

DEATH AND DYING AMONG PAKISTANI MUSLIM POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

Death is a uniformly upsetting phenomenon for the individuals of every society; however, the ways in which the idea of death handled varies according to society's psychological, religious and moral norms. The present inquiry was an exploratory survey aimed to explore fears related to death and dying among the Pakistani Muslim population. Sample of (N=251) completed Death and Dying Questionnaire (DDQ), originally designed for the present study. DDQ showed internal consistency ($\alpha=.811$). The majority agreed on the meaninglessness of life without death (26.7%), death as a painful event (25.9%) and end at the start of a new journey (29.9%). Mixed opinions were obtained for the quality of death. A higher agreement was shown for punishment after death (36.7%) and witnessing other's death (32.3%). Mixed opinions were obtained for the inability to accomplish the future task and fulfilling the needs of family members after death.

Keywords: *Death, Dying, Fear, Survey, Pakistani, Muslims, Karachi.*

1. INTRODUCTION

"Death is never plain and simple" (Piven, 2004a, p. 7). Death is a uniformly, disturbing reality for the individuals of every society. However, the ways in which the idea of death handled and fabricated varies according to society's psychological, religious and moral norms. Cultural ethos is "the veil of order and meaning that societies construct against chaos" (Kearl, 1989, p. 26). Cultures possess death ethos which are different standpoints towards death pertaining for the "need to deny, manipulate, distort, and camouflage death, so it is a less difficult threat with which to cope" (Kastenbaum, 2009; Corr & Corr, 2013, p. 71). In certain societies death is a forbidden topic; kept as secret event and regarded as a sign of misfortune and bad luck (Cox Bird, Arthur, Kennedy, Pollock, Kumar, Stanton & Seymour, 2013; Ho,

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Chan, Chow, Pon & Siu-Man 2010; Chan, Chan, Tin, Chow & Chan, 2006; Ogiwara & Matsubara, 2007) .

Death is said to be a multifaceted phenomenon, numerous studies concluded that we tend to perceive and feel death in diverse ways which ranged from sharp terror, neutral acceptance, and approach acceptance to blend of all feelings (Cozzolino, Blackie & Meyers 2014;Dezutter, Soenens, Luyckx, Bruyneel, Vansteenkiste, Duriez & Hutsebaut,2009; Neimeyer, Wittkowski & Moser 2004;Tassell-Matamua & Lindsay, 2016). People tend to deny death; avoid discussing death because it produces apprehension (Loy 1996; Lehto & Stein, 2009). Death implies distinct personal meanings, and it shapes the way we spent our lives due to this individual exhibit different responses to death, at once we can be terrorized or attracted towards the mysterious phenomenon of death (Wong & Tomer ,2011).

There are differences which exist for handling of emotions related to death and dying in western and eastern cultures. Western societies are death denying in nature, and people show great resistance towards the phenomenon of death (Kalish & Reynolds, 1981). A study carried out by Schumaker, Barraclough and Vagg (1988) concluded that Australian individuals, predominantly influenced by western cultural values possess higher death anxiety as compared to Malaysian individuals who tend to hold eastern cultural norms. The possibility of one's own death shapes our attitudes towards death (Suhail & Akram, 2002). The disparity exists for the handling of death related issues in western and eastern cultural backgrounds attributed to different psychological social and religious factors.

Religion address the issue of death and life after death, which creates ambiguity and apprehension distress (Moore & Williamson , 2003). In Hinduism there is widespread belief of "Karma "according to this for every action there is a reaction, painful death is an outcome of a person's past wrongdoings (Hardt, 1979), Buddhists believes that death is transcendence and release from misery (Jochim, 1986; Piven, 2004b). In Islam, death and life after death are one of core belief , Muslims believe that life and death are in the hands of Almighty Allah and He knows timing and occurrence of death (Tayeb et al., 2010). A study carried out by Parsuram and Sharma (1992) compared levels of death fears among individuals from three religious backgrounds, i.e. Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, the results showed that Christians possess higher levels of death fears as compared to

Muslims whereas Hindus reported the lowest intensity of death anxiety.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Cultural collectivism ameliorates death fears (Abdel-Khalek, Lester, Maltby, & Tomás-Sábado, 2009; Nakagi & Tada, 2014). Pakistani society is dominated by eastern collectivistic cultural values, and the dominant religion is Islam, here the suppression and denial of the matters related to death and dying is a common practice. The ineffective dealing of the sensitive issue of death leads to different psychological disorders, behavioral issues and other social maladies. Such passive avoidance provides fertile grounds to sprout various clinical problems; this created a need to explore the issue of death and dying in a Pakistani cultural setup. The present study is an initial effort to explore the meanings linked with death and possible reasons for fear of death and dying among Pakistani Muslims (i.e., believers of Islam). The study aspires to plan intervention and assessments in order to address and effective dealing with the sensitive matter of death and dying.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was to explore the fear of death and dying in Pakistani society.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the concept of death and dying in Pakistani society.
2. To investigate dominant reasons for fear of death and dying among Pakistani Muslims.

2. METHOD

2.1. Development of Death and Dying Questionnaire (DDQ)

The concept generation phase included literature review and an informal interview. In an interview (n=70) Muslim adults with age ranged from (16 to 50 years) were included. They discussed different concepts related to death and dying and the significant factors for

which Muslims of Pakistani society dominantly fear about death. The verbatim was thematically analyzed. The domains identified on the basis of inductive and deductive reasoning included: death as a painful event, punishment after death, life after death, the meaning of life without death, loss of personal and social identity after one's death, good and bad deaths. Thirteen items were written on the basis of identified conceptual domains. Five-point Likert option was decided to score responses.

2.2. Content validity

The items were reviewed by three experts (doctoral candidates) for vagueness and ambiguity. Items were modified on the basis of expert's views. Four items conjointly decided to be discarded from DDSQ.

2.3. Pilot Study

In order to ascertain comprehension and clarity of items, a list of 9 item questionnaire was given to (n=15) individuals.

2.4. Phase II: Internal Consistency

In this phase, the questionnaire was finally administered on participants to determine the internal consistency of items.

2.4.1. Participants

Sample of 251 individuals (135 men & 116 women) were recruited from different areas of Karachi city. Their age ranged from 16 to 59 years and above. (29.5%) participants rated themselves as having a lower religious interest ;(49.8%) moderate religious interest and (20.7%) showed strong religious interest. (50.2%) individuals reported to experience the death of loved ones during the past two years and (49.8%) did not face the death of loved ones during the past two years. They all were recruited through random sampling technique from different areas of Karachi city. Participation in this study was completely voluntarily.

2.4.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Muslims and healthy normal individuals with age range 16 years and above were included in the present study while non-

Muslims, children below 16 years and patients suffering from mental and physical health problems were not included in the study.

2.5. Materials

2.5.1 Consent Form

It contained a brief purpose of the study. It was also mentioned that the participation was on voluntary basis, and all the information would be solely utilized for research purpose.

2.5.2 Demographic Information Sheet

A self-developed personal information sheet was made by researchers of the study. It included information about gender, age, religious interest and experience of the death of loved ones during the period of the past two years. Separate columns with empty spaces were present to place a checkmark against each option

2.5.3. DDQ

It comprises of nine questions. Five points Likert scale was used to record the responses of questions which ranged from (5= strongly agree; 1= strongly disagree). All items were positively worded. The alpha reliability of DDSQ was found to be ($\alpha=.811$).

2.5.4. Procedure

All participants of this study were individually approached for data collection. They were selected from different areas of Karachi city. Participants were recruited from different educational institutes, workplaces, homes and personal referrals. All participants were fully described the purpose of the study and handed over forms if they showed willingness, they were told that participation in this study was on a voluntary basis for which they would not receive any monetary benefits, and they deserved full right to leave the study. They were warmly thanked for their participation by the researcher. All data was simultaneously scored and entered for analysis in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

3. RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants of Survey (N=251)

| Demographics | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 135 | 53.8 |
| | Female | 116 | 46.2 |
| Age | 16-26 years | 148 | 59.0 |
| | 27-357 years | 60 | 23.9 |
| | 38-48years | 28 | 11.2 |
| | 49-59 and above years | 15 | 6.0 |
| | | | |
| Religious inclination | Low | 74 | 29.5 |
| | Moderate | 125 | 49.8 |
| | High | 52 | 20.7 |
| Death of loved ones during past2 years | Yes | 126 | 50.2 |
| | no | 125 | 49.8 |

Table 1 shows the percentage and frequency counts of the demographic profile of individuals participated in the death and dying survey.

Table2

Item Total Correlation of DDQ (N=251)

| Question no's | Correlation Total Score |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .38** |
| 2 | .57** |
| 3 | .48** |
| 4 | .56** |
| 5 | .44** |
| 6 | .62** |
| 7 | .39** |
| 8 | .49** |
| 9 | .61** |

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows that nine questions in DDQ are positively correlated with total scores. The 9 items lie in the acceptable range ($r = .38$ to $.62$).

Table 3

Reliability Estimates of DDQ (N=251)

| Number of Items | Alpha Coefficient |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 9 | .811** |

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 3 shows good indices of the level of alpha reliability for DDQ.

Table 4

Responses of participants for DDQ

| Question nos. | Missing (n) | Strongly disagree (%) (n) | Disagree (%) (n) | Don't know (%) (n) | Agree (%) (n) | Strongly Agree (%) (n) |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Question1 (N=250) | 1 | 14.3 (36) | 16.3 (41) | 16.3 (41) | 26.7 (67) | 25.9 (65) |
| Question2 (N=250) | 1 | 15.5 (39) | 17.5 (44) | 18.3 (46) | 25.9 (65) | 22.3 (56) |
| Question3 (N=250) | 1 | 10.4 (26) | 18.3 (46) | 17.1 (43) | 29.9 (75) | 23.9 (60) |
| Question4 (N=250) | 1 | 13.9 (35) | 29.9 (75) | 12.0 (30) | 27.5 (69) | 16.3 (41) |
| Question 5 (N=250) | 1 | 19.5 (49) | 26.7 (67) | 11.2 (28) | 25.1 (63) | 17.1 (43) |
| Question6 (N=250) | 1 | 12.0 (30) | 21.5 (54) | 13.9 (35) | 36.7 (67) | 25.5 (64) |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Question7 (N=250) | 1 | 6.0 (15) | 25.9 (65) | 22.3 (56) | 28.7 (72) | 16.7 (42) |
| Question8 (N=250) | 1 | 10.4 (26) | 23.5 (59) | 13.1 (33) | 32.3 (81) | 20.3 (51) |
| Question9 (N=249) | 2 | 16.7 (42) | 25.9 (65) | 10.4 (26) | 26.7 (67) | 19.5 (49) |

Table 4 shows the percentage and frequency count for the responses of participants on DDQ.

Table 5

Responses of Male participants for DDQ(n=134)

| Questi on no | Missi ng value s | Stronglydis agree (%) (n) | Disag ree (%) (n) | Don'tk now (%) (n) | Agr ee (%) (n) | StronglyA gree (%) (n) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Questi on1 | 1 | 16.3 (22) | 17.8 (24) | 16.3 (22) | 23.0 (31) | 25.9 (35) |
| Questi on 2 | 1 | 19.3 (26) | 17.0 (23) | 20.7 (28) | 21.5 (29) | 20.7 (28) |
| Questi on3 | 1 | 8.9 (12) | 20.7 (28) | 20.7 (28) | 29.6 (40) | 19.3 (26) |
| Questi on4 | 1 | 15.6 (21) | 31.9 (43) | 8.9 (12) | 23.7 (32) | 19.3 (26) |
| Questi on5 | 1 | 20.7 (28) | 31.1 (42) | 8.9 (12) | 22.2 (30) | 16.3 (22) |
| Questi on 6 | 1 | 11.9 (16) | 23.7 (32) | 17.0 (23) | 25.9 (35) | 20.7 (28) |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Question 7 | 1 | 5.9 (8) | 25.9 (35) | 25.9 (35) | 25.2 (34) | 16.3 (22) |
| Question 8 | 1 | 8.9 (12) | 22.2 (30) | 12.6 (17) | 36.3 (49) | 19.3 (26) |
| Question 9 | 1 | 17.8 (24) | 23.7 (32) | 10.4 (14) | 29.6 (40) | 17.8 (24) |

Table 5 shows the percentage and frequency count for the responses of male participants on DDQ.

Table 6

Responses of Female participants for DDQ (n=116)

| Question no | Strongly disagree (%) (n) | Disagree (%) (n) | Don't know (%) (n) | Agree (%) (n) | Strongly Agree (%) (n) |
|-------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Question 1 | 12.1 (14) | 14.7 (17) | 16.4 (19) | 31.0 (36) | 25.9 (30) |
| Question 2 | 11.2 (13) | 18.1 (21) | 15.5 (18) | 31.0 (36) | 24.1 (28) |
| Question 3 | 12.1 (14) | 15.5 (18) | 12.9 (15) | 30.2 (35) | 29.3 (34) |
| Question 4 | 12.1 (14) | 27.6 (32) | 15.5 (18) | 31.9 (37) | 12.9 (15) |
| Question 5 | 18.1 (21) | 21.6 (25) | 13.8 (16) | 28.4 (33) | 18.1 (21) |
| Question 6 | 12.1 (14) | 19.0 (22) | 10.3 (12) | 27.6 (32) | 31.0 (36) |
| Question 7 | 6.0 (7) | 25.9 (30) | 18.1 (21) | 32.8 (38) | 17.2 (20) |
| Question 8 | 12.1 (14) | 25.0 (29) | 13.8 (16) | 27.6 (32) | 21.6 (25) |
| Question 9 | 15.7 (19) | 28.4 (33) | 10.3 (12) | 23.3 (27) | 21.6 (25) |

Table 6 shows the percentage and frequency count for the responses of male participants on DDQ.

4. DISCUSSION

The primary intent of the present survey was to explore the ideas related to death and dying. It investigates different death fears (unknown happening, painful death, fear about the inability to nurture family needs and the meaning of death) among the Pakistani Muslim population. A brief survey questionnaire was mainly designed on the basis of first-hand information about meanings and reasons for fear related to death and dying expressed by individuals during the interview. Nine-item questionnaire demonstrated an acceptable range of coefficient values ($r = .38$ to $.62$), Overall a higher level of alpha reliability ($\alpha = .81$) was found for the questionnaire. The questionnaire seeks to explore the prevalence of concepts related to death and dying and predominant reasons for which Pakistani Muslims fear about death.

The survey revealed that 26.7% of participants agreed that life would be meaningless without death while only 14.3 % disagreed with the idea that of meaninglessness without death, gender-wise analysis also showed that majority of individuals agreed with the idea that life would be meaningless without death. The greater prevalence of realistic concept of death and dying showed a possibility that majority of participants (59%) included in our survey were younger individuals (16-26years) who possess wider access to education and other technological advancements (television, social media) this aid to foster psychological maturity and a rather healthy outlook to deal with daily issues which overarches the formation of realistic concept related to death and dying among the individuals involved in present survey. Prior research suggested that young individuals possess a desire to seek explanations for death related issues through Mass media (Mak, 2010).

Overall, results showed that 25.9% of individuals perceived death as a painful event. Interestingly, an equal percentage of male participants showed an agreement as well as an ambiguity with the idea that death is a painful event (i.e., 20.7%). Females showed a

higher agreement (31%) that death is a painful event as compared to male participants. Such findings provide a lead that a higher perception for death as painful phenomenon may show the presence of a higher degree of dread for death among females of Pakistani culture. Also, the investigations carried out in western culture showed that females tend to be greater horrified by death as compared to males (Russac, Gatliff, Reece & Spottswood, 2007).

An overall higher percentage of individuals showed an agreement with the prospect of death as the beginning of a new journey (29.9%). Here also an equal proportion of male participants showed a disagreement as well as an ambiguity with the idea that death is an initiative for new journey event (i.e., 20.7%). Results showed that Pakistani males possess mixed opinions regarding the prospect of death as a start of new endeavour this may indicate the presence of probable positive or negative attitudes towards death.

Results showed that overall, there is a prevalence of somewhat hybrid opinion for the idea about the quality of death. (29.9%) of Muslim adults disregarded the notion of a good death in a sleep state whereas (27.5%) showed an agreement with the idea that good death happens in a sleep state. Gender wise analysis showed that a larger number of males strongly disagreed (15.6%) with the idea of a good death in sleep conditions as compared to females (12.1%). Likewise, an overall mixed opinion was expressed, i.e. ;(25.1%) agreed and (26.7%) disagreed with the notion that a bad death occurred via violent accidents. Higher number of females (28.4) tend to believe that death is bad if it happened by violent accident as compared to males (22.2%). Quality of death can be determined by observation and interpretation of the circumstances and conditions of another person's death. Such findings for an ambivalent opinion about nature of good and bad death may point out the fact that participants of the present study were Muslims and Islamic teachings focused upon a belief that only Allah (S.W.T) knows the timing and nature of death (Tayeb, Al-Zamel, Fareed & Abouellail, 2010).

Overall findings revealed that majority of Muslim adults expressed conformity with the idea that punishment after death (36.7%) is one of major reasons which accounts for fear of death whereas only (12%) showed a disagreement with the premise that

punishment after death is one of the core factors which accounts for fear of death while similar patterns were obtained for gender wise analysis. An explanation for the presence of such relatively transparent opinion points out the fact that life after Death is one of the core concepts of Islam and Muslims adherently believe that everyone would be rewarded or punished on the basis of his deeds in this world. In the Holy Quran, it is scripted "Every soul shall taste death, and you will be paid in full only on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have triumphed. The present world is only an illusory pleasure" (Quran, 3:185).

An inconclusive pattern of responses was obtained for the notion about the inability to finish the future goals is a reason for fear of death. Overall findings showed (28.7%) agreed, (25.9%) disagreed and (22.3%) showed an uncertainty for the fact about the inability to finish the future goals is a contributing facet for which people fear death. A possible explanation for such results points out lack of precise timing about death; we use to plan our lives plan and strive to achieve our anticipated life goals (i.e. grades, marriage, jobs, childbirth) at different timings. People tend to be more anxious for unforeseen life events as compared to planned ones because of unavailability of chances to manage themselves psychologically for actions (George 1993; Pearlin 1982; Thoits, 1983). making preparations for death reduces death anxieties (Cox et al.,2013). In the Holy Quran, it is stated that "When their specified time arrives, they cannot delay it for a single hour nor can they bring it forward," (16:61). This infers that death is a final and unpredictable event hence inability to achieve one's planned goals accounts for one of probable fear for death among Pakistani Muslims.

Overall, a higher number of individuals showed an agreement (32.3%) that witnessing other individuals dying is one the cause for fear of death among Pakistani nationals. Experiencing loss of loved ones leads to greater death preoccupation and the meaning of death in life (Mak 2012;Ogiwara & Matsubara, 2007). Also, similar trends were evident in both genders. In our country, accidents, terrorist attacks and other violent murders are widespread, and people become eye witness of others dying on day to day basis. Moreover, media portray violent deaths and death due to serious illnesses in a more detailed fashion in contrast with natural deaths. Media portrays

distorted images of death (Mak, 2010; Mak, 2012; Ogiwara & Matsubara, 2007). This may serve as an explanation for the higher prevalence of agreement for the idea that witnessing other's death is one of the possible factors for which Pakistani Muslims fear about death.

A somewhat hybrid opinion prevailed for the reasons of mortality fear due to inability to meet the needs of family members and loved ones among individuals in our survey, 25.9% agreed and 26.7% disagreed with the notion that reasons for fear of death are due to inability to nurture loved ones and family members, here also similar trends were evident in both genders. Pakistani society is collectivistic in nature; here people are dependent upon one another to meet financial and psychological needs. An explanation for the presence of mixed opinion for reasons of death fear because of inability to meet needs of family members and loved ones may be due to vagueness about the nature (i.e.; prolonged or sudden) and timing of death which further deepens the concern about the care of family and loved ones after one's death. Study announced the fact that individuals who inflicted by sudden death neither have pre insight knowledge about neither their imminent death nor a chance to discuss significant matters with their family members (Carr, James, Camille, Randolph & Ronald, 2001). Concept of death in Muslim patients and health care practitioners diverges from western and Arab regions with respect to religious beliefs, leaving a will, competing for unfinished tasks and significance of family concerns (Nadeem, Ashraf & Hussain, 2017). Dying with unaccomplished tasks, lack of concern for loved ones and unforgone maltreatments to others produce distress for peaceful afterlife (Chan, Tse, & Chan, 2006).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study showed that fears related to death and dying in Pakistani Muslim population include fears about punishments, painful death, fear of start of a new journey, witnessing the death of others and inability to fulfil needs of relatives.

The generalizations of present findings should be made with caution because small sample size and a myopic focus on the Muslim population. Also, the sample recruitment solely focused on Karachi city. It is recommended to replicate the study with larger sample size

and recruit individuals from different cities of Pakistan with different religious backgrounds (i.e., Hindus, Christian).

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APPENDIX**INFORMED CONSENT**

The purpose of this study is to know the different attitudes related to mortality fear in Pakistani culture. Your participation in this study is completely voluntarily; you have full right to leave this study at any time. The questionnaire would take 15-20 minutes to be filled. If you want to be a part of this study, please sign on the given below space.

Signature of Participant

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name (optional): _____

Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

Age:

☐ 16-26years ☐ 27-37years ☐ 38-48years ☐ 49-59years

Religious Interest:

☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Low

Death of loved one during past 2 years:

☐ Yes ☐ No

DEATH AND DYING QUESTIONNAIRE (DDQ)

1. Do you think that life would be meaningless if there is no death?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
2. Do you think that death is a painful event?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
3. Do you think that the death is a beginning of new journey?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
4. Do you think that a person died a good death if it occurred in sleep and around love ones?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
5. Do you think that a person died a bad death if it occurred by sudden and violent accident(bomb blast, murder, target killing)?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
6. Do you think that punishment after death is one of the reasons for which people fear death?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**
7. Do you think that inability to accomplish one's life goals after death is one of the reasons for which people fear death?
☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**
☐ **Strongly Disagree**

8. Do you think that witnessing other people's death in our daily lives is one of the reasons for which people fear death?

☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**

☐ **Strongly Disagree**

9. Do you think that unable to care the needs of family members after one's death is one of the reasons for which people fear death?

☐ **Strongly Agree** ☐ **Agree** ☐ **Don't Know** ☐ **Disagree**

☐ **Strongly Disagree**