

Qualitative Research Article: A Critical Appraisal

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The study in this article explored the attitudes and values that a group of nursing students has towards the care of the older adult (Evers et al., 2011). From the research, Evers et al. (2011) discovered four main values and five different attitudes that were common among the nursing students. Another key finding of the research was how student experiences with grandparents and older adults influenced those attitudes and values (Evers et al., 2011). As Evers et al. (2011) stated in the opening abstract, these “findings have important implications for education and practice” (pg. 404).

As I work towards earning my master’s degree to go into nurse education, I want to study various issues that I feel I will encounter while teaching. One of those issues is how to care for the older adult, because as discussed, the population is aging, and it will be essential that future nurses know how to and want to care for these individuals. This study provided me with background information about how nursing students view the older adult and what can be incorporated into education to allow for a better experience with the elderly. Evers et al. (2011) mention that by understanding the attitudes and beliefs that nursing students have regarding older adults, educators may better understand their behaviors towards those adults as well as choices surrounding gerontological nursing. Not only will it help me teach future students, but it will also allow me to guide those I mentor now in my nursing practice so that they may better understand and recognize the importance of caring for the older adult.

Problem Statement

As much of the population within the United States continues to age, there is more and more need for nurses to provide care to older adults. Many of the elderly are part of skilled nursing facilities, typically because they develop multiple medical issues and are no longer able

to care for themselves. While multiple factors contribute to an admission to a long-term nursing facility, a majority of it is due to a decline in health or a functional disability that is causing safety concerns or have led to the inability to care for oneself (Van Rensbergen & Nawrot, 2010).

Many studies look at the increasing number of people that are entering skilled nursing facilities as well as what is leading them to do so, but a topic that is often overlooked is who is going to care for these individuals. Just as the population ages, nurses are also aging (Evers, Ploeg, & Kaasalainen, 2011). Consequently, the numbers show that in Canada alone, there are more registered nurses currently within the 50-54 year old age group than any other, most of which practicing within long-term care facilities (Evers et al., 2011). While many are choosing to go into nursing, those doing so are not selecting geriatric or long-term care nursing as a specialty, as a majority goes into medical or surgical settings (Evers et al., 2011).

The researchers of this study recognized that without nurses replacing those that will be lost to retirement in specific fields like gerontological nursing, an issue arises in which there will not be enough nurses to care for the ever-growing elderly population. Research has shown that nursing students find geriatric nursing as a specialty that is redundant, uneventful, and one that needs much less skills technically than other fields within the nursing profession (Evers et al., 2011). What had not been previously studied was whether or not the beliefs, values, and experiences that nursing students have in regards to the elderly and geriatric nursing are contributing to the decision to go into other fields such as pediatrics and critical care nursing (Evers et al., 2011). Thus, this topic was selected by Evers et al. (2011) to carry out further research. While the researchers did not specifically state the problem, it could be clearly identified from the background information given. The study was not undertaken with an

ideological perspective as it sought to determine the perspective of the nursing students towards geriatric nursing.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the problem statement, the researchers undertook a study to look at what values and attitudes nursing students had towards the elderly as well as any influences or experiences that may have shaped the values and attitudes (Evers et al., 2011). The purpose of this study was identified as “a pilot project that examined fourth-year undergraduate nursing students' attitudes and values toward caring for older adults, and the perceived influence of their experiences with older adults (personal, work, or through the Bachelor of Science in Nursing [BSN] program) on these attitudes and values” (Evers et al., 2011, pg. 404). It is necessary to know the values and attitudes of the students and what shaped them so that both education and practice can provide a better understanding for future students (Evers et al., 2011). This plays an important role in whether or not these students will even consider going into geriatric nursing.

Research Questions

A qualitative study was selected by Evers et al. (2011) for this as the past studies they looked at were quantitative ones. While those measured attitudes, the researchers determined that by using a qualitative approach, the findings would be more in-depth and provided a better insight into what influenced the values and attitudes (Evers et al., 2011). The two questions the researchers focused upon, clearly indicated within the study, were: “What are the attitudes and values of fourth-year BSN program students toward caring for older adults (older than 65 years)?” and “How are these attitudes and values influenced by previous experiences (personal, work, and those in the BSN program)?” (Evers et al., 2011, pg. 405).

These two questions fit the qualitative method as they are very broad and will allow for further questions and inquiries to be developed from the answers received from the participants during the study. Polit and Beck (2017) explain that in qualitative research, the researchers need to begin with a question that is broad as this will allow the research to be narrowed and clarified through discussion with the participants along with self-reflection from the data gathered. Doing so will allow for a focus to develop on its own and further questions to be developed and asked based on the initial responses to the initial broader question (Polit & Beck, 2017). The questions asked in this particular study helped identify the attitudes and values of the participants, allowing the researchers to further clarify what possibly led to those attributes and why those factors played a part.

Support of Literature

In this particular study, the researchers chose to use a review of literature to develop the research questions that would be initially asked. As the literature on the topic of attitudes towards the elderly was explored, the researchers learned that positive and negative ones did exist in nursing students (Evers et al., 2011). Furthermore, those that had positive attitudes in the literature were typically either a senior nursing student or an older than average student (Evers et al., 2011).

The researchers also looked at what possibly influenced the attitudes of students, finding factors of the expectations of others, family relationships, particularly with grandparents, and the educators they had both in the classroom and clinical setting played a role (Evers et al., 2011). Additionally, the literature showed that when interventions were attempted to positively influence the attitudes the students had towards older adults within the educational setting, mixed findings resulted (Evers et al., 2011). Evers et al. (2011) found interventions within clinical

experiences improved attitudes, while community experiences had no influence, and the integration of gerontological courses within the curriculum both positively and negatively impacted the attitudes. Of particular interest, one study they looked at examined the attitudes students had at the beginning of a nursing program and throughout each year of the program finding that attitude scores were significantly higher in regards to positively verses at the end of the program (Evers et al., 2011).

Because of these findings, and the limitations the researchers were able to identify in the studies they reviewed, Evers et al. (2011) sought to use a more in-depth approach within their study. The literature reviewed had mostly used quantitative methods and were limited by small sample sizes and possible bias from nonresponses, which limited generalizability (Evers et al., 2011). By using a qualitative approach, the researchers felt a better insight into what truly has influenced the students' values and attitudes they identify have developed within them (Evers et al., 2011). This shows the congruency of the overall study, its purpose, and the questions asked to obtain the research to the literature reviewed as the issues with past research was identified by the researchers. Thus, Evers et al. (2011) were able to develop a method of study they thought would be a better fit to obtain useful information into clarifying what the attitudes and values are and what perhaps within students influenced the development of those attitudes and values.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Polit and Beck (2017) explain that qualitative studies use an emergent design, which allows for the process to continually evolve as decisions are made about the research based on what is learned from the participants within the study. While the characteristics of the design can vary due to the different disciplines that use the method, there are general ones that usually apply (Polit & Beck, 2017). These include flexibility, tendency to be holistic in nature, typically

involves the merging of data collection strategies, and relies on analyzing the data in an ongoing manner to allow for subsequent strategies to develop allowing for being able to determine when collection of data is complete (Polit & Beck, 2017). Lastly, Polit and Beck (2017) point out that researchers of qualitative studies are required to be involved intensely within the research.

Essentially, the researchers are tasked with being a bricoleur, a term defined as "a person who is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive reflection and introspection" (Polit & Beck, 2017, pg. 463).

Advanced planning is also a critical element of qualitative studies as it allows for more freedom of design choices during the process (Polit & Beck, 2017). It is particularly useful in selecting a framework that is broad, determining time allotment and costs, developing a strategy to collect data that includes allowing for opportunities to enhance trustworthiness, collecting any needed materials or equipment for the study, and helping identify any personal views, biases or reflexivity (Polit & Beck, 2017). By having worked through these elements in advance, it provides the researchers with the ability to manage any circumstances that may arise during the study (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Qualitative design commonly has three features, which include comparisons, settings, and time frames (Polit & Beck, 2017). Comparison studies are seldomly purposely planned as instead a need for it may emerge (Polit & Beck, 2017). Settings within qualitative studies usually occur in natural, real-world settings, while time frames are either cross-sectional with one collection point or longitudinal, having multiple collection points over a time frame (Polit & Beck, 2017).

The qualitative method fits this particular study as the researchers wanted to use an approach that would allow for less bias and non-responsiveness to the inquiry and obtain more

in-depth information from students (Evers et al., 2011). The qualitative way allows more freedom to change course with the interview questions if the interviewer wanted to expand on a statement that a participant made during the process. More information can also be collected because of how qualitative studies allow flexibility in changing the strategy if the interviewer felt it would yield more in-depth responses.

Type of Qualitative Research Design

The design of the study done by Evers et al. (2011) used an exploratory approach within a single case study. Furthermore, embedded units were used as subunits were included in the case that included pro-aged, anti-aged, or neutral bias in regards to the elderly (Evers et al., 2011). The setting of the study was within a Canadian BSN program and included one university and two community college sites that used the same curriculum incorporating gerontological content during the program through clinical case scenarios (Evers et al., 2011). Additionally, students were able to take an elective gerontology course and all students participated in clinicals that occurred on a medical surgical unit where the care of the older adult was likely (Evers et al., 2011). An interview of the selected students was completed to collect the data for the study, which was audiotaped and lasted 45-90 minutes (Evers et al., 2011). Because of the exploratory approach in which interviews occurred, this allowed the interviewer to ask the research questions and further expand based on the participants' responses.

Sample for the Study and Sampling Technique

Prior to this study, a group of students was asked to participate in a qualitative survey to allow for maximum variation (Evers et al., 2011). The purpose of it was to provide an indirect measure of the attitudes the students had towards older adults (Evers et al., 2011). An online questionnaire was sent to a group of nursing students who were in their fourth year of the nursing

program, which yielded a response rate of 19.6% as 51 of 260 students completed it (Evers et al., 2011). According to Evers et al. (2011), this allowed for three embedded subunits to form as students were allocated into a specific group based on how they scored in regards to being pro-aged, anti-aged or neutral. Random selection was then used to select participants from each subgroup. To help achieve saturation, Evers et al. (2011) determined that three participants from each subunit would be needed, and then randomly selected those who would participate in the face-to-face qualitative interviews. After the selection, the pro-aged group only had two, so a fourth was added to the neutral subunit to compensate for a total of nine participants (Evers et al., 2011).

I feel this was an appropriate method in selecting participants for this study. The researchers used data collected from a survey sent to 260 fourth year nursing students. Since the researchers were seeking to determine what influences nursing students may have that develop their attitudes and values, it was necessary to use students who had been immersed within a nursing program instead of just starting out in it. The researchers also worked to ensure they had diverse representation by using the data to create and delineate participants into groups so that all of the participants would not be pro-aged biased or oppositely, anti-aged.

Sample sizes are typically small for qualitative studies, so I feel that the nine students chosen were of an adequate sample size due to the nature of this being a pilot study and that each participant interviewed for 45-90 minutes. That can provide a substantial amount of information to analyze. However, since the researchers had determined that to achieve saturation, three participants were needed from each group, this was not met as the pro-age group only had two. While compensation did occur through adding a fourth participant to the neutral group, I do not feel that allowed for data saturation that the researchers had set out to achieve. Additionally,

Evers et al. (2011) list the small sample size and having only two participants in the pro-aged subunit as a limitation and the findings tentative.

Key Characteristics of the Study Population

These participants were 21-34 years of age and most of them had entered into a BSN program immediately after completing high school, with two having prior university exposure (Evers et al., 2011). Each of the university and community college settings were represented across the nine, with the majority being female, as one male was selected (Evers et al., 2011). Each of the participants selected had indicated a prior experience with caring for the older adult in clinical settings as well as previous work experiences outside of the nursing program (Evers et al., 2011).

Age wise, I feel this was an adequate range, as was the representation in regards to one male and the rest being female. This is typically the age group in which one chooses to enter a nursing program and with the focus being on the attitudes and values of nursing students, the one male participant is an accurate proportion when considering the number of men who go into nursing. However, a missing component of the characteristics identified is the cultural background of the participants. As Evers et al. (2011) noted, culture can significantly influence attitudes and values, which they discovered through their study but had not asked the participants to identify their cultural background. The study also only used students from what Evers et al. (2011) describe as a unique BSN program, as it used a self-directed, problem-based learning approach. Hence, transferability of the findings from this study to other BSN programs is limited (Evers et al., 2011).

Data Collection Procedures

The article provided sufficient information about how the data for this study was collected, and a clear description was given. The researchers identified that through an online communication board in which the fourth year nursing students all used, an invitation was sent to them to complete a survey within one month (Evers et al., 2011). From those results and through random selection, the students who were chosen were asked to participate in an interview on a voluntary basis, and if they agreed, each participant signed a consent (Evers et al., 2011). Evers et al. (2011) explained that the interviews were audiotaped and were each approximately 45-90 minutes in length. Additionally, the researchers included that the primary person interviewing the participants was a nurse, educator, and graduate student whom had not had any prior contact with any of the individuals interviewed (Evers et al. 2011).

Data Collection Instrument

In the initial selection process and division of respondents into the subunits, a survey was taken by a group of nursing students. This survey was a quiz of 25 true or false statements patterned from Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz (Evers et al., 2011). When the specific questions are answered incorrectly, it identifies either a negative or positive bias in regards to the older adult (Evers et al., 2011). Evers et al. (2011) explained that Palmore's quiz has been used often with nursing students but that some have found it to have low reliability and should only be used to guide discussions. Therefore, Evers et al. (2011) only used it to place students into the three subunits for sampling and was not used as a data source for the attitudes the nursing students identified. It was chosen because of its short number of questions and format, making it a suitable short online survey, which the researchers hoped would yield a higher response rate (Evers et al., 2011).

For the qualitative interviews of the nine selected participants, an interview guide was used (Evers et al., 2011). The researchers did not include the guide within the article, however, they indicated that it is available upon request (Evers et al., 2011). Evers et al. (2011) pointed out that the questions asked were open-ended ones, directed by the objectives of their study with a focus on how experiences the individuals had shaped the attitudes and values the participants mentioned during the interview. Evers et al. (2011) further identified some of the topics discussed, including personal experiences with older adults like grandparents, work and volunteer history, and experiences within their BSN program such as clinical rotations. Each interview concluded with a survey on the participant's demographics including age, gender, and level of education (Evers et al., 2011).

Data Collection

The face-to-face interviews used for this research were an appropriate method in which to collect the data for a qualitative study. An interview guide to follow during the interviews had been developed in advance. Polit and Beck (2017) identify this as a focused or semistructured interview within qualitative research, which occurs when researchers prepare a written guide prior to interviews, which can be a list of topics or questions that are covered with each participant. The researchers also indicated that open-ended questions were used in the interview process. This is an important component of qualitative research as questions need to be designed so that the answers to them provide in-depth details about what is being studied (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Recording of Data

Each of the interviews were audio recorded. It was not indicated in the article as to whether those recordings were each transcribed. Furthermore, if they were transcribed, no information was given on how the accuracy of the transcription was verified.

Observation Data and Field Notes

No observation data or field notes were indicated as being collected during this study. If any did occur, the researchers did not indicate as to how it was recorded.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the researchers organized it in what they describe as an editing fashion through the use of codes (Evers et al. 2011). In addition, Evers et al (2011) state that they allowed the purpose and objectives of the study direct the analysis of the data. While the researchers specifically mention the use of coding, it is not indicated as to whether this was manually performed or if a computer program was used.

Accuracy and completeness were accounted for within this analysis. Evers et al. (2011) note that the primary author of the article conducted the initial coding. The remaining coauthors, Ploeg and Kaasalainen, then reviewed that material as well as all of the stages that occurred within the data analysis (Evers et al., 2011). Consequently, the final themes and conclusions identified were all agreed upon by the researchers as they found that the themes were recurrent and reflected data saturation (Evers et al., 2011).

Findings of the Study

This study identified values and attitudes that nursing students have in regards to the elderly. The researchers were able to use those findings to explore and provide an insight into the purpose of their study, which was to examine values, attitudes, and contributing influences.

Evers et al. (2011) found four core values and five main attitudes, and through the results portion of the article, they elaborated further upon by providing examples of answers from students in interviews as excerpts. The values and attitudes were each discussed separately within the results, and within each category, factors that were identified through the interviews on what influenced those values and attitudes were discussed. After the results section, the researchers wrote a discussion section that described three key findings Evers et al. (2011) identified within their data analysis, noting that the findings were tentative due to the small sample size of the study.

As noted, the data from the interviews was coded by the authors to identify the themes, thus leading to a category scheme. The objectives of the study created the initial list of codes used, which led to the use of descriptive coding for the attitudes and values that emerged as the data was analyzed (Evers et al., 2011). That first list also generated the category of influences, and Evers et al. (2011) then identified the need for subcodes for that category, which were related to personal, work, and educational experiences. Within the embedded units of the analysis, further work was done to analyze it both across and within it (Evers et al., 2011).

The subcode categories were the basis of the three key findings Evers et al. (2011) discussed. When students had past and current positive relationships with the older adults in their lives, usually grandparents, they were able to associate the elderly with the values of respect, caring, and wisdom (Evers et al., 2011). This was similar in those students who had more contact that was personal with older adults, and if those adults were viewed as being healthy and active, the students identified them as independent and capable (Evers et al., 2011). Evers et al. (2011) showed how these positive interactions could be incorporated into nursing curriculum,

allowing ways for students to have more contact and experiences with healthy older adults during their time as nursing students to cultivate more positive attitudes.

Another finding from the subcode categories emerged from how students viewed working within long term care based on their experiences within those facilities . While students expressed respect, caring, and enjoyment of the elderly, the work that they did within that setting led to the students having a dislike for it and also viewing that type of nursing as lacking diversity, skill, and not being challenged (Evers et al. 2011). Based on this, Evers et al. (2011) indicated a need in finding ways to incorporate more positive workloads within long-term care rotations for nursing students to attract them to that specialty.

Lastly, the third finding was from previous work experiences the students had within long-term care facilities, including clinical rotations. Evers et al. (2011) found that this stemmed from what the students perceived about the older adult based on what they were told or heard from staff, faculty, and peers. This finding demonstrates the need for more positivity to come from those that interact with the students as the students not only look at them as role models and mentors, but also as guides as to what field of nursing they may want to go into once they graduate (Evers et al., 2011).

The authors not only were able to show how the data they collected identified the values, attitudes, and influence from experiences nursing students had, but also the importance of how further research needs to be done to change perspectives. Examples were given as well in how change can be implemented. It was also presented in a logical, clear matter that allowed the reader to follow the points the authors were making as well as how the study supported the original purpose of the study. While no conceptual maps, figures, or diagrams were part of the article, these were actually not necessary in explaining the findings of the study.

Understanding of the Topic

While I do not feel as if I was drawn into the setting or the world through the eyes of the students interviewed, the authors provided material from their study that I could relate to and have seen or could see happen. For example, I love caring for the elderly, but I have been in the students' shoes that expressed they were told not to go into gerontological nursing because it is not challenging and you will lose all the skills you have or never expand on them. Relating to the situation allows for one to better see the need for more research and interventions, which the authors were able to achieve. Each value and attitude is clearly discussed by the authors, as is each of the three findings. Additionally, the authors connect the data and findings back to the importance of influence, and the role it plays within their study.

Implications for the Study

Within the conclusion of this article, the authors identified a need for more research to be done on a larger scale to explore how having contact with healthy older adults as well as work experiences within long-term care can affect the attitudes of students towards the elderly (Evers et al., 2011). More and more older adults will need to be cared for in the upcoming years, and it is important that students view the elderly in a positive light. This can be achieved by promoting positive experiences as we as nurses, educators, and preceptors mentor these students (Evers et al., 2011).

As mentioned, I personally love caring for the older adult as I find doing so very rewarding because of the gracious and appreciative attitudes those individuals have. While I considered long-term care when beginning my nursing career, I did not choose it because of the various experiences you hear about from those who work there, such as not being able to spend time with the residents and a majority of the work day as an RN consisting of care plans and

paperwork. This is just one reason that more research needs to be done to change not only the experiences student nurses have within those settings but also into the environment itself of those settings. Research into ways to change long-term care to make it more appealing is essential as is education about it and the aging adult as education will help stop the stereotypical thought process. I hope by having a better understanding from this study of how experiences can influence the values and attitudes of nursing students that I can encourage and educate students as a nurse now and as a educator in the future on caring for the elderly.

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