

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Children's Perspectives towards the Elderly - A Cross-Sectional Survey

Perspectivas de los niños hacia las personas mayores - Una encuesta transversal

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Received: April 3, 2024.

Accepted: September 17, 2024.

Conflicts of interest: none.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71164/socialmedicine.v18i1.2025.1727>

Abstract

Background: With an aging global population, understanding the perceptions and attitudes of younger generations toward the elderly becomes increasingly vital for promoting intergenerational rapport and encouraging social cohesion. **Objective:** The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate the attitudes of children towards the elderly. **Methods:** A cross-sectional analysis was conducted among 384 children between the ages of 7-14 in selected schools of Mangaluru, Karnataka, India. The data was collected using a pre-validated rating scale. **Results:** The children's mean score on the attitude towards the elderly scale was 27.08 ± 4.39 , indicating that the 89.06% have a favorable attitude towards the elderly. Moreover, a significant association was found between the children's perspective towards the elderly and the demographic variables like age ($P = 0.003$), class ($P < 0.001$), and type of family ($P < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** Interventions and educational programs can be designed to cultivate positive attitudes about the elderly among children, which can eventually contribute to the creation of age-friendly communities.

Keywords: aged, attitude, children, elderly, older people

Resumen

Antecedentes. Con el envejecimiento de la población mundial, comprender las percepciones y actitudes de las generaciones más jóvenes hacia las personas mayores resulta cada vez más vital para promover relaciones intergeneracionales y fomentar la cohesión social. **Objetivo.** El objetivo de esta investigación fue evaluar las actitudes de los niños hacia los ancianos. **Métodos.** Se realizó un análisis transversal entre 384 niños de 7 a 14 años de escuelas seleccionadas de Mangaluru, Karnataka, India. Los datos se recabaron utilizando una escala de valoración, validada previamente. **Resultados.** La puntuación media de los niños en la escala de actitud hacia los ancianos fue de 27.08 ± 4.39 , lo que indica que el 89.06% tiene una actitud favorable hacia los ancianos. Además, se encontró una asociación significativa entre la perspectiva de los niños hacia los ancianos y las variables demográficas como edad ($P = 0.003$), grado escolar ($P < 0.001$) y tipo de familia ($P < 0.001$). **Conclusiones.** Se pueden diseñar intervenciones y programas educativos para cultivar actitudes positivas sobre las personas mayores entre los niños, lo que a la larga puede contribuir a la creación de comunidades amigables, independientemente de las edades.

Palabras clave: edad, actitud, niños, ancianos, personas mayores



Introduction

The speed at which the global population is aging is faster than ever before, due to medical and technological advancements. It is predicted that the percentage of people over 60 will grow from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050.¹ In India, there were 138 million elderly people in 2021, an increase of 34 million from the 2011 census. By 2031, this number is expected to grow by 56 million.² This demographic shift has brought about various challenges for the elderly, their families, and society, including health problems, financing of social services, elderly care within their homes, social support, adjustment to aging, and financial aid for the elderly.^{3,4} Although intergenerational relations are important, there are relatively few studies that have specifically focused on children's perspectives toward the elderly. This cross-sectional survey aims to address this gap by evaluating the children's perceptions towards the elderly.

Materials and methods

Design

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design.

Study participants

The study included children aged 7-14 years from selected schools in Mangaluru, Karnataka, India, with parental consent.

Sample size determination

Assuming 50% of the children have a favorable attitude towards the elderly, a precision of 5%, and a confidence level of 95%, the sample size required was 384. The sample size was calculated using nMaster software.

Ethical approval

The study obtained ethical approval from the Central Ethics Committee of Nitte (Deemed to be University) and permission from the school authorities. Parents were provided with an

information sheet explaining the nature and purpose of the study, and their written consent was obtained. Children were asked for their assent to participate in the survey, which was completely voluntary. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, the confidentiality of all data was ensured to protect the privacy of all individuals involved.

Procedure followed

Convenient sampling was employed and 384 children were selected for the study. A five-item demographic proforma and a pre-validated children's attitude towards the elderly scale ($r=0.92$) were used to gather data. The investigator read out each item to the children and explained it to them. The children rated the items on the scale which consisted of five sections, namely inclination, hygiene and moral values, ability to accept change, involvement, interest, and knowledge, with a total of 20 items. The items were scored on a three-point Likert scale as agree, neutral, and disagree, with agree scoring the highest. The negative questions were scored reversely. The scores ranged from 0 to 40. Children who score higher than 20 were considered to have favorable attitude towards the elderly, while scores ≤ 20 revealed an unfavorable attitude.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using Jamovi software. Mean and standard deviation were computed for continuous data, and frequency and percentage for categorical data. The Chi-square test was used to examine the association between the attitude scores and demographic variables.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of children according to their demographic characteristics N=384

Characteristics of the children	Values
Gender	42.7% males, 57.3% females
Type of family	62.2% nuclear, 37.8% joint
Grandparents	82.6% yes, 17.4% no

Age	Range: 8-14 years
Class of study	Range: 3 rd to 9 th standard

According to Table 1, more than half of the children surveyed were female (57.3%). Regarding family structure, a majority of the children (62.2%) lived in nuclear families, while 37.8% were part of joint families, which are defined as family structures that include multiple generations living together, typically consisting of parents, grandparents, and children. Additionally, a significant proportion of the children (82.6%) had grandparents. The children's ages ranged from

8 to 14 years, and they were enrolled in grades 3 through 9.

Table 2: Categorization of the children as per the attitude score N=384

Scoring	≤20	>20
Frequency (%)	42 (10.94)	342 (89.06)

The data in Table 2 shows that 89.06% of participants had a favorable attitude towards the elderly, while 10.94% had an unfavorable attitude, where the score is calculated based on the median.

Table 3: Section-wise attitude score of the children towards the elderly N=384

Sections	No. of items	Max possible score	Mean (SD)
Inclination	4	8	6.59 (1.64)
Hygiene and moral values	3	6	5.39 (1.07)
Ability to accept change	4	8	4.53 (0.89)
Interest and knowledge	4	8	5.3 (1.29)
Involvement	5	10	5.27 (1.4)
Overall attitude score	20	40	27.08 (4.39)

As per the Table 3, children's mean score on the attitude towards the elderly scale was 27.08±4.39 (score range 0-40).

Table 4: Association between attitude of the children towards the elderly and demographic variables N= 384

Sl. No.	Variables	Attitude score		Chi-square (χ^2) test	P-value
		<20	≥20		
1	Age (in years)			285.8	<0.001*
i.	7-10	7	152		
ii.	11-14	35	190		
2	Gender			24.5	0.22
i.	Male	25	139		
ii.	Female	17	203		
3	Class of study			323.5	< 0.001*
i.	3 rd – 6 th standard	22	208		
ii.	7 th – 10 th standard	20	134		
4	Type of family			98.6	< 0.001*
i.	Nuclear	15	224		
ii.	Joint	27	118		
5	Have grandparents			29.01	0.088
i.	Yes	35	282		
ii.	No	7	60		

Data in Table 4 revealed a significant association (P <0.001) between attitude score and demographic variables such as age, class of study, and type of family.

Discussion

Research has shown that children who interact with the elderly have a positive perception of aging.⁵ This interaction also has a significant impact on the well-being of older people.⁶ The results of this study suggest that most children hold a positive attitude towards the elderly, which is consistent with similar studies carried out in Turkey⁴, Nepal⁷ and the UK.⁸ Another study that used the drawing test method showed a positive image of the elderly, depicting an older family member as happy, healthy, and active.⁹ However, studies in Egypt¹⁰ and India¹¹ revealed a negative perception towards the elderly. Children as young as three years old were found to harbor a negative attitude towards older adults¹². Children's negativity was mainly due to the physical changes that come with aging¹³. Nonetheless, a study has shown that as children grow older, they tend to develop a more positive attitude towards aging.¹⁴ Finally, a study that used drawings to assess attitudes towards the elderly found that children depicted older family members as happy, healthy, and active⁹.

This study also found an association between attitude of the children towards elderly and demographic factors such as age, class, and family type, which is similar to a previous study conducted on youths.⁷ The study by Compernelle¹⁵ found an association between attitude and gender. However, this association was not observed in the current study. Most literature on elderly care focuses solely on the attitudes of healthcare professionals, including nurses. There is limited research on the views of young people towards the elderly. This study helps to bridge this gap and contributes to the existing literature.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the importance of creating educational programs that focus on teaching children about aging and the needs of the elderly. It also recommends implementing programs that shape children's attitudes towards the elderly, so they can contribute to their well-being. Similar studies can be conducted in different settings involving children of varying ages. Additionally,

qualitative studies can be undertaken to assess children's attitudes towards the elderly.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution

Both authors conceptualized the study. JMD was involved in data acquisition. JMD and NK performed data analysis. JMD drafted the manuscript while NK critically revised the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgment

The investigators express their gratitude to the study participants, school principals, teachers, and parents for their participation, cooperation, and continuous support.

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Social Medicine
Health For All

ISSN: 1557-7112