

Utilizing an 'Aging Suit' as a Tool to Shape Physiotherapy Students' Attitudes towards Older Adults, and Influence their Post-Study Inclination towards Working with this Population

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Abstract

Background: Aging suits are designed to simulate the conditions of old age by artificially inducing sensorimotor deficits commonly associated with this life stage. Employing an aging suit can serve as a tool to transform students' perceptions of older adults. Despite this potential, there has been no prior research conducted in Israel investigating the use of aging suits among physical therapy students (PTs). Hence, the current study aimed to assess whether wearing an aging suit influences PTs' attitudes towards older adults. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate whether this experience impacts students' considerations to work with older adults, and whether these effects continue over time or subside.

Methods: The study involved four stages:

A. Participants completed online questionnaires, including the Palmore Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ) and Kogan's Attitudes towards Older Adults (KAOP). Additionally, participants responded to questions regarding the extent to which they contemplate working with older adults.

B. Participants performed daily tasks while wearing an aging suit for 15 minutes. C./D. Participants responded to the attitude questionnaires and the question about working with older adults immediately following the

intervention, and then they responded again, after one week.

Results: Seventeen PTs (8 men/9 women) in their fourth year (average age 27.4 ± 2.4 years) of studies, participated. Knowledge score averaged 16.76 (± 2.05) out of 25 points. Positive attitudes were noted before (median - 149/204) and after the intervention (155/204), and were found to continue for one week. However, this difference was not found to be statistically significant. Initially, 41% considered working extensively with older adults, a sentiment that was unaffected by wearing the aging suit.

Discussion and conclusions: The study suggests aging suits can potentially alter attitudes among PTs regarding interest in working with the elderly. The absence of an immediate score difference may result from a high baseline score, creating a potential "ceiling effect." These findings, suggest avenues for future research with larger samples and additional health-care populations.

Keywords: aging suits, attitudes, older adults, students, physiotherapy