

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

Noble Chacko<sup>1</sup>, Jesty Sunny<sup>2\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Death Anxiety is a condition that is associated with the fear of one's own death as well as that of others (Kubler, 1969). People with high levels of death anxiety are prone to stress, depression and sometimes to the death of individuals due to the alterations occurring in the body physiology (Cella & Tross, 1987). Studies show that death anxiety among cancer patients is higher than that of normal individuals (Massie, 2004) and it may decrease their chances of survival. The aim of the present investigation is to compare death anxiety among male cancer patients and female cancer patients. 90 cancer patients (Males=40, Females=40) are selected for the study through convenient sampling. Socio demographic data sheet and Death Anxiety Scale by (Dhar, Savita & Dhar, 1998) were used to collect the data. The data was analyzed by using student t-test. The result shows that there is high death anxiety among cancer patients. It is found that there is no significant difference in death anxiety among male and female cancer patients. It is observed that Death anxiety and related symptoms are common in cancer patients and there is no significant relationship between death anxiety among male and female cancer patients. Cancer patients with increased death anxieties, should be given psychological interventions along with proper medical care to increase their chances of survival.

**Keywords:** *Gender Difference, Death Anxiety, Cancer Patients*

Cancer is the major cause of death in the present generation (Grossman, Brooker, Michael & Kissane, 2018). Presently there are over hundreds of known cancer types. Cancer is a deadly disease characterized by the uncontrolled multiplication or growth of cells. Not all cancer is fatal but most of them are. Cancer patients are more often preoccupied with fear of death and the anxiety produced out of it may reduce the rate of prognosis (Nordin, Glimelius, 1999). Very often death is seen as something negative and is associated with sadness. The meaning attached to death is also a contributing factor to anxiety and related disorders. The meaning of death varies among individual to individual (Kubler, 1975). It is true that older people think about their death most frequently but they are less afraid of it. Many cancer patients

<sup>1</sup> (Assistant Professor, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Rajagiri P.O. Ernakulam, Kerala, India)

<sup>2</sup> (M.Sc. Psychology Student, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Rajagiri P.O. Ernakulam, Kerala, India)

\*Responding Author

Received: April 26, 2018; Revision Received: May 3, 2018; Accepted: June 15, 2018

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

accept the death and are ready to face it. It may be out of depression, hopelessness and pessimistic attitude towards life. For many cancer patients and general public, religious views help them to keep a positive attitude towards death (Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, & ThomasDobson, 1995; Templer, 1972.).

Fear of dying not only involves physiological factors, it also involves psychological factors (Nicholson, Byrne & Fears, 1994). According to Sigmund Freud (1915) death is indeed unimaginable, at bottom no one believes in his own death, in the unconscious everyone is convinced of his own immortality. When people become aware about the fact they have to die one day they become uncomfortable and it creates a level of anxiety in them. Death Anxiety is a condition that is associated with the fear and apprehension about one's own death (Kubler, 1969). The fear of death may have various impacts on human beings. For some it creates excessive anxiety as Kubler mentions.

Almost everyone has death anxiety but the level of death anxiety varies among individuals. The thing is that we are not aware of death always, so the anxiety is very low in most of the individuals. Death Anxiety is more in individuals over the age of 50. Thanatophobic and Necrophobic persons are prone to death anxiety. People with high levels of death anxiety are prone to stress, depression and sometimes to the death of individuals due to the alterations occurring in the body physiology (Cella & Tross, 1987).

According to the WHO Cancer Profile Country Survey 2014 it was identified that there are around 6, 83,800 deaths all around the world due to cancer. In that 3, 57,500 are men and 3, 26,300 are women. In men 18.3% of death is caused by Mouth and Oropharynx cancer and in women 21.5% of death is by Breast cancer. When coming to the Indian population 53,842 men are affected with Lip, Oral Cavity cancer and 53,725 are affected with Lung cancer. In the case of women 144,937 are with Breast cancer and 122,844 are with cervix uterus cancer. The risk factors in men are tobacco smoking which contributes to 25% of cancer in men. In women the risk factor is physical inactiveness contributing to 15.1% of cancer in women. In total tobacco contributes to 14% of cancer and physical inactiveness causes 12.1% of cancer. But the greatest proportion is not from these two. It is the Household solid fuel use that contributes to the greatest amount of risk factors with a contribution of 63% (WHO, 2014).

Based on the data between 2010 and 2012 from India approximately 39.6% of women and men will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime. In India it is estimated that 14.5 lakh people are living with cancer. Over 7 lakh new cases are being reported every year. Every year there are 5, 56,400 deaths due to cancer. 71% of all cancer deaths occur in the age group between 30 and 69. 70% of the global cancer is Lung cancer. Tobacco is linked with 20% of global cancer (Times of India, 2017).

Studies show that Cancer patients have more death anxiety than normal people (Massie, 2004). The main reason for this is the fact that people see cancer as a deadly disease and they think that once they are affected with cancer death will follow them sooner in spite of the fact

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

that there are many cancers that can be treated when identified at an earlier stage. In many cancer wards the death of one cancer patient is followed by the death of other patients in the same ward. The death of ward inmates has created an increased fear of death among cancer patients. This results in the alteration of their body physiology making them more prone to death. But we can avoid such conditions by identifying people with death anxiety and providing them with proper counseling and psychotherapies. Proper awareness programs may change misconceptions about cancer (Marina, 2013).

Cella & Tross (1987) in an attempt to cross-validate the results with cancer survivors and to test its sensitivity to illness related variables administered Death Anxiety Questionnaire with measures of general anxiety, depression, somatization and global psychological distress. Significant but weak to moderate inter-correlations confirmed that death anxiety is separate but related to general anxiety, depression, somatic distress and global psychological distress. Feroz et.al. (1987) studied death anxiety among early and advanced malignancy cancer patients and found that younger subjects (below 30 years) scored significantly higher on death anxiety than older subjects (above 50 years). Early malignancy subjects too scored significantly higher on death anxiety than advanced malignancy patients. Death anxiety was least affected by financial status.

Even though a consistent conclusion about gender difference in death anxiety cannot be drawn based on present literature, many researchers suggest that death anxiety is found more among women than men (Pierce., Cohen, Chambers, Jacqueline., Meade, 2007). Among the adolescent, adult and older women, the death anxiety is higher than their gender counterparts. The study will help the psycho oncologists, social workers, nurses and physicians to treat the cancer patients more effectively and with empathetic understanding.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Aim*

- To study gender difference in death anxiety among cancer patients.

### *Objective*

- To compare death anxiety among male and female cancer patients.

### *Hypothesis*

**Ho:** There is no significant difference between death anxiety among male & female cancer patients

### *Research Design*

This study is a descriptive research which is used to describe the prevalence of people in cancer and death anxiety. The population used for the study is cancer patients from Ernakulam district. Questionnaire method was chosen. The sampling method used was convenient sampling. Those who met the inclusion criteria were selected for the study and the

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

sample size is 80. To test the hypothesis i.e. to compare the death anxiety among female and male cancer patients, t- test is used.

### *Instruments*

Instruments used to conduct the study were Socio-demographic data sheet prepared by the authors and Death Anxiety Scale (DAS-DMD) developed by Upinder Dhar, Savita Mehta & Santhosh Dhar for measuring the death anxiety among cancer patients.

### *Inclusion Criteria*

Persons who are affected with cancer from Ernakulum District can be included in the study. Participants should be able to read and write English. People with known Mental Disorders and with serious Physical Illness or Injuries other than cancer will not be included in the study

### *Definition of Variables*

#### *1, Conceptual Definitions*

Cancer: A term for disease in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade nearby tissues (National Cancer Institute, 2014).

Death Anxiety: Death Anxiety is a condition that is associated with the fear and apprehension about one's own death as well as that of others (Kubler, 1969).

#### *2, Operational Definitions*

Cancer: Cancer is a fatal disease characterized by the uncontrollable growth and multiplication of cells in the body which spreads from one part of the body to another part.

Death Anxiety: Death Anxiety is a fear that is caused by the awareness that he/she will have to face death.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

*Table 1, Result of student t test comparing male and female cancer patients on their scores on death anxiety.*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig.
Male	40	3.9	1.55	76.39	0.057
Female	40	4.625	1.79		

The above table shows the result of the t test while comparing the death anxiety score of 40 female cancer patients and 40 male cancer patients. The study was conducted on 40 male & 40 female cancer patients. The mean and standard deviation of male cancer are is 3.9 & 4.625 respectively. And the mean and standard deviation of female cancer patients are 1.55 & 1.79 respectively. The t score is 0.057 therefore the hypothesis stating that there is a significant difference among male and female cancer patients is rejected. Studies indicate the possibility of high death anxiety among cancer patients (Feroz et.al.1987). The present study finds the presence of medium death anxiety among cancer patients. Among the youger cancer patients, there is significant difference in death anxiety on gender basis (Cotter, 2001; Neimeyer& van Brunt, 1995; Neimeyer, Bagley, & Moore, 1986) and some studies negate this gender

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

difference in death anxiety (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2003; Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999; Neimeyer, 1986). Another interesting issue of relevance is related to gender differences in intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Allport and Ross, 1967). For example, Wilkinson (2004) found that women scored higher than men on extrinsic religiosity. Little theoretical guidance to explain this difference is available. However, recent arguments have been made that religious orientation scales of Allport and Ross (1967) implicitly reflect American Protestant values by privileging private religious motivations over others, such as religion for social benefits or religion for comfort (Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005).

### CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to determine gender difference in death anxiety among male & female cancer patients. From the study it was found that there exists a medium level of death anxiety among male & female cancer patients. But there is no any significant difference in death anxiety among male & female cancer patients. If cancer patients with death anxiety are identified they should be given proper care & attention. The reason is that people with high death anxiety have psychological as well as physiological changes in them which reduces their chances of survival (Dreyer, Blatt & Bleyyer, 2002). By giving proper psychotherapies & counseling to such patients, we can enhance their life expectancy and also to provide a betterment in their life. The study is subject to certain limitations. Age difference was not kept constant in the sample for the study and the individual differences were evident in the group.

### REFERENCES

- Abdel-Khalek, A.M., & Lester, D. (2003). Death obsession in Kuwaiti and American college students. *Death Studies*, 27, 541-553.
- Allport, G.W., & Ross, J.M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 432-443.
- Alvarado, K.A., Templer, D.I., Bresler, C., & Thomas-Dobson, S. (1995). The relationship of religious variables to death depression and death anxiety. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 51, 202-205.
- Baum, S.K. and Boxley, R.L. (1984). Age Denial: Death denial in the elderly. *Death Education*, 8:419-423
- Bischof, L.J. (1976). *Adult Psychology*. New York: Harper and Row, 4:137-142
- Cancer. (2012). *Encyclopædia Britannica 2011 Ready Reference CD*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Cappon, D. (1978). *Attitudes of the ageing toward death*. *Essence*, 2:139-147
- Cohen, A. B., Hall, D. E., Koenig, H. G., & Meador, K. G. (2005a). Social versus individual motivation: Implications for normative definitions of religious orientation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9, 48-61.
- Cotter, R. P. (2001). High-risk behaviors in adolescence and their relationship to death anxiety and death personifications. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 61, 4446.
- Downey, Ann, M. (1984). Relationship of religiosity to death anxiety of middle-aged males. *Psychological reports*, 54:811-8222.

## Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients

- Dreyer ZE, Blatt J, Bleyer A. Late effects of childhood cancer and its treatment. In: Pizzo PA PD, ed. *Principles and Practice of Pediatric Oncology*. 4th ed. Philadelphia, Pa: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2002:1431-1461.
- Fortner, B. V., & Neimeyer, R. A. (1999). Death anxiety in older adults: A quantitative review. *Death Studies*, 23, 387–411.
- Grossman, C.H., Brooker. J., Michael, N., &Kissane, D.(2018). Death anxiety interventions in patients with advanced cancer: A systematic review. *Palliative Medicine*, 32(1), 172-184.
- Kelly,M.C. & Dubek,S.(1977).Attitudes toward death in aged persons.*Psychiatric Journal of the university of Ottawa*,2:181-184.
- Khanna ,N., Khanna, R & Sharma, R.G.(1988).A study on death anxiety.*Journal of Personality and Clinical Studies*,4:47-51.
- Kubler-Ross,E.(1969).*On Death and Dying*. NewYork:Macmillan.
- Lefton,LA.(1982).*Psychology*,2<sup>nd</sup>ed.USA:Allyn& Bacon.
- Marina, N. (2013). Long-term survivors of childhood cancer: the medical consequences of cure. *PediatrClin North Am*. 44:1021-1042.
- McCarthy,J.B. (1980). Death Anxiety.The Loss of the self. *USA:Gardner*. 79: 425-469.
- Neimer, R.A., Bagley, K.J., & Moore, M.K. (1986). Cognitive structre and death anxiety. *Death Studies*, 10, 273-288.
- Neimeyer, R. A., & Van Brunt, D. (1995). Death anxiety. In H. Wass& R. A. Neimeyer (Eds.), *Dying: Facing the facts* (3rd ed., pp. 49–88). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.
- Nicholson, H. S., Fears, T. R. & Byrne, J. (1994). Death during adulthood in survivors of childhood and adolescent cancer. *Cancer*. 73:3094-3102.
- Nordin, K., & Glimelius, B. (1999). Predicting delayed anxiety and depression in patients with gastrointestinal cancer. *Br J Cancer*, 79: 525-529.
- Pierce, J. D., Cohen, A.B., Chambers, J.A., & Meade, R.M. (2007). Gender differences in death anxiety and religious orientation among US high school and college students. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10(2), 143-150.
- Riegel, K.F. & Riegel.R.M.(1972).*Development, drop, and death*. *Development Psychology*, 6:306-319
- Sanders, J.F., Poole, T.E. & Rivero, W.T.(1980).Death anxiety among the elderly of college students.*Gerontologist*,16:232-236.
- Wass,H.(1977).*Views and opinions of elderly persons concerning death*. *Educational Gerontology*,2:15-26.
- Wilkinson, W. W. (2004). Religiosity, authoritarianism, and homophobia: A multidimensional approach. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 14, 55-67.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

**Conflict of Interests:** The author declared no conflict of interests.

**How to cite this article:** Chako N & Sunny J (2018). Gender Difference in Death Anxiety among Cancer Patients. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 6, (2), DIP: 18.01.050/20180602, DOI: 10.25215/0602.050