

Original Article

Comparison of knowledge of and attitudes toward dementia between health-related and non-health-related university students

MI-HYUN YONG^{1)*}, CHAN-UK YOO²⁾, YEONG-AE YANG³⁾

¹⁾ Department of Occupational Therapy, College of Health, Kyungwoon University: Gumi, Republic of Korea

²⁾ Department of Occupational Therapy, Hanlyo University, Republic of Korea

³⁾ Department of Occupational Therapy, College of Biomedical Sciences and Engineering, Inje University, Republic of Korea

Abstract. [Purpose] This study compared the knowledge of and attitudes toward dementia between health-related and non-health-related students. [Subjects] The subjects consisted of a total of 416 people, 213 health-related students and 203 non-health-related students, at K University, which is located in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Republic of Korea, between May 1 and 14, 2014. [Methods] The subjects answered a self-administered questionnaire about their knowledge of and attitudes toward dementia. [Results] There was a significant difference in knowledge of and attitudes toward dementia between the two groups examined. [Conclusion] Health-related students displayed higher knowledge of dementia and a more positive attitude toward dementia compared with non-health-related students. In the future, education to cultivate professional knowledge about dementia and enhance positive attitudes toward dementia should be provided continuously to health-related students. This is because students in health-related fields will likely provide services to patients with dementia in the clinical field. Additionally, as they will likely provide support to the elderly in the future, non-health-related students also need to be educated about and develop positive attitudes toward dementia.

Key words: Dementia, Knowledge, Attitude

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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of dementia is increasing in Korea and worldwide. Dementia is a neurological disorder that brings about many social problems¹⁾. Given the increasing incidence of dementia, governments must recognize the accompanying challenges and prepare effective countermeasures.

Prior to such efforts, however, it will be necessary to educate people about dementia and correct negative perceptions²⁾. Personal knowledge of a disease has been reported to be associated with disease-related behaviors (recognition, help seeking, management, prevention)³⁾. Help-seeking behavior may be limited because although people know about a disease, they may not recognize the symptoms⁴⁾. Similarly, help-seeking behavior increases with the level of knowledge about the symptoms of a disease, demonstrating the importance of knowledge about a disease⁵⁾. Therefore, education about diseases with symptoms that can be recognized is

needed for early detection and future health.

In the future, students in health-related fields will provide services targeting patients with dementia in the clinical field. Thus, this study compared the knowledge of and attitudes toward dementia between students in health-related and those in non-health-related fields. The results of this study provide basic data and insights for professional training related to dementia for the future health workforce.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The subjects were students in health-related and non-health related fields (hereafter, health-related and non-health-related students, respectively) at K University, which is located in Gyeongsangbuk-do, Republic of Korea, during the period of May 1 to 14, 2014. They were a random sample stratified by study major. We explained the research process to the subjects and received written consent for research participation. Self-administered questionnaires on knowledge about and attitudes toward dementia were distributed and collected directly. Questionnaires were distributed to 250 health-related students and 250 non-health-related students, and a total of 416 completed questionnaires were collected from 213 and 203 health-related and non-health-related students, respectively. Questionnaires with unanswered items or insincere answers were excluded. All details of this

*Corresponding author. Mi-hyun Yong (E-mail: yongmihyun@hanmail.net)

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

		Health-related students (n=213)	Non-health students (n=203)
Gender	Male	72	120
	Female	141	83
Presence or absence of family with dementia	Presence	29	7
	Absence	186	217
Dementia information	Yes	188	140
	No	25	63
* Dementia knowledge source	Mass media	155	171
	Expert	16	19
	People around	15	23
	Professional data	25	3
	Other	8	12

*Multiple answers

Table 2. Knowledge of dementia by major

	Mean \pm SD
Health-related department	13.01 \pm 1.94*
Non-health-related department	12.03 \pm 2.53

*Significant difference from the non-health-related department ($p < 0.05$)**Table 3.** Attitude toward dementia by major

	Mean \pm SD
Health-related department	19.10 \pm 5.30*
Non-health-related department	21.41 \pm 6.55

*Significant difference from the non-health-related department ($p < 0.05$)

study were approved by the Science Research Council of Inje University.

The questionnaire included 10 questions about demographic characteristics, 20 questions about knowledge of dementia, and 10 questions about attitudes toward dementia. A tool developed by the Seoul Metropolitan Center for Dementia was used for the questions about knowledge of dementia. This tool scores 1 point for each correct answer and 0 points for each incorrect answer, with a final score of 0–20 points. Higher scores indicate greater knowledge of dementia. A tool developed by Cho⁶⁾ was used for the questions about attitudes toward dementia. Each question uses a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1 point (strongly agree) to 5 points (not at all), and the overall score ranges from 10–50 points. Higher scores indicate a more negative attitude toward dementia. The reliability of the two tools was verified at the time of development.

SPSS 20.0 was used for data analysis, and the significance level was 0.05. Descriptive statistics were carried out for the general characteristics of health-related and non-health-related students, and independent two-sample t-tests were performed to analyze differences in knowledge about and attitudes toward dementia between the two groups.

RESULTS

The general characteristics of the subjects are listed in Table 1. Scores for knowledge of dementia according to field of study are presented in Table 2. There was a significant difference in the scores for knowledge of dementia between the two groups ($p < 0.05$). Scores for attitudes toward dementia according to field of study major are presented in Table 3.

These scores also showed a significant difference between the two groups ($p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

Korea has an aging society, and the growing interest in dementia is reflected in the numerous studies being carried out. The aim of this study was to compare knowledge about and attitudes toward dementia between health-related and non-health-related students. The results of this study demonstrated that health-related students had greater knowledge about dementia and more positive attitudes toward dementia when compared with non-health-related students.

Lee's 2009 study²⁾ also reported that the dementia knowledge scores of health-related students were significantly higher than those of non-health-related students. This was considered attributable to the fact that health-related students have more opportunities to encounter information about dementia and the fact that they receive a more professional education about dementia than non-health-related students. In addition, attitudes toward dementia have been reported to be more positive with increased knowledge of dementia⁷⁾. According to studies on the relationship between knowledge and attitudes toward dementia, individuals with more information about dementia showed more positive attitudes toward dementia⁸⁾. Moreover, the quality of life of elderly individuals may vary depending on attitudes toward elderly people with dementia⁹⁾. Thus, Gwon suggested that it is important to teach proper awareness of and concepts about dementia because knowledge of dementia is low in university students¹⁰⁾. Therefore, education should be provided to health-related students, the workforce that will provide

professional health services in the future, so that they can continuously cultivate professional knowledge of dementia and have a positive attitude toward dementia. In addition, non-health-related students, part of the workforce that will support the elderly in the future, should also be educated about dementia and develop a positive attitude toward dementia through mass media and other means.

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