

Increased Death Anxiety in the Elderly During Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic

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Dear Editor

In December 2019, the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in China led to its spread around the world and became one of the major international concerns.¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that COVID-19 has become a global health concern and causes severe respiratory infections in humans.^{1,2} Human-to-human transmission has been described through droplets, and contaminated hands and surfaces. Early diagnosis, quarantine, and supportive care are essential in treating the patients.¹ With the spread of COVID 19 worldwide³ and also because of the lack of specific antiviral treatment and clinical pressure of treatment, thousands of severe cases of the disease die every day in the world.⁴ COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of social life, including mental health and physical health,⁵ and the direct and indirect psychological and social effects of COVID-19 epidemic disease are now apparent. It can affect the mental health now and in future.⁵ Concerns such as fear of death are increasing among patients in epidemics.⁶ By forcing several directives, including house arrests and quarantine, to deal with the spread of the virus, patients, health professionals, and the general public are under unbearable psychological pressure. COVID-19 appears to be a serious mental health challenge.^{7,8} Some groups, such as the elderly, may be more vulnerable than others.⁹ The world's growing elderly population highlights the need to pay more attention to the psychological problems of the elderly, such as death anxiety.¹⁰

One of the important issues of the elderly health is its psychological dimension, which requires special attention and prevention of disorders such as anxiety.¹⁰ Anxiety is one of the most common psychological problems in old age because people face all kinds of deficiencies and disabilities at this stage of life. Studies show that older people are more likely to be anxious because of low self-esteem, reduced activity and movement, loss of friends, reduced financial and physical independence, and chronic illness. Their most common anxiety is death anxiety.¹¹

Death anxiety is a natural experience, and having a low degree of death anxiety throughout life is necessary to lead us to positive activities, but high abnormal death anxiety may lead to incompatibility. Such anxiety exacerbates the stressful situations and creates feelings of emptiness and frustration about life.¹²

The elderly people face various life challenges day by day that is inevitable. Approaching death and anxiety about death is one of the topics discussed in the elderly health. On the other hand, since home quarantine is known to be the best way to prevent COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that stress, including death anxiety, increases in people, especially the elderly.

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