“It All Just Ends”: Death Attitudes Across Age, Gender and Religion

Bekah Bass
University of Northern Iowa

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“It All Just Ends”: Death Attitudes Across Age, Gender, and Religion

Bekah Bass | rebekah.bass@uni.edu
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

**Research Questions**

- This study looks at death attitudes across different demographic groups. I raise the following questions:
  1. How do death attitudes vary by age, gender, and religion?
  2. Do people with more (a) recent or (b) frequent death experiences have different death attitudes than those with fewer death experiences?

**Background**

- Death is a social reality and life is influenced by death: “[H]ow individuals view life affects their attitudes toward death. The converse is also true: How people view death affects how they conduct their lives” (Wong, Reker, and Gesser 1994:128).
- The fear of death, also referred to as death anxiety, is considered conscious negative thoughts and feelings towards death, whereas death avoidance is a negative attitude towards death that is less intense and less explicit (Tomer and Eliaison 1996, Wong et al. 1994).
- Neutral Acceptance is present when an individual is neither looking forward to death, nor fears it; Approach Acceptance is when death is accepted because it will end the negativity or pain of life (Wong et al. 1994). Scholars have identified different models of how death anxiety changes as individuals age, but a commonality among these models is that death anxiety declines as individuals move from middle age into old age (Hong et al. 2018; Tomer 2000).

**Data and Methods**

- Original data collected during January and February of 2021
- Online survey distributed through social media and email correspondence, mainly through connections at UNI
- Sample: n=322 cases
- Measures:
  - Death Attitude Profile – Revised (DAP-R) (Wong, Reker, and Gesser 1994)
  - Measures five facets of death attitudes using a 7-point Likert scale
    - Fear of Death
    - Death Avoidance
    - Neutral Acceptance
    - Approach Acceptance
    - Escape Acceptance
- Scores for questions in each attitude category are averaged and become the statistic for said category

**Analysis**

- ANOVA and difference-in-mean tests were done with categorical variables (income, gender, work status, experience with death) and the scores for each death attitude.
- Correlations between age and death attitudes, and among different death attitudes were calculated.

**Sample Characteristics**

- **Fear of Death**
  - Mean: 4.24
  - SD: 0.98
- **Death Avoidance**
  - Mean: 3.40
  - SD: 0.85
- **Neutral Acceptance**
  - Mean: 3.01
  - SD: 0.76
- **Approach Acceptance**
  - Mean: 3.03
  - SD: 0.77
- **Escape Acceptance**
  - Mean: 2.99
  - SD: 0.76

**Results**

- **Difference in Means: Religious and Not Religious**
  - Fear of Death: 1.968*
  - Death Avoidance: -0.022
  - Neutral Acceptance: -1.968*
  - Approach Acceptance: 15.122**
  - Escape Acceptance: 2.844**

- **Difference in Means: Women and Men**
  - Fear of Death: 2.047*
  - Death Avoidance: 1.680
  - Neutral Acceptance: -2.030*
  - Approach Acceptance: 1.235
  - Escape Acceptance: 1.800

**Conclusions**

- Similar to previous research on death anxiety and gender, analyses found that women showed significantly higher levels of fear of death than men. Additionally, men showed higher levels of neutral acceptance.
- There was a significant difference in death avoidance between the $50,000 - $75,000 annual income category and the less than $30,000 category. The wealthier individuals showed significantly lower levels of death avoidance than their less wealthy counterparts.
- As people age, their negative death attitude scores decline, while all types of acceptance increase.
- Those who are religious (primarily Christian in this sample) had higher Approach and Escape Acceptance, and lower Neutral Acceptance scores than non-religious individuals.

**References**


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