



## An Examination Of Age And Years Of Study As A Factor Influencing Attitude Of Nigerian Students Towards Death Anxiety

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### Abstract

This study investigated age and years of study as a factors influencing attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. A total of 160 participants comprising 100 young students (56 fresh and 44 stale), and 60 adult students (34 fresh and 26 stale) were recruited from the population of undergraduate student of Faculty of Social Sciences Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka-Nigeria. They are between the ages of 17-32 years, with a mean age of 20.8, and standard deviation of 2.3 years. They were drawn from different faculties of social sciences, The Death anxiety Scale (DAS) developed by Templar (1970) and validated in Nigeria by Adebakin (1990), Erinoso (1996) and Uzosike (1998). It is 15-item inventory designed to measure the concerns, fears, apprehensions and forebodings people often have about dying. It was a survey design and two-way ANOVA was employed for data analysis. Two research hypotheses were postulated: that age will significantly influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety and that years of study will significantly influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. The findings indicated that years of study and age as a factors yielded no statistically significant effect on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. The implication of this study show that age and years of study as factor yielded no significant effect on attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety is that young students and fresh students will express the same pattern of death anxiety like stale students will express the same pattern of death anxiety like adult students. It implies that both young and older, fresh students and stale students requires psycho-education on death and anxiety management training in order to cope with death and its attendant anxiety to enhance their well being and academic performance. It is evident that, death anxiety is a common social problem witnessed in similar way among university students. This requires attention of university authorities and mental health professionals to enhance and promote the well-being of the student and their academic performance.

**Keywords:** Age, Years of study, Students, Death anxiety

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## **Introduction**

### **Background of the study**

Basically, humans instinctively tend to react to the issue of death in a manner that aligns with the concept of self-preservation. This reaction can range from the complete rejection or denial of the said topic to being indifferent or inhabiting the middle ground and rarely, accepting it with both hands wide open. The direction (positive or negative) and the degree of the reaction determine certain outcomes which include the choices that we make, emotions we experience and some behaviours we exhibit. When the direction of our reaction is in the negative and the degree to a great extent will amount to the phenomenon which can be termed as death anxiety.

The way we view the world, what we think, and what we do are all influenced by our attitude, which is a disposition. Maio, Haddock and Verplanken (2018) defines attitude as an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information. The authors went on to define an attitude object as anything that is assessed on a scale of favorability and that this favorability can differ in terms of valence (positive and negative) and strength (stability over time, resistance to persuasive appeals, capacity to influence how we process information, and ability to guide behavior).

Three components make up attitude, as can be inferred from the definition. The set of beliefs, thoughts, characteristics, and ideas we associate with an object is referred to as the cognitive component. It provides an answer to the question of what you think of an object; the affective component addresses how we feel about an object or how makes us feel. It refers to the feelings or emotions associated with an object. The behavioral components refer to the proclivity to behave or act in a specific manner towards an object.

The valence nature of attitude is of three types namely; positive, negative, and neutral, and it can be considered from two

perspectives according to Maio, Haddock and Verplanken (2018). From the one-dimensional perspective, the elements of attitude (belief, feeling and behavior) are at opposite ends of a continuum and people tend to experience either end or a position in between, That is, if one is said to have a positive attitude towards an object, they are going to possess only positive belief, feeling and behaviour towards that object and so on. According to the two-dimensional perspective, one end of a continuum can be a mixture of both negative and positive elements of attitude, with the mixture favoring the valence of that dimension. That is, a positive position has few negative and many positive elements, a negative position has few positive and many negative elements, and a neutral position has few positive and few negative elements. The position of ambivalence, which is the presence of both many positive and many negative elements, is also explained by this two-dimensional viewpoint.

There are different stages for everything that has life, including the human life. Death as one of those stages is mysterious, inevitable and final; it is the otherness of life. Like every other attitude object, attitude towards death can be positive, negative or neutral. Positive attitude towards death include neutral acceptance, escape acceptance and approach acceptance and the negative; fear of death and death avoidance which are ways of confronting and reducing death anxiety (Asata, 2020). Like attitude, the components of death anxiety (cognition, emotion and behavior) are related or intertwined. According to Cai, Tang, Wu and Li (2017), Death intrusion emphasizes the cognitive component of Death anxiety, referring to intrusive nightmares, imagery, and thoughts related to one's own death and this can give rise to the emotional component, fear of death which manifests as immediate negative feelings of fear and/or anxiousness and dysphoria which consequently leads to avoidance of death, negative behaviours such

as avoidance of places, thoughts, events, or things that can elicit the aforementioned feelings, obsession with your health, constantly checking for signs of illness. Intense thoughts of death may trigger what might resemble symptoms of a panic attack; heart palpitations, nausea, lightheadedness etc.

Barret (2013) defines death anxiety as the fear of and anxiety related to the anticipation, and awareness, of dying, death, and non existence, It has been conceptualized to include fear of death of oneself; fear of death of others; fear of dying of self; and fear of the dying of others (Dadfar, Lester and Bahrami, 2015). In other words, an individual with death anxiety worries not only about dying and their own death but also the dying and death of others with whom they have a relationship. Various terms have been used in literature to describe the issue of (negative) attitude towards death. Aside from death anxiety, the most common terms are fear of death, death, death threat, and death concern and death acceptance. Although these terms can (and have been) used interchangeably at times, they also reflect important conceptual distinctions in other cases (Neimeyer, 2015). For instance, the term anxiety has a connotation of disruptive distress and confusion or chaos, which distinguishes it from other terms such as fear or threat. Therefore, death anxiety goes beyond the feeling of fear and threat, reaching into the realm of persistence, intrusiveness and maladaptive. In addition, Cai, Tang, Wu and Li (2017) defined death anxiety as the state in which an individual experiences physical symptoms of being upset and nervous, and dreaded feelings of worry and fear related to one's own death dying generated by an imagined threat to one's existence.

Lally and Valentine-French (2019) stated that while infants have no concept of death, children in their early and middle years may engage in magical thinking because they do not fully comprehend the finality of death. By late childhood, they are aware of the finality of death and the fact that everyone including them will pass away. They may develop fears

of their parents dying, as well as feelings of guilt if a loved one dies. Adolescents comprehend death just as well as adults. Lally and Valentine-French (2019) further observed that, some adolescents develop a fascination with death and think about their own funeral while imagining how others will feel and respond. Despite their preoccupation with death, the personal fable of adolescence makes them feel immune to death. There are differences in the level of fear and anxiety about death experienced by people of different ages in adulthood. According to Sinof (2016), literature reports that death anxiety peaks in middle age and decreases with increasing age. There are several reasons to support this viewpoint, including the fact that older adults have fewer care giving responsibilities and are not concerned about leaving family members alone. They have also had more time to complete activities that they had planned in their lives, and they recognize that the future will not provide them with many opportunities. Additionally, because they have already experienced the loss of loved ones and are more accustomed to the possibility of death. They are less anxious. Late-adults are more concerned with having control over how they die than with death itself.

According to Chopik (2017), death anxiety decreases throughout the lifespan. Although Olatunji and Afolabi (2014) found no significant influence of respondents' age cohorts (early, middle, and late) on their death anxiety scores in their study, they did state that the mean score of middle adults is the highest, but the difference is not significant. Furthermore, Russac, Gatliff, Reece, and Spottswood (2007) discovered that death anxiety peaked in both men and women during their twenties and then declined significantly.

Besides age, another factor that can influence death anxiety and is the focus of this study is an individual's years of study. In terms of the prevalence of death anxiety in the student population, Thiemann, Quince, Benson, Wood, and Barclay (2014) discovered that death anxiety was moderate among their student participants, and Chow (2017)

discovered the same level of anxiety among 501 university students. Nienabar and Goederes (2015) investigated the relationship between educational level and self-reported levels of anxiety regarding death of self and others among undergraduate and graduate students and discovered that, while undergraduate and graduate students did not differ on fear on being destroyed, graduate students reported lower levels of death anxiety on all remaining measures.

### **Purpose of the study**

This study seeks to examine the age and years of study as a factor influencing attitude of Nigerian students towards death anxiety. Specifically to:

1. Investigate if age will significantly influence attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.
2. Examine if years of study will significantly influence attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.

### **Statement of the problem**

Death is one of the important issues in life. Death anxiety is a growing issue among students in Nigeria; therefore it becomes necessary to investigate the factors that often influence the student's attitude towards death anxiety among the Nigerian students. Some researchers have previously carried out some investigations on various factors on death anxiety among pregnant women, military officers and medical personnel, but this particular study wants to focus on age and years of study on attitude towards death anxiety among Nigerian students.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested:

- H1: Age will significantly influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.
- H2: Years of study will significantly influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.

### **Operational definition of terms.**

**Attitude:** it is one's mental position in relation to something, a way of behaving or

thinking. **Death:** it is the irreversible cessation of vital functions of the connection between our mind and our body.

**Death Anxiety:** this implies the fear of and anxiety related to the anticipation, and awareness, of dying and death.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 160 participants comprising 100 young students (56 fresh and 44 stale), and 60 adult students (34 fresh and 26 stale) were recruited from the population of undergraduate student of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka-Nigeria. They are between the ages of 17-32 years, with a mean age of 20.8, and standard deviation of 2.3 years. They were drawn from faculty of Social Sciences of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka-Nigeria.

#### **Instrument**

The instrument employed in this study is death anxiety scale (DAS) developed by Templar (1970). It is a 15 – item inventory designed to measure the concerns, fears, apprehensions and forebodings people often have about dying. He provided the original psychometric properties for American samples, KR-20 internal consistency =.76 3-week test-retest =.83 while Adebakin's (1990) obtained .45. After a 3 – week test – retest = .15 concurrent validity coefficients

#### **Procedure**

One hundred and sixty (160) participants were selected for the study. They were between the ages of 16-35 years, with a mean age of 21.96, and standard deviation of 2.9 years. The researcher employed A Half-hazard sampling technique for the data collection. The researcher after obtaining permission from the Academic Office having introducing himself and the topic for the study on appointed day met with Heads of the selected departments discussed with them on the time of meeting with the students. Similarly, the researcher met with the students in the lecture room after lectures on agreed date and time spoke to them about the topic and those who were willing to

participate in the study stayed back, signed the consent form and afterwards filled and returned the questionnaire the same day. A total of 175 were distributed and a total of 160 were properly filled.

**Design/Statistics**

This is a survey design and two-way ANOVA was employed for data analysis.

**Results**

**Table 1: Summary table of means on attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.**

	Years of study	
	Fresh	stale
Young	$\bar{X} = 7.11$	$X = 6.57$
Age	n=74	n = 57
Adult	$\bar{X} = 7.13$ n = 11	$\bar{X} = 7.07$ n = 18

From table 1 above, adult fresh student obtain the highest group means of 7.13, followed by young fresh student ( $\bar{x} = 7.11$ ), adult stale student ( $\bar{x} = 7.07$ ), and young stale student ( $\bar{x} = 6.57$ ). A high group mean indicates high level of death anxiety, while a low group mean indicates low level of death anxiety. Thus, the various group means are observed to be below the norm of 7.50 for males and 8.30 for females, indicating normal death anxiety level.

**Table 11: Summary table of two-way ANOVA on attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.**

Hypothesis I: There will be no significant influence of age as a factor on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.

Hypothesis II: There will be no significant influence of years of study as a factor on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	P
Rows (Age)	3.69	1	3.69	1.11	>.05
Columns (Years of study)	4.30	1	4.25	1.12	>.05
Interaction (Age vs. years of study)	0.30	1	0.20	0.09	>.05
Within cells	413.67	156	3.20		

The result from the table II above shows that, F- calculated value of 1.11 was found to be less than F- critical value of 3.91 at  $p < .05$ . This implies that there is no statistically significant out come. Therefore, hypotheses I which states that “there will be significant influence of age as a factor on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety” is hereby rejected. This means that age as a

factor yielded no significant effect on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. Also, F- calculated value of 1. 12 were found to be less than F- Critical Value of 3.91 at  $p < .05$  showing that there was no statistically significant outcome. Thus, hypotheses II which stated that “there will be significant influence of years of study as a factor on the attitude of Nigeria students

towards death anxiety” is hereby rejected. This shows that year of study as a factor yielded no statistical significant effect on the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. Besides, the lack of statistically significant interaction effect of age and years of study as factors is evident following the F-calculated value of 0.09 which is less than F-critical value of 3.91 at  $p < .05$ . Thus, this implies that the two factors jointly do not influence the attitude of Nigeria students toward death anxiety.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study have shown that age is not a factor that influences the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. This finding agrees with Olatunji and Afolabi (2014) study that found no significant influence of respondents' age cohorts (early, middle, and late) on their death anxiety scores in their study, they did state that the mean score of middle adults is the highest, but the difference is not significant. Ogbodo and Agu (2019) reported that age as a factor yielded no remarkable effect on the attitude of Nigerian student toward death anxiety. However, this study does not agree with the findings of the study Russac, Gatliff, Reece, and Spottswood (2007) who discovered that death anxiety peaked in both men and women during their twenties and then declined significantly. Similarly,

Again the result of this study shows that years of study as factors do not influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. The result of the present study agrees with the report of Ogbodo and Agu (2019) who observed that year of study as a factor yielded no remarkable effect on the attitude of Nigerian student toward death anxiety. The finding of this study is in consonance with the study of Nienabar and Goederes (2015) who investigated the relationship between educational level and self-reported levels of anxiety regarding death of self and others among undergraduate and graduate students and discovered that, while undergraduate and graduate students did not differ on Fear of Being Destroyed, graduate students reported

lower levels of death anxiety on all remaining measures.

### **Implications of the findings**

Obviously age and years of study does not impact on students' attitude towards death anxiety implying that both young and older student, as well as new and older students will experience the same level of death anxiety when compared under the Nigerian norm on death anxiety scale used in this study. Therefore in term of intervention programmes on managing experience of death anxiety among the Nigerian students there should be no discrimination in terms of age and years of study.

### **Limitations of the study**

The finding of this study has shown that both age and years of the study as factors does not influence the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. However the result should be viewed within the context of the limitations posed by the method and sample size. The nature of the topic “death” This is because many people see death as a taboo topic and therefore are reluctant to discuss it, hence it affected the number of the participant and their attitude in responding to the questionnaire.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

It is recommended that future researchers in this of study should investigation other populations like patients with terminal illness. It is also suggested that future research should increase the sample size.

### **Conclusion**

This study was embarked upon to examine age and years of study as a factors influencing attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. The participants were drawn from drawn from among the undergraduate students of faculty of social Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka-Nigeria who were between the ages of 16-35 years, 160 students comprising 100 young students (56 fresh and 44 stale), and 60 adult students (34 fresh and 26 stale). The Death anxiety Scale (DAS) was

used for data collection. The findings reveal that both age and years of study are not statistically significant as a factor influencing the attitude of Nigeria students towards death anxiety. It implies that there are need to explore other factors other than age and years of the study responsible for death anxiety among the Nigeria undergraduate to enhance their well being and academic performance. The study concludes that, death anxiety is a common social problem Nigeria university students experienced in the same form. It is plausible that these findings have come from a particular data set, yet the present study gives a direction for the necessity of more integrated research in this field.

### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no grant/financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately affected their report of the findings of this research.

**Statement of informed consent:** The participation was on voluntary basis and informed consent was obtained from the individual who participated in this case report.

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