the participants lived in a family house with an older people for several years, they are most likely to have witnessed the process of aging with time, and as such, could have gained some anecdotal understanding of the ageing process. Again, the link between knowledge about ageing and attitudes towards older people could be further investigated, especially within the Saudi context, where such knowledge is gained informally.

Intention and willingness to care for older people

One major factor that tended to stand out from previous studies is the apparent disconnect between nursing students' attitudes towards older people and their preference (willingness and intention) to provide nursing care for them as a professional choice. This study adds further weight to the contention that students' positive attitudes towards older people do not necessarily translate to willing to provide care for them. While the findings indicate predominantly positive attitudes towards older people, most participants were unwilling to care for older people as a professional choice. This finding are at variance with the Saudi culture that expects children to provide the best care possible for their older relatives. These students were socialised into and educated in a system that emphasises the right of older people to have the best possible care, based on Islamic teachings that parents cared for children while they were at their weakest, and children, when they become adults, must repay this debt when their parents are old and at their weakest too.

Several arguments have been suggested for this disconnect between attitude and intention. Saudi researchers like Al-senany (2010) and Zakari (2009) suggested that the social, economic and cultural changes that Saudi Arabia is experiencing could be a factor. There seem to be a struggle between the traditional perception of women as housewives who have to stay at home to carter for children and the older ones, and the increasing proportion of women who are educated and expect to get a job and work outside the home. The participants in this study are also caught in this struggle too. On graduation, they expect to get a job and become a part of

the country's work force. However, they would still have to struggle with the social expectations that they should stay at home to take care of the family. It could be argued that nursing students are unwilling to choose care for the older people as a career preference, probably because it is seen as an extension of the housewife role that they have been struggling to escape from. Perhaps, caring for older people professionally does not appeal to nursing students because they have lived with an older person(s) for years and would not expect their professional career to be an extension of this. After all, Brown et al (2008) found that students do not enter nursing training with negative predisposition to older people, they suggest that such negative predisposition develops during their training, largely due to placements. Higgins et al (2007) also found strong negative predisposition to older people in acute care settings. If practical placements of a few month with older people could induce negative predisposition to caring for older people, it is perhaps reasonable to argue that a 'lifetime' of living with an older person could have the same results.

However, the educational system and curriculum could also be a factor here. Analysis for this study indicates that nursing education in the Saudi Arabia offers very minimal understanding of both the ageing process and effective care for older people. Specialties like gerontology are still undeveloped and nursing placements still do not offer optimum experience of caring for older people (Zakari, 2009). It does appear that nursing students have to rely on their informal experience with older ones at home for their knowledge about the ageing process. It is important for further studies to investigate the effects of specialised gerontology curriculum and placements that ensures exposure and experience with care of older people on students' predisposition to providing care for older people.

This study has shown that nursing students have significantly positive attitudes towards older people. However, these positive attitudes are not necessarily due to religious beliefs, as previous studies might have indicated, but are more likely to be associated with cultural socialisation and a consequence of growing up in a home with older people as part of the extended family. The study supports previous contentions that positive attitudes do not translate into willingness and intention to care for older people, amongst nursing students. One, it can be argued that the negative predisposition towards caring of older people could be a consequence of female nursing students desiring to break away from the traditional perception of women as responsible for caring for older people or the limited knowledge and/or experience of nursing care of older people offered by their nursing training. Two, there is possibility that the social friction between men who still expect women to be carers for the young and elderly, and the desire of women to be equally as educated and socially active as men could be negatively affecting the care of older people. However, further studies are required to investigate these contentions for any merit.

In addition, this study focused generally on nursing students without any gender targeting. Considering the argued changing roles of women in the Saudi society, future studies are also needed to examine the roles of men in the society, especially with regards to providing care and support to older family members. Perhaps, such studies might shed more light on how men are reacting to this change and what roles they take on in the family and the society. Lastly, it would also be necessary to examine the generally attitude towards provision of institutional care for older people in the Saudi society.

The study reports very positive attitudes towards older people by the students in one Nursing College in central Saudi Arabia. However, a relationship between positive attitudes toward older people and the intention to care for them could not be established. The experience of

students in Saudi society with older people outside the educational context provides useful understanding of older people for students, however, how this relates to their predisposition to providing professional care for older people is difficult to establish. Quantitative data alone is not sufficient to explore and understand the deeper meaning of these positive attitudes among nursing students toward older people and why it varies from their preference. To understand the positive attitudes of the young students, it is recommended that an in-depth exploration of these students' understanding, perceptions and lived experiences through qualitative study is necessary. This study's analysis of data from a questionnaire survey provides insights into nursing students' views toward the care of older people in Saudi Arabia, which is one of the aims of the study.

Recommendations and Future Studies

Attitudes are influenced by several dynamic factors, and as such, tend to change over time. Studies, in the future, need to investigate how the attitudes of students change through the course of their nursing program in Saudi Arabia

Studies need to investigate if any change in attitude during training is associated with a change in willingness and intention to care for older people.

Studies in other countries and context have suggested that well designed clinical placements that expose students to enriched care environment and the positives of ageing could influence students to be more interested in care for older people. Such strategies need to be trailed in Saudi Arabia

From an educational perspective, nursing education in Saudi Arabia needs to be improved with a better focus on gerontology to build on the informal knowledge about ageing that students have accumulated from home.

Also, within professional circles, nurses need to improve the professional status of value of caring for older people. The fact that care for older people is still not considered as a professional specialty might also be a strong influence on students willingness to care for older people.

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