

Research Paper

Relationship Between Coping Strategies and Locus of Control With the Anxiety of Death in Old People

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ABSTRACT

Objectives The prevalence of death anxiety in older adults is high. Thus, the aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between coping strategies and locus of control with death anxiety in older adults.

Methods & Materials In this descriptive and cross-sectional study, 113 elderly adults older than 60 years were recruited from the city of Tehran via available sampling method. For data collection, the Coping Strategies Inventory, Locus of Control Inventory and Death Anxiety Scale were employed. Then, the data were analyzed using SPSS 21 software and statistical tests such as Pearson correlation coefficient and Stepwise regression.

Results The mean (SD) age of the participants was 65.19(3.93) years. The mean scores of problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidance-focused coping, internal locus of control, external locus of control, and death anxiety were 48.20±7.45, 50.93±6.92, 50.39±8.67, 17.85±5.70, 61.51±6.08 and 8.67±2.31, respectively. Based on study findings, there was a statistically significant relationship between coping strategies ($P<0.05$) and locus of control ($P<0.05$) with death anxiety among older adults. The results of stepwise regression analysis indicated that avoidance and emotion oriented coping and external locus of control significantly predict death anxiety ($P<0.01$).

Conclusion Death anxiety is one of the key factors in the mental health of older adults. With regard to our findings, coping strategies and locus of control have an important role in death anxiety in older adults. Therefore, by designing psychological interventions based on coping strategies and changing locus of control from external to internal, death anxiety among the older adults can be improved.

Key words:

Death anxiety, Coping strategies, Locus of control, Older adults

Extended Abstract

1. Objectives

Death is a source of fear and anxiety for the older people; this is because death threatens the meaning of existence and ends life.

Due to the deterioration and loss associated with aging, it is expected that death anxiety increases as age increases. A review of the literature shows that there are several factors contributing to the anxiety of death such as locus of control, and accordingly, coping strategies have been investigated in several studies. Given the uncertainty, uncontrollability and irreversible process of death, anxiety

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is mainly associated with avoidance and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-oriented strategy known as trying to change the environment, does not seem to be associated with death anxiety. Furthermore, studies show that internalization is associated with more positive results, compared to externalization. For example, a sense of personal control is negatively accompanied by high perceived stress, negative mood and death anxiety. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the predictive role of coping strategies and locus of control in old people's death anxiety.

2. Methods & Materials

The current study is cross-sectional correlational study. The study sample comprised of all aged people in Tehran selected from public places such as neighborhood house, parks and cultural centers. To estimate the sample size, the proposed formula of Tabachnick and Fidel (2007) was used. Accordingly, the sample size was determined to be 106 using this formula. To ensure that the questionnaires are returned and also the possibility of partial completion of the questionnaire, and to prevent sample loss, the sample size was increased by 10% and finally 120 questionnaires were distributed to the population. To select the subjects needed for research, criteria such as the age of 60 years and above, lack of acute and chronic debilitating physical and mental diseases, lack of cognitive disorder and the ability to read and write were considered for inclusion. Due to the specific characteristics of the study

population and inclusion criteria, convenient sampling was used for sample selection. Eventually, after collecting the questionnaires and removing the faulty questionnaires, 113 questionnaires were analyzed. In order to observe moral considerations, informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from the participants. This study had no mental and physical harm on the participants, and all the participants were ensured that their information would remain strictly confidential. To collect the data, the Coping Strategies Scale, Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale, and Death Anxiety Scale (DAS) were distributed among sample subjects. It should be noted that research instruments were completed under close observation of the co-author at the place of the study. Data analysis was done using SPSS software version 21, and descriptive statistical methods were used to calculate the central tendency and variability indexes. Also, to evaluate the hypotheses, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and stepwise regression analysis were used.

3. Results

The average age of participants was 65.19±3.93 years. The mean (standard deviation) of problem-oriented coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidance coping, locus of control, external locus of control, and death anxiety were 48.20±7.45, 50.93±6.92, 50.39±8.67, 17.85±5.70, 61.51±6.08, and 8.67±2.31, respectively. In order to investigate the role of coping strategies and locus of control in explanation and prediction of death anxiety in the old

Table 1. Results of stepwise regression analysis in prediction of death anxiety based on the predictor variables

Step	Predictive Variables	B	β	R	R ²	F	Sig.	Linearity Assumption	
								Tolerance	Variance Inflation
1	Fixed	2.089	-	0.281	0.079	9.53	0.003	-	-
	External control	0.107	0.281						
2	Fixed	6.047	-	0.364	0.132	8.39	0.000	1.023	0.978
	External control	0.094	0.264						
	Avoidance coping	-0.062	-0.234						
3	Fixed	9.895	-	0.404	0.163	7.09	0.000	0.936	1.068
	External control	0.080	0.209						
	Avoidance coping	-0.060	-0.227						
	Emotion coping	-0.060	-0.180						

people, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and stepwise regression analysis were used. These tests have assumptions as parametric tests, which were measured and evaluated before inferential analysis.

The results of the assumption tests showed that these tests can be used to evaluate the hypothesis of the research. Pearson correlation coefficients showed that the avoidance and emotion-focused strategies have a significant negative correlation with death anxiety. In contrast, problem-focused coping strategies showed a significant negative correlation with death anxiety. It was also found that the external locus of control has a significant negative relationship with death anxiety, and the locus of control has a positive relationship with death anxiety. Stepwise regression analysis (Table 1) shows that in the first step, the first variable that was entered into the analysis and remained was the external control; this means that it was the most effective variable compared to other predictive variables.

In the second step, after external control variable, avoidance coping variable entered into the equation. In the second step, according to the coefficient of determination obtained, it can be stated that about 13% of the death anxiety of old people was due to the two variables of external control and avoidance coping strategies. In the third step, the last variable that entered into the analysis was predictor variable of emotion-focused coping. The correlation coefficient calculated in this step was 0.404, and the coefficient of determination was 0.163. The F obtained shows that the calculated regression model is significant at a confidence level of 99%. According to the coefficient of determination, it seems that 0.16 of variations of the variable can explain the criterion for death anxiety in old people by three predictive variables of external control, avoidance coping, and emotion-focused coping. The amount of beta shows that external control can directly predict death anxiety and avoidance coping and emotion-focused predict it in the opposite direction. In other words, with the increasing avoidance and emotion-focused coping, the level of death anxiety in old participants was reduced, and the more the external control increases, the more the death anxiety also increases along with it.

Conclusion

Although in the research literature, especially studies by Folkman et al., there is a consensus on the negative impact of avoidance and emotion-focused coping, there are consequences and emotional events and coping strategies known as adaptive strategies to deal with stressful events. However, these assumptions are true when stress-

ful events are manageable. In explaining this conclusion, it seems that old people who use avoidance and emotion-focused strategies deal with the ambiguous nature of the coming death more adoptively. Furthermore, Levenson (1973) believed that people with an internal locus of control have control over the consequences of an event go out of the cycle of repetitive thoughts easier. When people believe that they can cope with a stressful event, their concern is decreased and anxiety levels are also reduced on using effective coping strategies. As a result, it can be said that the more the external locus of control in old people, the less their ability to control racing repetitive thoughts to death.

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Conflict of Interest

All authors certify that this manuscript has neither been published in whole nor in part nor being considered for publication elsewhere. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.