

View Point

Understanding Death Anxiety: Through Psychological, Social, and Existential Point of View

Versha Deepankar¹

¹Department of Psychiatry, Nemi Chand (N.C) Medical College & Hospital, Panipat, Haryana, India



***Corresponding author:**

Versha Deepankar,
Department of Psychiatry,
Nemi Chand (N.C) Medical
College & Hospital, Panipat,
Haryana, India
versha.psych@gmail.com

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Death anxiety, or the fear or apprehension of one's own death, is a complex psychological phenomenon that extends beyond personal experiences which influences broader social and existential realms. Over the years, researchers have explored its various dimensions, uncovering factors that shape its intensity and expression. Recent studies by Husain *et al.*,¹ Bianco *et al.*,² Guner *et al.*,³ and Ogbonnaya *et al.*⁴ have advanced our understanding by examining death anxiety from psychological, social, and existential perspectives. These studies highlight how mental health, work dynamics, social isolation, and transformative life experiences interact to affect the way individuals experience and cope with the fear of death. This multi-dimensional approach highlights the complexity of death anxiety, revealing its deep connection to human existence and the universal confrontation with mortality.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL PREDICTORS OF DEATH ANXIETY

Husain *et al.*¹ provide an in-depth study of the psychopathological predictors and effects of death anxiety. Their research correlates significantly between death anxiety and mental health issues such as anxiety disorders, depression, and existential distress. They argue that individuals suffering from the above-mentioned conditions are at a high risk of experiencing intense fears related to death.¹ The study highlights the importance of addressing these underlying psychological issues in therapeutic interventions. In particular, when death anxiety is rooted in ongoing trauma or chronic anxiety, treatment approaches which incorporate cognitive-behavioral therapy and existential therapies could help individuals confront their fears and come to terms with the end of life.

The relationship between death anxiety and mental health disorders points to the prominent ways in which psychological factors can deepen the existential fears. The authors also emphasize that death anxiety is not just a symptom of anxiety or depression, but it is a noteworthy psychological phenomenon that interacts with various cognitive and emotional processes.

These findings suggest that treating death anxiety requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses both the emotional and cognitive components of the fear of death.

WORK-RELATED STRESS AND DEATH ANXIETY

Ogbonnaya *et al.*⁴ researched the effects of death anxiety on work performance, particularly among street-level bureaucrats—those who interact directly with the public and are responsible for

implementing policies. The investigation reveals that death anxiety can harm work engagement and job satisfaction. The study finds that workers with high levels of death anxiety tend to zone out from their roles, resulting in decreased efficiency and motivation. This is particularly concerning in high-stress work environments where public servants must perform under pressure.

The findings of Ogbonnaya *et al.* emphasize the need for public health initiatives that address mental health within the workplace, particularly in high-stress professions.² Organizations must understand how existential fears like death anxiety impact employee well-being and performance. Providing mental health support and encouraging open communication could reduce death anxiety among employees and improve their ability to carry out their duties effectively. Workplace wellness programs should implement interventions like mindfulness-based stress reduction or therapy to help employees cope-up with death anxiety.

THE ROLE OF LONELINESS IN DEATH ANXIETY AMONG THE ELDERLY

The impact of social isolation and loneliness on death anxiety has been an area of concern, particularly among elderly populations. Guner *et al.*³ examine how loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic worsens death anxiety in older adults.³ The study highlights the increased vulnerability of elderly individuals to existential fears during times of social isolation and crisis. Loneliness, combined with fears of mortality due to the pandemic, led many elderly people to experience a profound increase in death anxiety.

The authors suggest that loneliness, particularly in the elderly, can create a feedback loop that deepens existential fears. Without the emotional support of family and friends, elderly individuals may be left to confront their fears of death alone, which can lead to heightened anxiety and distress. Guner *et al.*³ propose that addressing loneliness through social support programs, virtual communities, and mental health services is essential for mitigating death anxiety in older adults. Given that many older individuals are isolated, particularly in the wake of a global pandemic, ensuring they have access to mental health care and social connections is crucial for their well-being.

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES: THE ROLE OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES IN DEATH ANXIETY

In the study that Bianco and his colleagues published in 2024, they also discuss the possible life-changing impacts that a near-death experience can have on an individual, in

particular, the apprehension of death. It was also concluded that those who underwent such experiences tend to experience lower levels of the fear of death because they have altered their self-image, and understanding of death itself, which in turn has raised their level of esteem and mindfulness.⁴ Many of these feelings would accompanied by such experiences are often described as feelings of peace, clarity, and transcendence, thereby changing the ways people think about death from a frightful and avoidable end to accepting and understanding it.

According to them, experiencing near death experience (NDE) allows an individual to tackle the impression of death head-on which in turn changes their perception of death from fearing it to being at peace with it. The changes in perception about death are due to the influenced self-esteem and mindfulness that people become more equipped with and become factors that are counterproductive to death anxiety. This phenomenon indicates that for people who have had life-altering experiences such as an NDE, assisting individuals to cultivate mindfulness and self-compassion in therapy may help alleviate their existential fears.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

The combination of research presented here suggests that death anxiety is not a univocal concept but instead represents the convergence of a variety of psychological, social, and existential concerns. Consequently, an effective treatment strategy for death anxiety will likely require approaches targeted at general psychological symptoms and conditions, increasing perceived social support, cultivating mindfulness skills or orientations in life in general, and helping clients to construct new and less threatening cognitive models of their ultimate demise.

From these findings, it follows that clinical psychologists and psychiatrists may be advised to include elements from several techniques to form a treatment plan when treating individuals who present with symptoms of death anxiety. This might involve cognitive restructuring or exposure strategies derived from cognitive-behavioral perspectives intended at assisting patients accept their fears about death. Clinicians also can benefit anxious clients through encouraging them to confront their fears directly during directive interviews in which the therapist challenges the rationality or necessity of particular deaths feared by the client.

The discrepancy of death anxiety is indeed a very important one in clinical psychology and psychiatric practice, and for many in such fields, its concerns stretch way beyond the clinical confines. Death anxiety can, however, be worsened or

developed by various causes as cited by recent studies: mental health conditions, workplace stress, social isolation, and life-altering events like NDEs. Though extending enlightenment about psychological, social, and existential aspects of death anxiety would enable the preparation of improved intervention for this common yet often debilitating dread. That research into such aspects continues to promise even more effective strategies of enabling individuals to face and lower their death anxiety and enhance their quality of life and mental well-being.

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