

Examination of the Relationship between the Meaning of Life with Death Anxiety and Resilience during Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

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Abstract

The outbreak of Covid-19 has put the world at a horrible state, which directly and indirectly affects death anxiety and resilience. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between meaning of life with death anxiety and resilience during COVID-19 Pandemic with quantitative and correlational methods. To this end, a sample of 148 people (107 women and 41 men) was selected using simple random sampling method and the variables were measured using Meaning in Life Questionnaire by (Steger et al., 2006), Templer's Death Anxiety Scale (1970), and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (2003). The statistical method of analysis of variance was used for the main hypothesis and Pearson correlation for the sub-hypotheses and SPSS 23 for statistical data analysis. The results indicated that the main hypothesis had a significance level score of less than 0.1 and the sub-hypotheses less than 0.1, with a correlation coefficient of -0.37, 0.31 and -0.41. Therefore, the main hypothesis and the sub-hypotheses were confirmed and were significant. According to the results, one can increase resilience and reduce death anxiety by strengthening meaning and giving meaning to life to maintain mental health at the time of COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords: meaning of life, death anxiety, resilience, COVID-19

Introduction

Human today once again faces the horrors of destructive, lethal and unpredictable factors after World War II. Principally, human mortality gives meaning to all areas of his life. However, why is it so difficult and horrible for a human to accept this mortality? Being unpredictable and human's being placed in a big suspension increases fear and worry but can make us appreciate, use time well and people and things that we are interested in. It can lead the people to fulfill their desires and aspirations like a guiding force. However, some humans surrender, but the nature of human existence depends on hopes and aspirations, and it is possible that human beings who surrender themselves will become light in the darkness. Humans need to understand hatred in order to understand love, darkness to understand light, and death to understand life. (Author)

The fear of death has increased with the outbreak of COVID-19. Death anxiety is an unusual, morbid, dramatic, and persistent fear coming from one's knowledge and beliefs about death. Human is always aware of the fact that one day he will leave his body and become mortal, but he will not taste the fear and anxiety of death until he suffers from an illness or an accident. According to the purpose and meaning of life death anxiety varies in degree and intensity. People's perceptions of death and mortality vary according to their culture, religion, and lifestyle. Thus, there are several definitions and perspectives on death.

There are three types of fear of death: 1) what happens after death, 2) death event, 3) not being alive anymore (Yazdi and Mirzaei, 2018).

According to terror management theory (TMT), the higher the self-confidence and self-esteem of people, the greater the death anxiety control will be. Concerns about death may negatively affect life quality (Ghamari and Mir, 2017).

Resilience literally means patience. According to Leipold and Greve's theory, resilience is defined as the stability, or rapid recovery, and even a person's growth in unfavorable conditions. Overall, resilience can be defined as follows: resilience is the capacity to cope with life's hardships, tragedies, and unrests through behavioral, psychological, emotional, mental adaptation, and adaptation to external and internal expectations that differ from person to person. Moreover, resilience affects stress levels and physiological processes.

While psychological resilience has been conceptualized as a personality trait, it is considered as a process that changes over time and is not constant (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013).

Various factors are associated with resilience. Based on the research findings, emotion regulation strategies are of the significant features of resilience. Emotional regulation is the internal and external processes responsible for controlling, evaluating, and altering an individual's emotional responses while realizing goals. People using negative emotion regulation strategies display more improper behaviors in face of stress. Therefore, emotion regulation involves the strategies that decrease, increase, and maintain emotions and enable the individual to cope with stressful situations (Mohammadkhani et al., 2017).

Thinking about the meaning of life has always been of interest to human life, with many philosophers and mystics having different views on what life means. Each person defines the meaning of life differently. In the current age, one of the most worrying and unknown issues is the meaning of life.

According to modern philosophers, meaning is used in one of the following meanings: 1) purpose, where the meaning of life is about the goals of life, 2) value, in this type of meaning, the meaning of life is about the importance and value of one's life, 3) function, where the meaning of life is about the function and benefit of one's life (Yazdi and Mirzaei, 2018).

Joseph John Campbell argued that human does not look for what life means, but by looking for this meaning can feel the experience of being alive.

Self-knowledge is fundamental and the main starting point for searching for the meaning of life. According to the studies conducted, in certain moments of life people are more interested in making sense of life (Schlegel et al., 2017).

Viktor Emil Frankl argued that meaning-seeking exists in human life and cannot be denied as it is the very essence of humanity that inspired human existence. However, human meaning-seeking may fail. One has to note that human endeavor in meaning-seeking and self-value in life do not always balance and can be stressful. Nietzsche states that the one who has found the reason for life will make it anyway.

Nouri et al. (2018) examined the effect of group meaning therapy on the meaning of family life and performance in mothers with children with autism spectrum disorders. The results showed a significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups and group significance increased the meaning of life and improved the performance of mothers with children with autism spectrum disorders compared to the control group ($p < 0.01$).

Lee and Younsok (2019) examined death anxiety and quality of life of elderly people living alone. The results showed that death anxiety was significant between age, gender, education,

occupation, religion, relationship with children, reasons for living alone, understanding health status, understanding socioeconomic status and management and tolerance of health problems. Moreover, there was also a significant negative correlation between participants' death anxiety and life quality.

Meyer et al. (2020) examined the relationship between resilience and determination among nursing students before licensing. The results indicated that the resilience relationship with the continuous effort component was moderately correlated. This correlation was higher than the correlation between the compatibility and resilience component.

Sutin et al. (2020) studied the meaning of life and the risk of cognitive impairment in a prospective 9-year study in 14 countries. Their results indicated that a lack of meaning in life was related to a risk of cognitive impairment over 9 years.

The main question of the study is whether there is a significant relationship between the meaning of life and the anxiety of death and resilience at this time with the prevalence of COVID-19.

Method

The study method was quantitative with correlational design. Moreover, it was a fundamental study in terms of purpose. Data collection method was simple random method. The tools used were three questionnaires: Meaning in Life Questionnaire by (Steger et al., 2006), Templer's Death Anxiety Scale (1970), and CD-RISC (2003). Meaning in Life Questionnaire by Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler (2006) is designed to measure the existence of meaning and the efforts to find it. The sum of the scores of the questions 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10 determines the individual's level of effort to find meaning and the sum of the scores of 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9 the meaning of an individual's life. According to Steger et al., the reliability coefficients of the subscales of the existence of meaning and meaning search are 0.70 and 0.73, respectively. In Iran, test-retest reliability of the scale was obtained by Ashtad (2009) with a two-week interval: 0.84 for the subscale of the existence of the meaning and 0.74 for the search for the meaning. Cronbach's Alpha for the search for the meaning was 0.75 and 0.78 for the existence of meaning. Thus, the scale seems to have a good internal consistency.

Templer's Death Anxiety Scale (1970) is used to measure death-related anxiety, which is the most widely used one in this regard. The scale is a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 15 correct and incorrect questions. The range of scores is from zero to 15, where a high score sows a high degree of death anxiety. Sajino and Klein (1996) reported Cronbach's alpha

coefficients for the three factors that were obtained by analyzing the Italian editing factors of this scale as 0.68, 0.49, and 0.60. Templer (1970) obtained the test-retest coefficient of 0.83. Studies of the reliability of the Death Anxiety Scale show that this scale has acceptable reliability.

CD-RISC (2003): According to the studies, the questionnaire has been able to identify resilient and non-resilient people in clinical and non-clinical terms and in research affairs. The questionnaire has 25 items scored on a Likert scale from zero (completely incorrect) to five (always correct). Thus, the range of test scores is between 0 and 100. Higher scores show more resilience of the subject. The results of factor analysis show that this test has 5 factors: the perception of individual competence, trust in individual instincts, tolerance of negative emotions, positive acceptance of change and secure relationships, control and spiritual influences. Connor and Davidson reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 for the scale. Moreover, the reliability coefficient obtained from test-retest method at a 4-week interval was 0.87. The scale has been standardized in Iran by Mohammadi (2005). He used Cronbach's alpha method to determine the reliability of CD-RISC and reported a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

The study used descriptive (mode, median, mean, variance, standard deviation, tables and graphs) and inferential statistics. In the inferential statistics, ANOVA method was used due to having three main variables, and Pearson correlation was used for the relationship of sub-hypotheses. Spss 23 was used for data analysis.

Results

This section first examines the age and gender of the population, which is called descriptive statistics, and the other section will examine the relationships between variables, called inferential statistics.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of age and gender

Statistics

		Age	Gender
N	Valid	148	148
	Missing	33	33

Mean	26.36	1.72
Std. Error of Mean	.585	.037
Median	24.00	2.00
Mode	23	2
Std. Deviation	7.113	.449
Variance	50.601	.202
Range	34	1
Minimum	20	1
Maximum	54	2
Sum	3902	255

As Table 1 shows, the mean age and gender of the 148 samples studied were 26.36 and 1.72, respectively with the lowest and highest numerical values of the age as 20 and 54 years, respectively.

Table 2: Age status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20	8	4.4	5.4	5.4
	21	22	12.2	14.9	20.3
	23	36	19.9	24.3	44.6
	24	16	8.8	10.8	55.4
	25	9	5.0	6.1	61.5
	27	18	9.9	12.2	73.6
	29	7	3.9	4.7	78.4
	30	9	5.0	6.1	84.5
	31	6	3.3	4.1	88.5
	32	10	5.5	6.8	95.3
	54	7	3.9	4.7	100.0

Total	148	81.8	100.0	
Missing System	33	18.2		
Total	181	100.0		

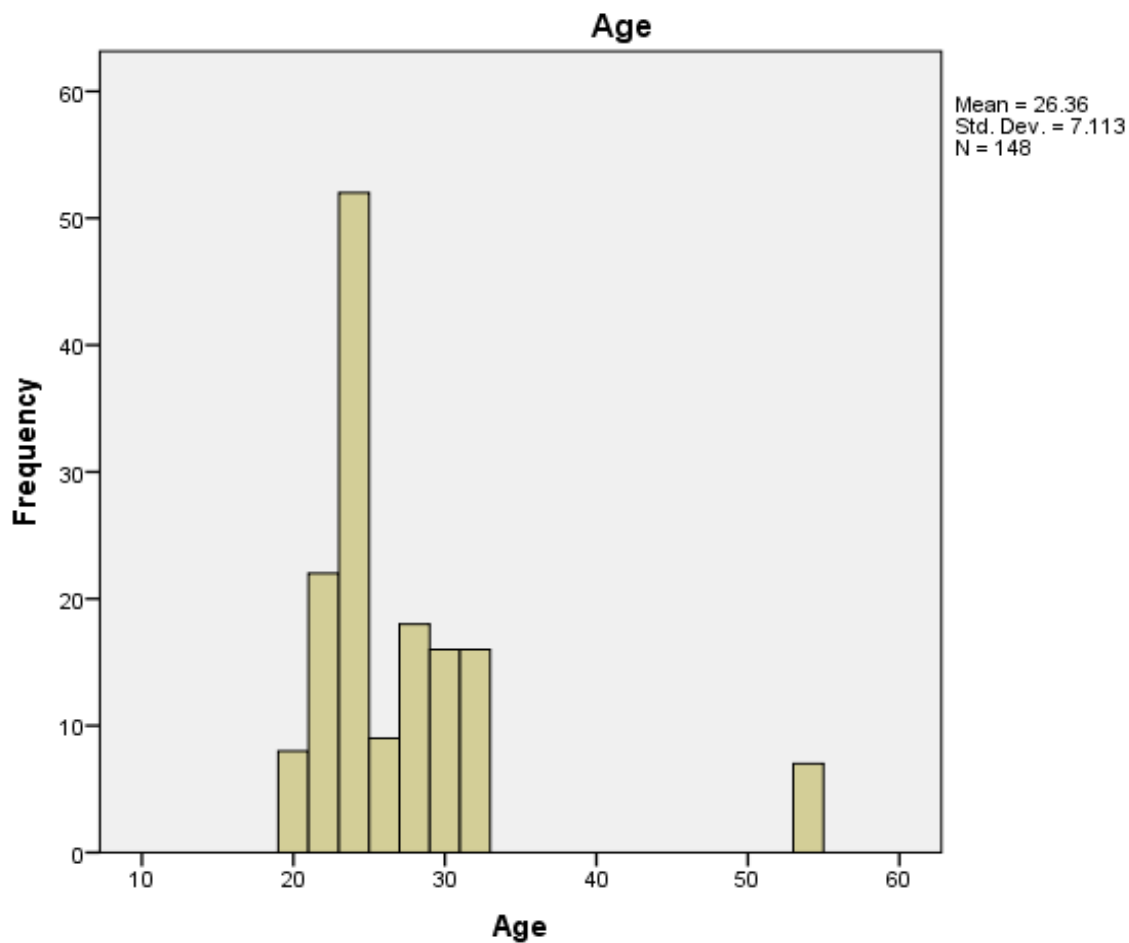
The values for the age in Table 2 are 20 to 54 years. The first column shows all the values specified for age. The second column shows the number of data that has this value. The third column shows the percentage of all valid data related to this value, and the fifth column shows the percentage of cumulative frequency for age.

Table 3: Gender status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	41	22.7	27.7	27.7
female	107	59.1	72.3	100.0
Total	148	81.8	100.0	
Missing System	33	18.2		
Total	181	100.0		

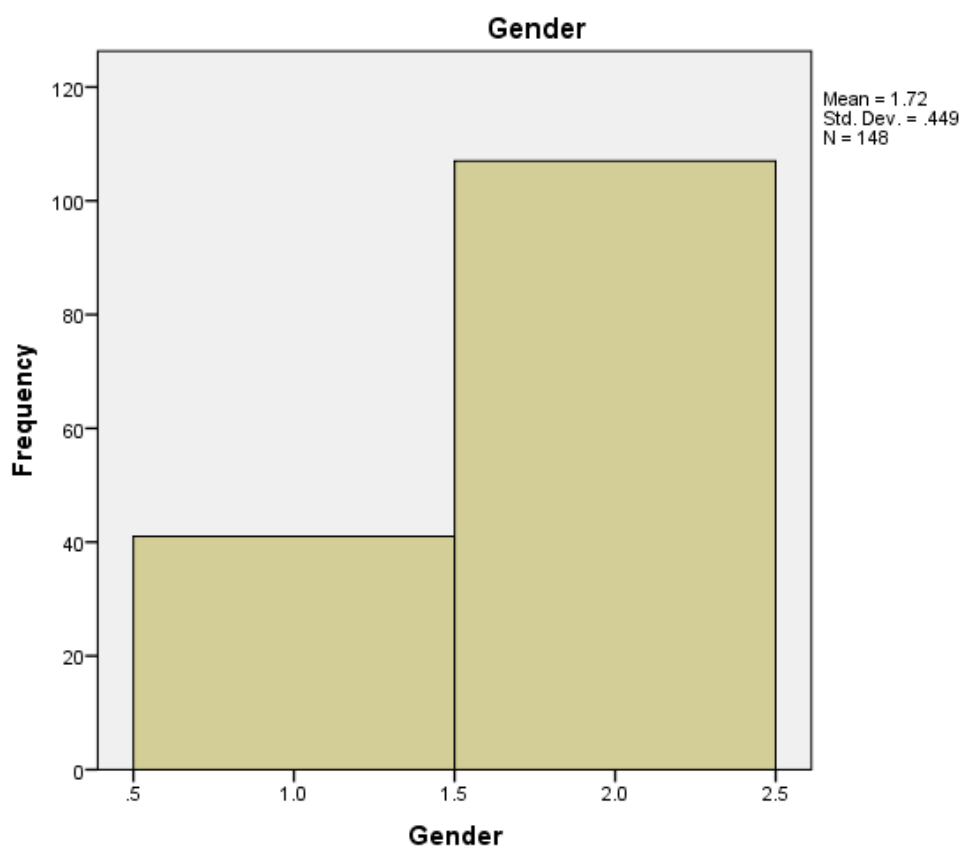
According to Table 3, the number of available data, the percentage of all available data, and the percentage of all valid data for males were 41, 22.7, 27.7, respectively, and for the females 107, 59.1, 72.3. Moreover, the cumulative frequency of the male gender was 27.7 and 100 for the female.

Diagram 2: Age



The diagram above shows the histogram diagram of age. The horizontal axis is the value of the age and the vertical axis is the frequency. According to this diagram, most research samples are in the age range of 20 to 30 years.

Diagram 2: Frequency diagram of gender histograms



The diagram above shows gender histogram. The horizontal axis is the value of the gender and the vertical axis is the frequency. According to this diagram, the number of females is higher than males.

Table 4: ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Resilience	Between Groups	12805.331	21	609.778	10.596	.000
	Within Groups	7250.858	126	57.546		
	Total	20056.189	147			
Death anxiety	Between Groups	250.419	21	11.925	9.930	.000
	Within Groups	151.310	126	1.201		
	Total	401.730	147			

According to Table 4, the significance level is less than 0.01 that is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the meaning of life with death anxiety and resilience.

Table 5: Correlation of meaning of life with death anxiety

		Meaning of life	Death anxiety
Meaning of life	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	148	148
Death anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-0.372**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	148	148

** : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of Table 5, the significance level score is less than 0.01 that is smaller than 0.05. Moreover, the correlation coefficient is -0.37, which shows a negative and significant relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety.

Table 6: Correlation of meaning of life with resilience

		Meaning of life	Resilience
Meaning of life	Pearson Correlation	1	0.310 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	148	148
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	0.310 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	148	148

^{**}: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of Table 6, the significance level score is less than 0.01 that is smaller than 0.05. Moreover, the correlation coefficient is 0.31, which shows a positive and significant relationship between the meaning of life and resilience.

Table 7: Correlation of death anxiety with resilience

		Death anxiety	Resilience
Death anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.413 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	148	148

Resilience	Pearson	-0.413**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	148	148

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results of Table 7, the significance level is less than 0.01 that is less than 0.05. Additionally, the correlation coefficient is -0.41 showing a negative and significant relationship between death anxiety and resilience.

Discussion

This study was carried out to examine the relationship between life meaning with death anxiety and resilience during COVID-19 Pandemic. The first finding from the study was a significant relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety and resilience according to Table 4. Furthermore, the results obtained from Tables 5, 6 and 7 showed a significant relationship between these three variables.

Although there are differences between this and other studies conducted in terms of population, sample and method, one can cite similar studies too including Balouchi et al. (2017) who examined the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between spiritual health and the meaning of life with the mental health of patients with colorectal cancer. There was a positive and significant relationship between the meaning of life, spiritual health and resilience with mental health. Meaning of life and spiritual health cannot predict the meaning of mental health. Resilience was a positive and significant predictor of mental health. Perspectives, values, and goals of the meaningful component of life can bring about increased resilience and, consequently, increased mental health. Additionally, a significant relationship was observed between meaning of life, spiritual health and resilience with patients' mental health. According to the results of the study above, there was a significant relationship between the meaning of life and resilience, which is similar to the present study. The population of the above study was patients with colorectal cancer, and in the present study, those who have quarantined themselves during COVID-19 Pandemic. Likewise, in terms of

variables, the above study used resilience, meaning of life, spiritual health and mental health and the present study meaning of life, death anxiety and resilience.

Hosseini et al. (2016) studied the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between death anxiety and general health of Iraqi immigrant adolescents affected by the war with ISIS. The results significantly confirmed the inverse relationship between death anxiety and resilience and indicated the optimal fit of the role of resilience mediators in the relationship between death anxiety and general health. According to the results, death anxiety and resilience, like the result of the present study, have a significant inverse relationship with each other and are similar in this regard. The population of that study was Iraqi immigrant adolescents affected by the war with ISIS, and in the present study, those who quarantined themselves during COVID-19 Pandemic. They are also different in terms of variables. In the above study, death anxiety, resilience and general health were used, but this study, death anxiety, resilience and the meaning of life.

According to the results, meaning of life could act as a potential and a force for higher resilience in adverse and critical situations. Moreover, meaning of life can change a person's attitude and vision towards death. Furthermore, it can also be an effective component in maintaining mental health. Human goes to war with destiny, difficulties and hardships based on the value and meaning of the life. Human cannot live long with feeling of emptiness; otherwise he will suffer from illness and existential emptiness. By strengthening the meaning of life - changing the type of insight and meaning-making - even the negative and tough dimensions of life like today's unfavorable conditions that have affected human life (COVID-19) and are inevitable can be changed from unfavorable and horrible situations to purposeful ones in line with concept and meaning in life.

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