

# Prevalence of fear of death sociology essay

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The previous chapter stated and showed the results and findings of this study. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the discussion of each finding. Each finding is regarding the three research questions that stated in Chapter 1. The prevalence of fear of death among different gender and age, gender differences towards fear of death and generation differences towards the fear of death, will be discussed. After the discussions of the findings, limitation of study, recommendation and conclusion were included as well.

### 5. 1 Discussion

#### 5. 1. 1 Prevalence of fear of death among different gender and age

From the finding of this study, it showed the prevalence of different levels of fear towards death among different age and gender in Johor Bahru district was 17% having very low levels of fear, and to the other extreme, 12% having very high levels of fear towards death. The others consisted of 24% low levels of fear, 31% having moderate levels, and 16% having high levels of fear. People can be having low levels of death due to the fact that death can be a path to end pain and misery, for example, to end terminal illness like cancer (Ewin, 2002). In addition, individuals with terminal illness like cancer were reported to have lower levels of fear towards death as they had already accepted the fact that they are going to face death sooner or later (Sherman, Norman, & McSherry, 2010). Besides that, individuals have low levels of fear towards death is also because they have a religion, in one way or another can promote well-being by reducing their fear towards death (Cohen, et al., 2005). Especially for intrinsic religious individuals, they believe that they have an afterlife after their death, thus it increase their likelihood to invest in religious work and increase the probability that they will go to heaven (Pyne, 2010). Moreover, religion can lower the fear of death by providing a sense of coping, emotional support (Cotton, Zebracki, <https://assignbuster.com/prevalence-of-fear-of-death-sociology-essay/>

Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006), and giving believers hope and sense of continuity that religion provides a pathway that transcends death (Xu & Mehta, 2003). Furthermore, research has indicated that people who are having low levels of fear towards death because they are less materialistic in comparing with those who are high in materialistic (Christopher, Drummond, Jones, Marek, & Therriault, 2006). According to Christopher et al (2006), fear of death is high for materialistic individuals because the sight of death clearly separates worldly things from the individual themselves, and individuals that have low levels of fear towards death were not worried of their possessions after their death. On the other hand, individuals with high levels of fear towards death may occur because of a few reasons as well. As Feifel (1959) quoted, individuals with high levels of fear towards death may be due to fear of the pain that death and dying might bring, punishment, loneliness, and the loss of control of their own lives (as cited in Sherman, Norman, & McSherry, 2010). Besides, as a healthy individual watched the suffering of a cancer-patient friend, they themselves will also fear that they will experience the pain during their time of death (Morrow, 2009). The fear towards death will increase if the pain is more intense and chronic (Bath, 2010). In addition, fear of the unknown can be another possible factor that caused people to have high levels of fear towards death (Morrow, 2009; TouchingYourFuture, 2012). It is seen as a core concept leading individuals to have high levels of fear towards death (Cicirelli, 2001). Fear is present because no one actually can tell what is after that beyond death (TouchingYourFuture, 2012). To some individuals, they do not know if heaven or hell really exist, because no one actually came back from the dead to report such things to them (Bath, 2010). People would not know

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about where their soul would be, or what will happen to their body (Bath, 2010). Furthermore, if a parent's level of fear towards death is high, it also affects the child to have high levels of fear towards death, especially if the parent emphasized strongly on the dreadfulness of death (Muris, van Zwol, Huijding, & Mayer, 2010). Another factor which caused high levels of fear towards death is because of fear of losing control (Morrow, 2009; TouchingYourFuture, 2012). People strived to gain control over most things, especially their own lives, but no one has gained control over death (TouchingYourFuture, 2012). The reason is because death is beyond the control of anyone, even though individuals can be very careful of their meals, behavior and regular check ups from the doctor, still they gain no control over their lives (Morrow, 2009).

5. 1. 2 Gender differences towards the fear of death

This study found that there is no significant difference between male and female in the level of fear towards death in Johor Bahru (JB) district. The total score for Death Anxiety Scale (DAS) is 15, the higher the score, the higher the level of fear towards death. According to Table 1. 7 and Figure 2. 4, it showed that female (n= 50) for both the older and younger generation exhibited slightly higher levels of fear towards death in comparing to their male (n= 50) counterparts. Regardless of the DAS scores reported, it was found to be that there is no significant difference between genders in the level of fear towards death. One of the reasons to explain this phenomena can be due to religiosity. Religion normally provide answers needed for questions which are unexplainable by science, like the afterlife of death, existential issues and questions regarding death, to give individuals a sense of controllability and predictability against overpowering anxiety and the fear towards death (Dezutter, et al., 2009). Both male and female also

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have their own religion, regardless of any kind of religion, this factor contributed to their levels of fear towards death. But different people have different degree of involvement in their religious activities (Barrett, Patock-Peckham, Hutchinson, & Nagoshi, 2005), hence the high and low levels of fear towards death. Individuals who are high in religious beliefs have greater well-being in comparison with individuals with low religious beliefs (Cohen, Shariff, & Hill, 2008). Research also showed that individuals who are high in religious beliefs tend to show lesser fear towards death, they actually fear something else, like fear of not being able to enter heaven after their death (Power & Smith, 2008). People who are low in religious faith are more worry of their physical death, having doubts about their fate and fearful of the unknown (Power & Smith, 2008). To be more specific, most respondents reported moderate, low and very low levels of fear towards death. There are 31%, 24%, and 17% respectively; on the other hand, respondents who reported high and very high levels of fear were not far behind, of 16% and 12% respectively. This may indicate that although they have religion as a source of reliance, but it is possible that there are other factors causing people to be uncertain towards the issue of death as well. The convenience of accessing to health care and medical service also played a part in relieving or adding stress to individuals upon the levels of fear towards death. As modern technology has improved, the life expectancies of individuals are promptly increasing as well, allowing some individuals to live about a hundred years old or maybe even older (Cicirelli, 2011). The accessibility of health care and medical service provided by, either the government or private sector, had led to the convenience that everyone is able to get help immediately if they are under the threat of death. For <https://assignbuster.com/prevalence-of-fear-of-death-sociology-essay/>

individuals who are facing life-threatening situations, they can be transferred to critical care facilities like the intensive care unit (ICU) for further treatment and special care around the clock (Sullender, 2010). The main government hospital in Johor Bahru is the Hospital Sultanah Aminah (HSA), which provides different kinds of facilities for emergency patients. Individuals who are facing life-threatening danger would not need to be worry about doctors attending to them because if their condition is critical, there are doctors standing by for 24 hours, and they will attend to the patients immediately (Hospital Sultanah Aminah, 2013). Apart from the easy accessed to health care and medical service in Johor Bahru, the pricing for hospitalization, health care and medical services are affordable as well. The prices for medication, facilities, and medical consultations are heavily subsidized by the Malaysia Ministry of Health (MMOH), thus a minimum fee will be charged to the public and free of charged for the disabled and the poor (Thatte, Hussain, de Rosas-Valera, & Malik, 2009). In addition, if anyone wants personal attention or private nurse, they can either visit private sector hospitals or call for freelance private nurses with affordable prices of Ringgit Malaysia (RM) 12 and RM 17 per hour for their services (Patsy, 2009). With the easily accessible medical facilities, personnel attention of medical examiners, affordable cost and health and treatment care, individuals in Johor Bahru are quite secure with their health care concern and as well as believing in the resources to overcome any life threatening danger.

### 5. 1. 3 Age differences towards the fear of death

This study found that there is significant difference between the younger generation and older generation age groups of individuals towards the fear of death in Johor Bahru (JB) district. Surprisingly, the younger generation (n= 50) reported higher levels

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of fear towards death in comparing to the older generation (n= 50) age group. At the beginning of this study, it was expected to find that the older generations are more likely to be more fearful of death. Unpredictably, it was found that the younger generations are more fearful towards death in comparing with the older generation. The reason of this finding can be explained by a few contributing factors. Firstly, from the older generation point of view, the older the age, the more different kinds of sickness or disease an individual gets, this has a term, known as frailty (Nicholson, Meyer, Flatley, Holman, & Lowton, 2012). This fact was accepted by most of the old people being interviewed in the old folks' home. They even mentioned that they went through different kinds of surgery until they were quite immune to the surroundings of the hospital. This proved that the older generation acknowledged that death and dying are accompanying their illness and sickness; but most of the older generation individuals are fearful of how they are going to face death (Lloyd-Williams, Kennedy, Sixsmith, & Sixsmith, 2007). Researches had shown that old aged individuals would prefer a death that is not painful (Gott, Small, Barnes, Payne, & Seamark, 2008), not by accidents, nor by violence (van der Geest, 2004). This kind of death referred to as a "good death" by the older individuals. They would prefer to die at home, surrounded by their family members, including their grandchildren and great grandchildren if possible (van der Geest, 2004). The elderly also would prefer dying in a comfortable environment, being respected as a dying individual, and having physical and psychological comfort from people around them (Miyashita, et al., 2008). In addition, older people also would not have much things else to fear about death if they accomplished everything they hoped for in life, and they are not being a

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burden to their family members or caretakers which accompany them throughout their last stage in life (Akechi, et al., 2012). Besides having accept the fact that death is a part of a cycle in life and wanting a good death, the older generation are not fearful of death in comparing with the younger generation because they believe that religion can be able to help them overcome the fear of death, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Individuals tend to turn to religion to help reduce the fear towards death as they may find meaning and hope through religiosity (Puchalski & O'Donnell, 2005). The most number of people having a belief towards God were ranged 58 years old and above (Bryner, 2012). In addition, another research also found that the older generation scored significantly higher in intrinsic religiosity than the younger generation (Thorson & Powell, 1990). Intrinsically religious can be defined as a set of beliefs that an individual used to govern themselves in accordance to their own religion (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010). It can be said that the older generation people are more religious than the younger generation, despite of whether they regarded God as judgmental of having a fatherly figure (Davie & Vincent, 1998). In other words, the older generation reported of being more intrinsic religious in comparing to the younger generation. As the older generations are more intrinsically religious, Thorson and Powell (1990) stated that they had lower levels of fear towards death. This statement was also supported by another study that mentioned that those individuals who reported with highly intrinsic religiosity tend to be having lesser fear towards death and dying, not just of their own death, but the process of dying and also the death and dying of their family members, relatives or spouse (Hui & Fung, 2009). Suyemoto and MacDonald stated that intrinsic religiosity helps to reduce the levels of fear towards death is mainly

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because of the promise of having an eternal life, although after passing through the stage of death, which they termed it as literal immortality (as cited by Hui & Fung, 2009). In another study, the researchers found out that some intrinsically religious old people used religion as a form of coping with death and the ending of life (Neimeyer, Currier, Coleman, Tomer, & Samuel, 2011). They claimed that having a personal religion can be a formed of strength and finding peace in the nearing of death (Neimeyer, Currier, Coleman, Tomer, & Samuel, 2011). This gives the older generation, no matter whether they are still healthy or lying at their death bed, the strength and courage to face anything that is coming. Furthermore, studies have also found that intrinsically religious individuals are more likely to have reduced risk of mortality, due to the fact that they observed more on healthy lifestyle, including not smoking, not consuming alcohol and other healthy behavior or lifestyle (Yohannes, Koenig, Baldwin, & Connolly, 2008). Intrinsically religious people are more willing to adopt a healthy lifestyle and partake fewer risky activities that have the potential of endangering their own lives (Yohannes, Koenig, Baldwin, & Connolly, 2008). The reason of doing this is because intrinsic religious people acknowledged that their body is the creation of God and good health is a gift (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010). Hence, the longevity of intrinsic religiosity individuals tend to be longer than those of extrinsic religiosity people. On the contrary with the older generation, surprisingly, the younger generation individuals are found to be more fearful of death. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the younger generation are fearful of dying at a young age (Lindfors, Solantaus, & Rimpela, 2012). This may due to the fact that the younger generation know that they have a future ahead of them, and afraid that they might not be able to fulfill their goals and dreams if they

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were to die young (Cicirelli, 1998), therefore, they tend to brush the thought of death aside and not thinking about it (Dennis, 2009). To this younger generation individuals, they view death negatively, in terms of extinction, rather than positively as having an afterlife after death (Cicirelli, 2001). As the older generations are more of intrinsically religion oriented, the younger generations appeared to be more extrinsically religion oriented (Thorson & Powell, 1990). Extrinsic religiosity referred to using religion with the intention of making oneself better, but not having the intention to be near to God (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010). Extrinsically religious individuals normally would be have higher levels of fear towards death because they does not internalized the teachings of religion, such as taking care of one's own body and health, therefore, they tend to take less precaution about their health as well as their well-being (Homan & Boyatzis, 2010). Other research also supports the fact that extrinsic religiosity individuals have higher levels of fear towards death (Wen, 2010). Although extrinsically religious individuals are exposed to the teachings of religion as well, but they do not necessary follow the teachings of their religion and doctrines (Ardelt, 2008). Because they do not devote their life to religion, they tend to be afraid of death from the aspect of fearing the unknown and fearing of the afterlife issues (Ardelt, 2008). Besides that, the younger generations are very much influenced by the media, which comprises of the television, internet, radio, news, video games and so on (CBS News, 2010). Different reports showed that the younger generations are spending much of their time on the media more than an average working adult spend the time on work (Rubin, 2010). Through this, we can see that much of what the younger generation see and hear from the media are very much influencing and affecting their

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perception of looking at things, including death as well (van den Beemt, Akkerman, & Simons, 2010). Most of the real life stories about someone dying or maybe even the report that someone is found dead normally would be exposed through the news. Printed newspapers, television or radio, online news sources and even news from social networking sites, can be a form of information for the younger generations to seek for the happenings around them (Williamson, Qayyum, Hider, & Liu, 2012). From the media about death, the younger generation learned from the movies or news they watched, it will affect their thinking, and develop a perception of death is a scary phenomenon (Richert, Robb, & Smith, 2011). For example, the media report of a dying stage of a young British celebrity, gave descriptions that the dying individual felt horribly pain, felt awful, agony, going blind, petrified, and images of the skeletal body might be good enough to scare the younger generations (Walter, 2010). Besides that, another example would be the death of Queen Victoria. In her journal before her death, the media reported her of having complaints about insomnia, loss of appetite, having malaise and in the state of fatigue (Abrams, 2010). After knowing all kinds of different feelings faced by celebrities or reality television shows, the horrible and disgust death portrayed by the media led the younger generations to be having high levels of fear towards death. To conclude, the fear of death among males and females, young or old generations are quite common globally, especially those who lacked meanings towards their own lives (Routledge & Juhl, 2010). However, the fear of death can be reduced if the individual had been intrinsically religious (Thorson & Powell, 1990), knowing where to get resources to enable their health and living a healthy lifestyle to preserve their own health (Yohannes, Koenig, Baldwin, & Connolly, 2008). 5. <https://assignbuster.com/prevalence-of-fear-of-death-sociology-essay/>

2 Limitation of study Throughout the whole process of this study, there were a few limitations that can be taken note and further improvements can be implemented in the future. Firstly, as this study only required the participants in Johor Bahru (JB), Johor, doing this study from Kampar, Perak is quite tough to achieve, especially when the older generations are needed to be involved in this study as well. As this is 2 different states, the questionnaires can only be distributed to participants of JB, which caused a barrier to proceed of the distribution of questionnaires in Kampar. Thus, data collection can only be done during semester breaks and internship for 3 months in JB. Secondly, most of the older generation participants in the old folks' home are non-English educated, they had some difficulties understanding the Death Anxiety Scale by Templar. Because the questionnaire was in English language, and majority of the older generation participants does not use English as their primary language. In addition, minorities of the old folks are illiterate, therefore, they does not understand the questionnaires at all. To overcome this problem, the questionnaires and even the informed consent was read and clearly explained to the old folks in order that they clearly understand the participation of the study. Another limitation is the number of participants. There were quite few participants that participated in this study (n= 100). Therefore, the number of participants available may not be able to represent the total number of residents in Johor Bahru (JB).

5. 3 Recommendation of study It will be better if researchers in the future will be able to add a few open ended questions at the end of the questionnaire. By doing so, it allows the participant to express themselves better by stating their reason, whether are they afraid of death or not. Otherwise, it is quite difficult to get the hidden factors of their fear

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towards death. By doing so, those participants which have high levels of fear might be encouraged to go for counseling to help them cope with their fear and to overcome it. Besides that, it is recommended that future researchers can translate the questionnaire. Translated questionnaire can be also offered to those who have Chinese or Malay as their first language, therefore, more participants could be involved in the research, not only those who know how to read English.

5. 4 Conclusion

As a conclusion, this study found that the prevalence of different levels of fear towards death among different age and gender in Johor Bahru district was 17% having very low levels of fear, and to the other end of the continuum, 12% having very high levels of fear towards death. The others consisted of 24% low levels of fear, 31% having moderate levels, and 16% having high levels of fear. Secondly, this study also found that there is no significant difference between male and female in the levels of fear towards death. Last but not least, it is found that there is a significant difference between the younger generation and the older generation in the levels of fear towards death.