

CORRELATION ANALYSIS BETWEEN PROTECTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS INDICATORS AMONG ADULTS EXPERIENCED COVID-19–RELATED JOB LOSS

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on the COVID-19 pandemic context which created a socioeconomic disruption among adults with large-scale job loss which its emerged as a significant psychosocial stressor. This situation affected adults' mental health and overall well-being. The present study examined the relationships between protective psychological variables i.e. general happiness, meaning in life (presence and search), and coping self-efficacy and two indicators of psychological distress i.e. death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty. The sample for this study was adults who experienced COVID-19–related job loss. The researchers used a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design for this study. Data were collected by using standardized self-report instruments with specific criteria purposive sampling. The sample comprised of 200 adults. 100 females and 100 males who lost their Job during Covid- 19. Pearson correlation analysis showed significant negative relationships between all protective psychological variables and both distress indicators. The results showed that Higher levels of happiness, stronger perceived meaning in life, and greater coping self-efficacy were significantly correlated with lower death anxiety and reduced intolerance of uncertainty among adults. These findings gave theoretical implications for positive psychology and self-efficacy theory which suggested that psychological well-being is important not only by the absence of distress but also by the presence of internal resilience issues among adults. Practical implications by the results highlighted the importance of initiate psychological support, purpose-centered counselling, and coping-skills sessions for mental health and employment assistance programs during such crisis situations like COVID-19, for adults. Overall, the study contributed to a deeper and a better understanding of psychological adjustment in the context of pandemic-related unemployment and highlighted the protective role of positive psychological resources in mitigating existential and uncertainty-related distress among adults.

Keywords: COVID-19, happiness, meaning in life, coping self-efficacy, death anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic created a huge global crisis which disrupted public health systems, economies, and daily social life. The early responses mainly focused on limiting the viral spread, thereby reducing mortality. However, the long-term effects of the extended lockdowns and the economic shutdowns became evident. One of the most important results of this was the widespread job loss, affecting millions of individuals globally across sectors and categories of operations. The job loss during the pandemic was not just an economic issue, but it also represented a deep psychosocial stressor that affected an individuals' sense of stability, identity, and future security.

Existing research has consistently shown that the concept of unemployment is linked to poor mental health outcomes, and includes elevated anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced subjective well-being. The renowned meta-analysis by Paul and Moser (2009) found that unemployment has a negative effect on mental health, while returning to work usually improves the psychological functioning. This supports the idea that job loss directly affects the well-being.

Although, job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic differed from the unemployment in more typical economic recessions. Unlike the typical cases of job loss, the COVID-19 unemployment happened alongside stretched uncertainty, social isolation, health related fear, and continuous exposure to the reminders of death. Resulting this, the individuals faced not just financial insecurity, but also increased psychological distress related to the uncertainty and concerns about life and safety. From the point of view of psychology, 2 constructs are especially very important for understanding distress in these circumstances. These are death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty. Death anxiety refers to the fear or distress that arises from the awareness of one's own mortality and the certainty of death. This is an important construct in the existential psychology and its commonly measured using the Death Anxiety Scale developed by Templar (1970), that remains widely used as a measure of the death related fear.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the death anxiety became more prominent because of the constant media reporting on the infection numbers, death rates, and the presence of death as a collective social reality. The research based on Terror Management Theory suggests that the increased awareness of the mortality can trigger the existential anxiety, leading the individuals to draw on the psychological coping resources to manage fears related to death (Pyszczynski et al., 2021). Alongside the death anxiety, the intolerance of uncertainty refers to a person's tendency to find uncertain situations stressful, threatening or difficult to accept. The contemporary theoretical formulations describe the intolerance of uncertainty as a transdiagnostic vulnerability factor that plays a role across many anxieties related and emotional disorders (Carleton, 2012). Carleton (2006) also suggested that the fear of the unknown may be a central element underlying anxiety more broadly.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a long period of uncertainty, that was marked by unpredictable health risks, changing governmental policies, unstable job markets, and unclear timelines for the recovery. For those individuals who lost their employment during this time period, the uncertainty extended far beyond health concerns that included doubts about future employment, income stability and social status, making the intolerance of uncertainty a predominantly relevant psychological outcome. Even though many studies have found the harmful psychological effects of

unemployment and pandemic related stress, the recent research highlights the importance of examining psychological resources that can protect these individuals from distress. Within the concept of positive psychology and stress coping mechanisms, the individuals are not seen only as passive victims of hardship but also as active agents who possess the inner resources that support resilience & adjustment. The present study examines 3 such protective resources, namely, general happiness, meaning in life, and coping self-efficacy.

The general happiness points towards a global subjective evaluation of well-being, including both affective & cognitive components of life satisfaction. The research has consistently linked happiness with better psychological adjustment, more effective coping, and lower vulnerability to stress related difficulties. Lyubormirsky and Lepper (1999) describe happiness as a relatively stable but changeable subjective experience that shapes how the individuals perceive and respond to the life's events. In job loss's context, the individuals with higher levels of happiness may have larger emotional flexibility and a wider range of coping strategies, that may help reduce the distress related to uncertainty and awareness of mortality.

The concept of meaning in life is another very important protective resource, especially within existential and humanistic psychology. Frankl's (1959) seminal work has highlighted that a sense of meaning gives the individuals purpose and coherence, helping them endure suffering and difficult circumstances. The contemporary research defines the meaning in life as having 2 related but distinct aspects, i.e., presence of meaning, which refers to the extent to which the individuals feel their lives are meaningful, and search for meaning, which refers to the active effort to find purpose and meaning in life (Steger et al., 2006). The research evidence consistently shows that the presence of meaning is linked to higher well-being and better psychological adjustment, whereas the role of searching for meaning depends on the context and may also reflect personal growth in some cases or distress in others.

In crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, the processes related to meaning may be especially important. Job loss can disrupt a person's sense of identity, role fulfilment, and the view of the future, thereby challenging the existing sources of meaning. The individuals who are able to maintain or rebuild a sense of meaning in life may experience larger psychological stability, that may be reflected in lower levels of death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty. In contrast to this, actively searching for meaning may function as an adaptive response to the existential disruption and may help the individuals adjust during periods of uncertainty and threat.

A third major protective resource examined in this study is coping self-efficacy, that refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to deal effectively with stressful situations. Based on Bandura's broader theory of self-efficacy, coping self-efficacy focuses on perceived ability rather than actual skill. The "Coping Self-Efficacy Scale" that was developed by Chesney et al. (2006) is used for measuring the confidence in problem-focused coping, emotional regulation, and seeking social support. The research has also shown that the "higher coping self-efficacy" is linked to "lower the psychological distress" and a better adjustment across a wide range of stressful situations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, coping self-efficacy may have especially played an important role because the individuals had to adjust to rapidly changing situations with limited external control. All those who believed that

they could actually manage stress, regulate their emotions, and seek support may have now experienced lower levels existential fear and distress related to uncertainty. In contrast to this, the individuals with low coping self-efficacy may have been more vulnerable to death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty, as reduced confidence in coping can weaken feelings of control and effective adjustment.

The importance of examining these mentioned protective psychological resources is highlighted by the global evidence on mental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. World Health Organization (2022) has reported a marked increase in the anxiety levels and depressive disorders globally during the very first year of the pandemic indicating the widespread and lasting psychological impact it has. The individuals who experienced job loss may face additional stress due to financial security, disrupted life plans, and challenges to social identity, placing them at a greater risk of psychological distress. Even though the research on mental health outcomes during the pandemic has increased, comparatively very few studies have examined existential anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, and positive psychological resources together within populations affected by job loss. A lot of the existing literature focuses on vulnerability and symptoms, often paying less attention to resilience related factors that may exist along the distress.

To address this very gap, the present study uses a correlational approach to examine the relationships between happiness, meaning in life (presence and search), coping self-efficacy, and 2 main indicators of psychological distress that are death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty among the individuals who experienced job loss related to COVID-19.

By focusing on the relationships rather than on cause and effect claims, this study follows current methodological standards for ethically examining naturally occurring psychological experiences during large scale crises. The findings offer a more detailed understanding of psychological adjustment under economic and existential stress by highlighting not only distress but also the psychological resources linked to lower levels of fear and uncertainty. These very insights have had extremely important implications for counselling interventions, mental health services, and policy initiatives that were aimed at supporting unemployed and economically disadvantaged groups during and after global crises.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Job Loss and Psychological Distress

A very large section of research shows that the concept of unemployment is consistently linked to poorer health outcomes. A meta-analysis by Paul and Moser (2009) found that moving into unemployment is associated with a clear decline in mental health, while returning to work usually leads to improvements in the psychological well-being. This hence supports the view that job loss is a psychologically harmful life event. The COVID-19 pandemic created an unusual situation in which job loss occurred on a larger scale and was often beyond individual control due to lockdowns and economic restrictions, thereby increasing concerns about its psychological impact. The research conducted during the said pandemic also indicates the links between job loss and mental health outcomes. Although, the strength of these effects may differ depending on the factors such as financial

support and broader contextual resources (Baird et al., 2022; Posel et al., 2021). Therefore, the overall literature suggests that the situation of job loss during COVID-19 worked as a huge stressor, contributing to heightened distress and vulnerability.

Importance of Uncertainty as a Crisis relevant Vulnerability

The intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is increasingly recognised as an important psychological factor that contributes to anxiety and emotional difficulties. Carleton (2012) has described IU as closely linked to the fear of the unknown and then later suggested that this fear may lie at the core of many anxiety processes (Carleton, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic created conditions marked by rapidly changing information, unpredictable risks, and unstable employment situations. These situations naturally increased the stress related to the uncertainty, making the concept of IU a particularly relevant outcome to examine in COVID related psychological research.

The evidence from pandemic studies supports the importance of IU in understanding distress and adjustment. As an example, the research published in *Frontiers in Psychology* found that perceived threat during the COVID-19 was associated with higher IU and psychological distress, and that the concerns about job loss were positively linked to IU (Blanus et al., 2021). The related studies also show the role COVID-19 anxiety and IU played in predicting resilience related outcomes showing that uncertainty intolerance is meaningfully involved in psychological functioning during crisis contexts (DURU et al., 2022)

Death Anxiety in the Context of Mortality Salience

Death anxiety is a key concept in existential psychology and is commonly studied using established measures such as Templer's (1970) Death Anxiety Scale. The awareness of the death tends to increase during the times of serious health threat, and the COVID-19 pandemic heightened this awareness through infection risks, public health messages and constant media coverage. As per the "Terror Management Theory", a person being reminded of death can trigger existential anxiety that can lead individuals to rely on sources of meaning and self-worth to manage these fears (Pyszczynski et al., 2021). The research conducted during the pandemic period also supports the links between pandemic anxiety, uncertainty, and the fear of death. For example, Bulut (2023) found that intolerance of uncertainty was related to greater fear of death and partly explained the relationship between COVID-19 anxiety and death related fear.

Thus, these findings suggest that uncertainty and concerns about mortality were closely connected during the pandemic.

Meaning in Life as a Protective Existential Resource

The meaning of life has a very long history as an important factor linked to resilience. Frankl's logotherapy framework proposed that a sense of meaning helps the individuals cope with adversity by providing purpose and a sense of psychological control (Frankl, 1959). The current research distinguishes between 2 aspects of meaning of life namely, presence of meaning that refers to the feeling that life is meaningful, and search for meaning that refers to actively trying to find purpose (Steger et al., 2006). The presence of meaning is usually linked with better well-being and healthier psychological functioning, while the effect of searching the meaning depends on the context and may

reflect either personal growth or distress. In crisis situations, the meaning may reduce psychological distress by offering structure and purpose when external sources of stability, like employment, daily routines, and financial security, are disrupted. This very theoretical reasoning supports examining both dimensions of meaning as predictors of death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty among individuals who experiences loss.

Coping Self-Efficacy and Adaptive Adjustment

The concept of “coping self-efficacy” means a person's confidence in their own ability to handle stressful situations in an effective way. Chesney et al. (2006) had developed and validated the Coping Self-Efficacy Scale, showing that it is a reliable and useful measure of coping ability. During the times of crises, very strong beliefs in one's ability to cope up may help reduce the psychological distress by supporting effective problem solving, emotional regulation, and seeking support from others. In this way the coping self-efficacy may lower the vulnerability to worries related to uncertainty and fears connected to mortality.

RESEARCH GAP

In conclusion, the existing evidence clearly shows that unemployment and job loss during the COVID-19 period are linked to increased mental health risks (Paul & Moser, 2009 and Psel et al', 2021). The research also highlights the importance of intolerance of uncertainty as a key psychological vulnerability during the prolonged periods of ambiguity (Carleton, 2012 and Blanusa et al., 2021), as well as the increased relevance of death anxiety in the contexts where awareness of mortality is heightened (Templer, 1970 and Bulut, 2023).

However, relatively very few studies have actually examined these distress related outcomes along the positive psychological resources like happiness, meaning in life and coping self-efficacy, especially among individuals who have experienced job loss due to COVID-19. To address this gap, the present study examines how these protective psychological resources are related to and predict death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty under the pandemic related conditions of employment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

- 1. To assess the relationship between general happiness and death anxiety** among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. To assess the relationship between general happiness and intolerance of uncertainty** among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3. To assess the relationship between presence of meaning in life and death anxiety** among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4. To assess the relationship between search for meaning in life and death anxiety** among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5. To assess the relationship between presence of meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty** among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. To assess the relationship between search for meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. To assess the relationship between coping self-efficacy and death anxiety among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. To assess the relationship between coping self-efficacy and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant correlation between general happiness and death anxiety among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H2: There is a statistically significant correlation between general happiness and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H3: There is a statistically significant correlation between presence of meaning in life and death anxiety among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H4: There is a statistically significant correlation between search for meaning in life and death anxiety among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H5: There is a statistically significant correlation between presence of meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H6: There is a statistically significant correlation between search for meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H7: There is a statistically significant correlation between coping self-efficacy and death anxiety among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H8: There is a statistically significant correlation between coping self-efficacy and intolerance of uncertainty among adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design for this study was a **quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research** to assess the relationships among protective psychological factors and psychological distress indicators among adults who lost their jobs during COVID-19 pandemic period. For this study, correlational design was considered appropriate due to the primary aim of the study which was to assess the **association** between the selected variables. This research design is commonly used in psychological research when variables cannot be practically manipulated and when the focus is on naturally occurring relationships among the variables under the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the present study was the **adults who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic period**. These were those adults whose job was lost directly or indirectly because of pandemic-related economic and organizational changes. The sample comprised of 200 adults. 100

females and 100 males who lost their Job during Covid- 19. A **purposive sampling technique** was used to select adults who met this criterion of COVID-19 related job loss. Purposive sampling was most appropriate for this present study because the present study focused on a defined population that had experienced a life event as comparison to the whole population. This aspect allowed the researchers to target the specific portion of the population to collect data from individuals most relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data for this present study, were collected by using a self-report survey method. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. The participation in this study, was entirely voluntary. All ethical considerations which included informed consent and the right to withdraw from the study at any point, were properly followed throughout the data collection process in this study.

Research Instruments used:

General happiness was measured by using the **Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)** by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). SHS is a **4-item self-report scale** which is designed to assess an individual's global subjective happiness. Each item in this scale is rated on a **7-point Likert-type scale**. Higher scores in this scale, indicate greater perceived happiness of the respondent. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of this scale for diverse samples, range from **.79 to .94**. **construct validity of this scale**, established through positive correlation with the other constructs like “life satisfaction and positive affect”, and negative correlations with “depression” and “negative affect” (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). This scale has been used in cross-cultural and in the field of psychological research which supports its suitability for this research.

“Meaning in life” was assessed by using the **Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)** developed by Steger et al. (2006). MLQ consists of **10 items** i.e. **Presence of Meaning** with 5 items and **Search for Meaning** with 5 items. Responses are recorded on a **7-point Likert-type scale** ranging from *1 (absolutely untrue)* to *7 (absolutely true)*. Higher scores indicated a greater presence of meaning and search for meaning in life among adults. MLQ also demonstrated better internal **consistency**, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from **.82 to .88** for the Presence subscale and **.86 to .92** for the Search subscale across different cultural contexts and is extensively used in research in psychology.

Coping self-efficacy was measured by using the **Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES)** by Chesney et al. (2006). This scale has **26 items** that assess individuals' confidence in their ability to cope effectively with life stressors. Items are rated on an **11-point Likert-type scale**, ranging from *0 (cannot do at all)* to *10 (certain can do)*. CSES measures three dimensions of coping: problem-focused coping, emotion regulation, and support-seeking behaviors. **Internal consistency of this scale**, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding **.90**. along with **Construct and criterion validity** (Chesney et al., 2006). The scale is widely regarded as a reliable measure of coping-related self-efficacy in both clinical and non-clinical populations.

Death anxiety was measured using the **Death Anxiety Scale (DAS)** developed by Templer (1970). DAS consists of **15 with Yes/No, items** designed to assess fear, concern, and anxiety related to



death and dying. Higher total scores indicate greater levels of death anxiety. DAS has showed acceptable **reliability**, with internal consistency coefficients between **.76 to .83**. DAS remains one of the most frequently used and cited instruments for assessing death anxiety and has been applied extensively in health, clinical, and existential psychology research.

Intolerance of uncertainty was measured by using the **Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS)**. This scale was originally developed by Freeston et al. (1994) and later refined by Buhr and Dugas (2002). This version of the IUS consists of **27 items**, on a **5-point Likert-type scale** ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*entirely characteristic of me*). Higher scores show greater difficulty in tolerating uncertain situations and ambiguous outcomes. IUS shows strong **internal consistency**, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients with **.91 and .94**, along with **construct validity** as per strong associations with worry, anxiety, and related cognitive vulnerability constructs (Buhr & Dugas, 2002; Carleton, 2016).

RESULTS

For the hypotheses testing, in this study, Pearson correlation was calculated as mentioned in the table 1 as follows.

Table1 : Correlations Between Happiness, Meaning in Life, Coping Self-Efficacy, and Psychological Distress Variables. S. No. Variables r df p
 1 General Happiness – Death Anxiety

S. No.	Variables	r	df	p
1	General Happiness – Death Anxiety	-0.544	199	< .001
2	General Happiness – Intolerance of Uncertainty	-0.547	199	< .001
3	Presence of Meaning in Life – Death Anxiety	-0.544	199	< .001
4	Search for Meaning in Life – Death Anxiety	-0.536	199	< .001
5	Presence of Meaning in Life – Intolerance of Uncertainty	-0.547	199	< .001
6	Search for Meaning – Intolerance of Uncertainty	-0.552	199	< .001
7	Coping Self-Efficacy – Death Anxiety	-0.636	199	< .001
8	Coping Self-Efficacy – Intolerance of Uncertainty	-0.662	199	< .001

For **Hypothesis 1**, as it proposed that there would be no significant relationship between general happiness and death anxiety. The analysis (table 1) revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between general happiness and death anxiety with $r(199) = -.54$ and $p < .001$ which indicated that higher levels of general happiness were associated with lower levels of death anxiety. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. **For Hypothesis 2**, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between general happiness and intolerance of uncertainty. The above results showed a statistically significant negative correlation between general happiness and intolerance of uncertainty with $r(199) = -.55$ and $p < .001$. This result suggested that adults with higher levels of happiness reported lower intolerance of uncertainty. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

For Hypothesis 3, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between presence of meaning in life and death anxiety. The above result (table 1) showed a significant negative relationship between presence of meaning in life and death anxiety with $r(199) = -.54$ and $p < .001$, which indicated that greater perceived meaning in life was associated with reduced death anxiety. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. **For Hypothesis 4**, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between search for meaning in life and death anxiety. Correlation analysis showed a statistically significant negative relationship between search for meaning in life and death anxiety with $r(199) = -.54$ and $p < .001$. This result suggests that individuals who were actively searching for meaning experienced lower levels of death anxiety. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. **For Hypothesis 5**, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between presence of meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty. The above results showed a statistically significant negative correlation between presence of meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty with $r(199) = -.55$ and $p < .001$ which indicated that a stronger sense of meaning in life was associated with lower intolerance of uncertainty. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. **For Hypothesis 6**, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between search for meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty among job losers. Correlation analysis showed a **statistically significant negative relationship** between search for meaning in life and intolerance of uncertainty with $r(199) = -.55$ and $p < .001$. This result indicated that adults who reported higher levels of searching for meaning experienced lower levels of intolerance of uncertainty following job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, **the null hypothesis was rejected** at 0.05 level of significance. **As Hypothesis 7**, as it stated that there would be no significant relationship between coping self-efficacy and death anxiety. The above analysis showed a strong negative correlation between coping self-efficacy and death anxiety with $r(199) = -.64$ and $p < .001$ which suggested that adults with greater confidence in their coping abilities experienced lower levels of death anxiety. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. **As Hypothesis 8**, it stated that there would be no significant relationship between coping self-efficacy and intolerance of uncertainty. The above results indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between coping self-efficacy and intolerance of uncertainty with $r(199) = -.66$ and $p < .001$. This result implied that higher coping self-efficacy was associated with reduced intolerance of uncertainty. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The above findings showed a statistically significant negative relationship between general happiness and death anxiety among job losers which suggest that adults reporting higher happiness tended to report lower death-related fears. This result is consistent with previous evidence that subjective well-being is linked with better psychological adjustment under stress. Conceptually, happiness depicts a good psychological state that support better emotion regulation, sound cognitive flexibility, and nurture adaptive appraisal. If consider in the COVID-19 context activated existential concerns as theories such as Terror Management Theory proposed that adults rely on psychological resources to manage mortality-related distress and related traumas (Pyszczynski et al., 2021). Even though, the present study did not applied causality but the correlation analysis showed that happiness can coexist with coping patterns that is associated to reduced death anxiety. This result is aligned with the argument that positive subjective states are related to more adaptive functioning during adversity or bad times. (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

For hypothesis 2, results showed a statistically significant negative relationship between general happiness and intolerance of uncertainty which indicated that higher happiness was correlated with lower difficulty tolerating uncertain situations. As, Intolerance of uncertainty is recognized as a core cognitive-affective construct relevant to anxiety processes, particularly in ambiguous environments (Carleton, 2016). During COVID-19–related job loss, uncertainty about health, income stability, and reemployment intensified this uncertainty-driven distress. The results suggests that adults with higher subjective happiness can perceive uncertain circumstances as less threatening and will engage in coping strategies that support them to function well. Significantly, research highlights fear of the “unknown” as a fundamental driver of anxiety (Carleton, 2016), implying that emotional well-being may correspond with lower uncertainty-related reactivity. From a positive psychology perspective, happiness can be linked with overall coping and can be more balanced appraisals under stress, which may be reflected in reduced intolerance of uncertainty. These findings suggest the relevance of subjective well-being in understanding and support psychological adjustment among economically affected adults during COVID-19 times (Paul & Moser, 2009).

For hypothesis 3, results showed A negative relationship was identified between meaning in life and death anxiety and presence of meaning in life. This corresponds firmly with existential and meaning-centred perspectives. It suggests that a unified sense of purpose and life significance can co-occur with reduced existential fear. Frankl's (1959) foundational work stated that meaning work as an important psychological anchor in the times of adversity, reinforcing resilience when individuals resist suffering and threat. In contemporary empirical terms, the “presence” dimension of meaning has been consistently linked with better well-being and adaptive functioning (Steger et al., 2006). Individual who experience deprivation from their job during a global health crisis, their identity and purpose is questioned due to employment disruption. It possibly increases vulnerability to death anxiety. The noted negative relation suggests that individual report lower mortality-related distress when they rebuild a sense of life meaning. Essentially, this interpretation remains correlational. It upholds a theoretically logical view that meaning-related resources are minutely associated with existential adjustment. Such findings are also harmonious with mortality-salience frameworks, in which meaning

systems represent as barrier against death-related fears (Pyszczynski et al., 2021).

For hypothesis 4, results showed, a statistically significant negative relationship was observed between search for meaning and death anxiety. This is an interesting pattern because “search for meaning” can operate differently across contexts. Steger et al. (2006) conceptualized search as an active process of meaning-seeking, which may represent growth-oriented exploration for some individuals, but distress-driven striving for others—depending on personal circumstances and levels of meaning already present. In the present scenario, during the time of COVID -19, loss of job might have sparked existential questioning. Although, the negative relation suggests that individuals who stated greater engagement in meaning-seeking tended to report lower death anxiety. One possible interpretation (yet correlational) is that meaning-seeking may reflect an adaptive coping orientation—actively attempting to make sense of adversity and reframe loss—which could coexist with less grief associated to death. This aligns with meaning-centered methods that highlights that purposeful meaning-making processes can support psychological adjustment in the times of crisis (Frankl, 1959). The result adds nuance by implying that, in this population, seeking meaning might not necessarily be a marker of distress, but rather could be a reflect constructive engagement with existential issues.

For hypothesis 5 and 6, results showcased a statistically significant negative relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and presence of meaning and search for meaning in life. Anxiety and worry processes are closely associated with intolerance for uncertainty, which is commonly defined as the inability to tolerate unknown future events and ambiguous outcomes (Carleton, 2016). Financial instability and timelines for recovery intensifies uncertainty in job loss situations. The observed relationship highlighted that individuals who experienced greater meaning and purpose in life might have reported less difficulty in tolerating unpredictability. In the times of unpredictable external circumstances, a consistent sense of meaning can offer psychological structure and perceived stability. From an existential point of view, meaning may serve as a framework that helps individuals interpret uncertainty in less threatening ways, thereby lowering uncertainty-driven distress (Frankl, 1959). Empirically, the presence of meaning is reliably linked with improved psychological health (Steger et al., 2006), and the current findings expand this association to uncertainty intolerance under pandemic-related employment disruption. Even though causality cannot be established, the results support the theoretical view that meaning-based resources are closely intertwined with adaptive responses in uncertain, high-stress environments.

For hypothesis 7, results showed that higher confidence in coping abilities was linked with lower mortality-related distress. This association is consistent with self-efficacy theory, which emphasized that beliefs about one's ability to handle demands are central to stress adaptation and emotional functioning (Bandura, 1997). Coping self-efficacy in crisis situation can be a reflection of one's perceived competence to regulate emotions, solve problems, and ask for support—behaviours that may coincide with reduced anxiety in the face of threat. The Coping Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Chesney et al. (2006) who showcased that it is a useful measure of coping confidence with relevance to psychological adjustment. People with high coping self-efficacy may believe that they are able to handle distress during COVID-19 job loss, which may be reflected in lower death

anxiety. The interpretation remains correlational; nevertheless, the result is theoretically coherent. It indicated that coping-related beliefs are strongly associated with existential distress outcomes in economically and psychologically challenging periods.

For hypothesis 8, results showed a statistically significant negative relationship between coping self-efficacy and intolerance of uncertainty which suggested that adults who believed that they could cope properly tended to report less difficulty tolerating uncertainty in their lives. This finding is highly consistent with cognitive-behavioural models in which coping confidence shapes and support adults' responses to uncertain future events, significantly reducing worry and uncertainty-related distress. As intolerance of uncertainty has been described as a central factor for anxiety vulnerability (Carleton, 2016), and in a COVID-19 pandemic job-loss scenario, uncertainty was not only continuous but multidimensional. During such situations, coping self-efficacy can support adaptive engagement with uncertainty by nurturing perceived control by encouraging problem-focused coping, and by facilitating emotional regulation (Bandura, 1997). Empirical support for coping self-efficacy as an adjustment-related resource is well established (Chesney et al., 2006). Although the current finding is correlational, the strength of the observed correlation suggests that coping-related beliefs are closely related with uncertainty tolerance among adults who faced employment disruption during COVID-19 times.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In terms of theoretical Implications, the present study contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of psychological adjustment during crisis situations such as pandemic-related job loss among adult population. The findings of this study, highlighted the importance of protective psychological resources i.e. general happiness, meaning in life, and coping self-efficacy in relation to death anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty among adults. This study reinforced positive psychology and psychological frameworks based on self that focus resilience factors along with vulnerability factors in understanding mental health issues among adults. Specifically, the negative correlation observed between protective psychological variables and distress variables which suggest that psychological well-being is not only the absence of distress but is significantly shaped by positive internal issues. The findings also supported theoretical perspectives i.e. Terror Management Theory and self-efficacy theory by showing how adults rely on meaning systems, emotional well-being, and coping confidence to manage mortality salience and uncertainty during crises. The study also advances contemporary conceptualizations of intolerance of uncertainty as a transdiagnostic vulnerability factor by illustrating how positive psychological variables may mitigate its effects. Thus, the research broadens theoretical discourse by integrating existential psychology, positive psychology, and coping theories into a unified framework for understanding psychological responses to socioeconomic disruptions like pandemic-related unemployment.

In terms of practical implications, the present findings have important implications for mental health practitioners, policymakers, organizational leaders, and community support systems. Firstly, the strong correlations between the variables i.e. coping self-efficacy and reduced psychological distress suggested the significant of using interventions that can enhance adults' confidence in managing stress and adjust well. For this, there is need to develop counselling programs and resilience training

initiatives for adults which may help unemployed adults to strengthen and sue coping strategies for their better emotional regulation. Secondly, the importance of meaning in life indicated that there is need of including psychosocial interventions by using meaning-centered approaches i.e. logotherapy-informed counselling, narrative therapy, or purpose-oriented life planning are few such examples. These approaches can help adults to reconstruct and explore their identities and purpose under the life disruption like unemployment disruption in COVID times. Lastly, the correlation between the variables i.e. happiness and lower uncertainty-related distress suggested that well-being promotion initiatives are need of the hour such as mindfulness programs base on positive psychology, and social support initiatives. These initiatives can play a diagnostic role in crisis situation such as COVID-19. There is need at a policy level, to integrate psychological support services for adults with employment assistance programs. These initiatives can help to mitigate long-term mental health consequences among adults related to job loss. Overall, these implications focus the need for holistic psychosocial initiatives to address both emotional well-being and adaptive coping resources in times of crisis in future among adult population.

In terms of limitations, the study has its certain limitations. The present correlational design limits causal interpretations between the variables under this study i.e. protective psychological variables and distress outcomes. Along with this, this study used self-report measures which may introduce response bias, and the purposive sampling can also limit the generalizability of findings to broader populations. For future researchers, it is suggested to use mixed method research to get a qualitative view from the adults to understand the situation in a better way.

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