

## Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education on the Relationship between Death Attitude and Aspiration of Life

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### Abstract

**Background:** Attitudes toward death significantly influence how individuals plan and pursue life goals, yet the relationship between death attitudes and life aspirations remains underexplored among Nepalese youth, a population navigating rapid social change and significant mental health challenges.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between death attitudes (including death anxiety, avoidance, and acceptance) and life aspirations among Nepalese youth, and to investigate the moderating roles of sex, age, and education in this relationship.

**Methods:** A quantitative, correlational research design was employed with a sample of 391 youth from the Kathmandu Valley, selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using

the Death Attitude Profile–Revised (DAP-R) and the Aspiration Index. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to assess associations and moderating effects.

**Findings:** A statistically significant positive correlation was found between death attitude and life aspiration ( $r = 0.328$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that more adaptive attitudes toward death are associated with higher life aspirations. Moderation analyses revealed that sex and education significantly moderated this relationship, while age did not. The interaction effects for sex ( $\beta = 0.171-0.183$ ) and education ( $\beta = 0.145-0.164$ ) were consistent across positive, negative, and total death attitude models.

**Conclusion:** The findings demonstrate that death attitudes are meaningfully associated with the life aspirations of Nepalese youth, with this relationship being stronger for females and those with higher education. This suggests that death attitudes can serve as catalysts for goal formation rather than solely as sources of distress.

**Novelty:** This study is among the first to empirically establish the link between multidimensional death attitudes and life aspirations in the Nepalese context, identifying sex and education as critical moderators, thereby providing a foundation for culturally relevant theory and intervention development.

**Keywords:** Aspiration Index, Death Attitude Profile-Revised, Education, Gender, Nepalese Youth

## 1. Introduction

Attitudes towards death inform how people plan, value, and pursue their lives; they influence meaning-making, risk behaviour, mental health, and long-term goals. Recent empirical work shows a clear association between death attitudes - including death anxiety, neutral acceptance, and death avoidance - and how individuals set and prioritize life goals and aspirations. For example, people with higher death anxiety tend to endorse different goal profiles and report lower subjective well-being and life-purpose measures (Officer et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

These findings are explained by psychological theories: Terror Management Theory postulates that awareness of mortality shapes self-esteem and goal pursuits, while Goal-Content Theory and meaning-in-life frameworks explain how intrinsic (growth, relationships) vs extrinsic (status, wealth) goals relate to well-being when mortality is salient. Empirical research using these theories generally reports meaning in life as a mediator of the relationship between death concerns and either life satisfaction or goal orientation, thus giving an indication of possible ways in which death attitudes could shape youths' aspirations (Asatsa, 2020; Wang et al., 2025).

Cross-cultural and cross-population studies report variability but consistent patterns: students and younger adults often show high variability in death anxiety and distinct attitudes (avoidance, fear, acceptance) that correlate with life-orientation, mental health indicators, and behaviors like risk-

taking or withdrawal. Studies in medical and caring professions further indicate that education, exposure to death, and cultural framing modulate death attitudes and subsequent attitudes toward life and work. These findings motivate a focused study of youth populations where life-course planning and aspirations are still forming (Azarian et al., 2016; Sharabati et al., 2024).

In Nepal, rapid social changes, education and migration pressures, and cultural-religious narratives about life and death all contribute to the formation of youth aspirations and attitudes toward the future. Recent empirical work in Nepal has just begun to document death-related attitudes among young people (Karki & D’Mello, 2024a, 2025). Public health data underpin the urgency: Nepal’s mental-health surveys and local studies point to significant youth mental-health burdens and suicide-related behaviour-outcomes intimately connected to death attitudes and life hopes. In this context, gauging how death attitudes relate to aspirations for life among Nepalese youth is relevant both for theory development (how mortality concerns influence goal formation) and for informing interventions that aim at strengthening young people’s life plans, resilience, and mental health (Lama et al., 2021; NHRC, 2020).

In spite of some emerging studies among Nepalese that outline death attitudes among youth and other, separate studies on youth aspirations, little empirical work has sought to examine relations between death attitudes (death anxiety, neutral acceptance, avoidance) and the aspirations of life (career, migration intent, family, and personal goals) among Nepalese youth. Existing Nepalese papers document components of each construct but fail to test their interconnections, mediators (e.g., meaning in life), or moderators (e.g., gender, rural/urban, education). This has been a limiting factor for culturally relevant theory development and design of psychosocial or educational programmes that could support adaptive aspiration formation in the face of mortality-related concerns (Karki et al., 2024; Karki & D’Mello, 2024b).

## 2. Research objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between death attitude and aspiration of life among Nepalese youth, with a specific focus on how different dimensions of death attitude—such as death avoidance, and acceptance—shape young people’s future-oriented aspirations related to education, career, personal development, and life goals. The study aims to identify the patterns and strength of association between these constructs and to explore whether demographic factors such as gender, age, and educational background influence this relationship.

## 3. Materials & Methods

This study employed a quantitative method through a correlational research design to study the association between death attitude and life aspirations among youths living in the Kathmandu

Valley. Assuming a prevalence of 50%, a 95% confidence level, and a margin of error of 5%, the sample size calculated in this study was 391. The simple random sampling technique was used because each eligible youth had an equal chance of being sampled, enabling this study to achieve wide and diverse representation from various demographic groups within the study area.

Data were collected with standardized and well-established psychological instruments. The Death Attitude Profile–Revised (DAP-R), by Wong, Reker, and Gesser (1994), was used to measure the five principal dimensions of attitudes toward death (Wong et al., 1994). Measuring life aspirations was carried out with the use of the Aspiration Index developed by Kasser and Ryan (1996), based on Self-Determination Theory and devised to include both intrinsic and extrinsic life goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Following data collection, statistical analyses were carried out: first, correlation tests to determine the strength and direction of the association between death attitudes and life aspirations; second, regression analyses to assess the extent to which death attitudes predict the life aspirations of Nepalese youth.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Correlation between death attitude and aspiration of life

The correlation analysis shows that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the death attitude and the aspiration for life of the respondents. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables is  $r = 0.328$ , with a significance level of  $p < 0.01$ , meaning that the association is unlikely to be a chance one. What this implies is that the more defined the individuals' attitudes toward life—in terms of acceptance, reduced fear, and increased awareness—their aspirations or goals regarding life similarly increase. The sample size for this analysis was 391, thus providing sufficient empirical evidence for interpreting the observed relationship.

*Table 1: Correlation between death attitude and aspiration of life*

<b>Correlations</b>			
		<b>Death Attitude</b>	<b>Aspiration of life</b>
Death Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	391	391
Aspiration of life	Pearson Correlation	.328**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	391	391

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

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

With a correlation of moderate strength, it infers a meaningful relationship between how young people perceive death and how they shape or envision their future life goals. A correlation of this size in the positive direction would suggest that the more reflective or constructive a young person's attitude toward death, the more motivated she or he may be to pursue ambitions related to personal development, education, career, and general life planning. This finding is supported by psychological theories that emphasize the ways in which recognition of one's mortality stimulates life purpose and goal-directedness. In general, findings suggest that death attitude is an important factor in shaping life aspirations among Nepalese young people, emphasizing the usefulness of examining these constructs together.

#### 4.2 Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Positive Death Attitude and Aspiration of Life

Table 2 illustrates how sex, age, and education influence the relationship between a positive death attitude and aspiration. The findings highlight that sex and education serve as significant moderators, while age does not show a notable moderating effect.

**Table 2: Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Positive Death Attitude and Aspiration**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Positive death attitude * Sex	.036	.010	.171	3.416	.001	.015	.056
Positive death attitude * Age	.000	.001	.036	.701	.484	-.001	.002
Positive death attitude * Edu	.024	.008	.145	2.883	.004	.008	.041
Positive death attitude * sex*Age*Edu	5.828E-005	.000	.027	.541	.588	.000	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Aspiration

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

**Positive death attitude \* sex:** The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.036, p = .001) indicates a statistically significant interaction between positive death attitude and sex. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.171) reflects a moderate positive effect, suggesting that the impact of positive death attitude on aspiration varies by sex, with a confidence interval (0.015, 0.056) that does not include zero.

**Positive death attitude \* age:** This interaction presents an unstandardized coefficient near zero ( $B = 0.000$ ,  $p = .484$ ) and is not statistically significant, indicating that age does not meaningfully moderate the relationship between positive death attitude and aspiration. The confidence interval includes zero ( $-0.001, 0.002$ ), reinforcing this lack of effect.

**Positive death attitude \* education:** This interaction is significant, with an unstandardized coefficient of  $0.024$  ( $p = .004$ ) and a standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 0.145$ ). This suggests that education positively moderates the relationship between positive death attitudes and aspiration, implying that individuals with higher education levels may experience a stronger influence of positive death attitudes on aspiration. The confidence interval ( $0.008, 0.041$ ) does not include zero, confirming its significance.

**Positive death attitude \* sex \* age \* education:** This three-way interaction term has a very small coefficient ( $B = 5.828E-5$ ,  $p = .588$ ) and is not significant, with a confidence interval that includes zero. This indicates that the combined moderating effect of sex, age, and education on the relationship between positive death attitude and aspiration is minimal.

In summary, these results suggest that sex and education play significant roles in moderating the effect of a positive death attitude on aspiration.

#### 4.3 Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Negative Death Attitude and Aspiration of Life

Table 3 illustrates how sex, age, and education influence the relationship between negative death attitude and aspiration. The findings indicate that both sex and education play significant moderating roles, while age does not appear to have a notable effect.

**Table 3: Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Negative Death Attitude and Aspiration**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative death attitude * sex	.057	.016	.178	3.567	.000	.025	.088
Negative death attitude * Age	.001	.001	.055	1.096	.274	-.001	.003

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Negative death attitude * Edu	.039	.012	.164	3.286	.001	.015	.062
Negative death attitude * sex*Age*Edu	9.768E-005	.000	.031	.618	.537	.000	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Aspiration

Source: Field Survey, 2024

For the interaction of negative death attitude and sex, the unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.057$ ,  $p = .000$ ) is statistically significant, accompanied by a moderate positive standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 0.178$ ). This suggests that sex significantly influences the relationship between negative death attitude and aspiration, with one gender experiencing a stronger impact. The confidence interval (0.025, 0.088) does not include zero, reinforcing this conclusion.

In terms of negative death attitude and age, the interaction shows an unstandardized coefficient close to zero ( $B = 0.001$ ,  $p = .274$ ), indicating no significant moderation by age. The confidence interval (-0.001, 0.003) includes zero, confirming the absence of a significant effect.

Regarding negative death attitude and education, the interaction is significant, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.039 ( $p = .001$ ) and a standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 0.164$ ). This implies that education positively moderates the impact of negative death attitudes on aspiration, suggesting that individuals with higher education levels may feel a stronger influence from negative death attitudes on their aspirations. The confidence interval (0.015, 0.062) does not include zero, further supporting the significance of this effect.

Lastly, the three-way interaction of negative death attitude, sex, age, and education has a very small unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 9.768E-5$ ,  $p = .537$ ) and is not significant, with a confidence interval that includes zero. This indicates that the combined moderating effect of sex, age, and education on the relationship between negative death attitudes and aspiration is minimal.

In summary, both sex and education significantly moderate this relationship.

#### 4.4 Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Total Death Attitude and Aspiration

Table 4 illustrates how sex, age, and education influence the relationship between total death attitude and aspiration.

**Table 4: Moderating Effect of Sex, Age, and Education between Total Death Attitude and Aspiration**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	Death Attitude * Sex	.024	.007	.183	3.670	.000	.011	.037
	Death Attitude* Age	.000	.000	.046	.910	.363	.000	.001
	Death Attitude * Edu	.017	.005	.164	3.280	.001	.007	.028
	Death Attitude *Sex*Age*Edu	3.810E-005	.000	.030	.584	.560	.000	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Aspiration

Source: Field Survey, 2024

**Death Attitude \* Sex:** The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.024, p = .000) shows a significant positive interaction between death attitude and sex, with a moderate standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.183). This indicates that sex plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between death attitude and aspiration, suggesting that the impact of death attitude on aspiration is more pronounced for one gender. The confidence interval (0.011, 0.037) does not include zero, reinforcing the significance of this effect.

**Death Attitude \* Age:** The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.000, p = .363) is not statistically significant, and the confidence interval (0.000, 0.001) includes zero. This implies that age does not significantly moderate the relationship between death attitude and aspiration.

**Death Attitude \* Education:** The interaction term for education is significant, with an unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.017, p = .001) and a standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.164). This suggests that education positively influences the relationship between death attitude and aspiration, indicating that individuals with higher education may feel a stronger impact of death attitude on their aspirations. The confidence interval (0.007, 0.028) does not include zero, confirming the significance of this effect.

**Death Attitude \* Sex \* Age \* Education:** The three-way interaction term is very small ( $B = 3.810E-5$ ,  $p = .560$ ) and not statistically significant, with a confidence interval that includes zero. This suggests that the combined moderating effect of sex, age, and education on the relationship between death attitude and aspiration is minimal.

In summary, sex and education significantly moderate the relationship between total death attitude and aspiration, while age and the combined moderating effects of sex, age, and education do not have a significant impact on this relationship.

## 5. Discussion

The positive correlation between death attitude and aspiration of life discovered in the present study is moderate and statistically significant ( $r = 0.328$ ,  $p < .01$ ), proving that stronger or more adaptive attitudes toward death are associated with higher life aspirations in Nepalese youth. This pattern is in good agreement with recent cross-cultural work showing that death-related cognitions and attitudes can enhance goal-directed behaviour and life-purpose orientations rather than solely producing avoidance or paralysis. For example, Wang (2025) reports pathways whereby certain death attitudes (in particular, neutral acceptance and constructive reflections) relate to stronger intrinsic goal pursuit and well-being findings, which align with the moderate positive association observed here. Similarly, experimental and survey work has shown that increased mortality salience or reduced death anxiety can increase the importance placed on meaningful, intrinsic aspirations over and above extrinsic goals (Anamagh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2025).

Our moderation results—that sex and education significantly moderate the relationship, but age does not—also echo patterns in prior literature. Many studies report sex differences in death attitudes, generally finding that women report higher death anxiety or more avoidant attitudes than men, and that gender shapes how mortality-related concerns translate into behavior and goals. The large sex  $\times$  death-attitude interactions in the present data (moderate standardized Betas  $\sim 0.17$ – $0.18$ ) mirror Karki’s Nepal-focused findings and multicountry reports, which document gendered patterns in death anxiety and its psychosocial correlates. These gendered differences may reflect sociocultural norms about emotional expression, caregiving roles, or risk-taking that alter how death attitudes are translated into life aspirations (Belak & Goh, 2024; Karki & D’Mello, 2024a).

This moderating role of education is also supported by prior research that has suggested that higher schooling or more formal exposure to reflective curricula can change both death attitudes and goal frameworks. Education is associated with greater exposure to diverse perspectives, increased meaning-making resources, and a stronger capacity to translate existential reflections into concrete life plans; studies validating the DAP-R and research on life goals (Kasser & Ryan; SDT literature) report that educational attainment often accompanies greater emphasis on intrinsic goals and

resilience when facing mortality concerns. Our finding that education amplifies the effect of death attitude on aspiration suggests that educated youth may be more able to convert reflective or even anxious thoughts about death into constructive life planning (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

The non-significant moderating effect of age in our sample is also consistent with research focused on youth populations, where age variation within a relatively narrow range often presents little moderating influence on the death-attitude → aspiration link. Although age is a robust predictor of death attitudes across the entire life course, with older adults differing systematically from younger people, within youth samples, the variance contributed by chronological age tends to be small, with other factors such as gender, education, religiosity, or recent exposure to death explaining more of the heterogeneity. This pattern suggests that interventions aimed at enhancing adaptive death attitudes to support aspirations should prioritize educational and gender-sensitive strategies rather than age-stratified approaches among youth (Adhikari et al., 2025; Çakari, 2020).

## 6. Conclusion & Recommendation

In sum, the modest positive association between death attitude and aspiration of life, the significant moderation by sex and education, but not age, all point to the idea that how young people relate to death meaningfully shapes their future goals, and this influence operates differentially across genders and educational levels. Such findings sit comfortably within an emerging literature that reframes certain death attitudes, such as acceptance or reflective awareness, not solely as risk markers but rather as potential catalysts in the formation of life-affirming goals.

Based on these findings, we would like to recommend: (1) conducting gender-sensitive death-education or reflection programs through schools and youth centres that assist young people in processing mortality in ways that facilitate purposeful goal setting; (2) including meaning-making and aspiration-planning modules in higher-education curricula, since education seems to facilitate translation of death reflections into positive life plans; and (3) prioritizing more longitudinal and mixed-method research in the Nepalese context to test causal directions, identify mechanisms (e.g., meaning in life, religiosity), and tailor interventions to local cultural norms. This will help in the conversion of these correlational insights to actionable policies for youth mental health and life-planning support.

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