



Relationship Between Depression and Death Anxiety Among Elderly

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ABSTRACT

Old age in human beings is the final stage of the normal life span. Depression in older adults is a major health concern. It is a more common problem than people might think. However, it must be emphasized that depression is not a part of the normal aging. Death anxiety refers to the fear and apprehension of one's own death. Elderly with higher scores in depression also have higher levels of death anxiety. The study aims to find the relationship between Depression and Death anxiety among the elderly. Sample consisted of 240 elderly. Geriatric Depression Scale developed by Yesavage et al and Death Anxiety Scale developed by Templer were administered to the sample. The data collected was statistically analyzed using Karl Pearson's correlation. Analyses revealed that as Depression increases Death anxiety also increases among elderly.

KEYWORDS : Depression, Death anxiety and Elderly

INTRODUCTION

Old age in human beings is the final stage of the normal life span. Old age is frequently defined as 60 or 65 years of age or older.

Late-life depression is usually confused with the effects of the multiple illnesses associated with this age and the medication used for their treatment, or it is considered normal among elders. However, it must be emphasized that depression is not a part of the normal aging. Left undiagnosed, depression can cause emotional pain for elders and their families.

Depression in elderly is caused due to Psychological, Physical and Social factors. Anxiety, sadness, incapacity to feel pleasure in normal activities, persistent, vague or unexplained physical complaints, difficulties falling asleep, discouragement, memory problems and difficulties concentrating, social withdrawal and isolation, negligence about personal care, confusion, delusions and hallucinations are some of the depressive symptoms in elderly. Higher levels of depression can lead to higher levels of death anxiety.

Death anxiety is defined as "the thoughts, fears, and emotions about that final event of living that we experience under more normal conditions of life". Erikson's psychosocial theory states that in later stages of life "ego integrity" is attained. Erikson proposed that when person reaches late adulthood he/she engages in life review, if elderly find meaning and purpose in life ego integrity is attained and hence should have lower death anxiety (Belsky, 1999)

Decrease in death anxiety in old age may be due to older adults being more successful with emotional regulation, especially negative emotion.

In old age, people must confront the possibility of their own death as well as the death of loved ones. Available data do not support the hypothesis that death anxiety advances with age, because of two main reasons first, gradual acceptance of death with advancing age and maturity, second, for some elders fear of life can be greater than fear of death. Many older people experience social isolation, financial concern, and age related physical problems which increase their dissatisfaction with life.

OBJECTIVE

To find the relationship between Depression and Death Anxiety among elderly.

HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant relationship between Depression and Death Anxiety among elderly.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ozturk et al (2011) conducted study to find out the level of death anxiety evaluate its relationship with several socio demographic and clinical variables among elderly. Two hundred elderly (117 male, 83 female) were included in the study. A formal psychiatric interview was conducted with the sample and demographic and clinical variables were recorded thereafter. After the interview, Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), State and Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), Templer Death Anxiety Scale (DAS), Death Depression Scale (DDS) and Short Form-36 (SF-36) quality of life scale was administered. Evaluation of the relationship between demographic variables and scale scores revealed positive correlation between DAS score and the number of children of the patients, while a negative correlation was present between DAS and length of education. There were no significant differences in DAS and DDS scores with regards to physical disorder type. The presence of bereavement within one year time was not a significant factor for change in DAS scores while there was a significant increase in death anxiety among elderly who had frequent death thoughts. The results of this study presented significant relationship between death anxiety and length of education, number of children and frequency of death thoughts among elderly. No such relationship could be determined for the type of physical disease.

Boushera and Arnout (1996) conducted a study to explore the relation between quality of life, coping strategies, death anxiety and depression in elderly persons. Study sample consisted of 150 elderly persons (75 males, 75 females) from Sharqia city aged between 60-79 years. Different tests like; Elderly Quality of life inventory, Coping strategies scale, Death anxiety scale, Beck depression short inventory were used. Research finding suggested that there was significant relation between coping strategies, death anxiety, depression and the quality of life for elderly.

METHOD:

Design:

The study adopts a correlational design

Sample:

Convenient sampling consisting of 240 elderly from Mangalore and Udipi district of Karnataka.

Definition of terms:

Elderly:

Conceptual definition:

Men and women of age 60 years and above are referred as elderly.

Operational definition:

Men and women of age 60 years and above are referred as elderly.

Depression:

Conceptual definition:

Depression is a mood disorder in which feelings of sadness, loss, anger, or frustration interfere with everyday life for an extended period of time (Zieye et al, 2008).

Operational definition:

Depression refers to feeling worthless, sad, hopeless, helpless and emptiness in life as measured by Geriatric Depression scale.

Death anxiety:

Conceptual definition:

Death anxiety is defined as the thoughts, fears, and emotions about that final event of living that one experience under more normal conditions of life.

Operational definition:

Death anxiety is defined as the thoughts, fears, and emotions about that final event of living that one experience under more normal conditions of life as measured by Templers death anxiety scale.

Test:

1. Geriatric Depression Scale (Yesavage et al, 1983)

The Scale consists of 30 yes/no questions and is widely used in screening depression among the elderly population.

Scoring:

Questions 1, 5, 7, 9, 15, 19, 21, 27, 29 and 30 if marked 'no' gets a score of 1 and questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 28 if marked 'yes' gets a score 1. Total depression score is obtained by summing the marks of each question.

Reliability and Validity:

The reliability and validity of the tool have been supported through both clinical practice and research. In a validation study comparing the long and short forms of the Geriatric Depression scale for self-rating of symptoms of depression, both were successful in differentiating depressed from non-depressed adults with a high correlation of 0.84.

2. Death Anxiety Scale (Templer, 1970)

The scale consists of 15 items and subjects have to encircle either true or false response as applied to them.

Scoring: Items 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 gets a score of 1 for true

response and 0 for false response. Scores are reversed for items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 15.

Reliability and Validity: The test has a test retest reliability of 0.83 and a co-efficient alpha of 0.76. The test is cross culturally valid.

Procedure: To collect data elderly were personally approached and the purpose of the study was explained to them. After getting their consent Depression and Death anxiety scales was administered to them as per the instructions in the manual and were later thanked for their co-operation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table 1
Karl Pearson's correlation between Depression and Death Anxiety among elderly.

Variables (N=240)	r
Depression and Death anxiety	0.206**

**p< .01

Correlation between Depression and Death anxiety is significant at 0.01 level hence the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between Depression and Death anxiety is rejected. Depression and Death Anxiety are positively correlated indicating that as Depression increases Death Anxiety also increases and vice versa.

The results are similar to the study conducted by Boushera and Arnout (1996) which revealed that Depression and Death anxiety are related

FINDING:

1. As Depression increases in elderly Death Anxiety also increases and vice versa

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Study can be extended to larger geographical area
2. Research in relation to other variables like physical and Psychological health, religion, family dynamics loneliness and financial problems can be done.
3. Further study can be done by taking various groups of elderly such as elderly with partner, with and without children, institutionalised elderly etc.

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