

Death Anxiety as a Function of Age and Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to investigate the relationship of death anxiety with different age groups and with different levels of religiosity. The purposive sample of one hundred and twenty participants (n=120) was taken to conduct this study. Sample consisted of three age groups; 40 adolescents (20 boys & 20 girls), 40 middle aged people (20 males & 20 females) and 40 old aged people (20 males & 20 females). Age range of adolescents was 13-20, of middle aged was 35-59 and of old aged was 60 and above. Collett-Lester fear (1969) of death scale was used to measure the scores on death anxiety while intrinsic/extrinsic-revised religiosity scale (1989) was used to assess the level of religiosity. After taking informed consent, the questionnaires were administered to the participants. The results of ANOVA suggested that adolescents showed higher level of death anxiety than the middle aged and old aged people. It was also found from results of ANOVA that people having low levels of religiosity showed higher level of death anxiety than people having high levels of religiosity. Moreover, results of t-test showed that women experienced more death anxiety as compared to men on one subscale of death anxiety.

KEYWORDS: Death anxiety, Religiosity, Fear of Death.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of mankind, death has been an inevitable reality and the last stage of man's life. Attitudes toward death are not completely positive or negative; rather, they are on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the perception of death as humanity's mortal enemy, while on the other end of the continuum, death is accepting and even welcoming as a passage to a more blissful state [1]. Death also has a subjective meaning that differs from person to person. Every individual has his or her own interpretations of objects and events related to death. If these interpretations have negative results, then the person suffers from high death anxiety. This sort of concept of death depending upon death fears fits into the larger theoretical model of death anxiety postulated by Tomer and Eliason [2]. The concept of death anxiety can be defined as "a negative arousing response motivated by the hope of a state in which the self does not survive" [3].

One variable that is associated to the fear of dying of a human being is age. Nevertheless, the relationship amid views about dying and age is not completely understandable [2]. A very common view about death anxiety is that an increase in age leads to greater fear of death because the distance between us and death becomes short. However, different researches have proved this idea wrong. A research on 50 individuals belonging to three age units: the adolescent (18-26), the adult (35-50), and the old (60 and elder) showed that even though demise concern was elevated in adolescents, but it was elevated in adults also and lesser in the old people [4]. A current combination of results of different studies about fear of dying in the old people proves that death anxiety becomes stable through the last years of existence [5].

Researchers conducted a research about the connection of death anxiety with age and psychosocial development. A bibliographic data sheet, the Templer Death Anxiety Scale and the Constantinople Inventory of Psychosocial Development were administered on 194 participants. Outcome depicted an inverse relationship of age and psychosocial maturity with death anxiety i.e. an inverse relation exists amid them and death anxiety. Fear of death decreases with an increase in age and psychosocial maturity [6]. Researchers also carried out two researches to measure the fear of death in adult years of human life. Different tests were used in both studies, with Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale in the first study and Templer Death Anxiety Scale in the second study. Results of both these studies indicated that death anxiety was at its peak in both the genders during their teen age and after that their death anxiety decreases significantly. Also, women exhibited more death anxiety than men in both these studies [7]. Pakistani researchers conducted a research on the effects of different correlates of fear of death, including age,

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gender, and religiosity. Templer Death Anxiety Scale and Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale were given to a sample of 132 individuals. Results showed that people of older age, people of low religiosity and women were more fearful about being dead afraid of death and that they viewed demise as a negative experience than the men, younger people and highly religious people [8].

A research study studied six communities of people who were retired for the relation of age concentration, religiosity and fear of death using a death anxiety scale developed by Nelson and Nelson. One community named Pious consisted of religious retired people. Findings indicated that age has no impact on death anxiety of retirement community in five communities, other than Pious. Pious community exhibited lowest death anxiety in each age category [9]. Like the notion of fatality, the idea of religiosity is also multidimensional and the main concern regarding the relation amid fear of demise and religiosity is either religiosity is a relief in front of demise or it is an incentive to nervousness. A study was done about the combinations of many trial results of demise concern researches and found that certain aspects of being religious were negatively, some were directly and some were still not correlated with fatality fretfulness [10]. Religiosity, in particular intrinsic religiosity, as well as spirituality may influence directly the perception of death or may have an effect on this perception by affecting the extent to which life is perceived as meaningful [3]. Negative correlations between intrinsic religiosity and death anxiety are consistent with such a position [11].

In the study about the bond amid religiosity and fear of demise, one most important aspect is the belief in an afterlife. Believing that the afterlife exists is, in turn, connected to a decrease in the fears associated with death because then people become sure that they will still have a life to spend. Belief in an afterlife also increases a person's religiosity by depicting that the deeds done in this life have to be judged after death and the status of the afterlife depends on these deeds as well. Resultantly, people with such a belief try to live a religious and pious life. All these attitudes lessen the death anxiety a person suffers from. A qualitative research was carried out to study the level of religiosity in people when they are challenged by a terminal illness. Sample consisted of 14 hospice patients who were all interviewed through an open-ended interview. Results indicated that most of the participants showed no adherence to any religious belief, some participants turned away from their previously held religious beliefs, and a few participants did turn towards religious beliefs [12]. Researchers worked out on cognitive mapping of the concept of death by conducting open-ended questionnaires on Pakistani youth. Tradition and modernity were found to be the two most influential elements on death concept in our youth [13].

2 RATIONALE

Death anxiety is a very ancient concept that has fascinated human beings for a very long time. Different philosophical approaches toward this idea have shown that either the fear of death can be very strong for the person or the person can understand his life's full meaning after having a clear concept of death. The same value has been given to the idea of death by different psychologists. Another very common aspect of death anxiety is the factors that have huge effect on death anxiety. These factors include age, gender, religiosity, and ethnicity. Different researches have been conducted in the West regarding these variables and their effects on individuals. Culture has been found to be of great importance in all these factors, determining the cultural differences found in the concept of death anxiety. So, I wanted to know that how two of these variables, namely age and religiosity are related to death anxiety in our cultural framework. The two factors chosen by me are age and religiosity, both of which are very important in death anxiety. People differ greatly in their levels of religiosity and belief in an afterlife is a very crucial aspect of religiosity affecting fear of death. In the same way, people of different ages also differ in their degree of death fear. So, through this study, I intend to know these factors' effects of death anxiety and I also want to provide benefits to the society by suggesting some ways in which negative effects can be converted into positive ones.

3 OBJECTIVES

The study focused the following issues:

- To investigate whether death anxiety differs significantly across different age groups.
- To measure and assess whether higher levels of religiosity influence death anxiety in a more positive way as compared to lower levels of religiosity.
- To study whether men experience more death anxiety than women

4 HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses had been formulated for this study:

- Adolescents will be having high death anxiety than the middle as well as old aged people.
- People having low level of religiosity will be high on death anxiety as compared to those having high level of religiosity.
- Men will have less fear of death than women.

5 METHOD

5.1 Participants

The purposive sample was composed of 120 individuals belonging to three different age groups. The three age groups were adolescence (M=16.2, SD=1.39) having age range 13-20, middle age (M=49.5, SD=5.18) having age range 35-59 and old age (M=64.1, SD=4.23) having age range 60 and above. Minimum level of education was intermediate. Each participant was asked to take part in this study after taking the informed consent.

5.2 Materials

Collett-Lester fear of death scale. The Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale was given in 1969. It has 36 items which measure four different aspects of death anxiety, thus forming 4 subscales; Fear of Death of Self, Fear of Death of Others, Fear of Dying of Self, and Fear of Dying of Others. A test-retest reliability of 0.55 was found [14]. A positive correlation has been found between Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale and other death anxiety scales by researchers [15].

Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised (I/E-R) Religiosity Scale. The intrinsic/extrinsic-revised religiosity scale was made by Gorsuch and McPherson [16]. It has 14 items. It is 5 point Likert scale. It has 8 items measuring intrinsic religiosity, 3 items measuring extrinsic personal religiosity and 3 items measuring extrinsic social religiosity.

5.3 Procedure

A brief introduction of the idea of the research was given to the subjects. A consent form was given to the subjects in all the age groups in order to have their consent and to ensure complete privacy to their information. Demographic information was also sought and was used to know the age of each participant. Then the Collett-Lester fear of death scale and the religiosity scale were administered one by one to the participants and after completion they were taken back. The whole procedure was completed in 20-30 minutes. Then the participants were debriefed about the study using debriefing sheet.

6 RESULTS

For data analysis, Statistica 6.0 was used in this study [17]. Collett-Lester fear of death scale provided five different measures on death anxiety. These measures included death anxiety regarding death of self, death of others, dying of self, dying of others, and total. For analysis we used Statistica 6.0 and we applied Two-Way Anova to look at all these five measures one by one, while t-test for gender differences.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N=120) Statistics

Variables	Adolescents	Middle Age	Old Age
Education			
Matric	5(12.5%)	10(25%)	15(37.5%)
F.A	35(87.5%)	15(37.5%)	15(37.5%)
B.A		15(37.5%)	10(25%)
Gender			
Men	20(50%)	20(50%)	20(50%)
Women	20(50%)	20(50%)	20(50%)
Age			
13-20 years	40(100%)		
35-59 years		40(100%)	
60 and above			40(100%)

Table 2.Two Way ANOVA of Age and Religiosity for Death of Self Subscale

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Age Group	1809.45	2	904.73	7.75*
Level of Religiosity	1470	1	1470.00	12.59*
Age Group * Level of Religiosity	108.45	2	54.23	0.46
Error	13307.3	114	116.73	

* $p < .005$

Table 2 shows the significant main effect of age group and level of religiosity in terms of death of self whereas no interaction of age group and level of religiosity.

For the death of self we found a significant main effect of age $F(2, 114) = 7.75$, $p < 0.0007$. Adolescents ($M = 1.63$, $SE = 1.69$) expressed significantly ($p < .02$) higher death anxiety levels for their own death compared to middle aged ($M = -5.2$, $SE = 1.63$) and significantly ($p < .0008$) higher than old aged ($M = -7.53$, $SE = 2.01$). There were no statistical differences between middle age and old age groups. See figure 1 for a comparison of means.

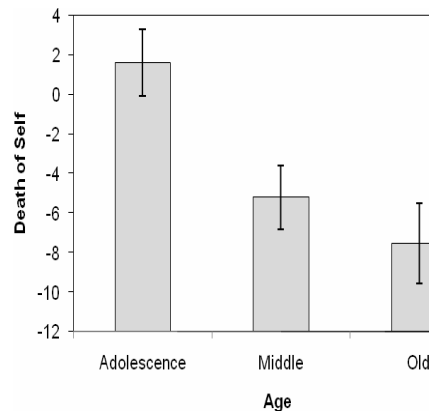


Figure. 1.Death anxiety score for Death of Self showed mean differences among adolescence, middle aged, and old aged. Standard errors bars represent ± 1 standard error of mean, and are the same in all other figures in this thesis, unless otherwise stated

We also found a significant main effect of Religiosity for Death of Self $F(1, 114) = 12.59$, $p < .0008$. People with high religiosity ($M = -7.2$, $SE = 1.53$) expressed lower levels of death anxiety for Death of Self than people with low religiosity ($M = -0.2$, $SE = 1.41$). See figure 2. We found no interaction between age and religiosity for Death of Self.

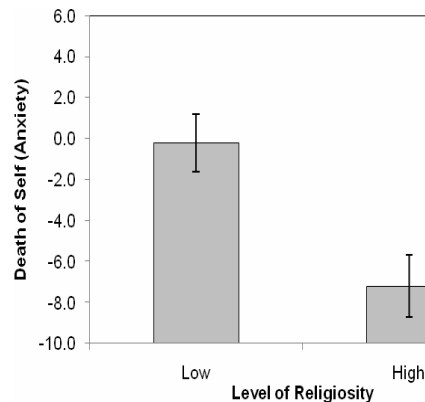


Figure. 2.Death anxiety scores for Death of Self across high and low Religiosity

For Death of Others we once again found the main effect of age $F(2, 114) = 6.53$, $p < 0.002$. Post-hoc tests revealed that anxiety in adolescents ($M = 4.98$, $SE = 1.27$) was significantly ($p < .001$) higher than old aged ($M = -14.8$, $SE = 1.28$) but was not different than middle aged ($M = 2.23$, $SE = 1.21$). The middle and

old age groups were not statistically different, see figure 3. No main effect of religiosity or interaction was found to be significant.

Table 3.Two Way ANOVA of Age and Religiosity for Death of Others Subscale

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Age Group	838.07	2.00	419.03	6.53*
Level of Religiosity	27.08	1.00	27.08	0.42
Age Group*Level of Religiosity	12.80	2.00	6.40	0.10
Error	7316.05	114.0	64.18	

* $p < .005$

Table 3 shows the significant main effect of age group in terms of death of others whereas no main effect of level of religiosity and no interaction of age group and level of religiosity.

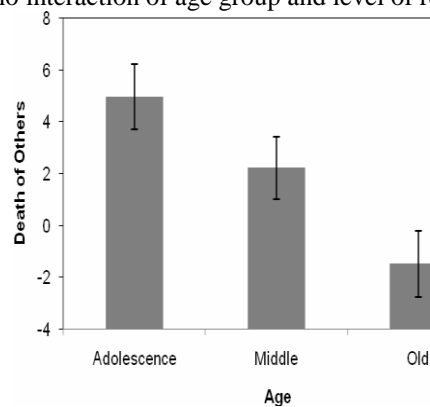


Figure. 3.Death anxiety score for Death of Others showed mean differences among adolescence, middle aged, and old aged individuals

We also found a significant main effect of Age Groups for Dying of Self $F(2, 114) = 3.61, p < .01$, suggesting that death anxiety resulting from Dying of Self in adolescent ($M = 3.03, SE = 1.11$) was comparable to middle aged ($M = 3.33, SE = 0.78$) and old aged ($M = -0.58, SE = 1.42$) individuals, however anxiety between middle aged people was significantly ($p < .046$) higher than old aged people. See figure 4. No main effect of religiosity or interaction between age and religiosity was found to be significant.

Table 4.Two Way ANOVA of Age and Religiosity for Dying of Self Subscale

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Age Group	376.80	2.00	188.40	3.61*
Level of Religiosity	31.01	1.00	31.01	0.59
Age Group*Level of Religiosity	44.07	2.00	22.03	0.42
Error	5956.45	114.00	52.25	

* $p < .05$

Table 4 shows the significant main effect of age group in terms of dying of self whereas no main effect of level of religiosity and no interaction of age group and level of religiosity.

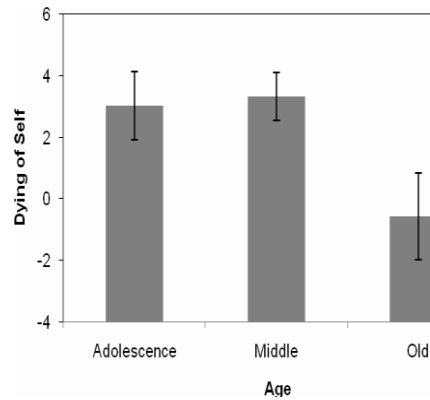


Figure. 4.Death anxiety score for Dying of Self showed mean differences among adolescence, middle aged, and old aged individuals

For Dying of Others no main effects or interactions were found to be statistically significant. And finally we ran a (3 X 2) Analysis of Variance on the total score. Representing a composite score of death anxiety in different age groups and their levels of religiosity, we found a significant main effect of age, $F(2, 114) = 10.83, p < .0001$. Adolescents ($M = 9.58, SE = 3.51$) expressed significantly ($p < .04$) higher death anxiety levels for total death anxiety scores compared to middle aged ($M = -2.7, SE = 2.64$) and significantly ($p < .0001$) higher than old aged ($M = -13.43, SE = 3.82$). See figure 5.

Table 5.Two Way ANOVA of Age and Religiosity for Total Death Anxiety Score

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Age Group	10596.02	2.00	5298.01	10.82**
Level of Religiosity	2270.70	1.00	2270.70	4.64*
Age Group*Level of Religiosity	341.25	2.00	170.63	0.35
Error	55840.00	114.00	489.83	

** $p < .0005$, * $p < .005$

Table 5 shows the significant main effect of age group and level of religiosity in terms of total death anxiety whereas no interaction of age group and level of religiosity.

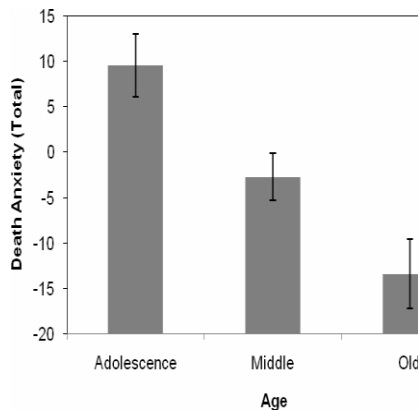


Figure. 5.Death anxiety total (composite) score showed mean differences among adolescence, middle aged, and old aged individuals

We also found a significant main effect of Religiosity, $F(1, 114) = 4.64, p < .03$. Individuals with high religiosity ($M = 2.17, SE = 3.03$) expressed higher total death anxiety than low religiosity group ($M = -6.53, SE = 3.12$), see figure 6 below. No significant interaction was found between age and religiosity.

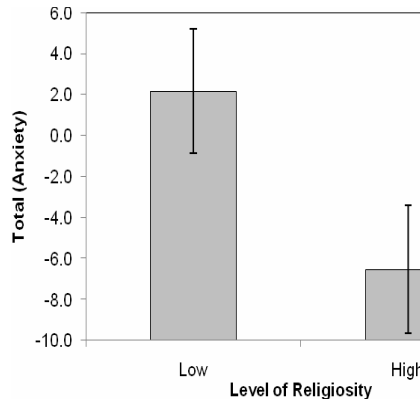


Figure. 6.Death anxiety scores (total) across high and low Religiosity

No main effect of gender was found for all the death anxiety scores except for dying of self. For dying of self, analysis (t-test independent samples) showed that anxiety in girls/women ($M = 3.25$, $SE = 0.90$) was significantly higher ($p < .04$) as compared to boys/men ($M = 0.60$, $SE = 0.97$), see figure 7 below.

Table 6.Means, Standard deviations and t-value of Men ($N=60$) and Women ($N=60$) for Dying of Self Subscale

Gender	M	SD	t
Men	0.6	6.97	2.83*
Women	3.25	7.51	

$df = 118$, $*p < .05$

Table 6 shows that Men ($M = 0.6$, $SD = 6.97$) scored lower on dying of self as compared to Women ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 7.51$), showing a significant difference between men and women.

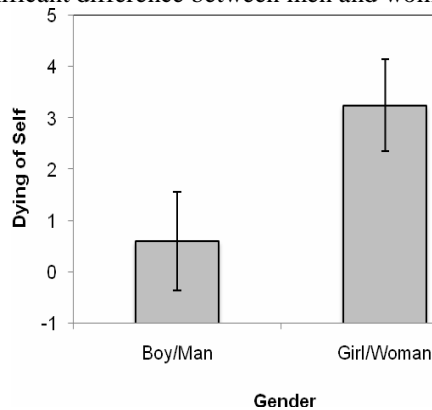


Figure. 7.Death anxiety scores for 'dying of self' showed that girls/women show significantly higher anxiety than boys/men

7 DISCUSSION

We explored the relationship of age and religiosity with death anxiety and for this purpose used fear of death scale and its four subscales. The results of the study showed that death anxiety was higher in Collett-Lester adolescents compared to middle- and old-aged groups. Fear of death was higher in people having low level of religiosity than high and this fear was higher in women compared to men.

We claimed that people with low level of religiosity would suffer from more fear of death than the people having high level of religiosity. This hypothesis was supported by the results on the subscale of Death of Self as well as on total Death Anxiety. This finding is consistent with a study carried out in

Pakistan by Suhail and Akram [8]. They administered Templer Death Anxiety Scale, Collett-Lester Fear of death Scale and Scale of Religious Index on 132 individuals and established that people having low levels of religiosity scored higher on death anxiety as compared to those having high religiosity levels. They and we propose that religion teaches people a set of religious ideas that include extension of life after they die and that afterlife is blessed by being in heaven if the individual has followed a virtuous life. So people who believe in religion experience lower death anxiety because of expectations of better afterlife. This they can achieve by adhering to the religious doctrines focusing on forgiveness for all past wrong deeds. Resultantly, people who have strong intrinsic religious beliefs suffer less from the fear of death.

For Death of Self, Death of Others, Dying of Self and Total scores we found an age effect, adolescents scored higher than the middle- and old-aged people. Russac, Gatliff, Reece, and Spottswood conducted two studies to measure the fear of death in adult years of human life [7]. Different tests were used in both studies, with Collett-Lester fear of death scale in the first study and Templer Death Anxiety scale in the second study. Results of both these studies indicated that death anxiety was at its peak in both men and women during their 20s and after that their death anxiety declined significantly. Wu, Tang, and Kwok conducted interviews on 237 old aged people (60 to 91 years) of China to determine their cognitive and emotional reactions towards death [18]. The results of the study indicated that greater death anxiety was associated with younger age i.e. close to 60 years, while for increasing old age death anxiety lowered. One common view about old age is that they always have some degree of preparation to face their death as they have seen a lot of deaths and funerals throughout their lives, so they do not experience high death anxiety. Moreover they do not have careers to pursue or families to raise, thus generally have less death anxiety [19]. This confirmed our second hypothesis that adolescents will be having high death anxiety as compared to the middle and old aged people.

The third hypothesis of the research i.e. women experience more death anxiety than men was confirmed only for one subscale (Dying of Self) of death anxiety. Even though, in our study, this gender difference was only for one subscale, but the finding that women suffered more than men from death anxiety has also been confirmed by the findings of other researches as visible in a research conducted by Chuin, and Choo [20]. They conducted a survey on 320 participants who were asked to complete Templer Death Anxiety Scale and Age Universal Religious Orientation Scale. They found noteworthy sex dissimilarity in fear of death with women scoring higher anxiety than men on death anxiety.

8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we add that our study found and replicated a number of previous studies. It seems that death is an inevitable phenomenon; people who subscribe to religious ideas suffer less on the hands of fear from death than the less religious ones. Our study found that participants had higher intrinsic religiosity and perhaps took death as an internal affair. This may have marshaled impetus to do good or bad in their worldly life. Now if you were not religious, age would decline the fear of death in time. Personal experiences of losing friends, retirement, and raising a family are all done with and thus the older individuals prepare themselves for the eventual end. Women tend to suffer from death anxiety more than men, although not on all measures we investigated but nevertheless points out a gender difference that may exist with regards to death anxiety. We can only speculate that this gender difference results from being a woman and belonging to the 'weaker' gender. In that perspective fear of death may be more intense than their counterparts.

9 Limitations and Suggestions

The results of the current study would have been clearer and reliable if it could have been extended to a larger and diversified sample. Scales were from western culture and sample was from eastern culture, eliminating this difference would have revealed more clear results.

In future, other demographic variables like ethnicity should also be studied. This was a quantitative research about death anxiety; in future, a qualitative approach should also be used to determine the phenomenon. In future, scales should be developed that should be appropriate with our culture and research should be conducted using the native scales. Cultural issues regarding death anxiety should also be taken into account.

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