

# IMPACT OF FEAR OF PERSONAL DEATH ON LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG OLD AGE PEOPLE

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## Abstract

The impact of fear of personal death on life satisfaction among old age people has been studied. 60 samples were taken from the age group of 65-75 years (30 males and 30 females) from the urban areas of Delhi. Fear of Personal Death Scale by Dr. M. Rajamanickam (1999) and Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Prof. Hardeo Ojha (2005) were used to evaluate fear of personal death and life satisfaction respectively among the elderly. Results indicate low fear or absence of fear of personal death in old age (Mean=94.18, SD=25.51), with above average life satisfaction (Mean=67.65, SD=7.37). The levels of life satisfaction have been found to have a negative correlation with the fear of personal death thus indicating that these variables are inversely correlated in old age persons. No significant gender difference has been found among old age males and females. The findings of the study may be extended to fostering a more supportive environment and better acceptance related to death in elderly for a higher level of life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** old age, death, fear of death, life satisfaction, development.

## INTRODUCTION

Death may be defined as the total cessation of life processes that eventually occurs in all living organisms [1]. Generally, death is considered as the end of a living creature [2]. It is considered to be inevitable and is seen as the final task in the development process of a human being [2].

The concept of human death has always been surrounded by mystery and superstition, and its precise definition remains controversial, differing according to culture and legal systems [1]. In some cultures, the subject of death is considered extremely sensitive and fear arousing, and hence discussions around it tend to be prohibited [2]. An individual tends to be afraid of death as it interferes with one's

enjoyment and pleasures of life and destroys all hopes and ambitions [2].

The fear of death and dying is quite common, and most people fear death to varying degrees [3]. This fear of death or the fear of the dying process is known as Thanatophobia [4]. The fear of death may result from the anticipation of pain and suffering related to death, fears of the unknown and the loss of control, the idea that they will completely cease to exist after death occurs, and the worry of what will happen to loved ones and those entrusted to the individual's care post dying [3].

The aging process includes, in addition to changes in one's appearance, cognitive decline, or increased generalized aches and pains, moving inevitably closer to death [5]. Studies suggest that lower ego integrity, more physical

problems, and more psychological problems are predictive of higher levels of fear of death in elderly people [6].

According to Ruut Veenhoven (1996), life satisfaction may be defined as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole. In other words, it refers to how much the person likes the life he/she leads. In general, life satisfaction remains relatively high in old age [7]. Research suggests that changes in life satisfaction were better predicted by years from death than age, thus indicating that the physical and cognitive decline that often take place as individuals near death are much more impactful on life satisfaction than the chronological age [8].

Although few, studies in this area have focused on the association between life satisfaction and fear and anxiety related to death. Roshani, K. (2012), Flint, G. A. et al (1983) and Taghiabadi, M., et al (2017) found in their respective studies that there exists a significant negative relationship between life satisfaction in the elderly and death anxiety [9,10,11]. Similar findings were reported in a study by Moreno, R.P., et al. (2009) to investigate the factors associated with death anxiety among elderly living in and out of institution in Spain. They found that life satisfaction is inversely associated with death anxiety [12]. Given and Range (1990) conducted a study to assess the relationship between satisfaction with life and death anxiety in two elderly groups - those living in nursing home and those living at their own home. They found that the elderly with higher life satisfaction reported lower levels of death anxiety and exhibited a more positive attitude towards ageing and vice versa. Their living location, however, seemed to play no role in life satisfaction and death anxiety [13]. Similar findings were reported in the study carried out by Imanzadeh, A. & Hamrazdeh, M. (2018) to understand the factors regarding ageing-related issues. They found that the obstacles and problems that play a deterring and negative role in old age include memory impairment and remembering problems, anxiety of death, physical impairment and sleep disorders [14]. Kim, H. K., & Kim, J. H. (2020) also suggested through their research findings

that the better prepared elderly are toward the concept of death, including lower death anxiety levels, the higher their reported satisfaction with life [15].

In order to understand the gender differences among elderly males and females, Kang, T.K. (2013) carried out a study to assess life satisfaction as a correlate of death anxiety among elderly. They found that in addition to a significant negative correlation between the two variables, there existed significant differences among elderly males and females [16].

So, the purpose of the present study is to assess the impact of fear of personal death on life satisfaction among old age people.

## Method

### Objectives

- To assess the fear of personal death among old age people
- To evaluate the level of life satisfaction among elderly
- To assess the impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age persons
- To determine the gender differences in the impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age group

### Hypotheses

- There will be a significant impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age persons
- There will be a significant gender difference in the impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age group

### Sample

- The total sample size for the current study was 60 (N=60), belonging to the old age group (65-75 years).

- Equal number of male and female subjects were chosen.

- Sampling design was random sampling.

- Inclusion Criteria –

o Persons belonging to old age (65-75 years)

o Both males and females

o Persons who can read and write

- Exclusion Criteria –

o Persons younger than 65 years

o Persons older than 75 years

o Persons who are unwilling to participate

o Persons who are unable to read and write

o Persons having physical and mental illness

Tools

- Fear of Personal Death Scale developed by Dr. M. Rajamanickam (1999) was used to measure the strength of fear of their own death among old age people. The scale consists of 40 items, requiring a response on a 5-point scale. These items measure the fear of personal death across 7 dimensions.

- The level of life satisfaction among old age subjects was measured using Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Prof. Hardeo Ojha (2005). The scale consists of 20 items which require responses on a 5-point scale.

Procedure – The subjects were made to feel comfortable and rapport formation was done with each participant before the questionnaire was given out to them. They were explained about the procedure and confidentiality was ensured. A consent for participation was also sought by the subjects. The questionnaires were then handed out to them to respond to them.

Statistical Tools

- Mean

- Standard Deviation

- t-test

- Correlation

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 – *Tabular representation of Mean and Standard Deviation of Males and Females on Fear of Personal Death*

	MALES	FEMALES
	64	85
	125	114
	65	43
	42	98
	127	62
	90	127
	90	100
	79	88
	120	97
	95	98
	103	107
	154	106
	54	107
	70	100
	64	132
	99	129
	65	125
	61	85
	127	99
	90	62
	90	98
	79	62
	106	90
	95	97
	103	101
	154	106
	68	107
	70	98
	64	122
	64	129
<b>Mean</b>	89.23	99.13
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	28.58	21.34
<b>OVERALL MEAN</b>	94.18	
<b>OVERALL SD</b>	25.51	

Table 2 – Tabular representation of Mean and Standard Deviation of Males and Females on Life Satisfaction

MALES	FEMALES
79	57
73	79
69	75
65	66
61	69
66	68
72	64
61	71
43	69
59	67
70	70
68	70
83	47
69	74
75	66

78	65	
67	66	
68	59	
60	73	
66	76	
72	68	
63	69	
59	71	
59	67	
70	70	
69	58	
81	57	
70	74	
79	66	
69	65	
<b>Mean</b>	68.1	67.2
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	8.16	6.59
<b>OVERALL MEAN</b>	67.65	
<b>OVERALL SD</b>	7.37	

Table 3 – Tabular representation of correlation between Fear of Personal Death and Life Satisfaction

	Males	Females	Overall
Correlation	-0.376	-0.247	-0.33
Significance	Significant at the 0.05 level	Not Significant	Significant at the 0.01 level

Table 4 – Tabular representation of comparison between Means in Males and Females on Fear of Personal Death and Life Satisfaction

	Fear of Personal Death	Life Satisfaction
p-value	0.134	0.64
Significance	Not significant	Not Significant

#### Discussion

The results indicate the absence of fear of personal death in 60% respondents belonging to old age group (Mean=94.18, SD=25.51). Higher fear related to personal death have been reported in old age females (Mean=99.13), as compared to old age male subjects (Mean=89.23). Elderly females have been found to exhibit more stable patterns with respect to fear of personal death (SD=21.34) in comparison to elderly males (SD=28.58). The difference in mean values of fear of personal

death between old age males and females has not been found to be statistically significant ( $p=0.134$ ), and thus may be attributed that the difference in mean values is due to chance factor. The most commonly reported attributions for fear of death are reaction to death and deprivation of social attachments.

The presence of low levels of death anxiety among elderly in the present study confirms findings of previous studies by Sinoff, G. (2017), who concluded that death anxiety is usually absent in the elderly and Wong, P. et al (1994) who found that elderly reported lower mean score of fear of death than other attitudes of death [17,18]. Iverach, L. et al (2014) also reported that older people do not typically report higher death anxiety than younger people. [19]. The finding that gender does not play a major role in death anxiety among elderly is also in agreement with previous findings by Xie, Y. & Liu, B. (2022), and Azeem, F. & Naz, M.A. (2015) who concluded that both elderly men and women reported

equal levels of death anxiety [20,21]. Lockhart, L.K. et al (2001) also found that gender did not significantly predict attitudes related to death [22]. Assari, S. & Lankarani, M.M. (2016) reported that although gender did not have any direct significant effects on death anxiety, it could affect other correlates of death anxiety, which could explain the presence of high variability among the sample population [23]. The low level of death anxiety may be contributed to by other psychosocial factors of the old age people who were the respondents of the present study and it has been found similar to both the genders.

With regards to the levels of life satisfaction among old age people, 83.33% respondents reported experiencing above average and high levels of life satisfaction (Mean=67.65, SD=7.37). Old age males obtained a higher mean score in levels of life satisfaction (Mean=68.1) as compared to old age females (Mean=67.2). Elderly females have been seen as exhibiting more stable patterns in relation to life satisfaction (SD=6.59) in comparison to elderly males (SD=8.16). The difference in mean values of life satisfaction between old age males and females has not been found to be statistically significant ( $p=0.64$ ) and it may be inferred that the difference between male and female subjects is due to chance factor which has been reflected from their mean scores.

The finding of above average levels of life satisfaction are in agreement with studies by Leeson, P.J. et al (2018), through which they found that elderly reported feeling as satisfied as when they were younger [24]. Sposito, G. et al (2013) also reported that older individuals have better satisfaction with life, whereas, Raj, D. et al (2014), in their study, found that a majority of elderly people tend to experience a moderate level of life satisfaction [25,26]. The current research finding that gender does not bear significant influence over life satisfaction levels among the elderly is consistent with previous findings by Suganya, S. et al (2018) and Joseph, J. et al (2014), which stated that gender does not have a major influence over levels of life satisfaction in old age [27,28]. High level of life satisfaction among the old age people of the present study may be

contributed to by their lifestyle as well as their accomplishments in earlier stages of lifespan and it has also reflected in both the genders, which has revealed from the lack of significant differences from their mean scores.

The results of the present study suggested a moderate negative correlation between the levels of life satisfaction and fear of personal death (overall= -0.33 ,  $r_{\text{males}} = -0.376$ ,  $r_{\text{females}} = -0.247$ ), thus indicating that these variables are inversely correlated with each other. This finding is in agreement with previous studies done by Taghiabadi, M., et al (2017), Roshani, K. (2012), Kang T.K. (2013) in relation to the fear of death and life satisfaction being inversely correlated with each other [9,10,16]. The current study found moderate negative correlation between fear of personal death and life satisfaction among the elderly. The present study reports that an increase in fear of death adversely affects the level of life satisfaction among elderly, which confirms the findings of Karabağ Aydın, A. & Fidan, H. (2022) and White, W. & Handal, P.J. (1991) [29,30].

The overall findings suggest that old age people experience low fear of personal death and high levels of life satisfaction, and that these two variables are negatively correlated with one another. It has also been found that gender is not a mediating factor in the influence of fear of personal death on life satisfaction among the elderly, which agrees with the previous findings of Xie, Y. & Liu, B. (2022), who concluded that gender did not bear a significant moderating effect on the influence of life satisfaction and death anxiety on each other among elderly [31].

## Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to assess the impact of fear of personal death on life satisfaction among old age people. From the analysis it has been found that the hypotheses that there will be a significant impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age persons has been found to be true as high levels of death anxiety have been

found to be associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. Hence the alternate hypothesis has been accepted.

In case of the second hypothesis that there will be a significant gender difference in the impact of fear of personal death on the level of life satisfaction among old age group has not been found to be true as, although the mean values of fear of personal death are higher and those of life satisfaction lower in elderly females as compared to their male counterparts. Hence, the alternate hypothesis has been rejected and the null hypothesis has been accepted in this case.

From the overall discussion, it can be concluded that there is a significant impact of fear of personal death on the levels of life satisfaction among old age people, and the impact is similar for all elderly irrespective of their gender in the present study. So, the title of the present study is very apt and justified.

#### Suggestions:

- This study helps in developing a specific profile for the aged that would aid in better understanding with respect to the geriatric population.
- The findings of the study may be used to create intervention programs for the aged that aim to enhance their life satisfaction by eliminating fears related to death.
- The findings of the present study may be utilized to improve the mental health and thereby enhance the life span of the elderly at the very onset of old age.

#### Limitations:

- This study may be conducted with a larger and geographically spread-out sample for a more comprehensive understanding of the elderly population.
- Other correlates of fear of death and life satisfaction may be included in future studies.

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