Research on Positive Attitudes of Old People

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Abstract: Population aging poses a significant challenge in numerous countries nowadays. This study aimed to investigate the potential relationship between the young's attitudes towards old people and the young's aging anxiety. These two variables are measured separately by the Kogan's Attitudes toward Older People scale (KAOPS) and the Anxiety about aging scale (AAS). The results indicated that there's a negative correlation between these two variables. In essence, the outcomes suggested that a more favorable attitude towards the old people is linked to lower levels of aging-related anxiety among young individuals.

Keywords: population aging, attitudes towards old people, aging anxiety

1. Introduction

It is expected that during the 14th Five Year Plan period, the total population of elderly people aged 60 and above will exceed 300 million, accounting for over 20%, entering a stage of moderate aging. Around 2035, the elderly population aged 60 and above will exceed 400 million, accounting for over 30% of the total population, entering a stage of severe aging. Under this background of a severely aged population which the old people account for a larger proportion in the society, the pre-existed social problems towards them such as discrimination could be enlarged. Consequently, people's attitudes towards the old population and the resultant behaviors stemming from these attitudes hold paramount significance for investigation.

Attitudes are formed internally based on one's experiences with certain events (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018). Attitudes are also major factors that could have effect on one's behaviors. Attitudes toward aging can be defined as cognitions, emotions and behaviors which links to one's experience of aging (Ortiz-Rubio et al., 2020). Common ways of measurement include Kogan's Attitude Older People Scale (KAOPS) by Kogan, Attitudes to Aging Questionnaire (AAQ) by Laidlaw, etc. In this study KAOPS will be used to measure the young's attitudes towards old people. In previous related researches about the opinions and perspectives to the old population, young students would show negative, pessimistic and discriminate attitudes toward old people (Chen et al., 2011; Gallo, 2019). A past study has found that during the COVID-19, the old ones as the vulnerable population are receiving less help due to discrimination and this decreases their living quality (Vervaecke & Meisner, 2021)[1-3].

Anxiety about aging arises from concerns and worries about growing older, reflecting one's fear of anticipated threats and losses that may be experienced during the aging process (Watkins et al., 1998). There are many factors that affect aging anxiety, among which the most important is age. Regarding age, some studies have shown that young people have a higher level of anxiety about aging (Gao, 2012). These may be due to a fear of the unknown and a stereotype of this stage. In national surveys which are studying people's attitudes towards aging conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health (2018), millennials ages 18 to 34 were found to hold the most negative and pessimistic opinions towards aging. Forty percent of then believed that dementia and other health issues are inevitable with age.

Previous studies have found that attitudes towards the elderly can affect death anxiety in young people (Salter & Salter, 1976). Aging anxiety and death anxiety are very similar concepts, and the ultimate state of aging is death. In this way, our study hypothesized that the more positive the attitudes of young people towards the elderly, the less anxious they are about aging.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

A total of 82 participants from high school in Shanghai were initially recruited for the study. Among them, 54 participants successfully passed the attention check test, resulting in a final sample size of 54. We tested 30 males and 24 females, with a gender ratio of 1.25:1. The mean age was 17.6 (SD = 1.9) ranged from 17 to 24 years[4-6].

2.2 Materials

2.2.1 Kogan's Attitudes toward Older People Scale (KAOPS)

The most common tool used in research to evaluate attitudes is Kogan's Attitudes toward Older People scale (KAOPS) which includes 34 questions to evaluate whether an individual holds positive or negative towards old people (Kogan, 1961). Question1-17 test the degree of negative attitudes and question 18-34 test the degree of positive attitudes. The scale had been used in various countries consisting of China (Yen et al., 2009), Italy (Matarese et al., 2013) and Japan (Ogiwara rt al., 2007). Each question has 6 options from 1 which indicates completely disagree to 6 which indicates completely agree. To calculate the attitudes score, the scores obtained from negative questions are reversed, and then aggregated with the total score from the positive questions. This cumulative score effectively captures an individual's attitudes towards individuals aged 65 and above. A higher total score corresponds to a more positive attitudes, whereas a lower score signifies a more negative attitudes towards the elderly.

2.2.2 Anxiety about aging scale (AAS)

The AAS (Lasher & Faulkender, 1993) comprises 20 items that assess the following four dimensions (five items each) of anxiety about aging:(1) Fear of Old People, (2) Psychological Concerns, (3) Physical Appearance, and (4) Fear of Loss. Participants are presented with five response options for each question, ranging from 1 (indicating complete agreement) to 5 (indicating complete disagreement). The aggregate scale score is calculated by summing the scores obtained across all dimensions. Notably, higher scores on the scale correspond to heightened levels of fear or anxiety associated with aging.

2.3 Procedure

The two scales were conducted on a questionnaire in separate pages for the participants to complete in an online form (https://www.wjx.cn/). Participants were informed that the questionnaire would be conducted anonymously and their results would not be publicized except for the research and analysis in this study.

3. Results

In this study, Microsoft Excel and SPSSAU are used for the data analysis. All information collected from the questionnaire is displayed on the Excel table and calculated the values of the maximum, the minimum, the mean and the standard deviation. To examine the relationships within the dataset, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. This analysis was performed using the SPSSAU website (https://spssau.com/), a widely recognized online platform for statistical analysis in the field of social sciences. The Pearson correlation coefficient serves as an essential indicator of the strength and direction of linear associations between variables[7-8].

The total score distributions of KAOPS and AAS were illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2. For the data collected from the KAOPS completed by the participants, the maximum total score of is 52 and the minimum score is -22 which makes the range of total score 72. The mean value of the total score is 11.1, with a corresponding standard deviation of 18.2. In the case of data gathered from the AAS, the total scores exhibited a range of 25, with scores ranging from -12 to 13. The mean value for this scale was -1.2, accompanied by a standard deviation of 4.6.
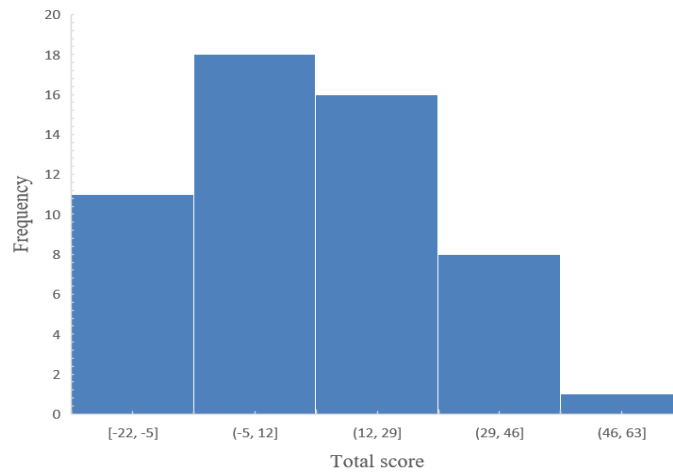
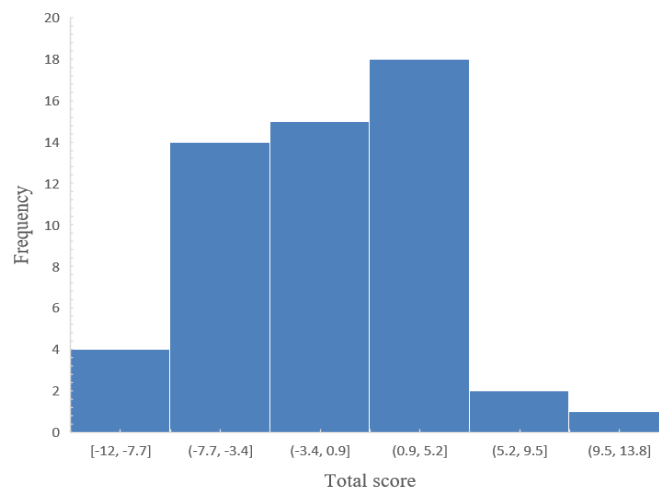*Figure 1: The frequency distribution of KAOPS total score*

Figure 2: The frequency distribution of AAS total score

A significant negative correlation was obserced between attitudes towards the old people and aging anxiety, $r = -0.417$, $p = 0.002$. This was shown in Figure 3.
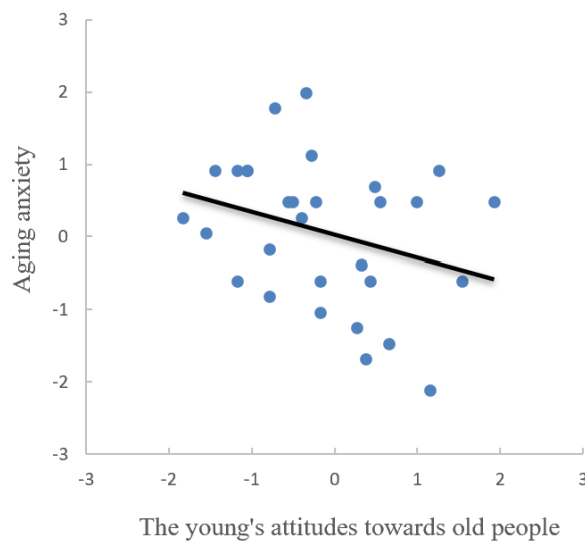

Figure 3: The correlation between the young's attitudes towards old people

4. Conclusion

Our findings have confirmed the presence of a significant negative correlation between Attitudes toward Older People and Anxiety about aging, which is consistent with our initial hypothesize. In essence, our results indicate that the more negative the attitude of young people towards the elderly, the more anxious they will be of aging.

As societies around the world are confronted with the challenges posed by an increasingly aging population, our results offer a valuable reference point for targeted interventions aimed at transforming young people's perceptions of the elderly. By addressing and altering negative attitudes, we have the potential to reduce age-related discrimination and foster intergenerational understanding and empathy. This, in turn, may contribute to the creation of a more harmonious and integrated social fabric. Importantly, our findings carry the promise of contributing to the mitigation of age-related anxieties among the younger generation. By dispelling negative stereotypes and fostering positive attitudes towards aging, we can empower young individuals to approach their own aging process with greater optimism and reduced anxiety. This shift in perspective can lead to healthier aging trajectories and improved overall mental well-being among both young and older generations.

The present findings encourage future work on the impact of aging anxiety among young people. While existing research has demonstrated the adverse effects of aging anxiety on the health and well-being of older and middle-aged adults, including manifestations such as loneliness and depressive symptoms (Bergman & Segel-Karpas, 2021), limited efforts have been directed towards comprehending its repercussions on behavior within the younger demographic. Furthermore, there is an unexplored avenue for examining the potential efficacy of interventions addressing aging anxiety among young people. According to the results, young people's aging anxiety rises as their attitudes towards old people are more negative. Therefore, their aging anxiety could be relatively reduced by improving the attitudes towards the old. In this way, the government can formulate more advertisements and programs to change young people's opinions upon the old people to a more positive side. Meanwhile, the young can have a healthier mental condition which improves life expectancy and the old ones will have a better status in the society[9-12].

There are limitations in the current study. Firstly, 34.2% of the data obtained was deemed invalid. This could be attributed to the extensive number of items within the test questionnaire or potentially linked to the online administration of our assessments, both of which might have impeded participants' capacity to maintain complete focus during task completion. To ensure the accuracy of the data, these invalid data were excluded from our subsequent statistical analyses. Secondly, it is noteworthy that all participants engaged in questionnaire completion were native Chinese speakers, while both the KAOPS and the AAS are originally developed in English. The translation of the questionnaires was not conducted strictly to the standard scale translation procedure. This less stringent approach to translation may have introduced potential misinterpretations of the items, thereby potentially compromising the accuracy of their responses.

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