Research Paper
Content Analysis of the Topics of Ageing-related Theses at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Objectives "Ageing" has created challenges for societies, particularly in developing countries. In this regard, the "Research Agenda on Ageing for the 21st century" (RAA-21) has been prepared and published through a joint project of the "United Nations Program on Ageing" and the "International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics." The University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences is the first university in Iran that has admitted students in Gerontology, and currently has the largest number of students studying the subject of "Ageing." The current study aims to compare the topics of dissertations on ageing in the University with the priorities of RAA-21, because no similar study has been conducted at the University so far.

Methods & Materials total of 248 dissertations and proposals on "Ageing" were included in this study. The titles were categorized into three levels (priority, research area, and specific topic) with a deductive content analysis approach using RAA-21 guidelines. The results were qualitatively described and compared with RAA-21 priorities.

Results The fourth and fifth priorities of RAA-21 ("healthy ageing" as well as "biology and diseases") were identified as the most common priorities in the dissertations of both the University and the Gerontology Department (39.9% and 21%, respectively). The second priority of RAA-21 ("material security") had the least number of dissertations (3.3%). With respect to "research areas," the highest number of dissertations was conducted in the "physical and mental function"(21.8%) and then "biomedical" and "healthy ageing" (19% each) subcategories. "Macro-societal changes and development" and "poverty" subcategories had the least number of dissertations (0.0% and 0.4%, respectively).

Conclusion distribution of dissertation topics conducted on "Ageing" at the University does not match with the priorities of RAA-21. As a descriptive study cannot present a certain causal relationship, an investigation into the reason for the differences is suggested for further studies. Moreover, it is also useful to prepare the national priorities for research on "Ageing," using need assessment and RAA-21 as guidelines.

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Extended Abstract

1. Objectives

The increasing trend in longevity and number of elderly people over the past decades have created different needs for various countries [8]. In this regard, attention to the gerontology science has also increased around the world, and research has been recognized as one of one of the main foundations of ageing-related policies [10]. Of the important questions raised is that, considering the needs of societies, what are the research priorities in the field of ageing? and in each of the areas, what issues need to be paid more attention to? To answer these questions, United Nations Programme on Ageing (UNPoA), and International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG) developed Research Agenda on Ageing for the 21st Century (RAA-21) [11].

Iran also has already affected by the aging phenomenon. Structural changes in the age groups of the Iranian population are underway requiring special research and policy [12]. Therefore, it is necessary to pay proper attention to research in the field of gerontology. University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences (USWRS) is the leading university in this field, and accept students at various degrees, such as MSc., MPH and PhD. However, there has not been a study on evaluating the topics of ageing-related theses at this university so far. In this regard, this paper aims to evaluate the topics of aging-related theses at USWRS based on RAA-21 criteria.

2. Methods and Materials

First, we referred to the Persian portal of the central library of the University and the theses related to Ageing were extracted. Then we referred to the education department and a list of proposals from 2014 onwards were gathered. Those proposals not included in the list of extracted theses were added to the study. Finally, the topics of 248 theses and proposals were examined. Content analysis using deductive approach was used to study and categorize the topics. The classification presented in RAA-21 was used as an initial basis, and then the results evaluated. In RAA-21, there are 109 specific topics for aging-related research, in total. Each of them has been included in one of 12 critical research areas, where these areas have been categorized into five major priorities [11]. The topics of study theses were evaluated with respect to these three factors.

3. Result

Of 248 theses reviewed, 169 had been defended and delivered, and 79 had been submitted for defense and were under evaluation. The first thesis related to the ageing found in the library was for 1998, and the last proposal approved at the time of this study was for July 2017. The largest number of completed theses was for 2015-2016, and the highest number of ongoing proposals was for 2016 (n=44). The highest number of submitted theses and proposals belonged to graduate students (62.5%), and then MPH (19%) and PhD students (18.5%). The most of study theses and proposals (37.1%) were for the Department of Gerontology. The second and third rank were for the Department of Nursing (22.8%) and Department of Rehabilitation Management (7.3%).

In terms of major priorities, the most common and attractive research topics in all theses and proposals were "basic biological mechanisms and age associated diseases" (39.9%) and "determinants of healthy ageing" (21%). The lowest attractive topic was "current practices and options for maintaining material security in old age" (3.3%). In terms of critical research areas, the most common research areas in the entire university was related to the "physical and mental functioning" (21.8%), followed by "healthy ageing," and "biomedical" (19%). In terms of covered specific topics, the most common topic was about "mental health" (11.6%), followed by "research methodologies" (6.2%), and "prevention and effective intervention" (5.8%). In total, of 109 specific topics presented by RAA-21, 57 topics in study theses were examined.

4. Conclusion

Based on the available studies in literature, the current study is the first study that examines the topics of theses related to ageing in Iran. The results of the study indicate that the number of theses related to ageing has grown considerably in recent years. Three top research priorities in RAA-21 were related to social, economic, and developmental issues, while it was found out that these priorities had not attracted the authors of theses and proposals in our study. Instead, priority 4 (determinants of healthy ageing) and 5 (basic biological mechanisms and age associated diseases) were the most attractive topics in all departments, including Department of Gerontology. Thus, there is a difference between research priorities mentioned in RAA-21 and those of USWRS. This study had a descriptive aspect and does not explain the reason for this difference. It is suggested that this difference be investigated in future studies, and by taking

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into account the existing international guidelines and local needs assessments, the priorities of ageing-related research at national level be addressed.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

In this study, in order to maintain the principles of research ethics, the name of the students and theses were confidential.

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