



RESEARCH ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT ELDERS AND ELDER DISCRIMINATION

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research was planned and conducted to determine the attitudes of university students toward elders and elder discrimination.

Materials and Method: The research sample consisted of 584 students studying in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Karabük University. The study protocol was approved by the university research ethics committee and informed consent was obtained from all individuals who agreed to participate the study. Elder discrimination attitude scale was used as a data-gathering tool. This scale consisted of the following subdimensions-"limitation of the lives of elders," "positive attitudes toward elders," and "negative attitudes toward elders."

Results: Of the students participating in the research study, 37.3% were males, and 62.7% were females. In the subdimension "limitation of the life of elders," the most positive approach was "care of elders should not be seen as a financial burden by family members." In the subdimension "positive attitudes toward elders," the most positive attitude was shown to be that "priority should be given to elders in queues," and in the subdimension "negative attitudes toward elders," the most positive approach was that "the main responsibility of elders is helping their children with tasks such as household and kitchen chores and in the care of grandchildren."

Conclusion: The study found that students in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Karabük University had a positive approach toward elders and respected elders and cared about them.

Key Words: Discrimination (Psychology); Aged; Students.

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ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN YAŞLI AYRIMCILIĞINA İLİŞKİN TUTUMLARININ İNCELENMESİ

Öz

Giriş: Bu araştırma, üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşlı ayrımcılığına ilişkin tutumlarını belirlemek amacıyla planlanmış ve yürütülmüştür.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Araştırmanın örneklemine Karabük Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi'nde öğrenim gören 584 öğrenci alınmıştır. Çalışma protokolü etik komite tarafından onaylanmış ve onay çalışmaya katılmayı kabul edenlere bildirilmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak "Yaşlı Ayrımcılığı Tutum Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Ölçek, "yaşlının yaşamını sınırlama" alt boyutu, "yaşlıya yönelik olumlu ayrımcılık" alt boyutu ve "yaşlıya yönelik olumsuz ayrımcılık" alt boyutlarından oluşmaktadır.

Bulgular: Araştırmaya alınan öğrencilerin %37,3'ü erkek, %62,7'si de kızdır. "Yaşlıların Yaşamını Sınırlama" alt boyutunda en olumlu tutum "Yaşlıların bakımı aile bireyleri tarafından ekonomik yük olarak görülmemelidir" maddesinde, "Yaşlıya Yönelik Olumlu Ayrımcılık" alt boyutuna ilişkin "Sıra beklenmesi gereken yerlerde yaşlılara öncelik verilmelidir" maddesinde ve "Yaşlıya Yönelik Olumsuz Ayrımcılık" alt boyutuna ilişkin ise "Yaşlıların temel sorumluluğu ev ve mutfak işleri, torun bakımı gibi konularda çocuklara yardımcı olmaktır" maddelerinde gösterilmiştir.

Sonuç: Karabük Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi'nde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin yaşlı ayrımcılığı ile ilgili olumlu tutuma sahip oldukları belirlenmiştir. Gençler yaşlı bireylere saygı göstermekte ve onları önemsemektedirler.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ayrımcılık; Üniversite Öğrencisi; Yaşlı.

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INTRODUCTION

Old age is a natural, an unavoidable, and an inevitable process for all people, just like other stages of life. The aging process occurs early or late and is more or less problematic depending on genetic inheritance, nutrition, environmental conditions, and the sociocultural efforts of each individual. According to an analysis done by the World Health Organization (WHO), ages ranging 45–59, 60–74, 75–89, and 90 or above are considered to be middle age, early old age, old age and advanced old age, respectively (1).

According to the report of the World Health Organization, the fertility rate is decreasing in all countries, causing the population to age. This quick decline in the fertility rate increased the percentage of the aging population (1,2). The increase in the elder population in the developed and developing countries, increases in urbanization, and the popularization of nuclear family cause serious problems in countries around the world, in families, and in society. A communal and social result of these problems is elder discrimination (3).

Research has shown that discrimination against elderly is due to the physical, mental, and psychological changes they undergo during aging. According to literature, mostly youth discriminates against the elderly (4). However, while some studies show that university students have negative attitudes toward the elderly (5-7), others show positive attitudes (8-10). Therefore, this study was planned and conducted to determine the attitudes of university students toward elders and whether they discriminate against this older age group.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Participants

The universe of participants in this study consisted of first- and second-year students in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences departments (Economics, International Relations, and Public Administration) of Karabük University. The research did not use the sampling method, but it aimed to reach all of the students in the defined universe. In this context, the universe consisted of 584 students. The study protocol was approved by the university research ethics committee and informed consent was obtained from all individuals who agreed to participate the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected in a survey form consisting of two parts. In the first part of the survey, there were variables for deter-

mining the characteristics of students. In the second part, there was an “elder discrimination attitude scale” (EDAS) consisting of 23 items developed by Vefikuluçay and Terzioğlu (11) in order to determine the attitudes of university students toward elders. EDAS consists of three dimensions:

1. Dimension of limitation of the life of elders: beliefs and perceptions of society on the limitations of the social life of elders (items 1, 5, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23),
2. Dimension of positive attitudes toward elders: positive beliefs and perceptions of society about older individuals (items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 20),
3. Dimension of negative attitudes toward elders: negative beliefs and perceptions of society about older individuals (items 3, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18).

Answers given to the EDAS used in the research were evaluated according to the total scores given to each item. Items in the scale were evaluated using a 5-point Likert type scale with choices of “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “undecided,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” The total internal consistency coefficient of the scale (Cronbach’s) was found to be 0.80. The maximum score a students could receive was 115, and a minimum score was 23.” High scores showed that the students had a positive attitude toward elders, and low scores showed negative and discriminatory attitudes toward elders.

If the EDAS score average for the “limitation of the life of elders” was closer to 45, it meant that the student had a positive attitude about the life of elders and did not exhibit discriminatory attitudes. If the EDAS score average was closer to 9 on the same measure, it meant that the student has a negative attitude about elders and expressed discriminatory attitudes. On the next subdimension of the EDAS score—positive attitude toward elders—an average closer to 40 meant that the student did not feel discriminatory toward elders. If this subdimension EDAS score average was closer to 8, it meant that the student has a negative and discriminatory attitude toward elders. Finally, on the third subdimension—negative attitudes toward elders—a score average closer to 30 meant that the student has a positive attitude toward older people, and if the average was closer to 6, it meant that the student held negative and discriminatory attitudes toward elders.

Data Verification

Data were analyzed using the SPSS 17.0 program, and students in the sample group were given frequency and percentage values according to individual characteristics. Views of students on each item of the elder discrimination attitude sca-

**Table 1**— Scale and Subdimensions for Attitudes Towards Elders.

Scale and Subdimensions	Number of Articles	Cronbach's Alpha	Total Average Score	sd
Limitation of the Life of Elders	9	0.759	35.68	4.70
Positive Attitude toward Elders	8	0.802	31.43	4.94
Negative Attitude toward Elders	6	0.796	16.58	3.28
General Attitude	23	0.805	83.69	4.25

le were given along with the percentage values with arithmetic mean and standard deviation values calculated. Total scores were taken for the evaluation of scale and subscale (dimensions). In the comparison of scale and subscale with the individual characteristics of students, a *t test* (for two groups) and analysis of variance (for three groups or more) were performed.

Factor analysis of the scale was also applied, and the eigenvalue of the scale was over 1. The scale gathered data under three factors that explained 72.4% of the total variance. Bartlett's test results showed that factor analysis can be applied ($\chi^2 = 2386.558$; $p < 0.001$) and calculated. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value ($KMO = 0.822$) showed that the sampling volume was sufficient.

RESULTS

Among 584 students 37.3% of the students were male and 62.7% were female; 45.1% of students studied Economics, 28.7% studied Public Administration, and 26.2% studied International Relations. On the distribution based on the place students lived the longest, city centers were at the top with 58.4%. Some 81% of the students stated that no elders were living in their houses, and 44.6% of the students stated that the elders in their family live in their own houses with their spouses. Meanwhile, 60.3% of the participants visited elders in nursing homes at some time.

Total average scores for the 23-item scale and its subscales used to determine the participating students' attitudes toward elder discrimination (EDAS) and Cronbach's Alpha values for reliability analyses are given in Table 1. Accordingly, Cronbach's Alpha value is calculated as 0.759 for the first dimension, "limitation of the life of elders," 0.802 for the second dimension, "positive attitudes toward elders," 0.796 for the third dimension, "negative attitudes toward elders," and 0.802 for general attitudes. The average score of students' attitudes in the "limitation of the life of elders" subdimension was calculated as 35.68; average score of students' positive at-

titudes toward elders subdimension was calculated as 31.43; and the average score of students' negative attitudes subdimension was calculated as 16.58.

Descriptive statistics regarding the 9-item subdimension, "limitation of the life of elders," of the 23-item scale are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, the most positive attitude is shown in these items: "care of elders should not be seen as a financial burden by family members" ($\bar{x} = 4.23$) and "life of elders must be limited to their houses" ($\bar{x} = 1.64$). To the item "life of elders must be limited to their houses," 90% of students answered "strongly disagree" and "disagree." Most negative attitudes of students toward elders showed up in these items: "elderly cannot carry their bags and packages without help" ($\bar{x} = 3.11$) and "elders who lost their spouses should not get remarried" ($\bar{x} = 2.50$).

In the research, descriptive statistics regarding the 8-item subdimension of "positive attitudes toward elders" are presented in Table 3. The most positive attitudes were shown in "priority should be given to elders in queues" ($\bar{x} = 4.42$) and "elders should be cared for by their families they live with" ($\bar{x} = 4.41$). Most negative attitudes were shown in these items: "elders are more patient than younger people" ($\bar{x} = 3.23$) and "elders are more tolerant than younger people" ($\bar{x} = 3.30$). To the item "priority should be given to elders in queues," 88% of the students answered positively with "agree" and "strongly agree."

Descriptive statistics on the 6-item subdimension of "negative attitudes toward elders" are presented in Table 4. The most positive attitude is shown in these items: "the main responsibility of elders is helping their children with household and kitchen chores and in taking care of their grandchildren" ($\bar{x} = 2.73$) and "elders should not go out alone" ($\bar{x} = 2.86$). The most negative attitudes were revealed in these items: "when hiring for a job, younger people should be preferred instead of elders" ($\bar{x} = 3.72$) and "in promotions among individuals in a job, priority should be given to younger people" ($\bar{x} = 3.58$).



Table 2— Descriptive Statistics for Subdimension of “Limitation of the Life of Elders”.

Article Number	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	\bar{x}	sd
		%	%	%	%	%		
1	Life of elders must be limited to their houses	51.5	38.5	5.8	3.1	1.0	1.64	0.81
5	Appearance of elders is repelling	57.4	27.6	7.5	5.1	2.4	1.68	0.98
12	It is unnecessary for elders to buy houses, cars, items, clothing	42.1	36.5	12.5	7.5	1.4	1.90	0.98
14	Elders who lost their spouses should not get remarried again	19.9	26.4	41.6	8.2	3.9	2.50	1.02
17	Elders should be put into nursing homes	52.6	24.1	14.7	6.3	2.2	1.82	1.05
19	In hospitals, instead of elders, priority should be given to younger people	58.4	19.5	11.3	6.7	4.1	1.79	1.14
21	In jobs, elders should be paid less than younger people	34.9	31.3	22.9	7.9	2.9	2.13	1.07
22	Elders cannot carry their bags and packages without help	6.0	23.8	31.8	29.6	8.7	3.11	1.05
23	Care of elders should not be seen as a financial burden by family members	7.5	3.1	8.7	20.5	60.1	4.23	1.20

Table 3— Descriptive Statistics for Subdimension of “Positive Attitudes Toward Elders”.

Article Number	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	\bar{x}	sd
		%	%	%	%	%		
2	Elders are more patient than younger people	6.5	20.5	28.3	33.2	11.5	3.23	1.10
4	Priority should be given to elders in queues	5.5	3.1	3.4	19.5	68.5	4.42	1.08
6	Younger people should benefit from the experiences of elders	3.3	3.6	10.6	37.2	45.4	4.18	0.98
7	Elders should be cared about by the families they live with	3.4	2.7	5.0	27.2	61.6	4.41	0.96
8	Elders are loving	1.9	3.1	15.1	46.9	33.0	4.06	0.88
9	When decisions are made in the family, opinions of elders should be taken into consideration	1.9	3.8	15.1	43.7	35.6	4.07	0.91
13	Elders are more tolerant than younger people	6.5	12.5	39.9	26.7	14.4	3.30	1.07
20	When the budget is made in the family, opinions of the elders should be taken into consideration	4.1	7.0	21.4	43.8	23.6	3.76	1.02

**Table 4**— Descriptive Statistics for Subdimension of “Negative Attitudes Toward Elders”.

Article Number	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	\bar{x}	sd
		%	%	%	%	%		
3	Elders get ill all the time	4.8	28.4	31.2	31.7	3.9	3.02	0.98
10	The main responsibility of elders is to help their children with topics such as house and kitchen works and in taking care of their grandchildren	15.9	31.3	25.7	17.6	9.4	2.73	1.20
11	When hiring for a job, younger people should be preferred instead of elders	4.6	7.9	26.5	33.0	27.9	3.72	1.09
15	Elders cannot adapt to changes like younger people	4.5	12.3	28.9	37.2	17.1	3.50	1.05
16	In promotions among individuals in job lives, priority should be given to younger people	4.6	9.2	30.0	35.6	20.5	3.58	1.06
18	Elders should not go out alone	12.3	26.4	30.8	23.6	6.8	2.86	1.12

Views of participants on elder discrimination were compared with their individual characteristics (Table 5), and it was determined that there was no significant difference on the views of students based on gender, department, grade, age, place the student lived the longest, whether elders live at home with them, whether they visit nursing homes ($p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

This study determined that the attitudes of students were generally positive about elders. It is possible to see this outcome as a natural result of the existence of respect and love toward elders in the society we live in, in our culture, and in our manners and traditions.

Table 5— Comparison of Attitudes of Students Toward Elders as Correlated to Individual Characteristics.

Variable	Group	\bar{x}	sd	t/F	P
Gender	Male	3.62	0.41	0.587	0.558
	Female	3.64	0.36		
Department	Economics	3.60	0.37	1.435	0.062
	Public Administration	3.71	0.34		
	International Relations	3.61	0.42		
Grade	1	3.63	0.38	0.583	0.560
	2	3.65	0.38		
The place the student lived the longest	Village	3.66	0.40	0.308	0.819
	Town	3.61	0.38		
	County	3.65	0.39		
	City	3.62	0.37		
Did elders live at home with them	Yes	3.65	0.36	0.545	0.586
	No	3.63	0.38		
Place the elder lives	In their own house with their spouse	3.66	0.39	0.654	0.658
	Alone in their own house	3.58	0.30		
	In their own house with their children	3.65	0.38		
	In their children's house with their children	3.59	0.38		
	Other	3.61	0.43		
Visited nursing home	Yes	3.62	0.40	0.539	0.590
	No	3.64	0.36		



In studies both foreign (10,12-18) and domestic (4,19,20) university students had a positive attitude toward elders.

The total average score of students in the "limitation of the life of elders" subdimension was calculated as 35.68. This value was closer to the maximum score of 45 ($9 \times 5 = 45$), and this shows that students did not feel that elders were limited or should be limited in their lives. The total average score of students for the subdimension of "positive attitudes toward elders" was 31.43. This value was closer to the maximum score of 40, so overall, their attitudes were positive. The total average score for students in the subdimension of "negative attitudes toward elders" was 16.58. This score was below the average of the maximum score of 30 and above the minimum score of 6. This showed that students revealed some discriminatory attitudes toward elders. When it is considered that the maximum score students can obtain from the complete EDAS is 115 and the minimum score is 23, and the total average score was 83.68 (because it is above the average of minimum and maximum that is $69 (115 + 23) / 2 = 69$), the score can be interpreted as positive, although not very positive.

In this study, no differences in elder discrimination were found on the basis of gender. This finding is consistent with the findings of Vefikuluçay (21) and Soyuer et al. (4). However, in our research, females had a more positive attitude toward elders than males. The research shows that in both Turkey and in Western countries, women have a more positive attitude toward elders than men (3,22-24). This situation may show that female students are affected by the traditional role of women in Turkish society as caregivers.

In our study, no significant differences were found on the basis of gender, department, age, or the place the student lived the longest. These results show that the mainstream culture, not subcultures, affect individuals the most.

In this research, although no difference was found between the age of students and their total scores, second-year students have a more positive attitude toward elders than first-year students. As a matter of fact, in other studies, it was found that as the grade increases, students develop a more positive attitude toward elders (13,21,23,24); our research findings support literature. This information shows that education in universities benefits students positively and affects their approaches to elders in a positive way.

Although no significant difference was detected between the situation of elders living together with students and students' total scale scores, the scores of students who lived with elders were found to be higher than the students who did not live with elders. In Turkish culture, respect for elders is an

important cultural value. The literature shows that individuals living with their grandmothers and grandfathers have more positive attitudes toward elders (7,11,25). This finding may stem from positive communication with the aged individuals sharing the same house with the students and thus, individuals who live with elders gain a positive perspective on older adults.

One limitation of this study is that it was carried out only with students studying in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. Therefore, the present findings cannot be generalized to all university students in Turkey. Future research should include random sampling and increased sample size. The other research results suggest the followings:

- Education programs for increasing the awareness of students about elder discrimination should be prepared,
- Old age and elder discrimination topics should be added to graduate and postgraduate curriculums.

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