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ABSTRACT

Death Anxiety in Palestinian and American Undergraduates in Time of COVID-19

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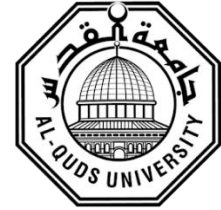
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Background: Death Anxiety is a form of anxiety that is characterized by a fear of one's own death or the process of dying. In response to the new Covid-19 pandemic and its complications in regard to the overwhelming reminders and transmissions of death scenarios, rising figures on the news, and the death of loved ones, The Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety was assisted in measuring Palestinian and American students' level of death anxiety.

Objectives:

1. To measure the effect of Covid-19 pandemic in a Palestinian context,
2. To compare Death Anxiety results with previous studies done in the Intifadas and other Arab Countries,
3. To draw differences and similarities in a cross-cultural approach between the U.S and Palestine,
4. And move forward with a more research-oriented approach towards the topic of death from Palestinian perspectives situated in a post-diasporic and mid-conflict era.

Methods: Participants of BU in the study were asked to answer a survey then complete The Arabic Scale of Death Anxiety Scale by Ahmad Abdel-Khalek (2004). The scale contains 23 items (i.e. I am afraid of falling asleep and never waking up) on a Likert-scale format of 5 possible answers



(Strongly Disagree) up to (Strongly Agree). The scores can range from (Strongly Disagree) which indicates lower death anxiety, and (Strongly Agree), which indicates the highest level of death anxiety. However, participants of CBU were asked to read a scenario of a person fighting Covid-19 but succumbing to death, or another scenario of a person experiencing a heart attack. After reading the scenario, the participants were asked to complete the ASDA. MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status was utilized to allocate CBU participants's social status, while income was reported in BU participants.

Results: BU and Alhliya participants had higher ASDA scores ($M = 3.232$, $SD = 0.962$) than CBU participants ($M = 2.843$, $SD = 0.843$). In the three samples, the majority of participants were female, roughly 82% of the BU and Alhliya sample, and 69% of the CBU sample.

Accordingly, in both samples, females had significantly higher ASDA scores than males. For social status, married participants had higher ASDA scores than single ones. The mean ASDA score of the divorced group was highest, and there was little statistical power with only two individuals in this group. This demographic was not collected in the CBU group since most students are single. As for religion, among the BU participants, there was a significant effect of religion. Specifically, Muslim participants had significantly higher ASDA scores than Christian participants. There was no such difference among CBU participants. As for the social economic status, we performed a median split on the data from each sample. In the CBU sample, participants below the median SES had significantly higher ASDA scores than those above the median (small effect size). There was no such difference in the BU sample. There was no such difference among CBU participants.

Conclusions: In this study, the authors attempted a cross-cultural approach to compare between American and Palestinian students' death anxiety during the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. Different variants were grounded to allocate the possible effects these variants could have on students' death anxiety such as sex, religion and social status. Overall, BU participants had higher ASDA scores ($M = 3.232$, $SD = 0.962$) than CBU participants ($M = 2.843$, $SD = 0.843$).

Research Keywords: Undergraduates, death anxiety, Covid-19, socioeconomic status, religion, cross-cultural.