



## Editorial

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

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The coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) first spread from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and in just two months, according to the World Health Organization, it became a worldwide pandemic (1). COVID-19 is an acute respiratory infectious disease with the main symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath, which has high transmission and prevalence. With the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent changes such as the closure of high-risk jobs, the creation of emergency public health levels, and home quarantine; social and economic relations and the way of life of people, especially the elderly, were severely affected (2). Surveys conducted in 2022 have shown that COVID-19 has mostly led to the death of the elderly and vulnerable groups (3). In this regard, the results of studies indicate the death of 1.8 to 16.7 percent of the elderly over 60 years old (4).

From the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a perception among people around the world and governments that older people over the age of 60 are most affected by COVID-19 and need to take health care seriously (5). Research on COVID-19 has shown that the virus affects various aspects of the life of the elderly, the most important of which is the increase in death anxiety. Although death anxiety is normal in old age, it was during the COVID-19 pandemic that older people experienced high levels of death anxiety. Death anxiety reduces physical function, mental disorders, life dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem in the elderly (6). In this regard, Erbesler & Demir investigated the relationship between death anxiety and depression in the elderly during the outbreak of COVID-19. The obtained results showed that death anxiety was present in all the elderly

admitted to the hospital, and having depression aggravated their anxiety (1). One of the main reasons for the increase in death anxiety among the elderly was that early reports from Wuhan, China, showed that in the early months, half of the COVID-19 deaths were elderly, and the incidence and mortality rate was significantly higher than at other ages (7).

Accepting death and not having fear and anxiety about it is another advantage of spirituality in old age (8). In this regard, studies have shown that the elderly, who are at high levels spiritually and religiously, do not experience much death anxiety (9). Spirituality is understood as an internal belief system that creates vitality and peace in people's lives. Religious practices are considered coping styles that significantly reduce stress in critical situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, in situations where the person is out of control, relying on God and performing religious acts makes the pain more bearable for the person (10). The high prevalence of death anxiety in the elderly is because they suffer from many physical problems, chronic diseases, psychological disorders, and dependence on others (11). Spiritual activities during this period help the elderly overcome the anxiety and fear caused by COVID-19. In other words, religious practices are used as a style of coping with stress, which reduces anxiety and fear caused by COVID-19 (12). In this regard, Rababa et al., (9) in a study examined the relationship between death anxiety and well-being and spirituality in the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that people with lower levels of spirituality and well-being suffered more from death anxiety. It was also found that the higher the spirituality of the elderly, the less they

experience death anxiety. In another study, Guner et al., (10) in a study examined the effect of loneliness on death anxiety in the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed a high prevalence of loneliness and death anxiety in the elderly. Elderly people who received less loneliness and social support during the COVID-19 outbreak were more likely to have death anxiety. Also, marital status, age, gender, and several children played a role in the mortality anxiety of the elderly.

According to studies, older people who engaged in spiritual and religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced less death anxiety. Also, having religious beliefs leads to meaning and peace in people's lives, which results in reducing the fear and anxiety caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 (6-8). Overall, given that two years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 in the world, we are still witnessing the mutation of this deadly virus and no specific time has been set for the post-corona era, the mental health of many people, especially the elderly, has deteriorated. Special attention should be paid to it. In this regard, it is important to address the psychological health of the elderly population before any other study.

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