Religious Orientation and Death Anxiety among Elderly Pakistani Muslims: Mediational Role of Afterlife Belief and Ego Integrity

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The present study aimed at assessing the afterlife belief and ego integrity as potential mediators between religious orientation and death anxiety among older Muslim adults. Data were collected from 515 adults above the age of sixty, recruited from different areas of Punjab (Pakistan). Men (*n*=304) and women (*n*=211), were given representation in the Convenient sample. Age of the sample ranged from 60 to 93 years (*M*=65.3, *SD*=6.17). Urdu translated Revised Religious Orientation Scale (Rasheed & Obaid, 2012), Afterlife Belief Scale for Muslims (Ghayas & Batool, 2017), Urdu Translated Ego Integrity Scale (Ghayas, 2016) and Urdu translated and adapted version of Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety (Ghayas, 2016) were used to measure the study variables. Structural Equation Modeling was carried out through AMOS and results revealed that negative afterlife belief and ego integrity were fully mediating the relationship between death anxiety and intrinsic religious orientation. Extrinsic religious orientation appeared as a non-significant correlate of death anxiety. Results of the study support the death apprehension theory and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.
Keywords: Religious orientation, death anxiety, ego integrity, afterlife belief, older adults

One of the most important concerns of old age is death anxiety. It is a universal psychological dilemma for a human being to confront deathand the anxiety generated through the consciousness of its being

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inevitable. The origination of negative emotions resulted from ideas of one's approaching absolute nonexistence is normally referred as death anxiety (Cicirelli, 2006). Approaching death causes dread to individuals because it indicates the end of life and intimidates the sagacity of actual existence. Although knowledge about the end of life is a vital part of human life and there are individual differences in the attitudes of people towards death. It is anticipated that death anxiety increases with age as of age-related problems. On the other hand, it is also reported that older adults are less anxious about death (Fortner, et al., 2000). These differences in attitude towards death reflect the ways how people deal with fundamental existential queries regarding the meaning and purpose of life and the possibility of the afterlife.

Religions provide a framework to answer questions regarding death and dying (Neimeyer, et al., 2004). It indicates that individuals' religiosity and religious attitudes are among the possible important causes of individual differences in death anxiety. According to Jung (1965), all major religions of the world provide a complicated system of death preparation for their believers. Jung further emphasizes that death is not the negation of life, rather it is the fulfillment and a way to explore the goal for which one can put effort and it is the religion that helps an individual to achieve this goal. The relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety has been studied widely but results are quite complicated and conflicting. Based on theoretical and empirical evidence, there are four basic theories that describe the nature of this relationship and explain different factors that might influence this relationship (Ellis, et al., 2013).

According to buffering theory (Eliade, 1996) religions emphasize the importance of afterlife and the theory claims that strong belief in afterlife, reduces the death anxiety by promising that death does not mean the end of existence rather it is the entry in to next phase of life (Wink & Scott 2005). According to Nelson and Cantrell (1980), the nature of association between religious variables and fear of death is not linear, rather it is curvilinear. The same idea is given by Neimeyer et al. (2004), and according to them, people on both extremes of religious beliefs may have less death anxiety than the people who are uncertain

about personal philosophies regarding the existence of an afterlife. Solomon, et al. (1991), discussed the coping strategies for dealing with fear of death and emphasized the role of religion. Proponents of this theory propose that death anxiety do interfere in the lives of individuals and they used different types of paths to deal with it. Moreover, it is elaborated that the religious notion of a life after death functions as a protection against fear of death.

According to death apprehension (DA) theory (Ellis & Wahab, 2013) is a comparatively new theory and its proponents claim that no one can avoid death apprehension as the idea of dying is often allied with pain. Furthermore, they said that death is marked with the end of pleasures which a person enjoys by social, sexual, and family relationships. According to this theory, every individual wants to live forever and doesn't want to die, and through religious teachings he learns the concept of life after death. Accepting the reality of the afterlife causes the increase of death anxiety because almost all religions conceptualize the ending of life as equally positive and negative (i.e., heaven and hell). Since only a few highly religious individuals pass their whole life according to prescribed religious rules and regulations. Therefore, apprehension about afterlife will be exclusively frightening for those who believe that God is highly challenging and more unforgiving than merciful and kind. The DA theory suggests that there are four variables which determine the level of death anxiety: firstly, strong belief on existence of afterlife, secondly, belief in a demanding God causing negative punishment-oriented afterlife belief, thirdly religiosity, and fourthly having a positive belief that a person will experience divine forgiveness in the life hereafter. In contrast with all other three theories, the DA theory predicts that high belief in the existence of the afterlife leads towards the belief that people are answerable for their deeds and they are surely going to be punished in the life hereafter. It can be said that religiosity enhances the death anxiety of believers. Keeping in view the importance of Death apprehension theory, current study is based upon the postulates of DA theory.

Previously various researches are conducted to assess the nature of the relationship of death anxiety with a religious orientation, religiosity,

or religious attitudes (Byrne & Morgan, 2019; Jong et al, 2018; Kurtulan & Karaırmak, 2016; MacLeod, et al., 2019; Pandya & Kathu, 2021; Rababa et al., 2021; Saleem & Saleem, 2020; Wen, 2012). Ellis and Wahab (2013) provided a theory-oriented review of empirical literature regarding religiosity and death anxiety. They reported that 40 studies supported an inverse relationship between death anxiety and religiosity, nine studies were supporting the relationship as a curvilinear, 27 studies revealed a significant positive correlation, and 32 researches indicated non-significant relationship. Keeping in view the diversity in the nature of relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety, it is important to conduct indigenous studies to find out the pattern of relationship in typical cultural context.

Most of the researches reflect negative association between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety (Hui & Fung, 2009; Mansurnejad & Kajbuf, 2012). It is also said that extrinsic religious beliefs are found to have a positive correlation with anxiety about death (Pierce ,et al.,2007). Moreover few researches suggest that the association between extrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety is not necessarily significant (e.g., Fortner et al., 2000; Tomer & Eliason, 2000).

The controversy regarding the simple linear relationship between death anxiety and religiosity has compelled the researchers to find the role of third variable that determines the relationship between death anxiety and religiosity. For instance. Falkenhain and Handal (2003) provided evidence that afterlife belief play an important role in this relationship. Afterlife beliefs refer to people's beliefs in a life after death. It is sometimes known as literal immortality. Religious belief is typically what underlies the faith in an eternal life. Positive and compassionate afterlife beliefs are important source of optimism and relieve for elderly people (Exline & Yali, 2007). Conviction in life after death is the center of the holy belief system of religions (Flannelly et al., 2006). A study conducted by Wink (2006) conveyed that religiousness and belief in a rewarding afterlife interacted in predicting death anxiety.

On the same grounds, Hui and Coleman (2012), tried to give an understanding of the pathway between death anxiety and religiosity by including ego- integrity and afterlife belief as two mediators. Structural

equational modelling revealed that religiosity buffer against death anxiety via having positive beliefs and experiencing ego integrity. Their results revealed serial mediations as analysis showed that two afterlife belief and ego integrity were having a causal association with each other. Their research highlighted the significance of ego integrity in the association between religiosity and death apprehension. Erikson (1963) gave the concept of ego-integrity versus despair as the major psychosocial crisis to be resolved. It can be attained through acceptance of life and by having assigned some meanings to life.

According to Erikson (1963), religion is highly important in the psychosocial development of individuals. In the same way, Fishman (1992) reported that spiritually and religiously high elderly people experience more ego integrity. The belief system provides a more compassionate frame of reference to inform the optimistic consequences of worrying situations to level the advancement of the meaning-making course about life. Religion is associated with the cognitive dimension (purpose in life, acceptance of aging, etc.) of ego integrity. It is said that mature and proper participation in religious activities plays a significant role in searching for meaning and purpose in life because during religious activities individuals find many social opportunities to reveal their dignity and worth (Spilka, et al., 2003). Wong (2008) suggests that the attitudes of individuals towards life have a significant effect on their attitude towards death. A study conducted by Haroon et al. (2018), reported that ego integrity helps in decreasing the death anxiety among older adults. They suggested to study the role of religiosity in the ego integrity and death anxiety of Pakistani older adults.

According to systematic review conducted by Jong (2020), the evidences related to the nature of relationships between religiosity and death anxiety is not sufficient and it needs to be explored in specific cultural contexts to understand the nature of relationship. Different religions offer different frameworks to answer questions regarding death and dying and it indicates that death anxiety and religiosity are highly culturally relevant. The Muslims living in Pakistan are having different religious belief, perceive death differently, and get them ready for the death may be in a different manner as compared to the non-Muslims and

people living in the west. Therefore, the current study aimed to test the model proposed by Hui and Coleman (2012). They mainly focussed on buffering theory but in the current study the relationship between death anxiety and religious orientation is explored in the light of comparatively new theory of Death Apprehension (Ellis & Wahab, 2013). Current research tried to fill the gap related to the need of indigenous studies to understand the pattern/direction of relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety. So far no Pakistani published research explored the important role of afterlife belief in the life of older adults. Furthermore, the exploration of the mediational role of afterlife beliefs and ego integrity between religiosity and death anxiety is inspired by the controversy on the simple linear relationship of these two variables. Moreover, the study is an attempt to validate Erikson's eighth psychosocial stage (ego integrity and despair) on the Pakistan population. Current study will fill the gap regarding the direction of relationships among variables of current study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study
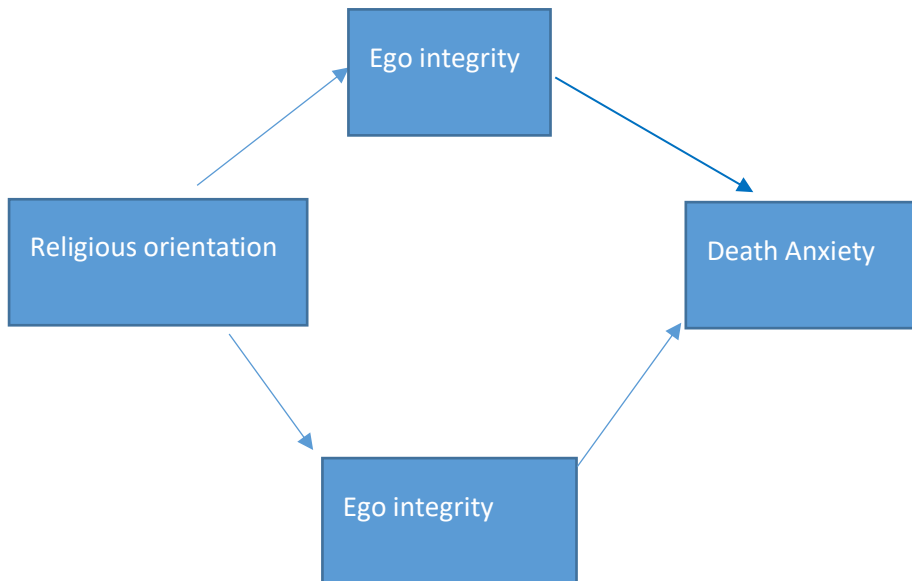
Objective

To explore the mediational role of ego integrity and afterlife belief in the relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety among Pakistani older population.

Method

Sample

Older adults with minimum 60 age (age range, 60 to 85, $N = 515$; *Mean age* = 65.2 years, *SD*= 6.46), including 304 (59%) men and 211 (41%) women were recruited through convenient sampling from Punjab, Pakistan. The education level of the participants was primary to post-graduation (Primary=190, Secondary=150, higher secondary=105, graduation and post-graduation=70).

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Older adults with any terminal illness and physical disability (limb-related disability, blindness, deafness, etc.) were excluded from the sample of the study. Elderly people living with their families were included and those who were living in old homes were not included in the sample. Only married individuals were included in the study and unmarried participants were excluded from the study. Majority of the Pakistani population belongs to middle socioeconomic status therefore in the current study older adults of middle class were recruited.

Instruments

Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety (Abdel- Khalek, 2004). Twenty three items Urdu translated and adapted version of Arabic Death Anxiety Scale (Ghayas, 2016) was used. Response format of the scale is Likert type (0= *No*, 1= *A little*, 2= *A fair amount*, 3= *Much*, 4= *Very much*). All items of scales are positively phrased and participant's responses are added to obtain a total score. Higher the score, greater will be the level of death anxiety and lower the score, lessor will be the level of death anxiety of participants. Alpha reliability of the translated and adapted

scale is .92. Alpha reliabilities of original scale ranged between .88 to.93 and one week test- retest reliability was *r* = .90. (Khalek, 2004). Alpha reliability of the translated and adapted version of scale was .91 (Ghayas, 2016).

Ego Integrity Scale. (Ryff & Heincke, 1983*)***.** Sixteen item Urdu translated version of Ryff (Ghayas, 2016) measure of integrity was used to measure the ego integrity of elderly people. The scale comprised of four point Likert-type Scale ranging from strongly *disagree* to strongly *agree)*. Seven items are positively phrased (item no 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 15) and nine items are negatively phrased (3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16). A reliability coefficient for the scale is .83. Higher the score, greater will be the level of integrity of participants and vice versa. Alpha reliability of the translated version of the scale was .84(Ghayas, 2016).

Revised Religious Orientation Scale (Gorsuch, & McPherson, 1989*)***.**Urdu translated Revised Religious Orientation Scale (Rasheed & Obaid, 2012) was used in the current study. It consists of 14 items. The response format is five points Likert scale (i.e., completely *disagree*=1, *disagree*=2, *no idea*=3, *agree*=4 and *completely agree*=5). It has mainly two subscales; intrinsic religious orientation, and extrinsic religious orientation (8 and 6 items) furthermore extrinsic religious orientation is comprised of two subscale extrinsic personal (3 items) and extrinsic social (3 items respectively). Item no 3, 10, and 14 are reversely scored items and remaining 11 items are positively phrased. Original scale reliability estimate of all subscales range from .60 to .83 while for the translated version it is .65 to .75.

Afterlife Belief Scale for Muslims (ABSM). Afterlife belief scale (Ghayas & Batool, 2016) is a 16-item measure developed in Pakistani Muslim context.. This scale measures positive afterlife belief, negative afterlife belief and extinction based afterlife belief. Response format of the scale was five point Likert scale ranging from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. Psychometric properties were fulfilled

during the development process. The internal consistency of subscales ranged from .65 to .78 (Ghayas & Batool, 2016).

Procedure

Cross sectional research design was employed in the current study. Identification and selection of participants took some time as elderly people were approached through various means for instance, work groups and through national banks pensioner record. Data collection took almost six months as all the participants were personally contacted. Convenient sample of the study was personally contacted in different venues (home, national banks, workplace etc.). Initially, the purpose of the study was shared with the participants and procedure of response on the scales were made clear to them. Their all queries regarding purpose, response format and confidentiality of data were resolved. After obtaining informed consent, data was collected. Confidentiality of the data was ensured to the participants. Scales were administered individually. Initially 1000 forms were distributed and 800 forms were returned. 550 forms were found complete in all dimensions to be used for the purpose of current study and 250 incomplete forms were discarded. Finally, 35 forms were also excluded due to the reason of being outliers. So the final analysis was carried out on a sample of 515 participants. Participants showed deep interest while responding to the questions. As all the items were in Urdu language so none of the participants reported any difficulty in understanding the scale items. It reflected that items were equally understandable and comprehendible for participants with various level of education. In the end, they were apprised for their cooperation and it was planned to provide counseling to the participants if it will be required but none of the participants revealed any discomfort regarding questions of the scale.

Results

Table 1

Descriptive and Psychometric Properties of Scale of Present Study (N=515)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*α*	Skew	Kurtosis
Death Anxiety	39.82	20.55	.93	.07	-.78
Positive afterlife belief	27.35	4.86	.80	-.42	.06
Negative afterlife belief	16.24	3.45	.80	-1	.93
Ego Integrity	26.03	6.56	.78	.08	-.09
Intrinsic religious orientation	30.52	3.80	.79	-1	1
Extrinsic religious orientation	20.44	2.52	.76	.01	.01

Table 1 reflects the descriptive statistics of scales used in the current study.

Table 2

Intercorrelations among Study Variables (N=515)

	Variables	2	3	4	5	6
1	Death Anxiety	.14**	.03	-.09	.34**	-.37***
2	Intrinsic religious orientation		.36***	.41***	.18***	-.17***
3	Extrinsic religious orientation			.21***	-.05	-.22***
4	Positive afterlife belief				.25***	-.17***
5	Negative afterlife belief					-.17***
6	Ego integrity					

Table 2 revealed that death anxiety is positively correlated with intrinsic religious orientation, and negative afterlife belief. On the other hand, death anxiety is found as negative correlate of ego integrity. It reflects that high level of intrinsic religious orientation and negative afterlife belief lead towards the experience of increased death anxiety while ego integrity decreases the level of death anxiety. Furthermore, death anxiety was found to be non-significant correlate of positive afterlife belief, and extrinsic religious orientation

Table 3

Decomposition of Standardized Effects in Path Analysis (N=515)

Predictors	Outcomes	Direct Effect		Indirect Effect	
		β	*95% CI*	β	*95% CI*
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Death Anxiety [a]			.06***	.18 - .25
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Death Anxiety [b]			.07***	.03 - .09
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Death Anxiety [c]			.02***	.004 - .02
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Negative Afterlife	.18***	.09-.26	-	-
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	Ego Integrity	-.14***	-.06- -.23	-	-
Negative Afterlife	Ego Integrity	-.15***	-.25- -.05	-	-
Negative Afterlife	Death Anxiety	.27***	.19-.35	-	-
Ego Integrity	Death Anxiety	-.32***	-.40 - -.25	-	-
Chi square (df)	9(1), *p*=.37				
RMSEA	.00				
GFI	.99				
CFI	.99				

Note. a = Intrinsic religious orientation→Negative afterlife belief→Death anxiety
b= Intrinsic religious orientation→Ego integrity →Death anxiety
c= Intrinsic religious orientation→Negative afterlife belief →Ego Integrity→Death anxiety
**p < .01, ***p < .001.

Structural equation modelling was used to run mediational analysis by the help of AMOS 20. Extrinsic religious orientation and Positive Afterlife Belief Subscales were excluded from the mediational analysis because they did not correlate significantly with the other variables in our model. The hypothesized model comprised of negative afterlife beliefs and ego integrity as two mediators between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety. After running structural equation modelling, finding revealed excellent fit of hypothesized model to the data as value of chi square was non-significant ($\chi 2$ =.79, *df*=1, *p* = .37) and values of .90 or greater for comparative fit index, goodness of fit index, and normed fit index (CFI = 1, GFI = .99, NFI= .99) and smaller value of root mean square error of estimation (RMSEA = .00). Results revealed that a significant amount of variance (R^2=.22) in death anxiety was explained by the indirect effects of intrinsic religious orientation via negative afterlife belief and ego integrity, which serially mediated between the two. All values beta were found to be significant.

In order to see the mediational effect of negative afterlife belief and ego integrity in relating intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety, structural equational modeling was carried out. Table 3 depicts

the direct and indirect effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety of older adults. The standardized direct effect of predictors on outcomes is significant in the model.

Figure 2.   Path diagram showing mediating role of negative afterlife belief and ego integrity in relation between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety
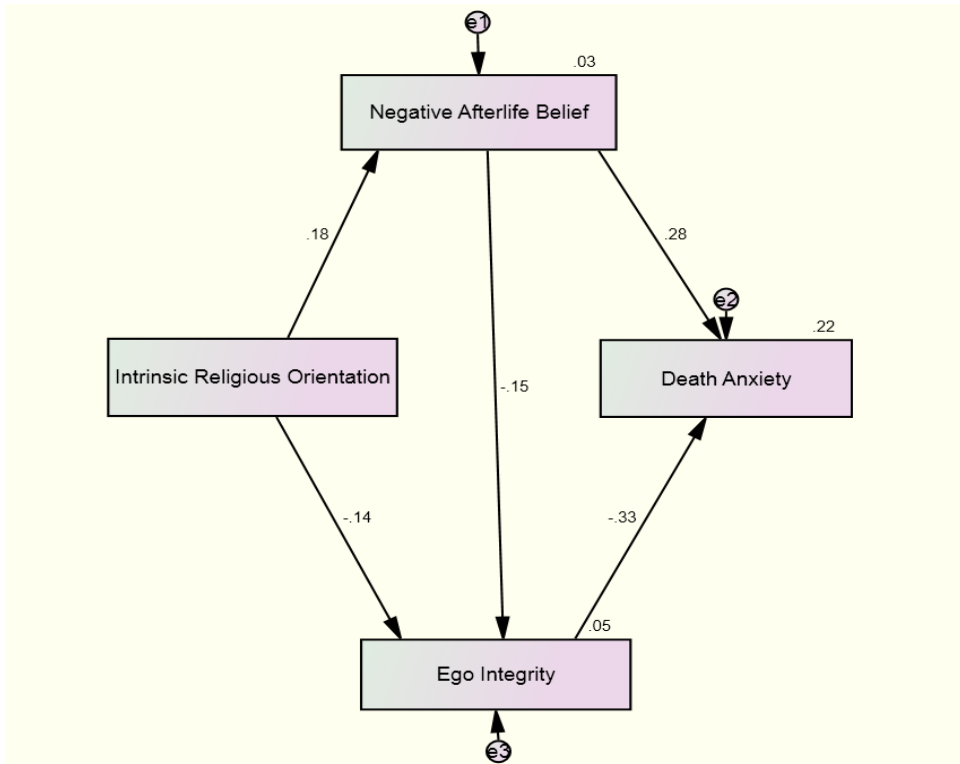
Initially all the paths were constrained except the direct effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety and results revealed that intrinsic religious orientation was significant positive predictor of death anxiety (β=.14, p<.001). After ensuring the direct effect, indirect effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety was measured without constraining any path and analysis revealed that intrinsic religious orientation was not directly predicting the death anxiety (β=.04, p=.12. It revealed that there was mediational role of negative afterlife belief and

ego integrity in relating intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety. In order to test the mediational role of negative afterlife belief other path was constrained and analysis revealed that negative afterlife belief mediates the positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety as the direct effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety was non-significant but indirect effect via negative afterlife belief appeared to be positively significant (β=.06, p<.001). Furthermore in order to test the mediational role of ego integrity other path was constrained and analysis revealed that ego integrity also fully mediates the positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety as the direct effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety was non-significant but indirect effect via ego integrity appeared to be significant (β=.07, p<.001). After constraining the path from negative afterlife belief to death anxiety serial mediation was proved as joint agency of ego integrity and negative afterlife belief also mediated the positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety(β=.02, p<.001).A significant amount of variance in death anxiety is accounted by intrinsic religious orientation via the mediational effect of ego integrity, negative afterlife belief and joint agency of negative afterlife belief and ego integrity. Figure 2 depicted that high level of intrinsic religious orientation predicted high level of negative afterlife beliefs and leads towards low ego integrity, both of which in turn predicted high level of death anxiety. The percentage of variance explained for the death anxiety was 22% (R^2 = .22). The total indirect effect of intrinsic religious orientation on death anxiety was significant. As a result, the efficacy of afterlife beliefs and ego integrity as two mediators of the relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety in later life was supported.

Discussion

In order to test the hypothesized mediational model, structural equation modelling was carried out. Analysis revealed that of religious orientation had direct and indirect impact on the death anxiety of older Muslim population of Pakistan.

        The intrinsic religious orientation appeared as a positive correlate the death anxiety. These results are in line with the study of Wen (2012) that reports positive correlation between death anxiety and inner religious motives which indirectly depicts that intrinsic religious orientation enhances the death anxiety. In the same way, Démuthová and Bucik (2013) claimed that having high level of intrinsic religious orientation influence the ideological orientation of believer, it makes people more sensible and tolerant to others, willing to help and sacrifice for them etc. As a result, intrinsically religious people develop high level of anxiety regarding others' death. The scale that was used measure death anxiety in the current study comprised items measuring anxiety regarding personal and others death and it might be one reason behind positive relationship. The documented researches reflected mixed results on the relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety and most of them reported this relationship as negative (Jacksoon et al.,2018; Jong et al, 2018; Kurtulan & Karaırmak, 2016; MacLeod, et al., 2019; Wen, 2012). However, most of the findings were based upon non-Muslim sample. Muslim elderly population experience and perceives things differently.. It might be an important reason behind the findings of current research. Pakistani elderly people are found to be more inclined towards religiosity and they start evaluating their past and present in the light of religious teachings. An intrinsically religious Muslim tries to live his life completely according to religion.   Normally, people who try to completely follow the religion strictly, start evaluating their past keenly and respond over anxiously upon their mistakes, consequently develops guilt and fear of evaluation which they have to face after death

        Results revealed non-significant relationship between death anxiety and extrinsic religious orientation. These results are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Chuin & Choo, 2005; Démuthová & Bucik, 2013; Ziapour, et al., 2014). Extrinsically religious individuals participate in religious activities for obtaining desired social or emotional outcomes. As the religiosity is not internalized, extrinsically religious people are motivated by some incentive or threat of punishment. They feel themselves under pressure. Sometime this pressure is internal (guilt, shame, repentance on past) and sometime it is external; peer pressure,

social desirability etc. (Neyrinck, et al., 2010). In old age, this pressure doesn't bring change in their attitude towards death as they have not yet internalized the true purpose of their religiosity. It might be possible that extrinsic religious orientation among Muslims does not influence their death concerns as it may give them temporary satisfaction but doesn't determine their death anxiety.

Results showed that ego integrity is significantly and negatively correlated with the level of death anxiety. This relationship supports Erikson's theory (1963), that older adults having high level of ego integrity approach death without or less fear because ego integrity develops an ability to accept the inevitable truth of past and inescapable approaching death. The integrated individual accepts the reality of closure, that is why shows less death anxiety (Cochran, 1991). On the other hand, failure to achieve integrity leads towards the state of despair and disappointment, which is a great obstacle in enjoying the virtues of old age and develops a concern that one will die too soon and eventually enhance the fear of death. Results of the study are in line with the studies conducted on different populations (e.g., Hui & Coleman, 2012). The literature (Chang, 2011; Hui & Coleman, 2012; Safdar et al., 2020). reflects that irrespective of cultural background, if a person experiences ego integrity, it ultimately helps in decreasing the death anxiety as ego integrity makes a person to perceive the life full of meaning and accepts the reality of death. Very rare researches (Haroon et al., 2018; Safdar et al., 2020) were conducted on the relationship between ego integrity and death anxiety among Pakistani Muslims. Findings revealed that integrity is a sound factor in the successful aging as it helps them to believe that there is no more past and they have to live in the present. Ultimately, they cope with the most fearful and inevitable aspect of one's life. Therefore, these results validate the application of Erikson's eighth psychosocial stage on Pakistani older adults.

Analysis of the structural equation modeling revealed that negative afterlife belief fully mediated the positive relationship of death anxiety with intrinsic religious orientation. The direct positive relationship of death anxiety with intrinsic religious orientation is consistent with the studies (e.g., Ellis &Wahab, 2013; Hamza &

Mohyuddin, 2013; Lazar, 2006; Moris & McAdie, 2009; Power & Smith, 2008) among people of different age groups and ethnicity. The results of these studies reveal that there is positive correlation between religious orientation and death anxiety among different religious groups and they depicted. The results also validate death apprehension theory (Ellis & Wahab, 2013) that asserts the escalated feelings of pain old age lead to loss of pleasure in life and death becomes a less threatening alternative to one's existence and a person might not be fearful of death. The theory postulates that people normally do not desire to die. Therefore, they acquire beliefs about an afterlife through religion. Accepting the reality of afterlife cultivate fear of death. According to nearly all religious teachings, the description of life after death is either positive or negative and there is no middle point to escape. Since very rare individuals do pass their life in a proper religiously prescribed way, therefore when they evaluate their deeds, it causes increased negative afterlife belief and which ultimately increases death anxiety. Furthermore, belief in life after death increases fear of death especially among those people who perceive God, as highly challenging. Consequently, the relationship between religiosity and death anxiety is dependent upon belief in a demanding God, belief in the reality of an afterlife, and confidence in divine forgiveness.

We also hypothesized that ego integrity would be a potential mediator in the positive relationship of death anxiety with religious orientation. The analysis demonstrates that therelationship between religious orientation and death anxiety is mediated through ego integrity. Furthermore high intrinsic religious orientation in older people causes low level of ego integrity and low ego integrity causes high level of death anxiety. On the other hand, having low level of intrinsic religious orientation increases the ego integrity which ultimately decreases the death anxiety among elderly population. Results support the Erikson theory (1950) as ego integrity is strong negative predictor of death anxiety. However, intrinsic religious orientation of elderly people is negative predictor of ego integrity. The reason might be that old people evaluate their life according to parameters of religion and sometimes past mistakes create anxiety and hit ego integrity negatively. The results are in

line with (Fortner et al., 2000) that provides the evidence for the negative relationship between ego integrity and death anxiety.

Additionally, the results of the current study reveals that there is a serial mediation because model represents that ego integrity and afterlife belief are found to be related with each other. Figure 2 represents that high level of intrinsic religious orientation determines high negative afterlife belief and low ego integrity which eventually leads towards high level of death anxiety. eventually. These results make sense that in old age high level of intrinsic religious orientation make a person strict follower of religion by strengthening his/her religious orientation. These results are partially in line with a study conducted by Hui and Coleman (2011) on a sample of Christian and Jews. Their results revealed that intrinsic religious orientation causes benign afterlife belief and benign afterlife belief causes increased level of ego integrity and ultimately leads towards the low level of death anxiety. Their study reveals that the relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and death anxiety is mediated by afterlife belief and ego integrity, furthermore they provided evidence for serial mediation as both mediators were found to be interlinked.

Conclusion

Results of the current study validated the death apprehension (DA) theory by depicting positive relationship between death anxiety and intrinsic religious orientation which is mediated by negative afterlife belief. Findings of the study related to the role of ego integrity in the death anxiety of old people, validated the eight stage of Erikson's theory (1963) in Pakistan. Findings suggests that negative afterlife belief has more significance in experiencing death anxiety as compared with positive and extinction beliefs.

Limitations and Suggestions

Regardless of the significance of study, results should be interpreted with caution considering the following limitations:

There are different sects of Islam in Pakistan, depicting some differences of opinion and practices but in the current study elderly

people belonging to different sects were not given equal representation and it might limit the generalizability of results. For future researches, it is recommended to take sample having equal representation from major sects (e.g. ahle-tashi, ahle-sunnat, ahle-hadis) of Islam in Pakistan. Furthermore, cross cultural studies can be conducted to see the role of culture in the nature of relationship between religious orientation and death anxiety. Measures of religious orientation, which we used in the current study depict the level of the construct at present time but do not give any information about their religiosity and religious orientation in the past. Results of the current study could be more meaningful if future researches will use some religious measures to see the religious orientation in the past because difference of religiosity in the past might influence study variables differently. Another important limitation of the study is that, the study was cross sectional in natural and it is suggested that future longitudinal researches should be conducted so that it can be clearly observed how religiosity, death anxiety, afterlife belief and ego integrity varies with the increase in age among elderly population. Qualitative study is suggested to explore the other factors that determine low and high death anxiety among alder population.

Implications

The current study is of high significance in a sense as it was the first attempt to validate the postulates of newly introduced death apprehension theory. The role of religious scholars is crucial in this regard. They ought to highlight both sides of afterlife (i.e. punishment and reward in Islam). They should comprehend that elderly people are conscious of the fact that they have been left with limited time to mend the mistakes committed by them. This apprehension is one of the major causes of death anxiety. Counsellors and Psychologists can play their role by making elderly people to reconstruct their life stories by paying more focus on even trivial positive life events and it will ultimately help elderly people to experience ego integrity and as a result it will work as a buffer against death anxiety. Counsellors and psychologists need to help the elderly people to develop positive afterlife belief and minimize their negative afterlife belief to manage death anxiety. Media can also play

important role by showing the content that may help elderly people to look at the past and future in a positive manner

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