

Assessing the Relationship Between Religious Beliefs and Death Anxiety: An
Explorative Study

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Abstract

This paper assesses the relationship between death anxiety and religiosity through the lens of interreligious factors, as well as the relationship between death anxiety and well-being. There has been a lack of research concerning non-Christian religions and the differences relating to death anxiety in those populations. This explorative study of 114 primarily undergraduate college students examines a correlation between death anxiety and well-being. During analysis, a positive correlation between death anxiety and well-being was observed. This finding, though inconsistent with previous literature, could propose an alternate interaction and rationale to the relationship between death anxiety and psychological well-being.

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Assessing the Relationship Between Religious Beliefs and Death Anxiety: An Explorative Study

Death comes to all animals in the end, and human animals are no exception. Human animals are, however, the only ones known to be cognizant of the finality of their existence. Many scholars have theorized about the importance of this awareness and the psychological dilemma it proposes (e.g., Becker, 1973). Inspired by Ernest Becker's work, a group of social psychologists, Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon, proposed a Terror Management Theory (TMT) stating that humans seek to suppress the terror that accompanies the knowledge of mortality by participating in cultural belief systems that give life meaning and build self-esteem (Greenberg et al., 1986). This theory suggests that human awareness of death has the potential to cause terrifying anxiety (i.e., death anxiety).

Darwinian evolutionary theory has guided the way for evolutionary psychological research. Evolutionary psychology studies the evolutionary processes that have sculpted the behavioral and psychological adaptations, along with the byproducts of those adaptations that are activated differently in modern versus ancient environments (Buss, 2009). The evolutionary motive to survive is a constant motivation to avoid threats and successfully reproduce. In modern environments, death anxiety may be experienced when human beings are confronted with their mortality. When this occurs, they may experience cognitive dissonance or an uncomfortable state of mind when experiencing contradictory values or perspectives. Death anxiety can have a negative impact on psychological well-being as it involves a conflict between the evolutionary instinct to survive and the awareness of inevitable death, causing cognitive dissonance (Juhl & Routledge, 2016).

Meaning-making in life (i.e., TMT) and self-esteem are theorized psychological buffers that are protective from the adverse psychological effects of death anxiety. Meaning-making is often measured through self-report data as meaning of life or the feeling that an individual's existence has significance or purpose. In an appraisal of existing research, Ryff et al. (1989) revealed that individuals with a lower meaning of life experienced more anxiety when their mortalities were made evident versus those with a higher meaning of life (Juhl & Routledge, 2016). Organized religion is a commonly used factor to facilitate meaning-making. Most religions allow individuals to connect with like-minded believers and find a community in which they can traverse a path to establish meaning in their lives.

Practicing religion has been tied to the meaning-making buffer against death anxiety by offering believers a sense of permanence, given that their belief culture is likely to outlive them (Greenberg, 2012; Menzies & Menzies, 2023). Though death anxiety is often paired with negative psychological consequences, there are personal and social benefits to ascribing to a cultural belief system, such as practicing a culturally valued religion or holding culturally communal values, besides holding death anxiety at bay, such as living a few years longer (Vail III et al., 2012; Ebert et al., 2020). Some religions include the belief that following "the right path" in life will ultimately lead to a rewarding afterlife that follows death.

According to Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszcznski's (1997) TMT, the one primary function of "cultural world views" such as belief in the afterlife is to help cope with death anxiety. Religiosity, or how religious an individual is, can often be measured by the frequency of church attendance or prayer behavior. The body of research shows

that higher religiosity is related to higher levels of self-esteem, mental and physical health, and well-being (Cohen et al., 2005). For example, Morris & McAdie (2009) found that there were significant differences in well-being and self-reported death anxiety between the three groups surveyed: Muslims, Christians, and non-religious individuals. Though the Muslim and Christian groups reported higher well-being than their non-religious counterparts, Muslims had the highest death anxiety scores, followed by the non-religious, with Christians reporting the lowest scores (Morris & McAdie, 2009). What accounts for the differences between the two belief systems? Morris and McAdie (2009) speculate that the “reward expectation” found in Christian afterlife belief versus the “judgment/punishment expectation” found in Muslim afterlife belief may be the answer.

The observed differences between the two religions beg the question, is conforming to any religion the factor that leads to lower death anxiety, or is it holding the specific beliefs within a religion like a rewarding afterlife or a secure attachment to God? There are other possible factors, including adherence to intrinsic (i.e., living sincerely within a religion within intention) or extrinsic (i.e., using religion for a purpose, like building relationships) normative religious motivations (Cohen et al., 2005). There could also be a lack of representation in measurement scales developed in the context of monotheistic, Abrahamic religions and the perception of a monotheistic deity as a counterpart to human beings. Indeed, most of the research done to examine the relationship between religiosity and death anxiety has been conducted with predominantly monotheistic Abrahamic samples (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). There is a need for more scales that are developed or modified in the context of

polytheistic, non-Abrahamic religions and the perception of the divine as a principle of the self or the universe (Huber & Huber, 2012). This study aimed to examine the relationship between religiosity and death anxiety under the lens of specific values and beliefs within various world religions rather than just “being religious” versus not.

The study’s primary goal is to survey participants who ascribe to various world religious beliefs about their values, their death anxiety, and their well-being at the time of the study. It was surprising to find such a lack of diversity when researching death anxiety and religiosity. This study will contribute to filling the existing data gap on non-Abrahamic religions and improving future research to include or focus on these samples. Where there are gaps in data, there are missed opportunities for growth and discovery within psychology.

The secondary goal of the study is to identify any significant differences in death anxiety levels when comparing the specific values or beliefs held within a religion. In doing so, this study could provide data that could be used to infer relationships between religious beliefs and the death anxiety levels of followers of those religions. Some areas of interest in this study are the relationships between death anxiety and well-being, religious coping, private religious practices, belief in an afterlife, and religious support.

Methods

Participants

Eligibility required participants to be at least 18 years of age and to be currently practicing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, or Islam. There were 3 non-

binary participants, 33 male participants, and 78 female participants ranging in age from 18 to over 65 years old.

Participants were recruited through MTSU's psychology research pool, community outreach, and snowball sampling. Those who participated through the psychology research pool received extra credit in their psychology courses. All participants were voluntary and received informed consent, per MTSU's IRB and the APA's ethical guidelines.

Materials

Demographics Survey

The initial demographics portion of the survey included age, sex, gender, marital status, the highest level of education received, annual household income, religious affiliation, and parent(s)/primary caregiver(s) religious affiliation.

Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

This shortened 18-item version ($\alpha = .81$) of the 42-item scale was developed to measure six domains of well-being and happiness. The sub-scales are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff et al., 2007; adapted from Ryff, 1989). The purpose of this scale was to measure the well-being of the participants at the time of reporting. Participants rated items (e.g., "I like most parts of my personality") according to their agreeance with the presented statement. The responses were scored ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree").

Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness and Spirituality

(BMMRS)

This measure contains key domains that evaluate the relationship between religiousness/spirituality and health (Fetzer, 1999). The domains included in this study were daily spiritual experiences, meaning, values, beliefs, forgiveness, private religious practices, religious/spiritual coping, religious support, religious/spiritual history, commitment, and organizational religiousness. Some domains offer short-form versions of the accompanying questionnaire, which will be used when applicable. This measure was chosen over others available because it allowed wording modification to be more inclusive of polytheistic religions or spiritual practices.

Daily Spiritual Experiences (DSES). This 10-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .92$) measures the individual's perception of interaction with and the involvement of the divine in their daily life. Participants were asked to consider if and how often (1 = "Never or almost never" to 6 = "Many times a day") they perceived spiritual experiences (e.g., "I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation").

Meaning. This domain measures how participants search for meaning in their experiences and their success in creating meaning-making that informs a life purpose. On a 7-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .91$) the participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") with statements regarding how their beliefs informed their meaning-making (e.g., "My spiritual beliefs give me a sense of significance and purpose").

Values. The 3-item short-form ($\alpha = .1$) version of this questionnaire assesses the participants' faith as their highest value reflected by their behavior. The low internal

reliability of this scale may be due to only having three items to compare. The participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”) with statements relating to faith as a value (i.e., “My faith helps me know right from wrong”).

Beliefs. This 5-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .76$) is a modified version of the BMMRS beliefs long-form questionnaire to include a more diverse selection of experiences. This domain seeks to assess the perceived effectiveness of participants’ interpretations when trying to understand challenging situations in the world and their personal experiences. The participants were instructed to consider how much they agreed (1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”) with presented explanations (e.g., “I think that everything that happens has a purpose”).

Forgiveness. The 3-item short-form ($\alpha = .55$) version measures the participants’ perception of self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness by God. The low internal reliability of this scale may be due to only having three items to compare. Participants indicated how often (1 = “Never or almost never” to 4 = “Always or almost always”) they perceived forgiveness in their daily lives (e.g., “I know that God forgives me”).

Private Religious Practices. The original 4-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .81$) was included to measure religious involvement outside the organizational and institutional structure. Participants selected how often (1 = “Never” to 8 = “Several times a day”) they engaged in religious activities outside of places of worship (e.g., “How often do you read sacred texts or other religious literature?”).

Religious/Spiritual Coping (RSCOPE). The 7-item ($\alpha = .71$) short-form version of this questionnaire assesses understanding and dealing with stressors in two possible patterns: positive coping related to benevolent religious methods and negative coping related to punishing or unsure religious methods. The participants were instructed to consider how they dealt with significant problems in their lives and select to what extent (1 = “Not at all” to 4 = “A great deal”) each statement, whether positive (e.g., “I work together with God as partners to get through hard times”) or negative (e.g., “I feel that stressful situations God’s way of punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality”) was involved in how they coped.

Religious Support. This domain measures the social relationship between participants and others in their places of worship or religious communities. The 8-item ($\alpha = .81$) short-form version was used. Participants were asked to consider different aspects of the relationships they may/may not have with others in their religious communities. They then answered questions regarding how often (1 = “Never” to 4 “Very often”) they would give or receive support within their community (e.g., “How often do you make the people in your congregation feel loved and cared for?”).

Religious/Spiritual History. The 2-item short-form version briefly measures religious/spiritual participation over the life course until the present, specifically from the lens of a life-changing religious experience. The participants were asked whether they had experienced a life-changing experience and at what age, “Yes” (coded as 1) or “No” (coded as 0). The reported ages were grouped into categories (1 = “9 and under” to 4 = “20+”).

Commitment. This 3-item questionnaire assesses the importance of and commitment to participants' religious beliefs. The participants were asked to indicate their agreeance (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 4 = "Strongly agree") with the statement, "I try hard to carry my religious beliefs over into all other dealings in my life." The participants were then asked about the average monthly tithe (1 = "Less than 50 dollars" to 7 = "10,000 dollars or more") made to their congregation or other religious causes and how many hours a month they volunteered (1 = "Less than 1 hour" to 6 = "More than 20 hours") at their congregation or with other religious causes/activities. These two responses were grouped into categories to simplify the collected data.

Organizational Religiousness. The 2-item short-form ($\alpha = .65$) version measures the participants' attendance and public religious practices. The low internal reliability of this scale may be due to only having two items to compare. The participants were asked how often (1 = "Never" to 6 = "More than once a week") they participated in public practice at their congregation or place of worship (e.g., "How often do you attend religious services?").

Belief in Afterlife Scale (BAS)

This 10-item scale ($\alpha = .81$) measures belief in an afterlife. There is a choice between two randomized forms, yet there is no significant difference; in this study, Form A was used (Osarchuk & Tatz, 1973). Though simple, it is one of the only afterlife scales continuously used and cited within psychology due to its validity over others. The participants were presented with a series of statements (e.g., "There must be an afterlife of some sort") supporting or denying the existence of an afterlife and then asked to select their agreeance (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree").

Death Anxiety Scale-Extended Items (DAS-E)

This 51-item scale ($\alpha = .94$) is a measure of death attitudes, including the anxiety associated with the fear of dying. It was updated in 2006 to include a more varied approach to death, building upon the initial research done by Templer and Loretto in primarily Christian countries (Templer et al., 2006). It holds similar reliability and validity to the original 15-item scale published in 1970 yet is more relevant to non-Christian populations. Participants were asked to select “True” (coded as 1) or “False” (coded as 2) when presented with statements regarding personal attitudes toward death (e.g., “I am very much afraid to die”).

Procedure

Participants scanned a QR code with their mobile phone, followed a link on their computer through email, or selected a slot on the psychology research pool site to take them to Qualtrics. The participants were first prompted to complete and provide informed consent before continuing the survey. After completing the informed consent, the participants completed a brief demographic information questionnaire.

Participants began the survey by completing the PWB, followed by the BMMRS. The BMMRS was broken up into smaller sections related to the domains we included in this study. Then, the participants completed the BAS and the DAS-E. Upon completing the final questionnaire, the participants were debriefed and provided with the researcher’s contact information if they had any questions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

146 participants began the survey in Qualtrics, but only 114 were included in the analysis. Out of the 32 participants who were excluded from the analysis, 22 participants omitted entire sections or skipped too many questions, and 6 did not meet eligibility requirements. 4 participants completed the survey in less than 5 minutes, suggesting a lack of seriousness in their participation. Of the 114 participants, 5 (4.4%) participants were Buddhist, 93 (81.6%) participants were Christian, 5 (4.4%) participants were Hindu, 1 (0.9%) participant was Jewish, and 10 (8.8%) participants were Muslim.

All analyses were performed using R Statistical Software (v4.3.3; R Core Team 2024). Mean scores and standard deviations for all major scales across all participants are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Major Scales

Scale	N	Mean	SD
PWB	114	52.360	12.590
DSES	114	44.105	11.593
Meaning Values	114	26.886	7.039
Beliefs	114	11.211	2.143
Forgiveness	114	21.623	3.996
Private Practice	114	9.386	1.767
RSCOPE	114	18.070	6.293
Support	114	21.544	4.139
Life Changing Experience	114	23.553	5.148
Experience Age	114	0.316	0.467
Commitment	114	1.333	1.019
	114	3.053	0.891

Descriptive Statistics for Major Scales

Scale	N	Mean	SD
Monthly Tithe Dollars	100	1.160	1.587
Weekly Hours Volunteered	114	1.772	1.563
Org. Religiousness	114	7.298	2.841
BAS	114	53.816	9.509
DAS-E	114	73.430	11.657

The sample size of non-Christian participants was too small to perform analyses between specific religious groups. Table 2 includes the mean scores and standard deviations between the Christian and non-Christian samples.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Major Scales in Christian vs. Non-Christian Participants

Scale	Christian (N = 93)		Non-Christian (N = 21)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PWB	53.151	12.479	48.857	12.788
DSES	44.118	10.997	44.048	14.249
Meaning	27.323	6.739	24.952	8.139
Values	11.312	2.075	10.762	2.427
Beliefs	22.022	3.486	19.857	5.507
Forgiveness	9.516	1.626	8.810	2.250
Private Practice	18.286	6.083	18.286	7.315
RSCOPE	21.602	4.145	21.286	4.209
Support	23.258	5.067	24.857	5.425
Commitment	3.140	0.842	2.667	1.017
Org. Religiousness	7.312	2.889	7.238	2.682
BAS	54.387	8.633	51.286	12.642
DAS-E	74.140	12.007	70.286	9.587

Explorative Findings

As the relationships between death anxiety and religious coping, well-being, private religious practices, belief in an afterlife, and religious support were of particular interest in this study, bivariate correlations were run for these variable associations. All bivariate correlations can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Pearson's Correlation Among the Variables of Interest

	1	2	3	4	5
1. DAS-E	-				
2. PWB	.33**	-			
3. Private Practice	-.11	-.28**	-		
4. RSCOPE	-.26**	-.54***	.61***	-	
5. Support	-.03	-.43***	.38***	.42***	-
6. BAS	-.16	-.44***	.33***	.45***	.18

Note. DAS-E = Death Anxiety Scale – Extended, PWB = Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being, RSCOPE = Religious/Spiritual Coping, BAS = Belief in Afterlife.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

There was a significant negative correlation between death anxiety and religious coping was observed, $r(112) = -.26, p < .01$, with high levels of religious coping associated with low levels of death anxiety. There was a significant positive correlation between psychological well-being and death anxiety, $r(112) = .33, p < .001$, with high levels of psychological well-being associated with high levels of death anxiety. After identifying the significant bivariate correlations, a multiple linear regression (MLR) was run to determine if psychological well-being and religious coping continued to be significant predictors of death anxiety.

Multiple linear regression was used to assess the unique associations of the PWB, RSCOPE, Private Practice, Support, and BAS scores on death anxiety scores. This model

accounted for 14% of the variance in death anxiety scores, $R^2 = .14$, $F(5,108) = 3.45$, $p = 0.006$. However, with all of the variables entered, only PWB scores were uniquely associated with death anxiety scores, $\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$. As a result, a final single predictor model was established. This model accounted for 11% of the variance in the death anxiety scores, $R^2 = .12$, $F(2,111) = 7.21$, $p < .001$. Only psychological well-being was a significant independent predictor of death anxiety $\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$, indicating a strong positive effect on death anxiety. Each standard unit change on the DAS-E was associated with a .26 standard unit change on the PWB ($\beta = .26$), with a 95% confidence interval of [.05, .47]. The multiple linear regression results for the final predictor model can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Death Anxiety

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	95% Confidence Interval	
						LL	UL
Intercept	67.70	10.26	6.59	< .001			
PWB	0.24	0.09	2.46	0.01	0.26	0.05	0.47
RSCOPE	-0.32	0.30	-1.08	0.28	-0.11	-0.32	0.09

Note. PWB = Ryff Psychological Well-Being, RSCOPE = Religious/Spiritual Coping. Exact *p* values are for the unique effects of the predictors. Significant predictors are bolded.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to collect death anxiety data on various religious groups and to explore the relationships between death anxiety and other variables, including psychological well-being, religious coping, private religious practices, religious support,

and belief in an afterlife. The data showed that well-being was significantly correlated with and predictive of death anxiety.

Previous research has concluded that death anxiety results from maladaptive coping strategies concerning the awareness of the finiteness of human life (Menziez, R. E. & Menziez, R. G., 2023). There is also literature that reports death anxiety having a negative impact on mental health and well-being, though religiosity seems to have the opposite impact (Cohen et al., 2005; Menziez, R. E. & Menziez, R. G., 2023). In Menziez & Menziez (2023) literature review, they report that there is a general lack of research examining the relationship between death anxiety and health or behavioral psychology. There have been reproduced studies that show correlations between death anxiety and poorer health outcomes as well as maladaptive behaviors.

The findings in this study are inconsistent with the literature that suggests that higher death anxiety is correlated with lower mental health and well-being. The results suggest that higher psychological well-being is positively correlated and predictive of higher death anxiety. A possible explanation for this result could be that individuals with higher well-being may willingly contemplate their mortality more often than their counterparts with lower well-being. In doing so, they may interpret the death anxiety as a less threatening stressor and more successfully cope with it in a way that does not compromise their well-being. Contemplating and accepting the finality of life may result in being a protective factor when related to overall well-being. This finding could also be due to the limitations of the study itself.

The limitations of this study include the composition of the final sample, which consisted primarily of female Christian college students. During data collection, the

desired sample size of 50 participants from each religious group was not achieved. A sample that was more religiously diverse and diverse in gender and age would be more fitting for future studies. Obtaining a more diverse sample would allow for a better generalizability of the findings. To obtain a more diverse sample, data collection would have to focus on engaging the community outside the typical university population. This new approach could include continuing data collection for longer, offering appropriate forms of incentive, and reaching outside of the middle Tennessee area to reach other religious populations more successfully. Another limitation is the use of a correlational study design. Correlations can infer relationships between variables but not determine causality. In future research, quasi-experimental designs could be approached ethically to attempt to determine a cause-and-effect relationship between death anxiety and other variables of interest.

Another limitation is the survey method of self-report measure that was used. Due to the nature of the variables considered being introspective, this would be a hard limitation to overcome. In the future, the use of reliable, objective measures of religiosity and death anxiety, along with self-report measures, could yield more precise findings. The limitation of possible unidentified confounding variables within the sample is also worth noting. The insufficient understanding of how certain religious factors impact death anxiety and its implications for overall mental health may contribute to unidentified confounding variables within the existing literature.

The significant relationship between psychological well-being and death anxiety was present in this sample limitations considered. The significant relationship raises questions about other possible interactions between death anxiety and well-being. Death

anxiety may serve as a protective factor regarding coping and well-being in some populations. Though the current literature is inconsistent with this study's findings, the data still suggests a strong relationship between the two variables considered.

Psychological well-being may have a unique relationship with death anxiety, as the findings in this study indicated that higher well-being was predictive of and correlated with higher death anxiety. Future studies should attempt to replicate this finding with a more robust sample among a more diverse population. If a more thorough analysis is conducted, then more apparent outcomes can be observed and better inform the clinical or applied application of treating death anxiety.

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Appendix A Ryff Psychological Well-Being (PWB)

Instructions: Circle one response below each statement to indicate how much you agree or disagree.

1. "I like most parts of my personality."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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2. "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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3. "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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4. "The demands of everyday life often get me down."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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5. "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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6. "Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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7. "I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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8. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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9. "I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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10. "I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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11. "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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12. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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13. "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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14. "I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago"

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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15. "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions"

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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16. "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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17. "I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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18. "I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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**Appendix B Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness and
Spirituality (BMMRS)**

DSES

A number of items in the survey use the word “God”. If this word is not a comfortable one, please substitute another idea that call to mind the divine of holy for you.

The following questions deal with possible spiritual experiences. Please consider if and how often you have these experiences.

Q1 I feel God’s presence.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q2 I find strength in my religion or spirituality.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q3 I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q4 I feel deep inner peace or harmony.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q5 I feel God's love for me, directly.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q6 I feel God's love for me, through others.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q7 I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q8 I feel a selfless caring for others.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q9 I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Q10 I desire to be closer to or in union with God.

- Many times a day
- Every day
- Most days
- Some days
- Once in a while
- Never or almost never

Meaning

Please choose how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on the scale below.

Q1 My spiritual beliefs give meaning to my life's joys and sorrows.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q2 Without a sense of spirituality, my daily life would be meaningless.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q3 The meaning in my life comes from feeling connected to other living things.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q4 My religious beliefs help me find a purpose in even the most painful and confusing events in my life.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q5 My spiritual beliefs give me a sense of significance and purpose.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q6 My mission in life is guided/shaped by my faith in God.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q7 Knowing that I am a part of something greater than myself gives meaning to my life.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Values/Beliefs

Q1 My whole approach to life is based on my religion.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q2 Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q3 My faith helps me know right from wrong.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q4 God's goodness and love are greater than we can possibly imagine.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q5 Despite all the things that go wrong, the world is still moved by love.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q6 When faced with a tragic event I try to remember that God still loves me and that there is hope for the future.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q7 I feel that is important for my children to believe in God.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q8 I think that everything that happens has a purpose.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Forgiveness

Q1 I have forgiven myself for things that I have done wrong.

- Always or almost always
- Often
- Seldom
- Never or almost never

Q2 I have forgiven those who hurt me.

- Always or almost always
- Often
- Seldom
- Never or almost never

Q3

I know that God forgives me.

- Always or almost always
- Often
- Seldom
- Never or almost never

Private Religious Practices

Q1 How often do you pray privately in places other than at your place of worship?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

Q2 How often do you watch or listen to religious programs?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

Q3 How often do you read sacred texts or other religious literature?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- Never

Q4 How often are prayers or blessings said before or after meals in your home?

- At all meals
- Once a day
- At least once a week
- Only on special occasions
- Never

RSCOPE

Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each involved in the way you cope?

Q1 I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q2 I work together with God as partners to get through hard times.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q3 I look to God for strength, support, and guidance in crises.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q4 I feel that stressful situations are God's way of punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q5 I wonder whether God has abandoned me.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q6 I try to make sense of the situation and decide what to do without relying on God.

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q7 To what extent is your religion involved in understanding or dealing with stressful situations in any anyway?

- Very involved
- Somewhat involved
- Not very involved
- Not involved at all

The following questions deal with the relationships you've had with people in your congregation.

Q1 How often do the people in your congregation make you feel loved and cared for?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

Q2 How often do the people in your congregation listen to you talk about your private problems and concerns?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

The following questions deal with things you may do for the people you worship with.

Q3 How often do you make the people in your congregation feel loved and cared for?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

Q4 How often do you listen to the people in your congregation talk about their private problems and concerns?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

Sometimes the contact we have with others is not always pleasant.

Q5 How often do the people in your congregation make too many demands on you?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

Q6 How often are the people in your congregation critical of you and the things you do?

- Very often
- Fairly often
- Once in a while
- Never

These questions are designed to find out how much help the people in your congregation would be willing to provide if you need it in the future.

Q7 If you were ill, how much would the people in your congregation be willing to help out?

- A great deal
- Some
- A little
- None

Q8 If you had a problem or were faced with a difficult situation, how much comfort would the people in your congregation be willing to give you?

- A great deal
- Some
- A little
- None

Religious/Spiritual History

Q1 Did you ever have a religious or spiritual experience that changed your life?

- Yes
- No

Q1.5 How old were you when this occurred?

Commitment

Q1 I try hard to carry my religious beliefs over into all my other dealings in life.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q2 During the last year about how much was the average monthly contribution of your household to your congregation or religious causes?

Q3 In an average week, how many hours do you spend in activities on behalf of your congregation or activities that you do for religious or spiritual reasons?

Organized Religiousness

Q1 How often do you attend religious services?

- More than once a week
- Every week or more often
- Once or twice a month
- A few times a month
- Once or twice a year
- Never

Q2 Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at a place of worship?

- More than once a week
- Every week or more often
- Once or twice a month
- A few times a month
- Once or twice a year
- Never

Appendix C Belief in Afterlife Scale (BAS)

1. Earthly existence is the only existence we have. (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. In the premature death of someone close some comfort may be found in knowing that in some way the deceased is still existing.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. Humans die in the sense of “ceasing to exist.” (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. The idea of there existing somewhere some sort of afterlife is beyond my comprehension. (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. We will never be united with those deceased whom we knew and loved. (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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6. There must be an afterlife of some sort.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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7. Some existentialists claim that when man dies he ceases to exist: I agree (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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8. The following statement is true: “There is no such thing as a life after death.” (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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9. Millions of people believe in a life after death: they are correct in so believing.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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10. Enjoy yourself on earth, for death signals the end of all existence. (—)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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Appendix D Death Anxiety Scale – Extended (DAS-E)

1. T/F - I am very much afraid to die.
2. T/F - The thought of death seldom enters my mind.
3. T/F - It doesn't make me nervous when people talk about death.
4. T/F - I dread to think about having to have an operation.
5. T/F - I am not at all afraid to die.
6. T/F - I am not particularly afraid of getting cancer.
7. T/F - The thought of death never bothers me.
8. T/F - I am often distressed by the way time flies so very rapidly.
9. T/F - I fear dying a painful death.
10. T/F - The subject of life after death troubles me greatly.
11. T/F - I am really scared of having a heart attack.
12. T/F - I often think about how short life really is.
13. T/F - I shudder when I hear people talking about World War III.
14. T/F - The sight of a dead body is horrifying to me.
15. T/F - I feel the future holds nothing for me to fear.
16. T/F - I am afraid of dying on a hijacked plane.
17. T/F - I am afraid of being embalmed.
18. T/F - I'm scared the doctor will tell me I'm dying.
19. T/F - I'm anxious that I might die soon.
20. T/F - Movies involving people dying trouble me.
21. T/F - I'm afraid of dying in an accident.
22. T/F - I worry about what will happen to me when I die.
23. T/F - I fear drowning.
24. T/F - I am very much afraid of perpetual torture after death.
25. T/F - Death is a dark, scary, and lonely thing.
26. T/F - I am afraid of dying from a life-threatening disease.
27. T/F - I do not smoke since I am afraid of dying from cancer.
28. T/F - I am afraid that I do not know when death is going to come.
29. T/F - I very much fear burning in hell.
30. T/F - I very much fear being tortured to death.
31. T/F - Dreams that bother me involve death.
32. T/F - I would be afraid of flying in a plane because an accident could kill me.
33. T/F - I am afraid of sleeping alone.
34. T/F - I am very much afraid of a terrorist attack.
35. T/F - I often dream about death.
36. T/F - I avoid stories involving death.
37. T/F - I'm afraid of being killed in my sleep.
38. T/F - When I'm in small places I worry about being trapped and dying.
39. T/F - I won't let doctors treat me because sometimes they accidentally kill people.
40. T/F - I worry about overdosing on medication.
41. T/F - I am afraid of being burned or cremated while I am still alive.
42. T/F - I have nightmares about dying.
43. T/F - Dreams about dying often wake me up.
44. T/F - It makes me nervous when I see an ambulance.

45. T/F - I am afraid of dying in a natural disaster.
46. T/F - I fear being killed in a war.
47. T/F - The idea of reincarnation frightens me.
48. T/F - When I think about death I can't go to sleep.
49. T/F - I don't like being around people who are very old.
50. T/F - I am troubled about the purpose of life.
51. T/F - The thought of no longer existing bothers me.
52. T/F - I worry that I might die today.

Appendix E IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-125
Title: Death Anxiety and Religiosity
Creation Date: 3-20-2023
End Date:
Status: **Approved**
Principal Investigator: Tara Kirkpatrick
Review Board: MTSU Institutional Review Board
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved
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