

Examining the Relationship between Death Attitudes and Life Aspirations in Nepalese Youth

Tej Bahadur Karki, PhD, PDF¹  | Mamata Prajapati, M.Phil.² 

Hira Lal Shrestha, PhD³ 

¹Nepal Philosophical Research Center, Kathmandu

²University Grants Commission, Nepal
Email: mamataprajapati6634@gmail.com

³Principal, Atharva Business College, Bansbari, Kathmandu, Nepal
Email: shrHIRA@gmail.com

Corresponding Author

Tej Bahadur Karki, PhD, PDF

Email: drtej.karki@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between death attitude and life aspirations among youths in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Quantitative in nature, with a correlational design, a sample of 391 participants has been selected using simple random sampling. The collection of data was done using the DAP-R, which assesses five dimensions of death attitude, namely, fear of death, death avoidance, neutral acceptance, approach acceptance, and escape acceptance. The Aspiration Index was administered to assess both intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations. Data analysis was performed using correlation and regression to test the associations and predictive effects of death attitudes on life aspirations. The results show that various dimensions of death attitude are significantly related to particular types of aspirations. Fear of death showed a moderate positive correlation with extrinsic aspirations, $r = 0.270$, indicating that the higher the death anxiety, the greater the motivation toward external achievements like wealth and social recognition. On the other hand, neutral acceptance and death avoidance showed a strong positive correlation with intrinsic aspirations, $r = 0.533$ and $r = 0.265$, respectively, reflecting a focus on personal growth, meaningful relationships, and self-fulfillment. Regression analyses showed both positive and negative death attitudes, and the total death attitude score significantly predicts overall life aspiration. Of these, total death attitude had the strongest effect, $\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$. These findings point to a nuanced role of death attitudes in shaping the life goals of the young by underlining that mortality perceptions can stimulate both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations in young people, depending on their nature. The study emphasizes that awareness of death attitudes

should be integrated into youth development programs to facilitate purposeful and balanced life planning.

Keywords: death attitude, life aspiration, extrinsic goals, intrinsic goals, youth, Kathmandu valley

1. Introduction

Attitudes toward death are complex multidimensional psychological constructs that include fear of death, death avoidance, neutral acceptance, approach acceptance, and escape acceptance. These dimensions are commonly measured with instruments such as the Death Attitude Profile–Revised (DAP-R), and recent studies continue to show that the ways in which people think and feel about death strongly shape emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes across the lifespan. Contemporary research emphasizes that death attitudes are not only clinical concerns but also predictors of broader psychosocial functioning (Cruzado et al., 2024; Han et al., 2023).

Theorists who relate death attitudes with life orientation emphasize theoretical perspectives, including Terror Management Theory and meaning-in-life models: the confrontation of mortality may either undermine future-oriented goals, through increased anxiety and avoidance, or can strengthen life aspirations through increased search for meaning and value clarification. Empirical work suggests that dimensions such as neutral acceptance and positive, reflective attitudes toward death often relate to higher life satisfaction, resilience, and endorsement of meaningful long-term goals, whereas high death anxiety is usually linked with lower well-being and maladaptive coping (Aliche et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

Recent empirical investigations across different populations—students, healthcare professionals, and older adults—confirm that death attitudes relate to important life outcomes, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, attitudes toward palliative care, and subjective well-being, and often, meaning in life mediates these relationships. For example, midwives' death attitudes were related to resilience and personality factors (2024), and studies of nursing and allied health students show that the presence of meaning mitigates the negative effects of death anxiety on professional attitudes. These findings evidence a replicable pattern wherein death attitudes influence how people prioritize and pursue life goals and aspirations (Liu et al., 2025; Tzamakos et al., 2024; Xu & Yu, 2024).

Meta-analytic and recent cross-cultural work indicates variability by culture and life stage: Collectivist versus individualist cultural backgrounds, and differing social practices around death, moderate the strength and direction of associations between death attitudes and psychosocial outcomes. A 2025 meta-analysis and other cross-national studies suggest that culture may either buffer or exacerbate death anxiety's impact on quality of life and goal-pursuit; thus, local sociocultural context is critical when studying aspirations of life in relation to death attitudes (Bennett et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

Methodological advances and recent validations, including translations of DAP-R and related scales, enable more robust measurement of death attitudes in non-Western settings, yet many empirical studies still treat aspiration of life using proximate constructs, namely, meaning in life, life satisfaction, and future orientation, rather than a direct theory-driven measure of "aspiration." Bridging specific death-attitude dimensions with precise measures of life aspirations, such as goal clarity, long-term planning, and vocational/relationship ambitions within the same study, remains comparatively rare, creating room for targeted research that simultaneously measures both constructs with validated scales (Cruzado et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

Although a few Nepali studies have begun to assess death attitudes, including for example, a 2025 Nepalese study reporting on death-avoidance attitudes among youth (Karki & D’Mello, 2025), and some additional death related articles published on fear of death (Karki & D’Mello, 2024), there is a clear absence of published empirical research that directly tests how specific death-attitude dimensions predict aspiration of life, operationalized as future ambitions, goal clarity, and life-planning, in Nepal’s sociocultural context.

1.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to study the relationship between death attitude and aspiration of life among youth living in the Kathmandu Valley. It also aims to assess how different dimensions of death attitude, such as fear of death, death avoidance, neutral acceptance, approach acceptance, and escape acceptance, are related to various domains of life aspirations as conceptualized in the Aspiration Index. In pursuit of these linkages, the study shall aim at identifying whether and to what extent death-related perceptions influence young people's goal orientation, value systems, and long-term life pursuits.

2. Materials & Methods

This study used a quantitative approach in the form of a correlational research design intended to identify and measure the association between death attitude and aspiration for life among youths within the Kathmandu Valley. For a 95% confidence level, 50% estimated prevalence, and 5% margin of error, the total sample size determined was 391. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique for fair representation of young people in the study area. The sampling strategy was designed in such a way that it captures a diverse representative cross-section of young people across different demographic spectrums.

Data collection was done using validated and widely used psychological measurement tools. The Death Attitude Profile–Revised (DAP-R) by Wong, Reker, and Gesser was used to measure five dimensions of death attitude (Wong et al., 1994). In measuring life aspirations, the study used an aspiration index developed by Kasser and Ryan (1996) based on the Self-Determination Theory that captures intrinsic and extrinsic life goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The data collection was followed by statistical analyses through correlation to test the strength and direction of the relationship between death attitude and aspiration of life, and regression analysis for the predictive effect of death attitude on life aspirations among youth.

3. Results & Discussion

3.1 Analyze the relationship between death attitude and aspiration for life

Table 1 examines how attitudes toward death relate to life aspirations, showing important connections between different aspects of death attitudes and both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations.

Table 1: *Analyze the relationship between death attitude and aspiration of life*

		Correlations				
		Fear of Death	Death Avoidance	Neutral Acceptance	Approach Acceptance	Escape Acceptance
Extrinsic Aspiration	Pearson Correlation	.270**	.228**	.221**	.150**	.119*

Correlations						
		Fear of Death	Death Avoidance	Neutral Acceptance	Approach Acceptance	Escape Acceptance
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.003	.018
	N	391	391	391	391	391
	Pearson Correlation	-.060	.265**	.533**	-.025	-.020
Intrinsic Aspiration	Sig. (2-tailed)	.234	.000	.000	.617	.694
	N	391	391	391	391	391
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Starting with extrinsic aspirations, the table reveals positive correlations with death attitudes. The strongest link is found with "Fear of Death," which has a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.270. This indicates that individuals who have a heightened fear of death are more inclined to pursue extrinsic goals, such as wealth or fame. Likewise, "Death Avoidance" (0.228) and "Neutral Acceptance" (0.221) also demonstrate significant positive relationships with extrinsic aspirations. These results suggest that a greater concern about death may motivate individuals to seek external validation or material success as a means of coping with their fears. The weaker correlations with "Approach Acceptance" (0.150) and "Escape Acceptance" (0.119) imply that while these attitudes are still positively associated with extrinsic aspirations, the connections are not as pronounced.

When looking at intrinsic aspirations, the correlations reveal a more complex scenario. There is a notable negative correlation with "Fear of Death" (-0.060), suggesting that those who fear death may not prioritize intrinsic goals like personal growth or fulfillment. In contrast, both "Death Avoidance" (0.265) and "Neutral Acceptance" (0.533) show strong positive correlations with intrinsic aspirations. This indicates that individuals who either avoid contemplating death or accept its inevitability tend to focus more on personal values and self-fulfillment, suggesting that intrinsic aspirations can thrive in the absence of death anxiety. The lack of significant correlations with "Approach Acceptance" (-0.025) and "Escape Acceptance" (-0.020) indicates that these attitudes do not have a meaningful impact on intrinsic aspirations.

3.2 Death Attitude and Aspiration of Life

Table 2 shows the relationship between attitudes toward death and aspirations for life.

Table 2: *Death Attitude and Aspiration of Life*

Correlations				
Variable	Measure	Positive Death Attitude	Negative Death Attitude	Death Attitude (Total)
Extrinsic Aspiration	Pearson Correlation	.227**	.318**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	391	391	

Intrinsic Aspiration	Pearson Correlation	.205**	.130**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.010	
	N	391	391	
Aspiration of Life (Total)	Pearson Correlation			.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N			391
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table presents the correlations between different types of aspirations (extrinsic, intrinsic, and total life aspirations) and attitudes toward death (positive, negative, and total death attitudes). It shows that both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations have significant positive correlations with positive and negative death attitudes, with extrinsic aspirations showing stronger correlations (.227** and .318**, respectively) compared to intrinsic aspirations (.205** and .130**). Comparatively, a negative death attitude has a higher level of correlation with extrinsic aspiration, whereas a positive death attitude has a higher correlation with intrinsic aspiration of life. It indicates that those who avoid death want to earn many physical properties, whereas those who accept death focus on earning intrinsic aspiration.

The total life aspirations also exhibit a significant positive correlation with the total death attitude (.328**). All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating a robust relationship between these variables.

3.3 Effect of Death Attitude on Aspiration

Table 3 illustrates how different attitudes toward death influence the variable Aspiration in a regression analysis.

Table 3: *Effect of Death Attitude on Aspiration*

Coefficients								
Model		(b)		β	t	Sig.	95% CI for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			LB	UB
1	Positive Death Attitude	.183	.036	.252	5.137	.000	.113	.253
	Negative Death Attitude	.243	.046	.261	5.339	.000	.154	.333
	Death Attitude (Total)	.171	.025	.328	6.853	.000	.122	.221
a. Dependent Variable: Aspiration								

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The findings indicate that each type of death attitude—Positive death attitude, Negative death attitude, and the overall Death Attitude score—significantly predicts Aspiration, as evidenced by the p-values (Sig.) of .000 for all variables, highlighting strong statistical significance. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for Positive death attitude is 0.183, suggesting that for every one-unit increase in Positive death attitude, Aspiration rises by 0.183 units. The standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.252 reflects a moderate positive correlation. In contrast, the

Negative death attitude has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.243, indicating a more substantial positive effect on Aspiration, with a standardized Beta of 0.261. The Death Attitude total presents an unstandardized coefficient of 0.171 and a standardized Beta of 0.328, demonstrating the strongest positive relationship with Aspiration among the variables. The 95% confidence intervals for each coefficient do not encompass zero, reinforcing the reliability of these results.

Overall, these findings imply that both positive and negative death attitudes, along with the overall Death Attitude score, are positively linked to Aspiration, with the Death Attitude total exhibiting the most significant influence.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study—that both "negative" and "positive" death attitudes relate positively to overall life aspirations, and that different dimensions of death attitude associate distinctly with extrinsic vs. intrinsic aspirations—resonate with and diverge from recent empirical research in many important ways. For example, the large-scale recent study entitled *Death attitudes and good life experience: the mediation and suppression effects of intrinsic and extrinsic goals* (2025) found that "neutral acceptance" of death was positively associated with intrinsic goals, and that "death anxiety" (analogous to fear of death) was positively associated with extrinsic goals; moreover, intrinsic goals mediated the positive effects of neutral acceptance on good life outcomes, while extrinsic goals suppressed those effects (Wang et al., 2025).

This is similar to the pattern observed in our data: neutral acceptance and death avoidance each show strong positive correlation with intrinsic aspiration, whereas fear of death tends more toward extrinsic aspiration. However, our findings also differ in some respects. In the 2025 study, death anxiety negatively correlated with well-being — i.e., it undermined what they term "good life experience" (Wang et al., 2025).

By contrast, our data indicate a positive relation of "Fear of Death" with extrinsic aspiration ($r = 0.270$) and that the total death attitude score (positive and negative combined) is a significant predictor in the regression equations of a higher aspiration level in general. What this could imply is that, at least among Kathmandu youth (our sample), rather than being suppressed by anxiety about death, life aspirations might be rerouted toward more extrinsically-oriented goals, such as accumulating wealth or earning public fame. Differences could reflect contextual/cultural factors, age differences, or sample composition (youth vs. general population), which would stand to speak to the complexity of death-attitude effects across settings.

Further, our strong positive correlation between "Neutral Acceptance" and intrinsic aspirations ($r = 0.533$) supports the suggestion derived from SDT that intrinsic goals—focusing on personal growth, meaningful relationships, and self-fulfillment associated with deeper existential reflection and perhaps a more mature attitude toward life and death. This pattern is supported by earlier research on older adults: in a study of older adults, *Ambitions fulfilled? The effects of intrinsic and extrinsic goal attainment on older adults' ego-integrity and death attitudes* (2009), intrinsic goal attainment was positively associated both with well-being and death acceptance, whereas extrinsic goal attainment was either unrelated or sometimes negatively related to psychological health or death acceptance (Van Hiel & Vansteenkiste, 2009). The focus of that study is on goal attainment rather than aspiration; however, the conceptual link between valuing intrinsic goals and adaptive death attitudes is in line with our findings.

Finally, the complex pattern in which both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations correlate with aspects of death attitude — and total death attitude predicts overall aspiration — suggests that the

relationship may not be uniformly adaptive or maladaptive. The recent 2025 study concludes that while neutral acceptance fosters intrinsic goals supportive of well-being, extrinsic goals tend to suppress the positive effects of death attitudes on "good life experience" (Wang et al., 2025).

In our context, though, youth might construe death anxiety as a driver for extrinsic success, possibly reflecting social or economic pressures, or cultural values relating to achievement, status, and security. In other words, while most studies frame death anxiety as well-being undermining, our data indicate that it could actually serve to fuel life ambitions — perhaps more along the lines of external rewards rather than fulfilling an innate drive or calling.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

In sum, this study shows the importance of a complex and multifaceted association between death attitudes and life aspirations among youth in the Kathmandu Valley. Both negative death attitudes, namely fear of death and death avoidance, and positive ones, such as neutral acceptance, predict higher life aspirations; however, each is leaning toward a different type of goals: fear of death toward extrinsic aspirations, and neutral acceptance toward intrinsic aspirations. Second, total death attitude appears as a robust predictor of overall life aspiration. These findings suggest that attitudes toward mortality are deeply interwoven with how young people envision and plan their futures, not only in terms of survival or material success but also in terms of personal growth and meaning.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that future research and interventions, conducted in contexts like Nepal-consider the type of aspirations that death attitudes encourage. For instance, educational and youth-development programs might consider facilitating reflection on mortality in a way that stimulates intrinsic goals-personal growth, community, and meaning-rather than solely extrinsic goals such as wealth and status. Second, longitudinal research would be beneficial in testing whether these death-attitude-influenced aspirations are translated into actual attainment of goals and long-term well-being. Lastly, instruments or adapted versions of aspiration and death-attitude scales prepared with cultural sensitivity may help capture the local nuances of how young Nepalese navigate mortality and life planning.

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