



## **Death Avoidance Attitude Among the Youth: Analysis in Nepalese Context**

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### **Abstract**

**Background & Objective:** The avoidance of death is a major psychological phenomenon that controls the approach and relation of human beings to the thought of death. The present paper studies the death attitude among Nepalese youths, focusing attention on gender differences as well as the sociocultural, religious, and socio-demographic factors causing death avoidance. Understanding these will help in the implications for the reduction of stigma about death and appropriate interventions.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional descriptive and explanatory research design was adopted, where data were collected from 196 youths across Nepal using a random sampling technique. The Death Attitude Profile-Revised (DAP-R) was the standard instrument used for measuring attitudes toward death. The Chi-Square test, t-test and Levene's Test for Equality of Variances were conducted to test the differences in death avoidance attitudes between male and female participants.



**Key Findings:** Results have indicated that while the mean score for the attitude of avoidance of death was a little higher for males than females, the difference was not significant. Both genders expressed a similar amount of discomfort when discussing the topic of death, suggesting that cultural factors are perhaps more influential than gender itself in shaping such attitudes. The findings have implications for context-specific research to understand the unique social and cultural dynamics at play.

**Conclusion & Recommendation:** The study concludes that developing appropriate educational interventions promoting open discussions on death is important, which will facilitate a reduction in anxiety and stigma. Improvement in mental health resources is thus recommended to be provided for youths to work out their fears and attitudes toward mortality within the rich cultural context of Nepal.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Death Avoidance, Gender Differences, Nepal, Youth

## **1. Introduction**

Death is an unavoidable truth for every living creature. Death is commonly understood as the permanent cessation of all biological functions that sustain a living organism. It marks the end of life for an individual and can be defined from various perspectives, including biological, philosophical, and cultural dimensions (Karki et al., 2024). According to Osho, "*Life and death are not two separate things. Life is a rhythm; one moment it appears, and another moment it disappears. Death is not the end of life, but the very culmination, the crescendo, the peak. If you have lived totally, you will find death to be a great relaxation, a deep silence, and a return to the source*". However, people are afraid to talk about death and try to avoid the discussion about death and dying. Death talk creates death anxiety also. Death anxiety refers to the fear or apprehension associated with the anticipation of death. It is a psychological condition where individuals experience anxiety when thinking about their mortality or the process of dying (Erbesler & Demir, 2023). Death is also seen as a social construct, with cultural and religious beliefs shaping its meaning. For instance, Durkheim argued that death rituals and mourning practices reinforce social cohesion and collective beliefs (Durkheim, 1915). But still, most of society avoids death and takes it as a social taboo. In the case of one study of China, the elderly tend to avoid discussing life-and-death issues due to cultural taboos and a lack of education on the topic. Their attitudes are often formed through personal experiences, such as witnessing the death of others, and are influenced by traditional Chinese culture, which considers talking about death as unlucky (Lei et al., 2022).

One previous study found death anxiety and death avoidance to be more prevalent among young adults than among middle-aged and older adults. The study shows that younger individuals have a more negative death attitude (Asatsa, 2020). Another study tested the effect of avoidant death attitudes combined with grief on the fading affect bias—the way that negative emotions decay more rapidly than positive emotions. The study provides some insight into how avoidance of death combines with emotional processing in young adults (Gibbons et al., 2018).



The cross-sectional study looked into attitudes toward death in adolescents and young adults, as well as their relation to sociodemographic variables. The results depicted an attitude of fear and acceptance of upcoming death in both groups (Álvarez, 2009). The effect of a death and dying course on the attitudes toward and fears about death among undergraduate students was assessed, offering information on educational interventions to reduce death avoidance among young people (Wallace et al., 2019). Another research assessed the psychological attitudes of the youth towards death in the context of exposure to school shootings. The findings indicated the effect of exposure to such events on death avoidance attitudes (Grinenko, 2023). Similarly, another study explored how individuals cope with the fear of death through materialism and death-related status consumption (DRSC). Analyzing data from 346 participants using structural equation modeling, the study found that the fear of death significantly and positively influences DRSC, with death avoidance acting as a partial mediator in this relationship (Cengiz & Cacciatore, 2024). A study investigated the relationships between experiential avoidance, meaning in life, and death anxiety among 300 Chinese cancer patients. The results showed that experiential avoidance was moderately positively correlated with death anxiety, while the presence of meaning in life was moderately negatively correlated with it (Yan et al., 2024).

Although various studies on death avoidance and anxiety have been conducted in many countries, there is also a great lack of research on these attitudes in the Nepalese context. So far, studies have examined the impact of cultural taboos Lei et al. (2022), psychological factors including experiential avoidance and materialism Cengiz & Cacciatore, 2024; Yan et al., 2024, and educational interventions Wallace et al. (2019) on attitudes toward death. Yet, the single cultural, religious, and socio-cultural realities of Nepal, which are inextricably linked with the perception of death, have largely been neglected. Furthermore, sociodemographic variables like the rural-urban divide, socioeconomic status, and access to mental health resources may greatly affect the death avoidance attitudes of Nepalese youth and remain underexplored. This gap underlines that context-specific research becomes necessary in understanding the psychosocial and cultural factors shaping death avoidance attitudes among Nepalese youth and in developing interventions fitted to their unique environment.

## **2. Research Methods**

The study is based on the descriptive and explanatory research design. The study has described the perception of youth on death avoidance attitude as well as it has described the differences in perception between the male and female participants. It is a quantitative research design. It is a cross-sectional study. The data was collected from 196 youths. The sample size was calculated by considering the 95% confidence level, 7% margin of error, and 50% prevalence; the formula was adopted by earlier authors in a similar study (Karki & D'Mello, 2024a). The random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents (Karki, 2014). It is a perceptual study so students were asked to respond to their answers in a five-point Likert scale. The study adopted the standard instrument of the Death Attitude Profile-Revised (DAP-R)



which was developed by Wong, P.T.P., Reker, G.T., & Gesser, G. The DAP-R is a multidimensional measure of attitudes toward death, encompassing fear of death (Wong et al., 1994). The standard instrument was already used in one previous article (Karki & D’Mello, 2024b).

The study has tested the reliability and validity of the research instrument. The data was pre-tested then it was translated into Nepali language to ensure its readability and understandability. The following table presents the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and the reliability analysis for a factor analysis testing attitudes associated with death avoidance (Table 1).

**Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.771
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	224.210
	df	10
	Sig.	.000
	<b>Factor Analysis</b>	<b>Reliability Statistics</b>
	Factor Loading Value	Cronbach's Alpha
I avoid death thoughts at all costs	.714	<b>.742</b>
Whenever the thought of death enters my mind, I try to push it away.	.768	
I always try not to think about death.	.815	
I avoid thinking about death altogether.	.766	
I try to have nothing to do with the subject of death.	.407	

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

The KMO value of 0.771 represents good adequate sampling, which supports the fact that the data are adequate to conduct factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reaches a chi-square of 224.210 with 10 degrees of freedom and has a significance level of 0.000. It proves that the correlations among variables are significant and hence data are appropriate for the extraction method.

The factor analysis results give five items, "death avoidance," whose factor loadings lie between 0.407 and 0.815. Loading was highest, 0.815 on the statement "I always try not to think about death" followed by "Whenever the thought of death enters my mind, I try to push it away" and "I avoid thinking about death altogether" with their loadings, 0.768 and 0.766 respectively. The statement "I avoid death thoughts at all costs" had a loading of 0.714, while the item "I try to have nothing to do with the subject of death" had the lowest factor loading of 0.407.

Internal reliability of the scale was measured using Cronbach's Alpha which turned out to be 0.742 which indicates an acceptable degree of reliability and thus the items put together measure the construct of death avoidance.

The summary of the KMO and Bartlett's test shows that the result is adequate for factor analysis, and the loadings are high. The reliability analysis established the internal consistency of the scale for measuring the attitude of avoidance of death.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Response to Indicators of Death Avoidance

The study analyzed the indicators of death avoidance and presented the frequency distribution, mean, and Chi-square test values. Table 2 shows the death avoidance attitudes of 196 Nepalese youth, both males and females, based on five statements. Responses are based on a five-level Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree, and the mean scores were compared by gender using Chi-square tests.

**Table 2: Response to Indicators of Death Avoidance**

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Chi-Square Tests
I avoid death thoughts at all costs	Male	6.8%	9.6%	28.8%	28.8%	26.0%	3.3469	.120
	Female	9.5%	17.2%	31.0%	30.2%	12.1%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>		
Whenever the thought of death enters my mind, I try to push it away.	Male	8.2%	11.0%	30.1%	32.9%	17.8%	3.3724	.819
	Female	6.9%	17.2%	27.6%	32.8%	15.5%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>		
I always try not to think about death.	Male	4.1%	11.0%	30.1%	37.0%	17.8%	3.5000	.570
	Female	4.3%	18.1%	21.6%	36.2%	19.8%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>24.9%</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>		
I avoid thinking about death altogether.	Male	6.8%	17.8%	32.9%	27.4%	15.1%	3.3112	.670
	Female	4.3%	22.4%	25.0%	30.2%	18.1%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>20.6%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>29.1%</b>	<b>16.9%</b>		
I try to have nothing to do with the subject of death.	Male	6.8%	8.2%	37.0%	31.5%	16.4%	3.3622	.213
	Female	4.3%	15.5%	30.2%	40.5%	9.5%		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>12.7%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>37.0%</b>	<b>12.2%</b>		

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

In relation to the statement "I avoid death thoughts at all costs", 8.5% of the total subjects strongly disagreed and 17.5% strongly agreed while the rest were distributed in other response categories. Male participants had a higher percentage of Agree, 28.8%, and Strongly Agree, 26.0%, than females, 30.2% agreed and 12.1% strongly agreed. For this item, the mean was 3.3469, indicating moderate avoidance of thoughts about death. The Chi-square value of 0.120 suggests that there is no significant association in gender.

The overall response on "Whenever the thought of death comes into my head, I try to push it aside" is spread quite evenly: strongly agreeing at 16.4%, and strongly disagreeing at 7.4%. The patterns for males, with Agree 32.9% and Strongly Agree 17.8%, and females, with Agree 32.8% and Strongly Agree 15.5%, were fairly comparable. The mean score is 3.3724, showing the average subject still tries to avoid the fact of death moderately. By Chi-square, there is no association: 0.819.

This statement "I always try not to think about death" had the highest mean score of 3.5000 among all items, indicating a higher degree of agreement with death avoidance. Females were slightly more willing to strongly agree at 19.8% compared to males at 17.8%. However, a considerable proportion of both genders agreed: Males - 37.0%, Females - 36.2%. The Chi-square test result is 0.570, showing no significant association based on gender.

In the statement "I avoid thinking about death altogether", 5.3% of the total respondents strongly disagreed and 16.9% strongly agreed. Females had a higher percentage of strong agreement, 18.1%, compared to males, 15.1%. The mean score, 3.3112, suggests a moderate agreement with this statement. The Chi-square test value, 0.670, indicates no significant gender-based association.

The statement "I try to have nothing to do with the subject of death" had the largest range of response deviation. Males were fairly evenly distributed between the categories, with 16.4% strongly agreeing and 31.5% agreeing, while females tended to agree, 40.5%, but not strongly agree, 9.5%. Overall, the mean score was 3.3622, moderate agreement, and the Chi-square test value is 0.213 reflects no significant gender association.

In total, the mean score of all the statements in the current study ranged from 3.3112 to 3.5000, indicating a moderate trend of avoidance of death among Nepalese youth. Females were more agreeable to the statements of death avoidance than males. However, no statistically significant differences were found between the genders, as revealed by the Chi-square test results.

### 3.2 Gender differences in death avoidance

The table presents the differences in death avoidance attitudes among Nepalese youth by gender, analyzing the mean scores, standard deviations, and statistical significance.

**Table 3: Gender differences in death avoidance**

Group Statistics								
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Death Avoidance	Male	73	3.4411	.72031	.08431			
	Female	116	3.3414	.81976	.07611			
Independent Samples Test								
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference



									<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>
Death Avoidance	Equal variances assumed	2.128	.146	.852	187	.395	.09972	.11697	-.13104	.33047
	Equal variances not assumed			.878	167.525	.381	.09972	.11358	-.12452	.32395

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

The mean score for death avoidance was slightly higher in males, 3.4411 (SD = 0.72031), compared to females, 3.3414 (SD = 0.81976). One can tell from this that, on average, males have a slight interest in avoiding the thought or discussion of death more than females. However, the difference in mean scores is small; the mean difference is 0.09972. The standard error of the mean for males was a bit larger than that of females, 0.08431 versus 0.07611, indicating there is a little more variation in the male group than in the female group.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances yielded an F-value of 2.128 and a significance level (p) of 0.146, indicating that the assumption of equal variances between the male and female groups is reasonable. When equal variances are assumed, the t-value is 0.852 with 187 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is 0.395 (two-tailed). The p-value is more than 0.05 significant level so there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in death avoidance attitude.

Males reported a slightly higher death avoidance attitude than females, although the difference was not statistically significant. The results indicate that gender is not an influential factor in shaping death avoidance attitudes among Nepalese adolescents. There is no significant difference in the level of death avoidance between these two groups, as evidenced by the overlapping confidence intervals and non-significant p-values.

#### **4. Conclusion & Recommendation**

In the research into the death avoidance attitude of Nepalese youths, it is established that gender does not play a significant role in shaping attitudes, as can be realized from the similarity in the levels of death avoidance reported by both males and females. This variation of responses to different death-related statements shows that while there is some degree of discomfort and avoidance in discussing death, the degree of discomfort is relatively similar across genders. These findings imply that the dominant cultural and social constructs of death in Nepal significantly influence the perspectives of the youth. This is also reflective of the broader academic discussions on death anxiety and societal taboos. Therefore, nuanced death avoidance necessitates a contextual understanding of these factors.

Educational programs could aim to develop healthier attitudes toward death and reduction of anxiety among youth through open discussion on dying and death in a safe and supportive



environment. These should be designed for the specific cultural contexts in Nepal, amalgamating psychosocial and religious perspectives that are relevant and meaningful to young people. Furthermore, mental health support services should be extended to provide counseling and workshops that will address death anxieties and acceptance of mortality. As in any other taboo subject, a more open talk about death would help younger generations bring a more balanced view to life and its end, thus lessening the stigma and terror associated with such a transition.

**Conflict of interest:** there is no conflict of interest

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