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The reliability and validity of the Death Obsession Scale among English university and adult samples

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Abstract

The reliability and concurrent validity of the 15-item Death Obsession Scale [Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (1998a). The structure and measurement of death obsession. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 24, 159–165] is examined among 174 English university students (83 men, 91 women) and 105 English adults (42 men, 63 women). Consistent with previous findings when using the Death Obsession Scale, the scale yields a three factor structure ('death rumination', 'death dominance' and 'death idea repetition'), demonstrates adequate reliability statistics, and displays concurrent validity with expected significant positive correlations with measures of death anxiety, death depression, obsessional symptoms, anxiety, depression and neuroticism. These findings suggest confidence in the use of the Death Obsession Scale in empirical studies surrounding death distress among English speaking samples. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Death; Obsession; Anxiety; Depression; Reliability; Validity

1. Introduction

A preoccupation with death features in all religious traditions and religious individuals are thought to use interpretations of death to provide meaning to their lives (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Bloom, 1992). To compliment this view, research suggests that anxiety created through preoccupation with death (death-anxiety (Kastenbaum & Costa, 1977; Templer, 1970))

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or depressive symptoms resulting from thoughts or reactions to death (death depression (Templer, Lavoie, Chalgujian & Thomas-Dobson, 1990)) are related to religiosity, a number of indices of psychological well-being, education about death and attitudes to people working with the dying (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; DavisBerman, 1998; Ireland, 1997; Neimeyer, 1994; Payne, Dean & Kalus, 1998; Payne & Range, 1996; Templer et al., 1990).

Abdel-Khalek (1998a) introduces the Death Obsession Scale developed among Egyptian undergraduate students, which is designed to measure a preoccupation, impulses and persistent ideas regarding death. The scale was developed to complement research areas which have investigated death anxiety and death depression, and is thought to provide a third element (of which death anxiety and death depression are the other two) to a general concept of death distress (Abdel-Khalek, 1998a). Therefore the use of the Death Obsession Scale is of interest to empirical studies that investigate death distress.

The scale contains 15-items and is scored on a 5 point response format (1 'no', 2 'a little', 3 'a fair amount', 4 'much', and 5 'very much'), with possible scores ranging from 15 to 75. The Death Obsession Scale demonstrates a three-factor structure comprising 'death rumination', e.g. 'I fail to dismiss the notion of death from my mind' (item 3), 'death dominance', e.g. 'the idea that I will die at a young age dominates me' (item 2) and 'death idea repetition', e.g. 'thinking about death causes me much tension' (item 13). Each of the subscales demonstrate satisfactory internal reliability (above 0.90) and concurrent validity is demonstrated for the scale with overall scores on the scale significantly positively correlated (all $P < 0.01$) with death anxiety ($r = 0.62$), death depression ($r = 0.57$), general obsession ($r = 0.46$), general anxiety ($r = 0.33$) and general depression ($r = 0.42$). Finally the scale can be linked within Eysenckian personality theory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985) with the scale demonstrating a significant positive correlation with neuroticism ($r = 0.35$, $P < 0.01$) and not with extraversion ($r = 0.07$, $P > 0.05$).

At present, these findings suggest a reliable and valid measure of death obsession. However, at present, examination of the psychometric properties of the scale is confined to Egyptian university students. Abdel-Khalek (1998a) suggests that his study needs to be replicated among English-speaking individuals. Further, it is prudent to examine the psychometric properties of the scale outside university students. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to examine the reliability and validity of the Death Obsession Scale among English students and older adults.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Two samples were used. The first sample comprised 174 (83 men, 91 women) English university students. Age ranged from 18 to 25 years among this sample (mean = 18.87, $SD = 2.4$). The second sample comprised 105 (42 men, 63 women) English adults. Among this sample, age ranged from 27 to 55 years (mean = 38.21, $SD = 10.2$).

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