

The Meaning of Life And Death Anxiety in Cancer Patients

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients. The hypothesis in this study is that there is a negative relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety. The subjects used in this study were 72 cancer patients. The measuring instrument used in this research is the *Death Anxiety Scale* (DAS) which was modified by Hapsari (2015) and *Meaning In Life Questionnaire* (MLQ) by Steger (2006). The results showed that there was a negative relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients ($r = -0.786$; $p = 0.000$)

Keyword: The Meaning of life, Death Anxiety, Cancer Patient

1. Introduction

Cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells can grow uncontrollably and have the ability to migrate to body system (Pangribowo, 2019). Data from the Global Burden of Cancer (GLOBOCAN) released by the World Health Organization (Makassari, 2017) states that the number of cancer cases in the world reached 19,292,789 cases and 9,958,133 deaths per year in 2020. Cancer deaths are expected to continue to increase by around 13.1 in 2030. A person diagnosed with cancer will experience several psychological responses as reaction from stimulus. Research conducted by Lestari (2020) showed that cancer patients experienced several psychological responses, such as rejection, anxiety, self-isolation and acceptance of illness. Cancer has several risk factors consisting of behavioral and dietary risks including high body mass index, lack of fruit and vegetable consumption, lack of physical activity, cigarette use, and excessive alcohol consumption (Narisuari & Manuaba, 2020). A person diagnosed with cancer will experience several psychological responses in response to the stimulus. In Lestari's (2020) study, it was found that cancer patients experience several psychological responses in the form of denial, anxiety, self-isolation, and acceptance.

Based on research by Sugeng, Prayogi, Surwo & Agung (2016), it was found that chronic diseases, one of which is cancer, can cause psychological problems such as depression and anxiety. This is supported by research conducted by (Anghie Azka, Sri Utami, 2017) which states that the level of anxiety in cancer patients at Baladhika Husada Hospital, East Java in the moderate category is 68 people (75.0%), the severe category is 20 people (21.7%), and the very severe category is 4 people (4.3%). There are no cancer patients who experience mild anxiety.

The results of research conducted by Fauziah (2019) confirm the results of previous research, that the reactions of cancer patients from one individual to another are very different depending on the patient's interpretation of the disease and death anxiety appears after experiencing several

phases, namely acceptance, worry, tension, fear and anxiety. One form of anxiety that is often experienced by cancer patients is anxiety about death. Death anxiety is defined as a psychological condition, both unpleasant thoughts and feelings when someone thinks about their own death, this arises due to uncertainty about when death will come and worry about the family left behind (Templer, 1976).

Research conducted by Loughan, et al (2021) found that anxiety about death is experienced by the majority of cancer patients, with a fairly high prevalence, especially in patients with primary brain tumors. Overall, 66% of PBT patients showed at least one symptom of death-related distress experienced by patients who were dying and 48% of cancer patients experienced moderate to severe death anxiety. Symptoms of generalized anxiety and fear of recurrence significantly predicted death anxiety.

In research by Lu, Yang, Chen, Ma, Tan (2024), it was stated that anxiety about death is closely related to fear of recurrence and development of cancer. Approximately 32% of advanced cancer patients experience significant death anxiety, which can affect cancer patients' quality of life. Research also finds that anxiety levels are higher among patients with certain types of cancer and are influenced by factors such as gender and marital status.

There are many factors that influence anxiety about death, one of which is the meaning of life. The meaning of life according to Steger (2011) means that the meaning of life is divided into three meanings, namely purpose centered definition which provides the understanding that individuals have their own personal goals in life. Significance-centered definition which provides the understanding that individuals find the meaning of their lives when they are able to understand the information obtained from the individual's life. The last one is a multifaceted definition which provides the understanding that finding the meaning of life requires a combination of several dimensions, namely the affective dimension, motivational dimension and cognitive dimension.

Frankl (2008) stated that individuals who are unable to find meaning in life will be frustrated which will cause emotional disturbances. This condition can obstruct a person's potential for adjustment, resulting in feelings of boredom, emptiness, meaninglessness in life, fear and anxiety about death. Research conducted by Larasati (2020) states that the meaning of life in cancer patients in the form of the patient's skills in accepting and trying to heal from the disease as well as support from family and nurses can reduce death anxiety.

The success of cancer patients in interpreting their life and taking values from their experiences can provide strength and encouragement to fight cancer cells in their bodies. The positive attitude possessed by cancer sufferers can help foster a sense of patience and high motivation in achieving healing efforts (Putu, 2016). Cancer patients who make efforts to gain meaning in life, such as taking time to help others or getting closer to God, can certainly help them overcome anxiety about death.

The meaning of life found by cancer patients can provide a more positive image to patients which can reduce the patient's fear of death (Cendrawati, 2016). This will be different when the patient does not try to find the meaning of his life, the patient will follow society's assessment and perception of a terrible death so that the death anxiety felt will increase as the days go by. Allah tells

humans to accept our situation and not to worry or be afraid of death. As mentioned in the Al-Quran in the Surah AL-Mulk verse 2 which means "The One who created death and life, so that He may test you, which of you has better deeds. And He is All-Mighty, Most Forgiving."

This verse emphasizes that life and death are part of God's plan to test humans. For patients who experience anxiety about death, this understanding can provide the meaning that death is not the end, but is part of a divine test. If this verse is interpreted, it can reduce anxiety related to uncertainty about what happens after death. Based on the background of the problem explained above, the problem formulation in this research is: **what is the relationship between the meaning of life and anxiety about death in cancer sufferers.**

2. Literature Review

A. Death Anxiety

Anxiety is defined by Kartono & Gulö (1987) as a restlessness, worry and fear of something that is unclear and has a direction in itself. Anxiety itself is a function of the ego to warn individuals regarding several dangerous possibilities so that appropriate responses can be prepared Freud (Maramis, 2016). Anxiety functions to protect the ego because anxiety signals individuals to respond that there will be a danger that can increase to defeat the ego.

Anxiety about death is defined as a psychological condition, both thoughts and feelings that are unpleasant when someone thinks about their death, this arises because of the uncertainty of when death will come and concerns about the family left behind (Templer, 1976). Death can cause deep anxiety that causes a person to be afraid to relate to things related to death that can separate them from someone they love. Carpenito (2014) states that anxiety facing death is a feeling of discomfort and discomfort or fear that arises because of the perception of a real threat or imagining a threat to someone's existence.

Based on several definitions above, the researcher took the theory of anxiety about death from Templer (1970) which states that anxiety is a psychological response in the form of feelings of fear of death that is uncertain when it will come and is considered to cause the loss of a loved one.

Templer (1970) explained that death anxiety in the DAS (Death Anxiety Scale) has five aspects, namely: subjectivity of closeness to death is an individual's experience that causes discomfort when thinking about the possibility of dying in the near future, negative thoughts about death related with an individual's thoughts about death that give negative emotions to the individual, eternal suffering from death is anxiety that comes from the individual's thoughts about the suffering that will be experienced in the form of severe pain and torture that will not stop, impact on safety death is generally considered an unpleasant experience that threatens one's existence, Fear of loss is characterized by the fear of losing things that have filled one's life, namely a family that always supports, sufficient material conditions, or conditions that are felt to be proud of., and fear of punishment related with individuals are too **worried about the consequences after death that come from their behavior while they are still alive.**

B. Meaning of Life

Meaning or meaningfulness has several meanings, namely something that is expected by the individual and something that shows a certain symbol (Chaplin, 1985). So that the meaning itself can be interpreted as something that is expected by someone who gives a certain symbol to achieve the individual's life goals.

The meaning of life is defined as a feeling that will be formed if the individual has a sense of value in himself and an awareness of his existence as a living being (Steger, 2006). Meanwhile, according to Steger (2011), the meaning of life is divided into three meanings, namely the purpose-centered definition which provides the understanding that the individual has his own personal life goals. Significance-centered definition which provides the understanding that the individual finds the meaning of his life when he is able to understand the information obtained from the individual living his life. The last is the multifaceted definition which provides the understanding that in finding the meaning of life, a combination of several dimensions is needed, namely the affective dimension, the motivational dimension and the cognitive dimension.

The meaning of life can be categorized as things that are considered important and valuable and can even provide special value for someone so that they can be used as their life goals. The meaning of life is in the individual's own life and is found in every event, whether pleasant or unpleasant (Bastaman, 2007). Without the meaning of life, the individual will feel physiological and psychological reactions (Frankl, 2008). These reactions include feelings of boredom, frustration, indifference to motivation and inability to accept physical limitations. The meaning of life is a level when an individual realizes that achieving goals requires strong effort (Opeyemi, 2016). This states that if an individual tries to give meaning to his life, the individual can find the meaning of his life as long as he lives.

Meaningfulness of life is also defined as a strength, intensity and activity that prioritizes individuals to increase understanding of the meaning of life felt by individuals (Steger, 2011). This explains that individuals understand their own needs so that the meaning of life is something that is unique and distinctive, because the search process is carried out differently in each individual. The search is intended to help individuals understand how the meaning is felt in their lives to achieve various goals. If individuals fail to find the meaning of life, individuals will feel empty. Based on several definitions, the researcher took the theory of the meaning of life from Steger (2006) which states that the meaning of life is a feeling that is formed when an individual feels valuable and is aware of his current condition.

Aspects and characteristics of the meaning of life are divided into two according to Steger (2006), namely:

1. Search for the Meaning of Life : The drive to find the meaning of life with the aim of understanding and finding the meaning of life from various aspects of life, both when happy and sad.
2. The Presence of the Meaning of Life : The presence of the meaning of life is an aspect that emphasizes the feelings of each individual who has a subjective nature of understanding the

meaning of life obtained in life. This presence is the result of the search for the meaning of life by the individual himself.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis proposed in this research is that there is a relationship between the meaning of life and anxiety about death in cancer patients. The higher the meaningfulness of life, the lower the level of anxiety about death. Vice versa, the lower the meaning of life, the higher the level of anxiety about death felt by cancer patients.

Methods

A. Research Design

The research design used in this research is a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The research subjects used in this study were cancer patients with the criteria of men and women who had been diagnosed with cancer for at least 6 months and were willing to become research respondents with an age range of over 15 years.

B. Research Subject

This study used cancer patient respondents aged over 15 years with a total of 72 respondents, 32 men and 40 women, with a minimum of 6 months of cancer disease with a variety of cancers, namely breast, cervical, ovarian, eye and blood cancer, skin and colon. The stages of cancer patients are stages 1-4.

Research Procedure

This study used cancer patient respondents. During the data collection process, the researcher joined a social media group whose members are cancer patients. This group has been established since 6 years ago and is aimed at all cancer patients so that it can provide the information needed regarding cancer. Before the researcher joined the social media group, the researcher had made an agreement with one of the members who was the admin of the group and the researcher promised to follow all the rules while joining the group. The sampling method in this study is the Non Probability Sampling method (random sampling with purposive sampling technique, namely a sampling technique based on certain criteria (Fitria & Ariva, 2019) for cancer patients.

Measuring instrument

Death Anxiety Scale

The death anxiety scale uses the Death Anxiety Scale (DAS) compiled by Templer (1970) and adapted from Hapsari (2015). This measuring instrument consists of 15 question items and has 5 aspects, namely: general death anxiety (3 items); The change of time and short life (3 items); Fear of the future (2 items); Fear of pain (4 items); Negative thoughts about death (3 items) on the DAS scale consist of 10 favorable items and 5 unfavourable items. The reliability test on this scale shows that the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.903, which means that the scale is valid and reliable.

Meaning of Life Scale

The Meaning of Life Scale uses the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) compiled by Steger (2006). This measuring instrument consists of 10 question items and has 2 aspects, namely: Search for the meaning of life (5 items); Finding the meaning of life (5 items) on the MLQ scale consists of 9 favorable items and 1 unfavourable item. The reliability test on this scale revealed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.985.

Data analysis method

The data analysis method used in this research uses parametric statistics and Pearson product moment correlation. This technique was used because the aim of the research was to find a correlation between two variables, namely death anxiety and the meaning of life. The data analysis process was carried out with the help of the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 23.0 for Windows application program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to determine the relationship between the meaning of life and anxiety about death in cancer patients. The subjects in this study were 72 cancer patients aged over 15 years. The subject was chosen because cancer is one of the problems that is increasing in Indonesia. Even though cancer patients have made treatment efforts, they will still have a decrease in physical activity so that many patients have difficulty giving values to their lives, which can cause anxiety about death in cancer patients.

During the data collection process, researchers followed a social media group whose members were cancer patients. This group has been established since 6 years ago and is aimed at all cancer patients so that it can provide the information needed about cancer. Before the researcher joined the social media group, the researcher had made an agreement with one of the members who was the admin of the group and the researcher promised to follow all the rules while joining the group.

Research Result

Test Assumptions

Researchers carried out assumption tests which included normality tests and linearity tests on research data. The assumption test was carried out using IBM SPSS 23.0 for Windows software.

Normality test

The normality test is carried out to determine whether the distribution of research data is normal or abnormal. If the significance value is above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) then the data can be said to be normally distributed. If the data obtains a significance value below 0.05 ($p < 0.005$), it can be interpreted that the data is not normally distributed. Researchers used the one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to carry out the normality test (ouput of normality test see table 1).

Table 1. Normality Test

Variable	p
Death of Anxiety	0,000
Meaningfulness Life	0,000

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the variables death anxiety and meaning of life have a significance value of 0.000. This value is below 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) so it can be concluded that the distribution of data on the variables death anxiety and meaning of life is not normal.

Linearity Test

The linearity test was carried out to determine the relationship formed between the two variables. If the significance value is below 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) then the data can be said to be linear. If the data obtains a significance value above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), it can be interpreted that the data is not linear (see table 2).

Table 2. Linearity Diagnostic

Variable	p value
Death Anxiety * Meaningfulness Life	0,000

Based on table on can is known that meaningfulness life and anxiety death own mark significance *linearity* of 0.000. If mark significance *linearity* is below 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) then there is linear relationship significant between meaningfulness life with worry to death in patients cancer.

Hypothesis testing

Researchers conducted non-parametric statistical tests using Spearman Rho because this research did not meet normality requirements.

Table 3. Correlation Spearman Rho

Variable	N	R	R ²	p value
Death Anxiety * Meaningfulness Life	72	-0.786**	0.47	0,000

Description : ** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Based on the table above, it can be explained that all dimensions of the meaningfulness of life variable have a significant negative relationship with the death anxiety variable. This can be seen from the significance value of the two variables below 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), namely 0.000 and the correlation coefficient value -0.786. Therefore, the hypothesis in this study can be accepted, namely that there is a negative relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients. The higher the meaning of life that cancer patients have, the lower the death anxiety experienced by cancer patients and vice versa.

Additional Analysis

Researchers carried out several additional analyzes, namely correlation tests between dimensions of the two variables and difference tests. This dimensional analysis was carried out to determine the level of correlation between the dimensions of the meaning of life and each dimension of death anxiety. Different tests were carried out to see differences in the level of death anxiety and the meaning of life in patients based on age, gender and length of time diagnosed with cancer.

Correlation Test

Researchers conducted a correlation test which aims to determine the level of correlation between dimensions of the meaning of life and each dimension of death anxiety. If the significant value is smaller than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) then it can be interpreted that there is a significant relationship. The following are the results of the correlation test in this research:

Table 4. Correlation Test between Subscale

Dimensions of Death Anxiety	Dimensions Meaningfulness Life		p value
	Search for the meaning of life	Finding meaning of life	
	Coefficient Correlation		
Death anxiety in general	-0.676**	-0.571**	0,000
The change in time is short	-0.727**	-0.677**	0,000
Fear of the future	-0.691**	-0.682**	0,000
Fear of pain	-0.718**	-0.661**	0,000
Negative thoughts about death	-0.782**	-0.714**	0,000

Description : ** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Test the Difference

In addition to conducting correlations, researchers also carried out different tests on demographic factors, including age, gender, length of time diagnosed with cancer, type of cancer and stage of cancer. From the different tests carried out, there was anxiety about death when looking at the age and stage of the cancer, while the other 3 demographic factors had no difference. The highest anxiety was found in older cancer patients with stage 4.

The level of death anxiety in the adult age group had a significant difference in mean value ($p = 0.000$). This shows that the early adulthood age group has a mean value of 51.20, middle adulthood 17.61 and late adulthood 0. The adult age group has a lower level of death anxiety compared to the early adulthood age group. Likewise, the level of death anxiety based on cancer stage had a significant mean difference ($p = 0.012$ and $p = 0.001$). Regarding the level of death anxiety, the largest mean value was for stage 4 cancer patients at 54.25 and the level of meaning of life with the largest mean value was for stage 1 cancer patients at 21.56.

Discussion

The results of this study prove that there is a significant negative relationship between the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients. This can be proven by the correlation coefficient value between variables of -0.786 with a significance of 0.00 ($p < 0.05$). The hypothesis in this study was accepted, namely that the lower the level of meaning of life a cancer patient has, the higher the level of death anxiety. The meaning of life and death anxiety have a determinant coefficient of 0.427, which means that the meaning of life makes an effective contribution of 42.7% to death anxiety in cancer patients.

The meaning of life is a feeling that is formed when an individual feels valuable and is aware of his current condition. Meaning of life is an important component for patients with poor health conditions because it is related to self-acceptance of one's shortcomings. Cancer patients usually need to find the meaning of life to maintain a positive view of the situation they face. The meaning of life that a person finds can help reduce the level of death anxiety (Larasati, 2020).

This research is supported by previous research conducted by Candrawati (2016) on 50 cancer patients regarding the meaning of life and death anxiety. The results of this study show that the overall meaning of life value has a significant negative relationship with anxiety about death. Cancer patients who can find the meaning of their life can become more resigned and accept the current situation so that they can reduce the level of death anxiety they feel (Hidayanti, 2017).

The meaning of life is related to death anxiety. This is because individuals who cannot find the meaning of their lives will experience frustration which can cause emotional disturbances and hinder a person's potential for self-adjustment. The feelings that arise are boredom, emptiness, meaninglessness of life, fear and anxiety about death (Frankl, 2008). Therefore, the death anxiety felt by cancer patients can be overcome by the patient searching for and finding the meaning of their life (Palupi, 2021).

This research discusses the meaningfulness of life from two dimensions, namely the dimensions of searching for the meaning of life and finding the meaning of life. The meaning of life has a relationship with the overall quality of life, including general anxiety about death, the passing of time and life briefly, fear of the future, fear of pain and negative thoughts about death. The meaning of life in the dimensions of searching for the meaning of life and finding the meaning of life in this study is related to the general dimension of death anxiety in the meaning of life. Sumanto (2016) states that the meaning of life can play a role in reducing death anxiety from the problems faced by each individual. Fauziah's research (2019) explains that patients with cancer will experience higher death anxiety compared to healthy people in general.

In this study, two dimensions of the meaning of life had a very strong relationship with anxiety about death, especially the negative thinking dimension. Cancer patients feel negative thoughts about death more than healthy people, so understanding and evaluating life experiences is needed to help eliminate negative thoughts that come from societal stigma (Fauziah, 2019). Research conducted by (Larasati, 2020) states that understanding the meaning of life with the help of family support and medical personnel is able to give patients positive thoughts about death and the patient's healing process.

Based on research by Sitio & Suza (2016), the search for the meaning of life can use various methods, namely, self-understanding, acting positively, deepening relationships and deepening worship, which can provide positive thoughts so that they can help individuals in searching for the meaning of their life. One way to get meaning in life is to approach God. Allah has told humans to accept the situation and not to be afraid of the future and death as in the Al-Quran in Surah AL-Mulk verse 2 which means "The One who created death and life, so that He might test you, which of you has better deeds. And He is All-Mighty, Most Forgiving." With this approach, indeed patients who

follow the advice not to be fear of the future that has been arranged by God for reducing their anxiety about death.

Cancer patients not only adapt to general death anxiety, but the perception of changes in time and life also has an impact on the meaning of life over time (Maramis, 2015). The dimension of searching for the meaning of life in the meaning of life in this study has a correlation with the dimensions of changing time and a very short life. A very fast time can make individuals think that they have not done anything meaningful for themselves. Individuals are unable to accept the situation and use their time to mourn situations full of shortcomings, making it difficult to find meaning in life (Fauziah, 2019). The discovery of the meaning of life can be in the form of the patient's ability to see the meaning and wisdom of the events that occur in his life. This brings a deep impression on him in the form of a feeling of satisfaction with life and the life that has been lived. Research conducted by Roberto & Hidayati (2021) states that patients who find the meaning of their lives become more resigned and accept their current condition.

. Patients who succeed in finding the meaning of life have high spirits in the treatment and healing process. Cancer patients who begin to try to find the meaning of life by trying to give meaning to every event they experience in life, appreciating every moment they have and filling it with activities that are beneficial to themselves and others can help patients in finding the meaning of life. Conditions where patients are able to take wisdom from their lives can reduce subjectivity and negative thoughts about death which are one aspect of death anxiety. The meaning of life can provide a sense of satisfaction in life and provide positive thoughts about death. Cancer patients will feel more prepared because in their lives the patient has made efforts that provide them with provisions for death. Cancer patients who have positive thoughts can provide happiness and avoid psychological illnesses such as anxiety, fear and depression (Irma & Raudatussalamah, 2018).

Other research results from this study found that the meaningfulness of life in the dimension of finding the meaning of life is correlated with the dimension of fear of pain and punishment. Based on research by Palupi (2021), someone who carries out positive social activities such as helping or sharing with others can help individuals in their search for the meaning of their life. Positive activities can be a form of meaning in life that can help reduce the fear of punishment after death.

Overall, this research can be concluded that the dimension of searching for the meaning of life has a large role as an indicator of death anxiety. This is because Indonesia is a country where the majority of people still follow public stigma, both positive and negative (Hidayanti, 2017). Based on research conducted by (Khamidah, 2019) with 50 cancer patients, it is stated that the public stigma related to cancer patients in the form of the belief that cancer is contagious, cannot be cured and is a curse causes patients to feel depressed and anxious about death. This can make it difficult for individuals to search for the meaning of life.

Additional analysis in this study was carried out using a difference test related to anxiety levels. The level of death anxiety in adult age groups has significant differences. The middle adult age group has lower levels of death anxiety compared to the early adult age group. Research conducted by (Merizka, 2019) states that middle adults find it easier to cope with death anxiety. This happens because middle adults find it easier to interpret their current physiological and psychological

conditions. Likewise with cancer stages, there are differences in levels of anxiety at each stage, namely patients with stage 4 cancer have more anxiety than stages 1 and 2 because stage 4 cancer is in the terminal illness category which is very close to death.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the overall meaning of life and each of its dimensions does not have a significant relationship with all dimensions of death anxiety in cancer patients. Further research studying the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients has not been found much in Indonesia. Patients with chronic illnesses are likely to experience mental disorders in the form of stress and conflicts over the meaning and purpose of life. The suffering felt mostly challenges the meaning of life (Ebrahimi, 2014).

Based on research that has been conducted, the results show that the meaning of life has a significantly negative relationship with anxiety about death in cancer patients. The higher the meaning of life, the lower the death anxiety that cancer patients have. Conversely, the lower the meaningfulness of life, the higher the death anxiety. The implications of this research can contribute to the world of education to enrich research results related to the meaning of life and death anxiety in cancer patients. This researcher can provide an overview of health workers, patient families and patients experiencing cancer so that health workers can intervene to increase the meaning of life in cancer patients in order to reduce anxiety about death. Families also have a big role in caring for cancer patients, such as helping care for families diagnosed with the disease. Fulfilling the meaning of life needs to be done to improve and reduce death anxiety in cancer patients, both from families and health workers.

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