

# Factors Influencing the Choice of Geriatric Nursing as an Area of Specialization among Nursing Students in Ekiti, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The ageing global population has necessitated adequate preparation for the healthcare needs of older adults. Nurses are front line staff in the health sector and are expected to play a major role in the care of the older adults. The study was descriptive and cross-sectional. Questionnaire was administered to 84 respondents who were final year students in two schools of nursing in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study shows that 69.0% of the students perceived their experience while caring for older adults as interesting and this significantly influenced the decision of 31.0% of them who were willing to take up career in geriatric nursing. Adequate training and care facilities should be provided to give student nurses' interesting experience during training in order to make geriatric nursing a more preferred area of specialization.

**Keywords:** Geriatric nursing, specialization, nursing students.

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## BACKGROUND

The care of the older adults is taking a central stage in health care delivery globally. This is expected going by the rapid increase in the population of older adults. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22% and by 2050, 80% of the older people will be living in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2021). WHO attributes this rapid increase to change in the leading cause of death – from infections to chronic non-communicable diseases- which increased life expectancy (Anyssa, G., 2016).

Evidence suggests that the proportion of life in good health has remained constant, implying that the additional years are in poor health. The implication of this is that the older adults are more likely to experience several conditions at the same time (WHO, 2021). It therefore becomes imperative for the health systems to respond to the needs of older adults who will be facing many chronic health conditions (Mahishale, V., 2015).

Health services utilization by this segment of the population is expected to be high because older adults are more likely to visit healthcare facilities than younger people. The health system will therefore face the challenges of meeting the health needs of our ageing population, and in particular, how to manage the increasing impact of chronic diseases (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014). Even though Nigeria is regarded as a country with relatively young population, an increasing burden of ageing on health services utilization has been previously reported (Aina, F. O., *et al.*, 2021).

Nurses play a vital role in health care delivery worldwide. In the context of our increasing older segment of the population, it is important to have nurses who are specifically trained and genuinely interested in the care of older adults as part of the health system preparedness to offer them optimum care. Geriatric nursing has been defined as a “branch of nursing concerned with the care of the older population, including promotion of healthy ageing as well as prevention, assessment, and management of

physiological, pathological, psychological, economic, and sociological problems ‘ (Farlex, 2009).

The foundation for sub-specialization in nursing would likely be influenced partly by the information obtained, personal disposition, and practical exposure to a particular area of specialization during training. Research into the factors that may influence the choice of geriatric nursing as a future career specialization may generate findings that may have important implications for the training of nursing students.

This study was designed to determine factors that may influence the choice of geriatric nursing as a future career specialization among the nursing students who are expected to embark on post-basic specialization after their diploma.

## METHODS

This descriptive study was conducted among final year students of the School of Nursing, Ado- and Ido-Ekiti. The two institutions run diploma programme in Nursing and are affiliated to Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital, Ado Ekiti and the Federal Teaching Hospital, Ido Ekiti respectively. The two are the only public tertiary health institutions located in Ekiti State, South West Nigeria. A self-developed pre-tested questionnaire was used to obtain information from the

participants on their awareness of older adults’ population increase, exposure to older adults’ care nursing, their perception of older adults’ care during their training, and their willingness to specialize in the care of older adults after their training.

## RESULTS

The mean age of respondents was  $21.8 \pm 3.03$  years, majority (57.1%) were aged 21 years and above with female preponderance (89.3%). Almost all the respondents (96.0%) had formal lectures on the care of older adults while 69.0% perceived their experience while participating in the care of older adults as interesting. Some of the reasons why some respondents perceived caring for older adults as not interesting include being stressful, tasking, boring, and lack of patience required for their care. Those who perceived it interesting did so because they were willing to provide special care and support needed by the older adults and their compassion for old people among other reasons.

However, only 31.0% were willing to take up career in geriatric nursing. The only factor that was significantly associated with choice of older adults’ care as a future career was perceived interest while participating in the care of the older adults with those who perceived it as interesting more willing to take up career in geriatric nursing ( $P = 0.01$ ).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Variable	Frequency (N)	Distribution (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
≤20	36	42.9
≥21	48	57.1
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	9	10.7
Female	75	89.3
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	80	95.2
Islam	3	3.6
Others	1	1.2
<b>Father alive</b>		
Yes	72	85.7
No	12	14.3
<b>Mother alive</b>		
Yes	79	94.0
No	5	6.0
<b>Father’s age (years)</b>		
≤59	58	69.1
≥60	26	30.9
<b>Mother’s age (years)</b>		
≤59	71	84.6
≥60	13	15.4

**Table 2: Knowledge and participation in older adults' care**

Variable	Frequency (N)	Distribution (%)
<b>Definition of older adults (years)</b>		
≥60	73	87.0
≥70	10	12.0
Don't know	1	1.0
<b>Whether population of older adults is increasing in Nigeria</b>		
Yes	59	70.0
No	18	22.0
Don't know	7	8.0
<b>Respondent had formal lectures on the Care of older adults</b>		
Yes	81	96.0
No	3	4.0
<b>Respondent participated in the care of older adults</b>		
Yes	72	86.0
No	12	14.0
<b>Whether it is desirable to have specialized ward for the older adults in the hospital</b>		
Yes	81	97.0
No	2	2.0
Don't know	1	1.0

**3: Table 3: Respondents' perception and interest in the care of older adults**

Variable	Frequency	Distribution (%)
<b>Respondent's perception while caring for older adults</b>		
Interesting	56	66.7
Not interesting	25	29.8
Not sure	3	3.5
<b>Whether respondent will consider geriatric nursing as a future career</b>		
Yes	26	31.0
No	58	69.0

**Table 4: Factors influencing the choice of geriatric nursing**

Variable	Chi <sup>2</sup>	P value
Age of respondent	2.25	0.10
Fathers' age	0.16	0.43
Mothers' age	0.29	0.51
Received formal lectures	0.20	0.43
Participation in the care of older adults	0.58	0.34
Perception while caring for older adults	12.23	0.01

**Table 5: Factors influencing respondents' perception of geriatric nursing**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>(A) Interesting (N=26)</b>		
(1) Older adults need special care and support which I am willing to offer	10	38.5%
(2) I have compassion for older adults	9	34.6%
(3) I like to prolong old peoples' lives	3	11.6%
(4) Caring for older adults gives me more knowledge about ageing and I consider it as an investment towards my old age	2	7.7%
(5) I see them as my parents	1	3.8%
(6) No reason	1	3.8%
<b>(B) Not interesting (N=58)</b>		
(1) Caring for old people was very difficult/ tasking/stressful	25	43.1%
(2) I don't have the patience	10	17.3%
(3) I am not just interested	8	13.8%
(4) I need more experience to decide	6	10.3%
(5) I hate seeing older people on bed	4	6.9%
(6) No reason/ not sure	5	8.6%

## DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated student nurses' perceived experience during training as a significant factor influencing their willingness to specialize in older adults' care. Those with positive perception were willing to pursue future career in the care of older adults.

The mean age of 21.8 years and female preponderance is similar to findings by Lim and Isik *et al.*, in Malaysia and Turkey respectively (Lim, S. G. *et al.*, 2021; Isik, E., *et al.*, 2015). In the Malaysian study, 21.8% were 21 years old with female preponderance (89.7%) while female accounted for 61.8% in Turkey. The young age group is expected because students are admitted to the programme immediately after secondary school. Nursing generally appears to be female dominated globally.

Majority of the students (60.0%) perceived their experience while caring for the older adults as interesting but this does not translate to their willingness to specialize in geriatric nursing as only 31.0% were willing to do so. This may not be surprising going by the reasons that influenced their perception. The three most prominent reasons for positive perception were willingness to offer care and support for the older adults (38.5%), compassion for older adults (34.6%), and willingness to prolong old peoples' lives. Chi *et al.*, has demonstrated students' attitude towards older adults as the best predictor of nursing students' willingness to care for older adults Chi, M., *et al.*, 2016). Similar findings were reported by other researchers (Che, C. C., *et al.*, 2018; Cheng, M., *et al.*, 2016). This appears to be more of passion than experience on the ward. Those who perceived their experience as not interesting did so due to reasons related to their experience and this includes care for older adults being either stressful, tasking, or difficult (43.1%), lack of patience to offer care that are needed (17.3%) while 13.8% were not just interested. This may be expected because there is no specialized ward for older adults in most hospitals in Nigeria. Care is provided on the general adult ward where most of the facilities required for the care of older adults care are not available. Caring for older adults without required facility and conducive environment can make the job stressful, tasking, and difficult and demands extra patience to be able to offer adequate care. Such situation can make older adults' care uninteresting as submitted by some of them. In a study by Oyetunde *et al.*, among nursing students in Ibadan, Nigeria, 73.0% agreed that older adults are difficult to care for (Oyetunde, M. O., *et al.*, 2013). Brown *et al.*, demonstrated that when students' nurses are exposed to poor standard of older adults' care, they develop negative attitude towards older people (Brown, J. *et al.*,).

The only factor that was significantly associated with their willingness to specialize in older adults' care nursing was their perceived interesting experience. This finding is in conformity with finding from previous research. Dai *et al.*, in an integrative study in China found prior experience among factors that affected work related to gerontological nursing (Dai, F. *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, Sexton *et al.*, found out that experience in first position ranked highest among factors influencing choice of specialty among CNSs' (Sexton, D. L. *et al.*, 1993). In a study by Wilkinson *et al.*, on the preference for specialty areas among new nurse graduates in New Zealand, positive experience as student was also an influencing factor. Similar findings were reported by researchers in other places (Wilkinson, J. *et al.*, 2016; Alrasheed, O. *et al.*, 2021; Karikari, G. 2020; Okuyan, C. B., *et al.*, 2020; Sakamoto, R. R., 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Strategies to enhance nurses' interest in older adults' care nursing should be instituted in Nigeria. Nurses training should include courses in gerontology to improve their attitude towards older adults and promote their interest to care for older people. Specialized ward for older adults should be created in all secondary and tertiary hospitals to make their nursing care less cumbersome and more appealing to nursing students. Further research is recommended to identify strategies to enhance students' interest.

These findings add to the body of knowledge on nursing care of older adults in Nigeria and can help policy makers, nurses' trainers and hospital administrators to work together to ensure that enough nurses are available to care for our ageing population.

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