

Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, an effort has been made to study the impact of age and marital status on the degree of Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) of adult women of Ranchi town in Jharkhand, India. A total of 120, married and single (unmarried / divorcee / widow) adult women in the age range of 45 to 70 years were selected by incidental non probability method from Ranchi town. The Death Anxiety Scale by Thakur and Thakur was administered on the sample and it was found that age has no impact on the degree of Death Anxiety whereas marital status has significant impact on Death Anxiety. Combined impact of age and marital status is also significant.

Keywords: *Thanatophobia, Age, Marital status, Adult women, Ranchi*

Everyone in this universe is, to some extent, afraid of dying and certainly none of us would choose it. However this fear of dying in some people take to a point where it becomes an acute problem and day to day activities are hampered by this disturbing fear of death, then they are described as suffering from Thanatophobia or Death Anxiety– the full blown phobia of dying and death. Death anxiety has the potential to profoundly influence the human psyche. It is important to understand the reason behind it and recommend suitable psychological measures. The causes of death anxiety are not yet fully understood and there are lots of disagreements between psychologists studying the subject. One definition of death anxiety is a "feeling of dread, apprehension or solicitude (anxiety) when one thinks of the process of dying, or ceasing to 'be' (Kaur, Banerjee & Rani, 2015).

The word Thanatophobia comes from the word "Thanatos", the personification of death according to Greek mythology. Thanatophobia has been derived from Greek word "Thanatos" meaning phobia of death. This is persistent and extreme fear of death or dying without any logical explanation. Like in any other phobia, there is no specific universal cause or reason for Thanatophobia. Instead, various unique traumatic events might lead to the

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Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

development of this psychological disorder. In some cases, Thanatophobia may exist concomitantly along with other behavioral or psychological disorders. No one can escape the bitter truth that everyone will die someday. It's quite normal on one's part to be concerned of one's well being and fear deadly or threatening situations in life. It is quite common for Thanatophobia patients to develop closely related fears and phobias. The sufferers may exhibit fear of funeral homes, tombstones, as well as other common symbols of death as they can remind them of the primary phobia. Individuals may also experience fear of ghosts and other supernatural entities; this especially happens in people having Thanatophobia based on religious factors or beliefs.

As with all types of attitudes, many factors are involved in influencing and shaping an individual's death anxiety. Thus, it has come to no surprise to researchers that many variables could affect the degree to which an individual experiences death anxiety. These variables include age (Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999; Swanson & Byrd 1998), gender (Harding, Flannelly, Weaver, & Costa, 2005), religious beliefs (Kraft, Litwin & Barber, 1987; Spilka, Stout, Minton, Sizemore, 1977), and health (Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999). All of these variables affect people's experiences and it is these experiences that prompt people to re-evaluate and re-examine certain attitudes and beliefs that they hold (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005). It has been noted that death anxiety may neither stay stagnant nor increase or decrease progressively over the years (Tomer & Eliason, 1996).

A complicating aspect of studying death anxiety is measuring the anxiety. The studies used in examining death anxiety do not experimentally manipulate the variables, thus limiting conclusions to correlations (Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999). An additional confounding factor is the distinction between death and dying. In spite of these challenges, a number of researchers have reported conclusive findings relating to the impact of different variables on death anxiety. Early hypotheses focused on age as a probable factor in death anxiety. The initial theories held that as people got older and closer to death, they would have more anxiety about death (Belsky, 1999). To the contrary, a number of studies that have been conducted to date provide evidence that in a significant number of cases elderly people experience less death anxiety than younger people. Erikson proposed that when a person reaches late adulthood he engages in a life review. If a person finds meaning or purpose in his life, he has integrity. Contrary to this, if a person sees their life as a series of missed opportunities they do not attain ego integrity (Belsky, 1999). Given Erikson's theory, older adults who find ego integrity should have lower death anxiety. One study used Templer's Death Anxiety Scale to explore death anxiety in adults ranging in age from 16 to 83 years old. It found adults above the age of 60 had significantly lower scores than younger adults (Stevens, Cooper & Thomas, 1980). This would seem to support Erikson's theory.

Previous research in death anxiety has suggested that marital roles, and especially the male's role as the family provider, influence the sex differences in death attitudes. Cole (1979) investigated the effect of marital roles by comparing sex differences in death anxiety scores

Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

of married persons with and without children, and of single persons. Fear of death among older adults is not well understood. Although existing research is somewhat inconsistent, most evidence leads to the conclusion that fear of death tends to be greater among younger age groups and declines with increasing age (Thorson & Powell, 2000). A recent meta-analysis of 49 studies of fear of death in older adults (Fortner, Neimeyer & Rybarczyk, 2000) found that fear of death was essentially stable over the age range 61–87.

Suhail and Akram (2002) discovered that older participants (55 – 70 years old) had higher rates of death anxiety. There are several explanations for the results: a) as the participants are old and are nearer to death, they might think about their mortality more often and this behavior results in increased fear and anxiety, and b) death of close friends and spouses might trigger off increased death anxiety. Additionally, DeSpelder and Strickland (2005) contended that adolescents tend to portray or feel a sense of invulnerability and invincibility. Death thus appears to be an event that occurs to other people but somehow does not happen to them. Therefore, studies have generally found mixed results regarding age and death anxiety (Kastenbaum, 2007). There have either been no age differences or relatively lower death anxiety among the elderly (Keller, Sherry & Piotrowski, 1984; Kastenbaum, 2007). No such studies have been reported in peer reviewed journal for Jharkhand. The present study was designed to investigate the effect of age and marital status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) in adult women of Ranchi, Jharkhand. Main and interactional impact of age and marital status on death anxiety among women were also explored.

The hypotheses of the study were as follows.

1. Married women will have less degree of Death Anxiety as compared to single women.
2. There will no difference in Degree of Death anxiety among women of different age.
3. There will be significant interactional effect of age and marital status on death anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 120 adult women. Out of which, 60 were married and 60 were single (widow/divorce/unmarried) women. They were selected from urban area of Ranchi using non probability incidental sampling technique. This technique is characterized by collecting data from the first available individuals of the population. The investigator personally approached the adult women, only those women were retained to constitute the final sample who met the following inclusion criteria:

*Falls in the age range of 45 – 70. *Belongs to Hindu Religion. *Unemployed

Tools

1. *Death anxiety Scale by Giridhar P. Thakur and Manju Thakur (TDAS):* The Thakur Death Anxiety Scale (TDAS) has items relevant to Indian conditions and response format used in the test showed increased reliability coefficient. The test consists of sixteen discriminating statements. Statements numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 15 and 16 were positively worded and numbers 3, 6, 8, 11 and 14 were

Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

negatively worded. Responses on the positively worded statements would get 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for the “Quite true”, “True”, “Undecided”, “False”, and “Quite false”. Further, responses on the negatively worded statements would get 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for “Quite true”, “True”, “Undecided”, “False” and “Quite false”. The maximum score one could get on the scale would be 80 and the minimum would be 16. Internal consistency and test retest reliability of the scale are 0.78 and 0.86, respectively. The scores 16 and 38 would belong to the low death anxiety group, scores between 39 and 55 would belong to middle death anxiety group and finally scores 56 and above would be in the high death anxiety group.

Procedure

The total sample was divided into two sub groups based on marital status of married and single, again the total sample was divided into three groups A1(45-50),A2(55-60) and A3(65-70) based on age. TDAS was administered individually by the investigator and data were collected for analysis and discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study and verify the formulated hypotheses, the scores obtained were analyzed with mean, SD and t-value. The obtained data along with the statistical treatments has been shown in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3. It was evident from the Table 1 that two groups of married and single women differ significantly in their degree of death anxiety. The married group showed less degree of death anxiety as compared to single women. The t-value obtained was 3.22 which are significant at 0.01 level of confidence.

Table1 T value and P value of married and single women

Group	N	Mean	SD	t Value	P Value
Married	60	45.93	10.44	3.22	0.01
Single	60	52.68	9.40		

****Significant at 0.01**

From Table 1, it is observed that, two groups (married and single) differ significantly on Thakur Death Anxiety Scale score. Married women with mean score of 45.93 showed less scared of death as compared to single women (mean=52.68). There was significant difference between married and single women in their degree of death anxiety. The t-ratio was 3.22 which were found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance and hence hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table2 T matrices of different age groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	t Matrices		
				AB	AC	BC
A. Age 1 (A1)	40	44.93	10.98	1.72(NS)	3.24**	1.68 (NS)
B. Age 2 (A2)	40	49.46	9.23			
C. Age 3 (A3)	40	53.53	9.52			

****Significant at 0.01**

NS:-Not Significant

Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

A1 = 45 to 50 years

A2 = 55 to 60 years

A3 = 65 to 70 years

From Table 2, it can be seen that the mean score of Age group one was 44.93, 49.46 for Age group two and for age group three, it was 55.53. Age group 3 showed higher death anxiety as evident from the highest mean (53.53) followed by age group A1 and age group A2 as 49.46, respectively. Even though Age group A3 showed higher degree of death anxiety, statistically it is not significant which supports the second hypothesis.

ANOVA of main and interaction effect of both the variable on Death anxiety

A two-way ANOVA was carried out to examine the interactional effects of age and marital status on death anxiety. The mean scores and ANOVA summary are shown in Table 4. This was observed that F-ratio value for the first factor age was found to be as 2.69, which was statistically not significant even at 0.05 level of significance. Second factor i.e. marital status was found to produce significant impact on Death Anxiety at 0.01 level of significance. The two way interaction effects of age and marital status were found to be significant and therefore hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Table 3 Different components of ANOVA

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Square	F ratio
Main effects				
A. Marital Status	2026.8444	1	2026.8444	9.94**
B. Age	1110.4889	2	555.24445	2.69 (NS)
2 way interaction AXB	3137.3333	2	1568.666	7.62**
Within treatment	17293.2444	84	205.87	

**Significant at 0.01

NS:-Not Significant

CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides reliable and important data on the relationship between Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) and marital status, and Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) and age. The salient findings can be given as hereunder.

1. Age has no significant role as far as Death anxiety among women is concerned.
2. Single women were found to be more prone to high degree of Death Anxiety as compared to married women.

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Effect of Age and Marital Status on Thanatophobia (Death Anxiety) among Adult Women of Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

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