



**Faculty Of Medicine and Health Sciences**

**UNIMAS NURSING STUDENTS' LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARDS OLDER PEOPLE**

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**Bachelor of Nursing with Honours**

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TOWARDS OLDER PEOPLE

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## **ABSTRACT**

An aged person is a vulnerable individual among older adults populations who frequently deal with declines of bodily functions and their changing needs which prompt them to seek healthcare services in the hospital. Consequently, nurses are foremost a caregiver that will oversee the older populations when they come to the hospital. As a student nurse who will embark on becoming the future generations of nurses, it is important to have knowledge and positive attitudes towards older people. This study aims to assess the knowledge and attitude towards older adults among nursing students. This study has not been studied in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, hence a cross-sectional study was conducted among 133 UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students who enrolled on a Bachelor of Nursing with Honours. Knowledge and attitudes towards older people were assessed using Palmore's Fact on Aging Quiz, and Kogan's Attitudes towards Old People Scale, respectively. Results of the study showed 69.2% and 54.1% of the participants had a high knowledge and positive attitude towards older people respectively. Meanwhile, there was a significant association between the socio-demographic variables, particularly the year of study and attitude. However, no other socio-demographic variables show a significant association with knowledge and attitude towards older people.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, attitude, older people, undergraduate nursing students

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1.1 Background of the study</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1.2 Statement of problem</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>1.3 Research questions</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1.4 Research Aim</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>1.5 Research Objectives</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>1.6 Significance of the study</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>1.7 Definition of terms</b> .....	<b>12</b>
1.7.1 Knowledge .....	12
1.7.2 Attitude.....	12
1.7.3 Older People.....	13
1.7.4 Nursing Students .....	13
1.7.5 Clinical Practicum.....	14
<b>1.8 Summary</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1 Level of knowledge towards Older People</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>2.2 Attitude towards Older people</b> .....	<b>17</b>

<b>2.3 The association between socio-demographic variables and knowledge towards older people.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.3.1 Gender .....	19
2.3.2 Age .....	19
2.3.3 Year of study .....	19
2.3.4 Experienced in clinical practicum.....	20
<b>2.4 The association between socio-demographic variables and attitude towards older people .....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.4.1 Gender .....	20
2.4.2 Age .....	21
2.4.3 Year of study .....	21
2.4.4 Experienced in clinical practicum.....	21
<b>2.5 Conceptual Framework .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.6 Summary.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.1 Research design .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.2 Research settings .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>3.3 Inclusion &amp; exclusion criteria .....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.3.1 Inclusion criteria .....	25
3.3.2 Exclusion criteria .....	25
<b>3.4 Sampling method and sample size.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.5 Study instrument.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.5.1 Reliability and Validity .....	28



<b>3.6 Ethical consideration .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3.7 Data collection procedure.....</b>	<b>29</b>
3.7.1 Pilot Study.....	29
3.7.2 Actual study .....	30
<b>3.8 Data analysis.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.9 Summary.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4.2 Level of knowledge towards older people .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.3 Attitude towards older people.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.4 Association between socio-demographic variables with level of knowledge and attitudes towards older people.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>4.5 Summary.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.1 Level of knowledge towards older people .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5.2 Attitude towards older people.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>5.3 Association between socio-demographic characteristics and level of knowledge and attitudes towards older people .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>5.4 Recommendation.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>5.5 Limitation of the study .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>5.6 Conclusions.....</b>	<b>52</b>

<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>APPENDIX A. ETHICAL APPROVAL APPLICATION LETTER.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>APPENDIX C. PERMISSION TO USE QUESTIONNAIRE (IF APPLICABLE).....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>APPENDIX D. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>APPENDIX E. GANTT CHART.....</b>	<b>70</b>

### **LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

<b>FIGURES</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Figure 2.1 Association between independent variable and dependent variable	24
Figure 4.1 Normality distributions of total score of knowledge	37
Figure 4.2 Normality distributions of total score of attitudes	42
 <b>TABLES</b>	
Table 4.1 Socio-demographic data of participants (n= 133)	34 -35
Table 4.2a Frequency and percentage distributions of respondents' knowledge towards older people	36 - 38
Table 4.2b Frequency and percentage distributions on level of knowledge towards older people	37

Table 4.2c Mean score on knowledge towards older people according to year of study	37
Table 4.3a Frequency and percentage of respondents' attitude towards older people (n= 133)	38 - 40
Table 4.3b Frequency and percentage distributions on level of attitudes towards older people	41
Table 4.3c Mean score on attitude towards older people according to year of study	41
Table 4.4a Association between socio-demographic variables and level of knowledge towards older people	42 - 43
Table 4.4b Association between socio-demographic variables and attitudes towards older people	43

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The background of the study would be introduced in this chapter, followed by the problem statement, the research questions, the aim of the research and objectives as well as it would discuss the significance of the study and the definition of terms.

#### **1.1 Background of the study**

The ageing population would be a worldwide phenomenon that affects everyone in the world. Ageing can be defined as a gradual, continuous process of natural change that begins in early adulthood and early middle age, where bodily functions decline (Stefanacci, 2022). Globally, it was estimated that population aged 65 and over would be increasing from 10% in 2022 to 16% in 2050, which leads to a significant challenges in all countries of the world, as people aged, later in their years, would be forced to deal with many social, economic, and health issues that would be difficult to be resolved, making these issues problematic for the society (Amiri, 2018).

According to recent statistics, Malaysia's population was estimated at 32.72 million in the first quarter of 2020, of which over 2.26 million are adults aged 65 years and older, compared to over 2.16 million in the first quarter of 2019 (Saharuddin & Maktha, 2022). The increase in the proportion of the population aged 65 and above indicates that Malaysia is slowly becoming an ageing nation. By 2050, the proportion of elderly aged 65 and above in Malaysia is expected

to be more than 15%, qualifying Malaysia as an aged nation, as reported by Azuar (2022) on The Malaysian Reserve.

In Malaysia, those who aged 60 years and above were defined as older people. According to the observation of the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) the population aged 60 years and above is gradually increasing from 2020 to 2022. Of Malaysia's 3.6 million are elderly compared to 3.3 million in 2020. In percentage terms, there was an increase from 0.8% in 2020 to 2022 and an increase of 0.4% from 2022 to 2021, the population doubled, which indicates the potential of the ageing population in the country were gradually increasing. Since older people are often associated with a variety of health problems, there may be a link between the growing number of ageing people and the increased demands and responsibilities placed on health care workers (Saharuddin & Maktha, 2022).

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

As a consequence of an increased ageing population and due to the tendency of older people having numerous health problems, there was a possibility of an increase in demand for health care workers to care for aged people (Saharuddin & Maktha, 2022). Consequently, nursing students, who represent the future of the healthcare workforce, are without doubt most likely expected to work with elderly after graduation. Numerous studies have shown that nursing students' knowledge levels are low and they have negative attitudes toward older people, although in some situations, higher knowledge levels do not necessarily mean positive attitudes toward older people.

Even in a country that values older people and recognises the importance of family ties, nurses's lack of knowledge and attitudes toward older patients can affect the quality of care they provide (Attafuah et al., 2022). A previous study by Younis et al. (2022) in Iraq, nursing students were found to have low knowledge about older adults as well as negative attitudes towards the ageing population. In addition, Attafuah et al. (2022) found that even in a country that values older people, the lack of knowledge and negative attitudes can affect the standard quality for medical care services.

These study results may be related to an individual's years of experience, they could also have completed a clinical practicum where the individual had the opportunity to work with elderly in a clinical setting. In addition, nursing students may also have been exposed to caring for elderly by taking care of their own family members. Although there are studies that suggest that experience produces a positive attitude toward older people, it may also be the opposite where experience produces a more negative attitude because they may have had a bad case dealing with older people in clinical practice or in their lives, which may influence their view of older adults.

Over time, this may lead to misconceptions and stereotypes that portray older adults as alike and they are given no chance to defend themselves against these misconceptions. In addition, nursing students at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) located in the East of Malaysia, are assumed to be from different ethnicities and races, known to have 34 different ethnicities in the country (RT, 2022). Due to these facts, the studies may give different results than other related studies done in Malaysia as the population in these Universiti mainly lived east of

Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to assess the level of knowledge and attitude towards older people among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students due to the limited access of articles regarding this study conducted in East Malaysia.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The research questions for this study are:

1.3.1 What is the UNIMAS nursing students' level of knowledge towards older people?

1.3.2 What is the attitude of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people?

1.3.3 What is the association between socio-demographic data and the level of knowledge of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people?

1.3.4 What is the association between socio-demographic data and attitudes of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people?

### **1.4 Research Aim**

1.4.1 The aim of this study is to determine the level of knowledge and attitudes towards older people among UNIMAS nursing students.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

1.5.1 To determine UNIMAS nursing students' level of knowledge towards older people.

1.5.2 To assess the attitudes of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people.

1.5.3 To examine the association between socio-demographic characteristics and the level of knowledge of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people.

1.5.4 To examine the association between socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes of UNIMAS nursing students towards older people.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

This research was made with the aim of providing information and knowledge to individuals or institutions with the results obtained from the respondent of these studies to be used as a source of information. Future undergraduate nursing students who are interested in a similar study can use this study as a future reference if applicable. Apart from that, this study can be a helpful research study in some ways to improve nursing education by measuring the average reaction of nursing students towards elderly, which hopefully can lead to the improvement of the curriculum that can encourage students to have a positive attitude towards the elderly. Last but not least, this study can provide healthcare institutions with information and evidence of the knowledge gap regarding the elderly among nursing students, in hope that hospitals that open space for clinical practicum to be held would be able to provide students with additional knowledge about elderly.

## **1.7 Definition of terms**

### **1.7.1 Knowledge**

Conceptual definition: “Awareness, understanding, or information that has been obtained by experience or study, and that is either in a person’s mind or possessed by people generally;



skill in, understanding of, or information about something, which a person gets by experience or study” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019)

Operational definition: The awareness of UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students towards older people would be measured using Palmore’s Facts on Aging Quiz adapted from Breytspraak and Badura (2015) consisting of 29 items with True and False as a choice of answer where by each of the correct answer will equal to 1 score and wrong answer equal to 0. The total score ranges from 0-29 and higher scores indicate a greater level of knowledge towards older people.

### **1.7.2 Attitude**

Conceptual definition: “A feeling or opinion about something, especially when this shows in your behaviour” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019.) or “The way that a person perceives and assesses someone or something, is known as their attitude; It is also known as their tendency to react favourably or unfavourably to a particular concept, item, person or circumstances” (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2016).

Operational definition: The way UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students perceive older people would be measured using Kogan’s Attitude towards Older People Scale adapted from Ghimire et al., (2019) consisting of 26 items using 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. Total scores range from 26 - 130, where higher scores indicate a positive attitude.

### **1.7.3 Older People**

Conceptual definition: “An older person is defined by the United Nations as a person who is over 60 years of age” (UNHCR, 2021).

### **1.7.4 Nursing Students**

Conceptual definition: “Nursing student means any individual formally enrolled in the College of Nursing in pursuit of a BSN or Graduate degree, including registered nurses (RN), students taking courses via distance education, special students, or individuals in postgraduate study, either alone or in combination with any other degree, regardless of the specific location of the student” (Law Insider, n.d.).

Operational definition: In this study nursing students are appointed to students who are currently attending four-year Bachelor of Nursing with Honours programme under Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), in UNIMAS at the time of the study conducted. Mainly Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 students during the 2022/2023 academic session will be involved in this study.

### **1.7.5 Clinical Practicum**

Conceptual definition: “Academic curriculum in a graduate-level programme that involves the student in supervised clinical practice, including direct client contact, and that gives them the chance to apply what they have learned in class to real-world practice situations” (Law Insider, n.d.).

Operational definition: Clinical placement of UNIMAS nursing students at the hospital for any relevant clinical nursing course.

### **1.8 Summary**

This chapter covers the study's background, where the issue with older people and how it relates to undergraduate nursing students would be explained. The problem statement in this chapter is that there was a lack of studies done on undergraduates nursing students' knowledge of and attitudes toward older people. Last but not least, this chapter also included the study's aim along with its objectives and research questions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

To create a general understanding of the research topic, a literature review was discussed in this chapter. It provides a general overview of the knowledge and attitudes towards older people that exist in different countries. Ageing is a global phenomenon (Saharuddin & Makhtar, 2022) which includes older people defined as 60 years and older (UNHCR, 2021). Although Malaysia is not yet an ageing nation, it is predicted that by the year 2050, the proportion of older people aged 65 years and above will be more than 15%, making it an ageing nation (“Department of Statistics Malaysia”, 2022).

As future nurses, who would be responsible for caring for the elderly, it is important that students are equipped with knowledge and understanding that includes a positive view of the elderly. Therefore, this literature review aims to discuss the level of knowledge and attitudes toward older people among health care workers and especially nursing students, together with the association between socio-demographic data and knowledge and attitudes toward older people. The selection criteria for the literature in this review are recent journal articles and those from 2014 to 2023.

The research articles used were primarily obtained from Google Scholar, Pubmed, and ResearchGate. Common search terms were “knowledge”, “attitude”, “older people” and “undergraduate nursing students”. This review is organised by knowledge about older people, attitude toward older people, association between socio-demographic data and knowledge

toward older people, and association between socio-demographic data and attitude toward older people.

### **2.1 Level of knowledge towards Older People**

Several studies have been conducted to examine the level of knowledge about the elderly among different populations from health care providers to undergraduate nursing students. According to (Attafuah et al., 2022), a study conducted in Ghana found that most health care providers lack knowledge about ageing and have misconceptions about ageing. In a study conducted by Amsalu et al. (2021), the level of education is shown to have a significant relationship with the level of knowledge of nurses about ageing.

In a study conducted by Saharuddin and Makhtar (2022), it was found that the majority (83.7%) of nursing students in a public university on the east coast of Malaysia have good awareness of ageing, which can be explained by the fact that senior year student have attended a gerontological nursing course that provides theoretical knowledge about ageing. A study conducted in Nigeria found a good knowledge of the elderly among nursing students, as most participants were aware of the difficulties in caring for elderly patients and the need for specialised training and understanding in this area (Faronbi et al., 2017).

However, a study conducted by (Ghimire et al., 2019), in which little more than half of the questions were answered correctly and the mean score of  $122.9 \pm 10.9$  was in the middle of the possible scoring scale (30-204), showed that undergraduate nursing students had a relatively low level of understanding of the elderly, even though a course in geriatric nursing was required during the first year of study. Students in the final year may have difficulty remembering what

was taught, and first year students are not yet fully familiar with all content (Ghimire et al., 2019). Therefore, the results showing the students' level of knowledge regarding the elderly are concerning because nursing students are the future health care providers who will consequently be responsible for caring for the elderly.

In another study by Mushin et al. (2020), nursing students in Zanzibar demonstrated poor knowledge of the elderly, with the majority lacking a basic understanding of physical, psychological, and social changes in older adults, even though participants were expected to have already participated in gerontology courses and clinical practise. However, students who lived in an extended family or with an older family member showed a remarkable association with participants' level of knowledge about older adults (Mushin et al., 2020). In a previous research conducted in Iraq by Younis et al. (2019), found that students answered half of the responses correctly, with an overall rate of incorrect responses 48%, which may be related to the lack of interest in the issue of ageing in their country, believing the elderly care is well taken care of although the opposite happened.

The results of all the studies show that the knowledge about elderly is low among nursing students all over the world. The studies found that higher knowledge is often associated with participation in gerontology courses and clinical practice, but participation in these courses does not necessarily mean that students have higher knowledge about older people. In a few cases, general public opinion about older people might have some influence on students' understanding of older people and the problems of the ageing population.elderly.

## **2.2 Attitude towards Older people**

To meet the special needs of the elderly and improve the quality of their care, more medical professionals with experience in elderly care are needed. Since nursing students are the future nurses in the health care system, it is important that they are equipped not only with knowledge but also with better perceptions toward the elderly, as this would determine their responses when caring for the elderly, who are stereotypically considered difficult to handle. A previous study by Saharuddin & Makhtar (2022), assessing nursing students' attitudes, 90.1%, a slightly positive and similarly in a study by Younis et al. (2021) found slightly negative results although the percentage of positive attitudes was lower, and in a study by Yáñez-Yáñez et al. ((2022), students rated themselves as having low positive attitudes (61.2%) toward the elderly.

The plausible reason for this seems to be that participants experienced unpleasantness with unhealthy adults, especially female students (Saharuddin & Makhtar, 2022). However, compared to a study by López-Hernández et al. (2021), better knowledge and previous experiences were found to be the characteristics that influenced more positive attitudes in female students. Also in the study of Mushin et al. (2020), the majority of students have a positive attitude towards older adults, although the reason that they live in an extended family and have little or no experience dealing with older adults causes a positive attitude. In a study by McCloskey et al. (2020), the mean is higher after completion of the nursing programmes and the results of a study by Elias et al. (2020) show that most participants (80.4%) have a slightly positive attitude toward older adults.

## **2.3 The association between socio-demographic variables and knowledge towards older people**

A few studies have been conducted that discuss the association between socio-demographic data and knowledge about the elderly, but some studies concluded that there was no significant association between any of the demographic variables and knowledge about the elderly. Only a few studies presented results with a significant association between the year of study and knowledge about older people. In this study, the socio-demographic data included gender, age, year of study and clinical practicum experience.

### **2.3.1 Gender**

There were few studies that looked at the association between gender and knowledge levels about older people. In the study by Saharuddin and Makhtar (2022), the level of knowledge about elderly is slightly higher in women than in men. In addition, a study conducted by Cheng (2021) found that there is little difference between the mean and standard deviation between males, 15.43(3.10) and females, 14.92 (2.67), suggesting that males have a slightly higher level of knowledge about elderly compared to females. Another study by Mushin et al. (2020) presented male having slightly low level of knowledge compared to female. There are also studies (Ghimire et al., 2019) where respondents are predominantly female, suggesting that there are low numbers of male nursing students in their countries.

### **2.3.2 Age**

There was a lack of study on the association between age and knowledge of elderly among nursing students. A study in Tanzania (Mushin et al., 2020) participants ages 18 to 24 years had a high level of knowledge (17.9%), while participants ages 25 to 33 years had a slightly lower level of knowledge (15.4%). Undergraduate nursing students older than 25 years old