

Death and dying
changing attitudes
through the ages
sociology essay



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The death process is permanent and predictable and it is known as the personal event that the person can never think. The history of deaths has been looked upon events of social importance and each and every culture has defined some rules and regulations to define death as an extraordinary passage and the way to deal with the outcomes. At the time of twentieth century, the terminology death along with its social definition has transformed and prepared extraordinary opportunities for the purpose of getting sociological inquiry. The decline in the mortality rate has been identified as most common feature within the social histories. Life expectancy rate the time of birth has increased from last 30 years in 1900 to 50 years. It has been stated that almost two third part of longevity from ancient times to the present times has occurred in the short period from 1900 (Preston, 1976).

Death has been an inevitable event since the inception of mankind in this universe. There is always the worry among individuals towards the life and well being. The individuals are worried at one or the other instance for living their lives. Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand what are the exact factors related to death and dying of humanity. An individual, if not dies, can result in disturbance of life cycle of this globe. This is not under the control of anyone to make amendments in this life cycle.

The report here titled as, " Death and dying: Changing attitudes through the ages"; discusses about various factors that are affecting the lives of individuals. Report begins here with a clear focus laid on the aims of the report followed by research questions to understand the topic thoroughly.

Various factors had been found of importance to be studied. There has

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always been a question in mind whether and how an individual behaves towards death and is it considered a positive aspect or not. How the individuals are are fear of death and what the right time of death is. These all aspects are explored in the report in below sections to have a thorough control over the research topic.

2 Aims and Research Question

The research report here aims to understand the struggle that human being is facing since centuries. The change in philosophy associated with life is the main cause of change in attitude of human beings towards death. One can explore further this death on relating it with the time period in the life of human history. The western world has increasingly shifted towards change in conception for death due to rise in Christianity and the way it has affected lives (Aries, 1974). Therefore, the below are few stated research questions to explore further the concept of death and dying and the changing attitude:-

Is death good or bad?

How the attitude of individuals has changed towards death and dying?

Is the man of today more worried against death?

What is the right time of death?

The discussion in this report would analyze various associated concepts to explore further the concept of death and dying in today's life.

3 Discussion

Most of the deaths have occurred among the old aged ones but not among young generation people. The studies in United States reveal that people at the age of 85 years and above has accounted for almost one percent of entire population and they account for 17% of death (J. Brody, 1983). So the deaths have taken new meanings for the society and individual both. Death is not known as an adventitious part of life (Parson, 1963). Smaller number of lives has cut before completing education, work and social life (Preston, 1977). Fatalism provides a higher degree of control as well as predictability (Cf. Lofland, 1978). The delay in the death process has come up with the speed. The social institutions and norms have delayed it. It is not much surprising that death and its social meaning has gone off and the proper understanding of death has been reassessed by sociologists. From past two decades, a considerable literature as a quasi popular and scholarly type has been generated by number of people such as journalists, nurses, psychologists, philosophers, theologians, historians, ethicists, sociologists, social critics and thanatologists (cf. Fulton 1976, 1981; Pollak 1979-80).

The word dying is called as the ultimate shortage of time by Moore (1963) and it has taken a most important point that it has the power to threaten an individual self. A famous person has given his view on the sociological study of death that death always asks for an identity of an individual (Robert Fulton, 1976a). Dying is known as the social process that focuses on the sociological issues that are concerned with the process of dying and self. Researches have not clearly shown the actual conditions of dying. But one British study has talked about the dying among the patients who are living in

this world and among the people who are known of their own attitude (Cartwright, Hockey & Anderson, 1973). The attitude of people towards death varies according to the ages and stages of life. Most of the people are living into later years and they have their own predicted on time deaths. A growing number of people are present at the position to consider the sense of their own deaths. Some sociologists have identified themselves engaged in the questions which are related to the death and its social meaning and its relation with the process of dying that how the topic of death is of great importance. What type of attitudes about death people have in their mind? What type of preparations they make for anticipating death (Riley, 1968)?

The first survey in United States have found the attitude of people towards death and that survey was conducted in 1960s (Riley, 1970). That study has assessed the thought about deaths that most of the people at the all ages have non-threatening images of death in their mind. It has found that death is a blessing and it is not dreadful event for the person who dies but it is very sad for the survivors. The study also has revealed that death comes very quickly and few people have argued that death means the people have to suffer a lot. There was significant increase found in the degree to which the deaths process imposed upon the everyday lives of people. People were asked about an uncertainty of deaths or their lives. It has been found that death as a part of thoughts increased among the person at all ages and it increased in the later years of the lives of people. The researchers have found that people are unwilling meet with these realities. In 1970s, people agreed that each person die with the dignity and if the person has died, then the person has to tell it to doctors. Some studies have also taken place

within the topic of anticipation of death. There was one question asked that do the people feel good to avoid the deaths and not try to make plans for anticipating deaths? Do they feel to make plans for death?

3. 1 Self destruction

The case of the sociological relationships of the person to the death which is known as suicide was taken. There were some sociological studies conducted on the topic dying and death (Cavan 1928; Halbwachs 1930; Henry & Short 1954; Dublin 1963; Gibbs & Martin 1964; Douglas 1967). Several studies have taken place on the social factors that are related with the rates of suicide. Several measures were taken such as industrialization which was identified by the gross national product and the status of integration. It has been found that status integration was negatively correlated with the suicide rates. Other study revealed about the suicide rates which were related with the family and their marital status and it was based on Durkheim' theory.

3. 2 Self management of death time

It has been stated by several studies that people who are concerned with the relationship of themselves to the society are self motivated for managing the time of their deaths. It has assumed that the determination to live the life without identifying any biological linkages. It must be involved within this topic (Marshall, 1980). The people who are separated from the society always commit suicide and the people who are attached with it, delay the death or try to observe the time of getting social significance (Kalish, 1970). It has been proposed that deaths can be expected at the time of social occasions such as the Jewish day of compensation (Yom Kippur; Phillips & Feldman, <https://assignbuster.com/death-and-dying-changing-attitudes-through-the-ages-sociology-essay/>)

1973). From the year 1904-1968, researcher had found the difference between the deaths in non election as well as election years. They found that there was significant difference in the mortality rates of US people before electing US president. Some researchers have shown the fact about the low mortality rates just before to ceremonial occasions and the researcher found strong relationships between the death and the birthdays. The theory was that the people at their birthdays receive attention from the people (Philips, 1972).

3. 3 Social Stressors and the Self

Several sociological studies have talked about the social outcome for the lives of people along with fundamental changes during the period of industrial relocations, retirement, and institutionalization and at the time of economic depression. The mortality rates depend on these variables. It has been predicted that retirement is known as a stressful event which lead the higher rates of death for retirees as compared to the people who works. Life long work is considered as the stressor and retirement variable acts as the moderator that increases longevity. It has been revealed by the studies that mortality rate among the early and normal retirees within the major industries are different. The mortality rate of early retiree was higher than the predicted rates. The mortality rate in case of normal retirees was no different between the normal and expected rates. Some data was taken out from the companies such as pension, medical records, personnel etc.

4 Findings

4.1 Death is good?

If you are born to this world, you are probable completely to experience death at one time or the other because death is inevitable. The point is whether death is a good thing to experience or is it a bad one? Everyone living in this society faces death at one or the other instance. No one is born eternal. An individual dies and ends his or her life at certain age due to natural or accidental death (Lynch, 1997). There are thousands of ways in which a human being can die. This death adds to the fear in mind of humanity. Human beings fear of this uneven cause at one or the other time.

Death is acceptable for some people, while others fear against death (Nagel, 1970). The pain and fear of death can be dangerous. At such an instance, it becomes important to result in an approach to ensure that a person lives for long; however, the human beings have no control over this mandatory part of life that results into end of life. A human being feels comfortable considering death is for all and there is no loss of it if anyone faces it. All the human beings have to face death one or the other day. The human beings shall live their days and take complete enjoyment of it. One shall not be worried for his death at the entire instance, but shall be aware of comfort and enjoyment throughout his life. Humanity has to take due interest of this and live his life.

While on looking at other side, people consider life as most important asset for them. Life is of supreme importance and there is the life is priceless.

Therefore, it brings into attention whether life is most important for one? Yes

it is as per the point that life is everything for a human being and the loss of life means the greatest loss that can be in one's life. There is no positive or negative aspect associated with it though. Human beings give away everything for the sake of life. This brings into attention the importance of life. Shall we live our life without any tension or shall we keep on worrying because of no importance of life? It is true that all the human beings want to live more and more. But, can one live for eternity? None of the human beings is here to be here. The life cycle keeps on rotating and the human beings die.

Thus, from the above discussion it can be noted that the point whether death is good is a complex point to be cleared. It is not easy to find the right way in which we can consider whether death is good for a person or if it is not. There comes the need to assist in the way to come up to know whether death is good or not (Nagel, 1970). If the age has gone for an individual to live, the death could be a favourable point for him. However, it is still tough to say that death can be 'good'. On the other hand, in case someone dies due to an accident or any uncertain reason, it is an unfavourable act for him.

4. 2 Death- A change in Perception

Death has been a point of sorrow since long when the conceptual designs by Holbein demonstrated the paintings of dead Christ with a sorrowful act (Julia, 1989). The perception of individual towards the death changes with the passage of time. For a child, death is not defined. However, in the adulthood, it becomes a fear factor for most of the human beings. The human beings consider it as the real cause of danger at their stage when the love to live.

Therefore, individual's perception is quite conservative at this stage.

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However, the old aged people are not usually worried of death due to the reason that they already lived their life.

Nagel (1970) has argued that people do not fear for death because of non existence for long term because of this. One does not consider life as suspended for a short period of time because this is considered as a misfortune. It can be a pity for those who get out of the circulation of life. One is not conceived, but is born for once. The point always exists in mind for the fear of death in humanity. Being dead is not an event but a curse as per the humanity. The consideration is laid on living for the whole life without any risk. However, the risks are always related with the life. One cannot be at a state of complete risk free life. The time does not demonstrate whether the state of life would be at complete risk free state. Therefore, the need exists at such an instance to life for the society. As per the interviews conducted by Barnes (2008), responses were collected with regard to existence of God. These provided the details of self reflection along with clarifying important themes of writings. Barnes (2008) says that he does not trust for existence of God, but he misses God.

4. 3 Man of today- Worried of death

The man in today's life is more worried of death (Julian, 2008). On looking at the past records of Renaissance and mediaeval times, it can be noted that death was amongst the community events. The family members band together with each other to share the moments of sorrow at such an instance. This helps them be with each other at typical instances. This was considered as the reason for being together. However, the concept has

changed into a religion in today's time. None of the character is rigid in itself
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right from the beginning to the end, as there are continuous changes in thought process (Troyer, 2007). Today, it is usual to share the moments of sorrow with each other at hospital to share the tough times with each other. This helps in confining the complex situation with each other to give some support in these times. However, the fear of death is one and the same on comparing time of past and that of present.

The death is such an instance which gets out of the scope of an understanding of human being. This even can occur anytime and anywhere with anyone, no matter what the situation and setting is with the surrounding. An individual conceives death as a complex phenomenon. The death has been a point of worry right from the time it was recorded long-long ago when the humanity started. It is a simple concept in everyone's mind that life is the cause of joys and death is the cause of sorrows. There is a paradigm shift in the concept associated with death. This was the concept quite personal in historic times, but has become individualistic at present instance. This raises the need for higher degree of need for maintaining and regulating the tough situations to assure that the mankind is out of danger. If an individual gets ready to face the time of death, he can do so. The human psychology is the main factor that can result in death or life of a human being (Michel, 2003).

The perception of an individual depends on his life and profession with regard to death. Doctors and nurses who are operating surrounded by death of people all around one or the other day, consider this as the normal phenomenon at usual instance, while others take it as a tough one. The main

factor is the relatedness of death with the person who is suffering from it.

This characteristic affects the humanity in one or the other way.

4. 4 Dreadful act- Is there right time for it

There has always been a conception in mind, what is the right age for death?

One considers life as an important part right from his birth to the time the human being leaves his life (Nagel, 1970). Therefore, the life of humanity is always a good opt for individuals. But, one looking at the real life, we can note a number of events when the individual wishes to leave his life due to some or the other reason. This acts against the humanity and the living being gives up against his life. This may be at early stages of life or might take place at later stages. When an individual feels uncomfortable of his body and physique, the chances are there for taking an interest of ending one's life. However, these chances even increases more when the human being is not comfortable mentally due to some or the other reason. This acts quite badly against the humanity and the life is at risk.

The death is an imminent part of one's life as one cannot survive always. The most common components associated with life are death, vision, and premonitions (Crissman, 1994). The situation of promotions are not easy to be faced as it is the time when one knows that he is going to die within short span. This is the main factor that acts against the life and well being. The person gets worried due to this factor. This knowing of the situation can be due to some magical reason, or be supernatural, or through the natural sign or inner conviction (Crissman, 1994). The condition rises to take due care of such an instance; else the chances are there for risk against life and well

being. Thereon, the humanity survives only due to the situational success
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(Bryant, 2003). However, historic people were during the Appalachian culture focused more depending on superstition.

5 Conclusion

For the topic titled as, “ Death and dying: Changing attitudes through the age”, the topic was noted to be highly complex in actual sense. It was found that the researchers are contributing well to the research topic since the last century. This demonstrates high degree of interest among the individuals towards this concept. The death is always under the consideration to postpone because of increasing awareness and interest among individuals to live their lives. There is always the moral dilemma related to the euthanasia among individuals.

However, the case of fear is increasingly getting over the lives. Increasingly individuals get involved in wrongful act. This has raised the accidents of suicides to a higher degree. The death in today’s time has shifted towards being more and more deadly. Individuals take more interest in being attracted towards enlarged life. However, the change in attitude of man is still not much different as compared to that of historic times. There is still the importance laid on lives and humanity. This raised the attention among individuals to live for longer duration. On the other hand, the complex lives in today’s time has resulted in increased the complexity of humanity. This further adds to the pressure on the mind of individuals leading them to depression and thus resulting in wrongful acts.

There is no time for death until the end of hope of an individual. This point out increasing interest among individuals to live and enjoy their lives with

not much interest laid on the other factors. The fear against death is therefore a phenomenon which does not seem to decrease even after decades. Individuals would be keeping living their lives for more and more years, in spite of this being an uncontrollable variable for individuals.