



## THE EFFECT OF GENDER, RELIGION AND CHANGING INDIAN FAMILY PATTERN ON DEATH ANXIETY AMONG OLD AGE PEOPLE

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### ABSTRACT:

*This paper aims at ascertaining the gender, religion and family pattern affecting death anxiety among Indian aging. Indian society is dynamically changing by the modernizations that are taking place in the family under rapid on-going socio-cultural changes in contemporary Indian society. For this study 240 (Male 140, Female 140) of an age 60 and above old age people from different religions were selected. Death anxiety scale was administered on participated sample. The results confirm the impact of religion, changing Indian family pattern and the role of gender on death anxiety among Indian aging. Moreover, results revealed the low level of death anxiety among old age in Jain families compared to Hindu and Muslim families. There is significant difference in accordance to gender; female group has high level of death anxiety. It is proved that gender influences death anxiety. Elder people of Nuclear family have higher mean score at death anxiety than elder people of joint family.*

**KEYWORDS :** Gender, Religion, Family Pattern, Death Anxiety .

### INTRODUCTION

Ancient Indian society provides a congenial set of conditions for physically comfortable and emotionally healthy old age. The extended family is golden side of Indian social system. Strong kinship ties and religious values extol the virtues of old age. People have, for generations, society acted as natural social security in the old age. In early period senior people in Indian society have enjoyed high status, respect, and authority, not only in family but also in society because of norms and values in the ancient scriptures. In Indian society, joint family system was being practiced from generation to generation. In traditional Indian society, old age people used to receive high status, honor and dignity in the family. It was considered that it is duty of son and family to give respect and take care of old age people at home. So old age people never had to seek care from outside the family and kinship group. Their children and family members take care of them with love by heart. This condition of elderly was very high in the preindustrial era. Many scholars have reported about deterioration high status of old age people in present-day India. Once upon a time old age people were honored as God but today there has been a marked change in treatment of old age people compared to preceding period.

India is going through rapid transformation. It resulted in braking joint family system which is an asset of emotional family relationship. Gradually nuclear family system is growing. Everything is changing due to interlocking factors of westernization, industrialization, urbanization, globalization, new technological changes, increasing literacy amongst women and changing value system of better employment and social status. In this way old trends and value systems are changing and are replaced by new lifestyles and waning traditional family values.

Due to this changing structure of society, a set of new challenges has to be faced by elderly people particularly. This changing scenario has brought out quite unpleasant and embers assign impact on old age

people. Social position of and attitude towards old age people are insecure in India. All these things are appalling for Indian social system. Old age people have lost their secure life and shelter which provides respect and effective care in joint family system. They are neglected by son and daughter-in-law. Due to such reason they have to live alone by force. This situation indicates growing rift between the generations. We want to think about reality behind this problem. There are many reasons like shortage of housing place in urban and metro cities. When both husband and wife are working; they feel that old age people are burden upon them. Young generation wants to live life as they want, they don't like interference in their matter. Mostly children go to urban areas leaving behind the old age people in native place. Old age person's insecurity increases with migration of their children from their house to metropolitan cities or abroad. It results in elderly people feeling loneliness and isolation. In another case they prefer to live separate from their parents. In such situation old age people face much psychological, financial, and physical crisis and it affects their everyday life.

### DEATH ANXIETY

Death anxiety has received considerable attention by research scholars. It's is also called as thanatophobia. There has been much research in last several years. Earlier researchers have defined death anxiety as uneasiness about one's extinction and dying process (Tomer, 1992), Jenet Belsky (1999) defined "Death Anxiety" as the thought, fear, and emotion about the final event of living that we experience under more normal condition of life (Belsky, 1999). According to Belsky, as people live their lives, they are continuously suffering varying degree of anxiety about death. Erick Erikson (1950) stated that people process through a series of crises as they grow older, and that later in life a stage of Ego Integrity is attained. Philosophers in modern era have almost unanimously assumed that the human encounter with death is one marked by dread, uncertainty and fear in word anxiety. More recent acceptable definition of death anxiety is "A cluster of death anxiety is characterized by fear, threat, and uneasiness, discomfort and similar negative emotional reaction as well as anxiety in psychoanalytic view as kind of diffusion fear that has no clear object." (Nemeyer, 1997) Death anxiety is an attitude that an individual holds towards death. It is defined as negative and apprehensive feeling that one has when thinking about death and dying and is used interchangeable with fear and death (Richardson, Berman and Piwowarski, 1983)

### GENDER

Another variable which is linked with death anxiety is gender. Some research indicates that older women reported high level of death anxiety than older men. (Suhail and Akrams 2002) Study on Pakistani Muslims discovered that women experienced greater death anxiety than men and Abdel-Khalek (2005) discovered that females experienced significantly higher death anxiety levels than males. (Cicirelli, 1999; DePaola, Griffin, Young, & Neimeyer, 2003). Research in Arab populations also supports this. (Abdel-Khalek, 2007; Suhail & Akram, 2002). Although those studies were not done exclusively with elderly individuals. Mumford et. al. (1997) carried out an epidemiological study on anxiety and depression in rural Punjab and Pakistan, a setting that is very similar to the Indian setting. They found that the prevalence rate of anxiety and depression was higher in women and married women in unitary families had higher levels of emotional distress than those in extended or joint families,

Besides this, another research indicates no gender differences in death anxiety. (Fortner & Neimeyer, 1999). Fortner and Neimeyer (1999) conducted a review on 49 studies about death anxiety and have also found that gender does not seem to predict death anxiety in elderly people. One should note, however, that this relates to the elderly and not to young adults. Regarding young adults, death anxiety is higher in younger females. (Wu, Tang, and Kwok's 2002) A study on Chinese elderly people in Hong Kong found that gender does not affect death anxiety. Being male or female does not increase or decrease one's death anxiety.

## RELIGION

Religion is derived from the Latin religion, According to the philologist Max Müller, the root of the English word "religion", the Latin Religion, was originally used to mean only "reverence for God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things, piety. There are many definitions of religion. The typical dictionary definition of religion refers to a "belief in, or the worship of, a god "or the "service and worship of God or the supernatural". According to Wikipedia "A religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. Many religions have narratives, symbols, and sacred histories that aim to explain the meaning of life, the origin of life, or the Universe. From their beliefs about the cosmos and human nature, people may derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle". Edward Burnett Tylor defined religion as "the belief in spiritual beings". He argued that narrowing the definition to mean the belief in a supreme deity or judgment after death or idolatry and so on, would exclude many people from the category of religions, and thus "has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them". Religious beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are the representations that express the nature of these sacred things, and the virtues and powers which are attributed to them.

Psychologist William James defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend them to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine". By the term "divine" James meant "any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not" to which the individual feels impelled to respond with solemnity and gravity.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

**Death Anxiety:** Death anxiety is defined as the thoughts, fears, and emotions about that final event of living that one experiences under more normal conditions of life as measured by Death Anxiety Scale developed by Upinder Dhar, Savita Mehata and Santosh Dhar.

**Religious Groups:** In present study religious groups considers people who practice one of three religious that are practiced are India which are Hindu, Muslim, and Jain

**Hindu-** A religion where the participants follow a supreme being which has many forms or incarnations and they also follow the cultural practices predominant to the religion.

**Muslim-** The religion where the participants believe that there is only one God and follows the sacred text of Quran. They believe in Mohammed as the Prophet.

**Jain-** This religion follows and believes in Jain shasan or Jain dharma. There are twenty four Tirthankaras, Rushabh as first and Mahavira as the last Jain practitioners who believe that non-violence and self control are the means by which one can obtain liberation.

**Aim:-** To study the level of death anxiety among Hindu, Muslim and Jain religion

## OBJECTIVES

- 1- To examine and compare the level of death anxiety among three religions.
- 2- To find out the level of death anxiety according to their family pattern.
- 3- To search the gender difference in the level of death anxiety.

## HYPOTHESES

- 1- There is no significant difference in the level of death anxiety across religion.
- 2- Elderly people living in Nuclear family would experience high death anxiety level than elderly people living in joint family.
- 3- There is no significant difference in the level of death anxiety in respect of gender.

## Research Design

In present study Comparative Research Design has been used.

### Variables

- **Independent Variables:** - Religion, Gender, Family Pattern.
- **Dependent Variable:** - Death Anxiety.

### Sample

For the present study, participants have been selected according to the religion. Moreover the subjects are selected who have strongly practiced their religious principles in their personal life. Sample design is as follows.

Religion	Gender				
		Male		Female	
		Nuclear Family	Joint Family	Nuclear Family	Joint Family
	Hindu	20	20	20	20
	Muslim	20	20	20	20
	Jain	20	20	20	20

### Tools

Death Anxiety Scale developed by Upinder Dhar, Savita Mehata and Santosh Dhar. This test consists 10 items which measure level of death anxiety. The reliability of the scale was measured by Split-half reliability coefficient, it was 0.87 besides face validity as all items of the scale are concerned with the variable under focus. The scale has high content validity. In order to determine validity from the coefficient of reliability (Garrett, 1981). The reliability index was calculated. The later has indicated high validity on account of being 0.93

### Procedure

With previous intimation of the data collection, data has been obtained from various participants who were willing to participate in the study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Table No 1. Showing Gender Differences on Death Anxiety**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	df	T
Death Anxiety	Female	120	6.18	2.086	238	5.91
	Male	120	4.65	1.926		

The present study aimed at to find out the impact of gender on death anxiety of elderly people. It is noticed from table 1 that gender made a significant effect on death anxiety. The mean score of elderly female is 6.18 and SD is 2.08, while the mean score of elderly male is 4.65 and SD is 1.92. The calculated 5.91 for mean difference is significant on 0.01 level of confidence. Table 1 shows that female group has high level of death anxiety than their counterparts. Sample researches have indicated such results (Mimarot, 2011, Cicirelli, 1999; DePaola, Griffin, Yong, and Neimeyer, 2003). Indian society is male dominant and family responsibility is imposed on female, hence the caring responsibility of family members automatically relies on shoulder of female. Indian females have a feeling that if they die early, before their husband, their family will become isolated and helpless.

Such types of fallings have led death anxiety among female group. Why women do have high death anxiety? Indian women are more sensitive about family matters due to

their caring main role within family. Schumaker, Barraclough, and Vagg (1988). In most societies, men are encouraged to pursue success and attain accomplishments which would cultivate the illusion of immortality while women are not. This illusion is useful as people rely on it to counter and conquer death anxiety. Other researchers declared that as women more readily admit troubling feelings as compared to men, their death anxiety scores are higher. Still others claim that death might have different connotations and implications for men and women and thus may be construed differently (Schumaker, Barraclough, & Vagg, 1988). This would affect their levels of death anxiety as they might fear different dimensions of death anxiety.

**Table No 2. Showing Family Pattern Differences among old age people on Death Anxiety**

	Family Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T
Death Anxiety	Joint Family	120	4.63	1.896	238	6.06
	Nuclear	120	6.20	2.101		

To investigate the effect of changing family pattern on death anxiety is one of the objectives of the study. Indian family system is rapidly changing. Day by day nuclear families are increasing. Its evident result is that psychological problems of elderly people are rising. It is evident from table no. 3. In nuclear family elderly people have higher mean score on death anxiety scale that is 6.20 than joint family elderly people, they have 4.63 mean score. The 't' value 6.06 for mean difference between joint and nuclear family and it is significant on 0.01 level of alpha. The family environment of joint and nuclear family is different. In joint family, people feel more secure. In joint family emotional bonding with each other is maintained by all family members. Also family support, emotional catharsis, sharing of problems, lack of loneliness, etc. This close relationship can increase confidence and self- esteem. It may buffer death anxiety. This positive factor is present in joint family hence; death anxiety is lower among joint family members.

**Table No.3 Summary of one-way ANOVA on Death**

Death Anxiety					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	49.758	2	24.879	5.613	0.004
Within Groups	1050.575	237	4.433		
Total	1100.333	239			

Table no 3 reveals one-way ANOVA results of death anxiety among different religion. The Hindu, Muslim, and Jain considered for the study. It is found that these religions differ on death anxiety ( $F(2,237)=5.613, p<0.04$ ). Anitha, B and Chaitanya Sridhar have conducted a study and have found significant difference in death anxiety among Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. India is secular country and a different religions people practice their own religions principal in their personal life. Each religion has different culture, values, norms, ethics, rituals, faith, beliefs etc. These factors are direct indirectly connected to death anxiety. Religion plays a different role in different way. Religion is seen as having three main functions within societies. Firstly, religion unifies people by providing shared beliefs, values, and norms (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005). Secondly, religion helps people deal with issues of life and death by providing a framework as to what kind of life people are supposed to lead and also what happens to them after death (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005). Thirdly, during times of crisis and upheaval, religion has been known to be a provider of emotional and psychological support to people (Richardson, Berman, &

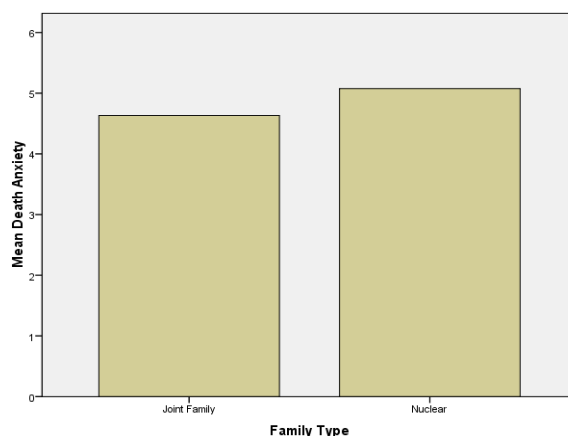
Piwowski, 1983). Therefore, we can conclude that religion plays mediating role in death anxiety. Above factors are responsible for yielding religion difference on Death Anxiety.

**Table No.2.1 Schiff's Post-hoc multiple comparison on death anxiety**

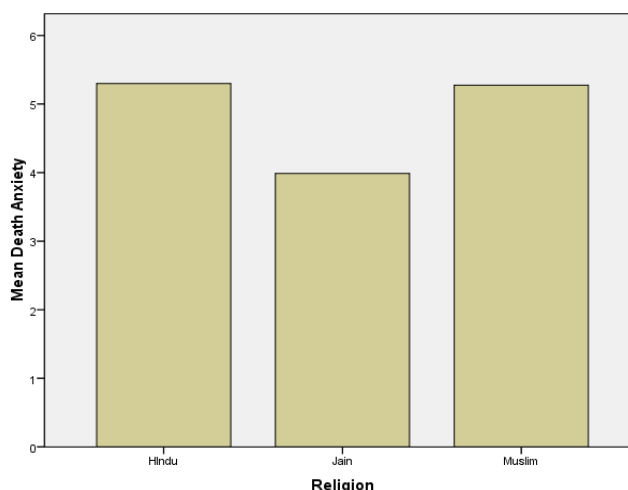
Death Anxiety Scheffe				
(I) Religion	(J) Religion	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
<b>Hindu</b> 5.85	Jain	1.062*	.333	.007
	Muslim	.237	.333	.776
<b>Jain</b> 4.79	Hindu	-1.062*	.333	.007
	Muslim	-.825*	.333	.048
<b>Muslim</b> 5.61	Hindu	-.237	.333	.776
	Jain	.825*	.333	.048
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.				

Table no. 2.1 shows the mean differences between three religions. The mean score of Death Anxiety among Hindu Elderly people is 5.85 which indicate higher than other religion. The Muslim religion elderly people also have similar level of death anxiety compared to Hindu religion. The main finding of this study is that the mean score of death anxiety among Jain elderly people is 4.79 which show a comparatively low level of death anxiety. In this study Jain elderly people have lowest mean score than other two religions. The study of Suhail and Akram 2002 discovered that religious faith is associated with death anxiety. There are many views and myths about life after death according to different religions. As the Jains perceive the rites of Sallekhana, they accept death, celebrate it and do not weep for the dead.

**Figure 1: Joint family and Nuclear family old age people comparison on death anxiety**



This figure also indicates that death anxiety is higher in nuclear family than in joint family old age people.

**Figure 2: Religion Comparison on death anxiety**

There are three religions showing on X axis and mean of death anxiety on Y axis of figure 2. This group highlights that Hindu and Muslim old age people have approximately same death anxiety. However, old age people from Jain religion have comparatively low level of death anxiety.

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