Investigating the Relationship between Death Anxiety and Attitude towards Life among University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between death anxiety and attitude towards life in students of Payam-e-Nour University in Rezvanshahr, Iran. This research was a cross-sectional study and it was conducted in the frame ofa correlational design on a sample of 100 students (N = 100) at Payam-e-Nour Universityin Rezvanshahr in 2015. In order to select subjects in the present study the random sampling method was used, given the nature of this study the method of data collection was a survey approach, and in order to collect data Templers' Death Anxiety Scale (DAS), Life Attitudes Scale (LAS), and checklist of demographic index were used. Also, in order to analyze the data, the independent t-test was used for the difference in the rate of attitude towards life and the Pearson correlation test was used for correlation between the variables. The data analysis showed that there was a significant correlation between the rate of death anxiety and attitude towards life. In addition, there was a significant correlation between students' death anxiety with their high attitude and low attitude towards life (p < 0.05). The findings of this study are in line with the literature review and indicate the effectiveness of death anxiety indicator and high and low attitude towards life.

Key words: Death anxiety, attitude towards life, university students

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays students form a vast and growing population of the country and it is natural that a variety of psychological problems are common among this population due to distinctive conditions of these periods [1]. The conducted surveys on students in the country during the recent years indicate a range of damages and problems among this group [2].These problems emerge in different forms such as mental diseases, academic failure, drug abuse and suicide [3]. Various reasons can put at risk students' psychological health that are available in a range from the internal factors such as the necessity of adaptation with the new conditions of student life, confusion in finding identity and inefficiency of the previous confrontation styles to the external factors such as economic problems, increase in others' expectations and the lack of social support [4].One of the related factors with psychological problems and irregularities is the acquisition of life concept and meaning. During the recent years the construct of meaning in life and attitude towards life have been given more attention in psychological research. This concept was first repeatedly shown in the writings of Viktor Frankl, the founder of the school of meaning therapy [5].

Frankel believed that disappointed, depressed and restless individuals and those who feel deserted often complain about the meaninglessness and absurdity of life [6]. The studies also show that the type of attitude towards life can be related to psychological stress-producing factors. Lack of meaning in life has a relationship with such variables

such as a great need for psychological treatments regarding depression and anxiety, symptoms of suicide and drug abuse [7].

In addition to the correlation studies in experimental researches regarding the effectiveness of the teaching meaning of life that is known as meaning therapy has well been revealed on the improvement of psychological and physical indexes. Meaning therapy instead of pessimism and loneliness calls a human being for effort and activity and states that the thing that brings human beings down is not their undesirable anguish and nature, but it's them eaninglessness of their life that is disastrous [8].In spite of such a theoretical and practical importance of meaning in life in the realm of psychology and counseling, there are still many ambiguities about this psychological constructs that much of it is related to the way of measuring this variable [9]. According to the researchers in this field, one of the areas that have received little attention regarding literature of meaning in life is related to how it is measured [10]. Individuals' preoccupation with death and dying is also inevitable. One of the most important human considerations in relation to death and dying, is the fear [terror] from death or "death anxiety" 11].

As living human beings never experienced death and nobody has not clearly touched it, individuals are anxious about it, but everyone according to certain factors experience various degrees of death anxiety. A little experiencing regarding death anxiety seems natural, but like other fears, if this anxiety is very severe, it will undermine efficient adjustment [12]. Death anxiety is a multi-dimensional concept and its definition is more difficult and most of the time it is defined as the fear of his or others' dying. In other words, "death anxiety" involves prediction of ones' own death and fear from death of the important people in their lives [13]. Belski considers death anxiety as thoughts, fears and emotions which related to the event the end of life and beyond the conventional state [14]. Death anxiety is defined as an unusual and big fear from death is accompanied with feeling of horror or terror when one thinks the process of death or the things that happen after death [15]. Death as the biggest problem and event of life has a complex concept that is accompanied with a lot of physical and psychological symptoms of pain and suffering. Death anxiety is associated with depression, generalized anxiety and suicidal thoughts that all of these lead to reduces a person's performance [16].

Therefore, given the importance and role of the relationship between anxiety and attitude towards life in university students and with regard to the findings of various studies in the case of challenges confronting youth and students, the present study seeks to investigate the effect of the relationship between anxiety and attitude towards life in university students in Rezvanshahr, Iran.

The sample size
With regard to the method in the present research that was a correlational study and with regard to size of samples in correlational researches that should be between 20 and 25 and in the best state 50 subjects for each study variable. Therefore, by considering fifty subjects per each of the tow variables, 100 subjects were used in this study.

$$N = 3q = 2 \times 50 = 100$$

Ethical considerations
In this study, informed consent took place without any coercion, threat, enticement and seduction and the individuals were respected whether to refuse or accept to participate in the study. It was tried that the research method not to be in contradict with religious and cultural principles of the subjects and research participants in all stages of design, implementation and reporting of the study to be protected in terms of human dignity, respect and physical and mental integrity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was a casual-comparative and correlational study and is in the domain of descriptive designs. The statistical population in this study included all of Payame-Nour University students, Rezvanshahr branch, who have been taking their courses during the academic year 2015-2016. The data in this study were collected through using a survey method in terms of questionnaires and clinical interviews. For this purpose, 100 (N = 100)students were selected through random sampling method from the statistical population. Data collection was done through a survey method and in order to evaluate the index of death anxiety Templer's Death Anxiety Scale (DAS), the meaning of life questionnaire by Esther, Freezer, Oveissi and Calor (MLQ), and the checklist of demographic index list were used. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient and independent t-test. The conduction of this research was as the following: First a number of student were selected as the sample of this study among those who were studying at Payame-Nour University through random sampling method, then they were asked read these questionnaires carefully and answer the questions. After completing the questionnaires, the participants in this research were acknowledged.

Instruments
Templer's death anxiety scale (DAS)
This questionnaire was designed by Templer in 1970. This questionnaire is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 15 true-false questions. The scale of measuring Templer's death anxiety is a standard questionnaire that repeatedly has been used in different studies at global level to measure death anxiety and in Iran it was translated, analyzed by factors and validated. Rajabi and Bohrani [2001] conducted it on 138 students in Ahvaz, and reported its reliability 0.60 and its internal consistency coefficient0.73 [17]. Templer [1970] has obtained reliability of this scale 0.83and reported its validity as desirable [18], Sain and Klein have reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three operating factors that were obtained with factorial analysis and Italian edition of this scale, respectively, 0.68, 0.49 and 0.60 [19].

Meaning life questionnaire [MLQ]
In order to measure meaning in life the meaning in life questionnaire [MLQ] were used that was prepared by Steger and colleagues [20]. In order to construct this instrument, these researchers first prepared 44 items and then using factorial-explorative analysis reached to factors of presence of meaning and seeking of it in life with 12 items. Then in a factorial analysis by removing one item reached an appropriate two-factorial structure with 11 items. In this analysis one item was considered for each of the scales. There was little negative correlation between the two factors of existence and search for meaning in life, also Steger and colleagues have been reported a desirable internal reliability for sub-scales existence and search for meaning [21].

Statistical Analysis
In the present study with regard to the nature of the study and review of previous research the data obtained from this study, first were analyzed using descriptive methods (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and then in order to analyze the research hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficient and independent t-test were used.

RESULTS

Statistical indices
The descriptive indicators related to subjects' gender in this study show that 85% of the sample is females and the other 15% is males. The descriptive indicators with regard to age show the average range of subjects age as 24.24 years (sd = 5.98, range = 1- 45).

Table 1: Demographic information of subjects

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	85	0.85
	Male	15	0.15
Field of study	psychology	49	0.49
	Accounting	9	0.9
	Management	9	0.9
	History	5	0.5
	Theology	9	0.9
	Social sciences	19	0.19
	Total	100	100

Table 1 show the frequency and percentage of subjects based on their field of study. The results showed that the majority of patients (0.49 percent) were psychology students and only a minority of them was studying history (0.5 percent)

Table 2: Descriptive indices of research variables in participants

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Death anxiety	1.59	0.514
Attitude towards life	1.27	0.447

Table 3: Pearson correlation between death anxiety and attitude towards life

Variable	Attitude towards life
Death anxiety	r = - 0.121**
	Sig = 0.014 N = 100

**P< 0.01, * P< 0.05*

The contents of Table 3 shows that there is a negative and significant relationship between death anxiety and attitude towards life (r = - 0.036, p < 0.01). With regard to direction of correlation, it can be concluded that the higher rate of

attitude towards life is related to lower level of death anxiety. Therefore, existence of correlation between university students' death anxiety and attitude towards life is confirmed.

Table 4: Independent t-test between death anxiety and the upper and lower attitude towards life

Variable	Frequency	Mean	Std. D.	T	Degree of freedom	Sig. level
Attitude towards upper life	73	1.62	0.490	1.211	98	0.229
Attitude towards lower life	27	1.48	0.509			

According to contents in Table 4, the calculated absolute value of t, t = 1.211 and in comparison with the obtained *t* from Table at the level of a / 2 equal to 0.05 and with a degrees of freedom 98, i.e.a/2 = 0.229,t is bigger: Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the contrary hypothesis is confirmed. With regard to significant difference between means, it can be said with a confidence of 0.95 that there is a difference between university students' death anxiety and the high and low attitudes towards life.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the correlation between the university students' death anxiety and attitude towards life in Rezvanshahr. According to the literature review and review of the above mentioned researches, the majority of the conducted studies are in line with the findings of this study. For example, although a lot of researches have been conducted with regard to different dimensions of death anxiety and effective factors on the level of its experience in individuals, only in some of these studies the relationship between the level of education and death anxiety has been investigated. As an example, Azaiza and his colleagues demonstrated that there is a correlation between level of education and death anxiety, in a way that the illiterate and semi-literate individuals experience more death anxiety in comparison with the educated individuals[22]. Between attitude towards life and death anxiety there can be a negative correlation, i.e. the higher the level of individuals' attitude towards life, the lower their death anxiety will be [23]. Thus, it seems that individuals with the lower level of attitude with their concerns about the future particularly anxiety about something called the death experience more anxiety. In general and given the results of the present study, it can be said that higher attitude towards life can be effective in reducing anxieties regarding individuals' thoughts about death. Since attitude towards life, optimism and providence show a cognitive, emotional and motivational state towards future, thinking about the future, expecting favorable outcomes, believing that things will go well, also a feel of confidence that all of these will happen as a result of suitable efforts, will bring happiness and joyfulness have and leads to purposeful activities.

The experience of individuals with low and high attitude towards life is different [24]. It is natural that individuals with a high level of attitude towards life consider life in a more positive way and thus they have higher level of death acceptance and experience less death anxiety. Jung [1965] believes that all people in the world have a preparation for death, thus people who have a higher and powerful attitude towards life, regard death as a natural process of life, and for these people death give a sense life [25]. In individuals with lower attitude towards life, awareness from the inevitability of death as an existential crisis, intrinsically leads individuals to need for find meaning in life and death anxiety rather than accepting death [26]. Rozman and Johnson [1994] concluded in their study that those with lower attitude towards life experience less death anxiety. In their report they claim that people who care more about life have more emotional disturbances in comparison with those who have lower attitude towards life and emphasis that the most appropriate way of solving emotional problems is just the purposeful ways towards life [27]. They believed that in explaining these differences one can refer to discussion of many individual and cultural differences that are present regarding various dimension of death and cause anxiety. People who have lower attitude towards life experience more death anxiety in relation to those who have higher attitude towards life. In explaining this finding, it can be said that those who have lower attitude towards life perhaps accept more the distressing feeling regarding death and those with higher attitude towards life avoid it [28].

Limitations of the study
This study similar to other human studies has limitations that can be cited as follows: 1) This study was conducted only among university students in Rezvanshahr. 2) The cross-sectional design of this study may endanger the generalization of results, and 3) Lack of control in other variables that effect attitude towards life can also be outlined among the limitations of the present study.

Research suggestions
It is a suggestion that the above-mentioned findings to be used in counseling centers.

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