

## Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new corona virus called SARS-CoV-2. World Health Organization first learned of this new virus on 31 December 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. Among those who develop symptoms, most (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing hospital treatment. About 15% become seriously ill and require oxygen and 5% become critically ill and need intensive care. Complications leading to death may include respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and septic shock, injury of the heart, liver or kidneys. In rare situations, children can develop a severe inflammatory syndrome a few weeks after infection. The purpose of this study is to analyse Stress and Death anxiety among workers and non-workers. Samples (N=100) were collected from Thrissur district in Kerala. Perceived Stress Scale and Death anxiety scale were used as measures to collect the data. Based on the results, we conclude that Stress is positively correlates with Death anxiety. There is no difference in Stress with respect to people's work status and gender and there is a significant difference in death anxiety with respect to work status and gender. Non-workers and males have high Death anxiety than workers and females.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Death anxiety, workers and non- workers, Covid-19 Pandemic*

COVID-19 is brought on by a brand-new corona virus known as SARS-CoV-2. Following a report of a cluster of instances of "viral pneumonia" in Wuhan, People's Republic of China, the World Health Organisation first became aware of this new virus on December 31, 2019. It has impacted every social setting and shaped our daily schedules, even those at work. Stressful events and anxiety brought on by the pandemic's close approach to death have affected all professionals. Stress is a state of pressure and strain on the emotions. A form of psychological anguish is stress. A small amount of stress may be desirable, helpful, and even healthy. Positive stress enhances athletic performance. Additionally, it affects motivation, environmental sensitivity, and adaption. But too much stress might hurt your body. Stress can raise the chance of strokes, heart attacks, ulcers, mental diseases like depression, as well as the aggravation of a pre-existing ailment. The morbid, abnormal, or enduring fear of dying or passing away is known as death anxiety. It is also known as

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## **Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic**

thanatophobia, which is the dread of death or the dead. Higher degrees of death anxiety are correlated with worse ego integrity, more somatic issues, and more psychological issues.

Covid-19 epidemic may have significantly altered many people's life. It changed daily schedules, financial strains, and social isolation. Worries about becoming sick, how long the epidemic will endure, if their jobs will be disrupted, and what the future holds are increasing quickly. Employment is a crucial aspect of life because it not only gives people the means to support themselves and raise their standard of living, but it also gives them a sense of confidence and self-worth. During the covid-19 lockdowns, many people lost their jobs, and those who were unemployed displayed emotional and financial distress, as shown by increased symptoms of anxiety and stress.

It is crucial to identify the issues faced by both workers and non-workers who approach life with excitement and vigour and have many goals for the future, as well as to take the necessary actions. Hence, the purpose of the study is to ascertain the variations in these variables among workers and non-workers, as well as the link between stress and death anxiety.

COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a global surge in anxiety and psychological distress, particularly among healthcare workers (HCWs). This review synthesizes findings from several studies examining the psychological impact of the pandemic on HCWs and the prevalence of death anxiety.

Rachel and Ross (2020) highlight the profound increase in death anxiety worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They emphasize the causal role of fear of death in exacerbating various mental health conditions. The pandemic has not only heightened personal fear of mortality but has also amplified concerns about the well-being of others.

Sahin's (2020) study in Turkey underscores the significant mental health burden faced by HCWs during the pandemic. High levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress symptoms were reported among HCWs, with specific risk factors such as gender, psychiatric history, frontline work, and COVID-19 testing exacerbating these issues.

Lazaro et al. (2020) reveals alarming levels of death anxiety among the general population, with a notable emphasis on fear of the death process and fear for the mortality of others. These findings suggest that the pandemic has not only heightened personal mortality concerns but has also intensified empathetic distress regarding the well-being of loved ones and strangers alike.

Sungan's (2020) study in Malawi sheds light on the pervasive anxiety experienced by nurses, highlighting functional impairment due to COVID-19-related stressors. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to support the mental health of frontline healthcare workers in resource-constrained settings.

Shakil et al.'s (2021) investigation explores the relationship between work status, psychological distress, and death anxiety during the pandemic. Their findings suggest that non-working individuals experience heightened death anxiety and psychological distress compared to their working counterparts. This underscores the complex interplay between employment status, mental health, and existential concerns during times of crisis.

## **Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic**

### ***Need and Significance of the study***

The aim of this study is to investigate the levels of stress and death anxiety among individuals categorized as workers and non-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a notable difference in stress and death anxiety between these two groups, prompting an exploration into which group experiences higher levels of stress and death anxiety amid the pandemic. By examining stress and death anxiety based on occupational status, this research seeks to determine whether one's occupation influences their experience of stress and death anxiety during the pandemic. Given the increased interaction with the external environment among working individuals compared to non-workers, the study focuses on understanding how workers navigate challenges outside their homes and manage stressors encountered in their professional roles amidst the pandemic. Through this investigation, the research aims to provide insights into the distinct stress and death anxiety dynamics experienced by workers and non-workers during the ongoing pandemic situation.

### ***Definitions of key terms***

#### **Stress**

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses.

#### **Death Anxiety**

Death anxiety refers to the fear of and anxiety related to the anticipation, and awareness, of dying, death, and nonexistence that people felt during the COVID-19 pandemic. It typically includes emotional, cognitive, and motivational components that vary according to a person's stage of development and socio-cultural life experiences.

#### **Workers**

Worker is a person or animal that performs a specific or necessary task or who completes tasks in a certain way. Here we look at the person who is doing his work even in the pandemic condition.

#### **Non-workers**

People who are not working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here we look at the person who is not working as well as losing his/her job due to the pandemic.

### ***Objectives***

1. To study the significant difference in Stress among workers and non-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To study the significant difference in Death anxiety among workers and non-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To study the significant difference in Stress with respect to gender during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To study the significant difference in Death anxiety with respect to gender during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. To study the relationship between Stress and Death anxiety among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Problem***

To study the Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

### *Hypotheses*

1. There will be a significant difference in Stress among workers and non-workers during Covid-19 pandemic.
2. There will be a significant difference in Death anxiety among workers and non-workers during Covid-19 pandemic
3. There will be a significant difference in Stress with respect to gender during Covid-19 pandemic.
4. There will be a significant difference in Death anxiety with respect to gender during Covid-19 pandemic.
5. There will be a significant relationship between Stress and Death anxiety among adults during Covid-19 pandemic.

### **METHOD**

#### *Participants*

The study comprised a sample of 100 participants, with 46 classified as workers and 54 as non-workers, selected using a convenient sampling method from Thrissur district, Kerala. The majority of participants fell within the 21-40 age range. Participants were divided into two groups based on their employment status, with 46 individuals categorized as workers and 54 as non-workers. Among participants who reported being in a relationship, the average duration was between 1-5 years.

#### *Instruments*

1. **The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)**, developed by Sheldon Cohen in 1983, assesses individuals' perceptions of stress levels with 10 items. It exhibits high reliability, with reported test-retest coefficients consistently above 0.80 and internal consistency coefficients typically exceeding 0.70. Concurrent validity is strong, correlating significantly with other measures of stress and related constructs. The PSS directly queries respondents about their current stress levels, offering clear response options and facilitating easy comprehension. Overall, the PSS serves as a valuable tool for comprehensively assessing perceived stress levels, providing insights into individuals' psychological states, and guiding interventions tailored to address stress-related concerns.
2. **The Death Anxiety Scale (DAS)**, introduced by Templer in 1970, evaluates death anxiety with 15 true/false statements. The scale demonstrates strong reliability, with a reported test-retest reliability of 0.83 and an internal consistency coefficient typically exceeding 0.70. Moreover, the DAS exhibits good concurrent validity, correlating significantly with other measures of fear of death and related constructs. Its effectiveness in distinguishing between individuals expressing high death anxiety and control groups further validates its utility. The DAS provides valuable insights into individuals' attitudes towards mortality and guides interventions aimed at addressing existential concerns.

#### *Procedure*

The data collection was mainly done from workers and non-workers through online. Two scales are mainly considered i.e., Perceived stress scale and death anxiety scale. A good rapport was established with the participant and after that they were given the general instructions and the purpose of the study was explained. Assurance was given to each, that the information gathered from them would be used only for research purpose and identity would be kept confidential. Consent from the participants was collected prior to participation. The

## Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic

subject is asked to finish the questionnaire and after completion participants were asked to recheck for omissions and then it was collected back.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1 - Combined Summary of t-tests for Comparing Stress and Death Anxiety**

Variable	Group 1	N	Mean	SD	Group 2	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig
Stress	Workers	46	17.33	6.000	Non-workers	54	18.15	4.692	0.768	>0.05
Death Anxiety	Workers	46	5.85	3.003	Non-workers	54	7.72	2.543	3.38	<0.01
Stress	Male	59	18.15	5.423	Female	41	17.22	5.189	0.861	>0.05
Variable	Group 1	N	Mean	SD	Group 2	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig
Death Anxiety	Male	59	7.59	2.60	Female	41	5.80	3.02	3.161	<0.05

The comparison of stress levels between workers and non-workers during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed no statistically significant difference, as evidenced by a t-value of 0.768 ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that both groups experienced similar levels of stress, potentially influenced by the pervasive impact of the pandemic on daily life, concerns about health and safety, and disruptions to routines. Although, when examining death anxiety, a significant difference emerged between workers and non-workers. Non-workers exhibited significantly higher levels of death anxiety compared to workers, as indicated by a t-value of 3.38 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This heightened anxiety among non-workers may be attributed to factors such as social isolation, uncertainty about the future, and the psychological toll of prolonged periods without employment. Conversely, no significant differences were found in stress levels between males and females ( $t = 0.861$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that both genders experienced comparable levels of stress during the pandemic. Although, males demonstrated significantly higher levels of death anxiety compared to females, with a t-value of 3.161 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding may be linked to higher COVID-19 morbidity and mortality rates among males, as well as concerns about financial stability and employment. These results underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic factors, gender dynamics, and mental health outcomes during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address varying levels of stress and anxiety among different population groups.

**Table 2- Summary of Correlation Between Stress and Death Anxiety Among Adults During COVID-19 Pandemic**

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation Coefficient
Stress	17.77	5.322	
Death Anxiety	6.86	2.906	0.228*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

The table 2 presents the summary of correlation between stress and death anxiety among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. The correlation coefficient between stress and death anxiety is 0.228, which is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This indicates a positive

## Stress and Death Anxiety Among Workers and Non-Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic

correlation between stress and death anxiety, implying that as stress levels increase, death anxiety also tends to increase. Research suggests that factors such as age, gender, and stressors play crucial roles in the severity of death anxiety. Individuals experiencing higher levels of stress may find it challenging to cope with adverse situations, leading to elevated levels of death anxiety. Conversely, lower levels of stress are associated with lower levels of death anxiety, as individuals tend to manage negative situations positively. These findings support the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between stress and death anxiety among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, previous research has highlighted the direct effects of stress and anxiety on depression during lockdown, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these psychological factors during times of crisis.

### CONCLUSION

The present study sheds light on the significant psychological impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly regarding stress and death anxiety among workers and non-workers. While no significant difference was found in stress levels between these groups, non-workers exhibited higher levels of death anxiety compared to workers. Additionally, gender differences were observed, with males showing higher death anxiety levels than females. Moreover, a positive correlation between stress and death anxiety among adults was identified, indicating that as stress levels increase, so does death anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of addressing mental health issues, providing awareness and counselling, and establishing support services, particularly for non-workers and males who may be more vulnerable to adverse psychological effects during such challenging times. However, it's essential to acknowledge the study's limitations, such as the small sample size and data collection constraints due to the pandemic, while also highlighting opportunities for future research to expand upon these findings and explore additional aspects of mental health in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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