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## THE VIEWS OF MEDICAL DOCTORS ON ELDER DISCRIMINATION

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**Introduction.** The age group of 65 and older grows rapidly in Turkey, which until recently was deemed to be young.

Changes in the social structure increase the importance of nursing elderly patients in the area of health services [1,2]. The most important problem here is the fact that health services can not be allocated fairly as it is implemented world wide [3].

Elder patients are generally frustrated because of the negative attitude during the provision of the health services [4]. It is hard to reveal and eliminate the negative attitude which arises from elder discrimination, which most probably exists. In this context many problems of value emerge, reflecting especially on doctor-patient relationships with the unfair allocation of health services during nursing elderly patients [5-7].

Our research has been aimed to determine the attitudes of the doctor-candidates concerning age discrimination and the factors affecting these attitudes, and to increase the awareness and level of knowledge regarding this matter.

**Material and Methods.** Our research has been conducted on 63 sixth grade students studying in Mersin University Medical Faculty during the 2009-2010 academic years. The form used as data collection instrument has been filled by all participants. While the first section of the two-sectioned data collection form consists of questions intended to determine the sociodemographic attributes of the students, whether they live with elder people and if they would like to live with elder people in the future, the second section is constituted as a scale for the senescence-related opinions of the students. The scale consists of 23 statements that incorporate both positive and negative judgments concerning elders, senescence or aging. The total point a participant can achieve with EDAS ranges between the values 23 and 115. Scoring a higher total point indicates the fewness of negative attitudes in respect of elder discrimination [8].

Elder discrimination attitude scale measures the sub-dimensions of discrimination, as well as generally determining elder discrimination. While the first sub-dimension titled as "confining elders' life" is constituted from nine statements determining the beliefs and perceptions towards confining elders' life, the "positive discrimination towards elders" titled second sub-dimension covers eight statements that determine the positive beliefs and perceptions towards elders, and

the third sub-dimension titled as "negative discrimination towards elders" consists six statements intended to determine the negative beliefs and perceptions towards elders [8].

The *Chi-square test*, *Student's t test* and *Mann-Whitney U test* were performed for statistical analysis.

**Results.** The average age of the 63 students (as 21 female and 42 male) was  $24.08 \pm 1.46$ . No significant relation between the students' EDAS scores and their sex, places of birth, places of domicile, types of family, whether they live with elders or not, and the places where their grandmother/grandfather live has been found.

*Table 1. Distribution with regard to elder discrimination attitude scale*

		n	Median	Min Max	p
Sex	Male	42	86	51-105	0.439
	Female	21	88	77-106	
Birthplace	Province	27	85	51-100	0.077
	Town	30	87.5	69-106	
	Village	6	93.5	81-101	
Residence	Alone/Student hostel	11	84	70-92	0.317
	Living with parents or relatives	23	87	51-103	
	Living with friends	29	89	69-106	
Types of family	Nuclear family	57	87	51-106	0.860
	Broad family	6	86	81-101	
Lived with elders	Yes	26	85	77-101	0.105
	No	37	89	51-106	
Residence of grandparents	Their family	10	84	79-101	0.662
	Uncle	18	88.5	74-102	
	Alone	20	86,5	51-106	
	Do not live	13	89	77-103	
Want to live with their parents	Yes	33	85	51-103	0.024
	No	29	90	70-106	

In this context and in terms of the students' EDAS total points, no statistically significant interaction between the facts that whether or not the students have lived with elder people in the past and whether or not they want to live with their parents in the future has been found ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 2. Evaluation of the points obtained as per the dimensions of elder discrimination attitude scale

		n	confining elders' life		positive discrimination towards elders		negative discrimination towards elders	
			Mean $\pm$ SD	p	Mean $\pm$ SD	p	Mean $\pm$ SD	p
Sex	Male	41	36.4 $\pm$ 4.4	0.62	31.9 $\pm$ 4.2	0.16	19.2 $\pm$ 3.1	0.99
	Female	21	37.0 $\pm$ 4.3		33.4 $\pm$ 3.3		19.2 $\pm$ 4.4	
Birthplace	Province	26	36.0 $\pm$ 4.1	0.61	30.8 $\pm$ 4.2	0.02	18.6 $\pm$ 2.7	0.51
	Town	30	37.1 $\pm$ 4.6		33.4 $\pm$ 3.5		19.6 $\pm$ 3.9	
	Village	6	37.1 $\pm$ 4.4		34.5 $\pm$ 3.3		20.0 $\pm$ 5.0	
Residence	Alone	11	34.2 $\pm$ 3.3	0.13	31.0 $\pm$ 5.2	0.44	18.5 $\pm$ 2.3	0.14
	Family or relative	22	36.9 $\pm$ 4.1		32.4 $\pm$ 3.4		20.5 $\pm$ 4.0	
	Friends	29	37.3 $\pm$ 4.7		32.9 $\pm$ 3.9		18.6 $\pm$ 3.5	
Types of family	Nuclear family	56	36.7 $\pm$ 4.5	0.56	32.4 $\pm$ 4.0	0.96	19.0 $\pm$ 3.5	0.21
	Broad family	6	35.6 $\pm$ 3.4		32.5 $\pm$ 4.0		21.0 $\pm$ 4.1	
Lived with elders	Yes	26	35.4 $\pm$ 4.3	0.05	31.5 $\pm$ 3.0	0.13	19.1 $\pm$ 3.3	0.84
	No	36	37.5 $\pm$ 4.3		33.0 $\pm$ 4.5		19.3 $\pm$ 3.7	
Residence of grandparents	Their family	10	36.6 $\pm$ 4.1	0.82	31.1 $\pm$ 3.2	0.47	18.7 $\pm$ 4.5	0.77
	Uncle	18	37.4 $\pm$ 3.6		32.3 $\pm$ 3.5		19.0 $\pm$ 3.2	
	Alone	19	37.0 $\pm$ 4.8		32.5 $\pm$ 4.6		19.5 $\pm$ 3.4	
	Do not live	13	36.0 $\pm$ 4.7		33.8 $\pm$ 4.1		20.1 $\pm$ 3.2	
Want to live with	Yes	32	35.8 $\pm$ 4.1	0.26	31.8 $\pm$ 2.9	0.24	18.3 $\pm$ 3.7	0.03
	No	29	37.5 $\pm$ 4.6		33.10 $\pm$ 4.9		20.3 $\pm$ 3.1	

**Discussion.** In our research the total point of the student's concerning elder discrimination has been found out to be 87.00. The score obtained in our research is higher than the scores obtained from researches employing the same scale but conducted on other university students [8]. It is considered that doctor candidates have a positive attitude in terms of elder discrimination [2]. The fact that the students who have participated in our research have a positive attitude, results from the traditional value of respecting the elders as a constant expectation. There are papers in the literature that shows that students receiving medical education have negative attitude towards the elders [9].

Our research showed that female students have higher EDAS points than the male students. Also a similar result has been obtained from the research employing the same scale [8]. In our country it is traditionally the women that provide

nursing. Our research has shown that the female students have also accepted the traditional way in Turkey [2, 7, 10].

It is indicated that cultural differences have influence on elder discrimination. The opinion that, in places where technology is less developed elders have higher economic and social rights and accordingly are subjected to less discrimination is adopted [11]. In parallel with this opinion, in our research it has been determined that the students who were born in rural areas have more positive attitudes than those who were born in urban areas.

It is an attention grabbing point that, the students who have experienced a period of time living together with elders have less points than those who did not, and the students who indicated that their grandparents live with their families have scored fewer points than those whose grandparents do not live with their families. While the first situation in the study made by Vefikulucay [8] is different, the second one is similar with our study.

The students' circumstances of having lived with elder people for all their lives, their grandparents living together with their families, and their desire to live with their own parents in their future lives bring in a more negative attitude towards the elders. Rapid changes in the social life such as the increase of urbanization, migration and industrialization, women's involvement in the working life and tending towards the immediate family causes the traditional structure to change [7, 12, 13]. Although most of the students who want to live with their parents in the future have stated that they do so due to their love towards their parents, in our study their total EDAS points have turned out to be lower than that of those who stated that they do not want to live with their parents in the future. An idea of special responsibility between the relatives is contradictory with the principle of ethical impartiality [5, 6, 14, 15]. On the other hand the fact that the doctor candidates' positive attitude is higher on those who do not want to live with their parents in the future is pursuant to the principle of ethical impartiality.

In our research the expected point of the negative discrimination sub-dimension is lower than the expected points of other sub-dimensions. It can be considered that the discrimination related attitudes of students who did not have quality togetherness with elders in their lives may have been affected negatively [7]. While the doctor candidates included in our research consider that it is necessary to treat elders more tolerantly and patiently and consider them as individuals whose experiences are to be benefited from, they have a negative attitude regarding giving priority to younger population in matters concerning economy and productivity [1, 14, 16, 17, 18].

**Conclusion.** Being similar with the conclusion of the research made with the same scale, the candidate doctors included in our research have a positive attitude. Determining the attitudes of doctor candidates in terms of senescence will enable to make the necessary planning for preventing elder discrimination and enabling them to approach senescence more positively.

Increasing the awareness of health personnel and especially doctor candidates, providing knowledge on elder discrimination during all phases of medical education, development of clinical and ethical rules by professional organizations, application of enforcements through laws by the governments and ensuring the participation of those who receive medical services can remove the discrimination made against the elders.

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