



Relationship Between Religious Spiritual Well-Being and Death Anxiety in Iranian Elders

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between religious spiritual well-being and death anxiety among Iranian elders. Subjects were 146 volunteer elders. They were selected by a convenient sampling. Instruments were Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48) the Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety (ASDA) factors. On the MI RSWB 48 and the ASDA, there were no significant association between religious spiritual well-being and death anxiety total scores. There were significant association between Hope Transcendent (HT), and Experiences of Sense and Meaning (SM) subscales of MI RSWB 48. Limitations of the present study were using of self-report scales, selectin of an old-age sample, a Muslim religion and an Iranian culture. Present results can be considered in the religious spiritual oriented interventions for reducing of death anxiety for elders in Muslim countries.

Keywords: Religiosity, spirituality, well-being, death anxiety, elders, Muslim, Islam, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Religious attitudes are a preventive agent to reduce of problems related to death and dying issues. Religion is one of the spiritual intelligence domains that can reduce death anxiety in elders [1]. Findings have shown that faith and believe to life after death is related to less fear of death. Persons, who were more religious, reported more less fear of death. In fact religious attitudes make persons overcome to their fear, feel more comfortable in their life and more cope with fact of death fear [2-6].

The relationship between death anxiety and religious belief seems to be too complex to provide a simple pattern of findings. Many studies on death anxiety have focused on examining gender differences, religious and spiritual influences, and aging [7]. Bahrami, Dadfar, Lester, and Abdel-Khalek (2014) found death anxiety, death depression and death obsession in Iranian older. Women repored higher death distress than men but there was no significant difference[8].

Kastebbaum (2000) reviewed studies on fear of death in general population and showed that in cross sectional studies elders had no higher fear of death than youths, high level of religious beliefs and participation in religious activities were not associated with low level of fear of death[9]. Duff and Hong (1995) revealed that persons with motivation of internal religious had lower death anxiety, and stronger belief to afterlife live was associated with lower death anxiety[10].

Chaggaris and Lester (1989) reported that scores on the four fear subscales of the CLFDS were not related to belief in God, an afterlife, or the subject would go to heaven, to church attendance, or whether the subject considered himself to be a religious person. Fear of one's own of death was related to a fear of hell[11].

There was no evidence for a strong association between fears of death and religious belief. Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, and Thomas-Dobson (1992, 1995) found that religious variables related to death depression and death anxiety[12]. In study of Campbell (2013; cited in Bahrami, Dadfar, Lester, & Abdel-Khalek, 2014), one of reason for fearing death was a non-existent or a terrible afterlife. Religious individuals may fear death more because they are afraid of the afterlife and the judgment that will be made about the way they lived their life[8]. Azaiza, Ron, Shoham, and Tinsky-Roimi (2011) reported that religiosity was not related to death and dying anxiety[13]. Beshai and Lester (2013) found that scores on a scale to measure the belief in a Day of Judgment were associated with scores on a traditional religiosity scale, but not with fears of death and dying[14].

On the The Reasons for Death Fear Scale (RDFS), Aflakseir (2014) reported that there was positive relationship between religiosity with reasons for death fear (Fear of Pain and Punishment, and Religious Transgression and Failures) in Iranian college students[15]. Ziapour, Dusti, and Abbasi Asfajir (2014) showed that there was no significant correlation between religious orientation and death anxiety in Iranian health personnel[16]. Aimed of the study was to examine the relationship between religious spiritual well-being and death anxiety among Iranian elders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was a cross sectional descriptive study. Subjects were 146 volunteer Iranian elders. They were selected by a convenient sampling. The Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48) and the Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety (ASDA) were used.

Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48) was made by Unterrainer, Huber, Ladenhauf, Wallner, and Liebmann (2010)[17]; and consists in total of 48 items and six subscales: General religiosity (GR), Forgiveness (FO), Hope immanent (HI), Connectedness (CO), Hope Transcendent (HT), and Experiences of Sense and Meaning (SM). Three subscales of FO, HI, and SM were included in perception of "Immanent"; and subscales of GR, CO, and HT were placed in perception of "Transcendent". Items of the MI-RSWB-48 are evaluated by a six-point Likert scale which is rated from "I totally disagree" (1) to "I totally agree" (6), and 16 items out of 48 items are reversely scored. Six subscales of MI-RSWB-48 are measured with eight items each. In the present study, Farsi version of the MI-RSWB-48 was made by Mahmood Alilu, Zarean, Beyrami, Hashemi, ElhamiAsl, and Aayat Mehr (2011)[18], was used. The Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety (ASDA) was developed by Abdel-Khalek (2004)[19]; and validated in the Arabic countries of Egypt, Kuwait, and Syria. It has 20 items, and each item is answered on a 5-point intensity scale anchored by 1 (no) and 5 (very much). In the present study, Farsi version of the ASDA was made by Dadfar, Abdel-Khalek, Lester, and Atef Vahid (submitted) [20] was used. Good validity with other scales and reliability with Alpha and test-retest reliabilities have been reported of two scales[17-18]

RESULTS

The mean ages were 68.58 (SD=7.10), male 68.81 (SD=7.44), and female 68.28 (SD=6.76), respectively. 585 were male, and 42% female. The mean score of the MI RSWB 48 was 20.34 (SD=30.70); and mean score of the ASDA 51.09 (SD=20.19).

Correlation between total scores of religious spiritual well-being and death anxiety was non-significant and negative in Iranian elders ($r = -0.009$, $p > 0.05$). There were significant association between subscales of Hope Transcendent (HT) ($r = .337$, $p < 0.01$) and Experiences of Sense and Meaning (SM) ($r = .183$, $p < 0.05$) (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Pearson correlations (*r*) between the MI RSWB 48 and the ASDA in Iranian elders (N=146)

Scale/subscales	<i>r</i> with ASDA
Scale	- 0.009
Multidimensional Inventory of Religious Spiritual Well-Being (MI RSWB 48)	
Subscales of MI RSWB 48	
General religiosity (GR)	-.074
Forgiveness (FO)	.004
Hope immanent (HI)	-.017
Connectedness (CO)	-.092
Hope Transcendent (HT)	.337**
Experiences of Sense and Meaning (SM)	-.183*
Immanent Perception (IP)	-.048
Transcendent Perception (TP)	.093

correlation is significant at the 0.01 levelcorrelation is significant at the 0.05 level*

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that total scores of religious spiritual well-being and death anxiety were non-significant and negative in Iranian elders; and there was a significant association between only subscales of Hope Transcendent (HT) and Experiences of Sense and Meaning (SM). On the ASDA, Lester, and Abdel-Khalek (2008) found that religiosity in a Muslim context and death anxiety were not associated [21]. Abdel-Khalek and Lester (2009) reported that there were not significantly correlated between death anxiety and intrinsic religious motivation, or religiosity and strength of religious belief [22]. Ghufuran, and Ansari (2008) showed impact of widowhood on religiosity and death anxiety among 60 to 75 years Indian elders [23]. There was a relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and death anxiety [24]. Wittkowski (2015) found that attitudes toward dying and death are correlated with disengagement and adaptive coping in German elders [25]. Moetamedi, Pajouhinia, and Fatehi Ardestani (2015) reported that there was a negative significant relationship between spiritual wellbeing and resiliency with death anxiety among Iranian elderly. Spiritual wellbeing was a valuable factor in prediction of death anxiety. Spiritual wellbeing and resiliency can be considered as vital factors in death anxiety [26].

Cross cultural aspects of religious spiritual well-being have shown in many studies [27-31]. Religion was the predominant predictor in the understanding of death acceptance or attitude, but the influence of racial socialization and world view were also significant contributors. World view and religion were dominant predictors in the understanding of death anxiety and racial socialization was a significant contributor [32]. In Muslim religion, the Great Allah has mentioned about death, its realization and impossibility of escape from death in many Surah and verses of the Holy Quran. Imani Far, Bostani, Dodman, and Raeisi (2011) compared views of Holy Quran and psychology about confront with death. They found that both of views emphasize in the willingness for immanent and the fear of death and agree with emotional reactions of individuals in the face with death and its acceptance depend on their behavior, personality, and coping mechanisms to deal with the past problems during the time of life. The most important difference between two views was the belief or non-belief in life after death that causes different operational definitions of quality of death, therapy targets and way of encounter with death [33]. Ali Akbari Dehkordi, Oraki, and Barghi Irani (2011) reported that there was a negative correlation between the internal religious orientation and death anxiety and a positive and significant correlation between the external religious orientation and death anxiety [34]. Mansurnejad and Kajbaf (2012) showed that main effects of religious orientation on death anxiety were significant. The individuals with intrinsic religious orientation significantly reported lower levels of death anxiety than individuals with extrinsic religious orientation. Internal religious orientation seems to decrease death anxiety and is an important factor in mental health [35].

Kastenbaum (2007) reported that there are difficulties in interpreting death anxiety scales: It cannot interpret death anxiety out of context of religious, cultural, and personal beliefs. It has been shown through results of various studies that a strong sense of religion in a person's life can be related to a lower sense of anxiety towards the death. Although there has been no association discovered between religiosity and death anxiety, it has also been shown that death anxiety tends to be lower in individuals who regularly attend religious meetings or gatherings [36]. Some of studies have reported that religious attitudes toward death can be considered as a threat to mental health [37]. Ellis, Wahab, and Ratnasingan (2013) found that religiosity is positively correlated with increase of death fear and

meaning and more religious persons showed more fear from the death in the US, Turkey, and Malaysia[38]. Démuthová (2013) showed that religiosity was not connected with the levels of fear of death. It seems that age is more important factor than religiosity[39]. The thought of death causes a different degree of anxiety for different individuals, depending on many factors for example religion [6, 40-43].

The present study has some limitations. Self-report scales were used; and subjects were from an old-age, Muslim religion, and an Iranian culture. Religious spiritual well-being was not a factor in prediction of death anxiety. Therefore, religious spiritual well-being cannot be considered as vital factor in death anxiety. So, the results should be interpreted on the basis of cultural considerations and native viewpoints. Present results can be considered in the religious spiritual oriented interventions for reducing of death anxiety for elders in Muslim countries.

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