



Religious and Cultural Practices of Muslims Living in Central Anatolia on Death and Mourning: A Qualitative Study from Turkey

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the cultural practices of society regarding death and mourning. The sample of this qualitative study consisted of 31 adults who presented to a Family Health Center located in two different provincial centers in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. The main themes of “optimistic thinking”, “pessimistic thinking” and “acceptance” emerged from the statements of the participants regarding death. It was determined that participants took part in cultural practices such as preparing for a burial and providing comfort to individuals who were about to die. This study sheds light on the cultural and religious practices of Muslim participants in Turkey regarding death and mourning.

Keywords Religious practice · Cultural practice · Central anatolia · Death · Mourning · Nursing · Qualitative study

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Introduction

Death, mourning, and grief processes are universal human experiences influenced by cultural values and beliefs, and cultural practices before death, at the time of death, and after death are encountered in almost all societies (Moore et al., 2022; Okechi, 2017; Strupp et al., 2021). There are many cultural practices regarding death under the influence of both the religion of Islam and traditional practices in Turkey. It is extremely important for nurses, who are in contact with patients and their relatives, to research and recognize the culture of the people they provide care for (Hemberg & Vilander, 2017; Moore et al., 2022; Young & Guo, 2016).

A nurse who knows the culture of the society they are in can use their empathy skills in approaching the patient, and this contributes to the achievement of the purpose of the care process (Henderson et al., 2018; Kaihlanen et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2019; Sharifi et al., 2019). In order for nurses to know the culture of the society they live in, and to identify and change practices that adversely affect health, they need to take into account the cultural characteristics that are especially relevant to health. Some of these cultural characteristics are related to traditional practices regarding death and funerals, which are a reflection of styles of socializing that take place as social phenomena in society (Sağır, 2013). This is because death is seen not only as the end of a person's life, but also as a phenomenon of loss for those in the family and social circles of the deceased person (Güven, 2019).

It is important for other individuals in society to be with the family and relatives of the deceased, to share their pain and provide social support so that they can get through this period of loss in a healthy way and return to normal life. This social support and sharing can be very effective on the mental health of people who are left behind. For example, it was reported that not being left alone at home for a while, especially in the first days after the death of someone close, alleviates the pain of the relatives of the deceased person that is caused by this loss and enables them to get through the mourning process more easily (Aslan, 2017; Güven, 2019; www.kulturportali.gov.tr).

In the literature, although there are descriptive studies that have examined cultural practices in the pre-mortem and post-mortem periods (Aslan, 2017; Bahar et al., 2012; Erdic, 2017; Ünal, 2017; Wish, 2020), studies that have examined these practices qualitatively (Dikmen, 2015; Güven, 2019) are more limited. Moreover, it is expected that this study will guide nurses to discourage society from cultural practices that harm health by getting to know the culture of the society they provide care for and include health-promoting practices in the care process. This study was conducted to determine the cultural practices of Muslims living in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey regarding death and mourning.

Research Questions

1. What are the thoughts of Muslims living in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey on death?
2. What are the cultural and religious practices of Muslims living in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey about an individual whose death is near?
3. What are the cultural and religious practices of Muslims living in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey about a deceased individual?

Material and Method

Design

This is a qualitative study.

Population and Sample

The study was carried out in Family Health Centers located in two different provinces in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. Using the purposive sampling method, individuals aged 40 and over, who presented to Family Health Centers for any reason, lost a loved one in the last five years, and had no memory problems were included in the study. From among the individuals who agreed to take part in the in-depth interviews between 3 August and 2 October 2020, thirty-one individuals who were interviewed until data saturation regarding cultural practices related to death and mourning process were included in the sample.

Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were collected using a Personal Information Form and a Semi-Structured Interview Form. **The Personal Information Form**, which was created by the researchers by reviewing the relevant literature (Bahar et al., 2012; Erdiç, 2017; Yılmaz et al., 2019), consisted of 11 questions on the characteristics of the participants such as age, gender, marital status, and educational status.

The “**Semi-Structured Interview Form**” was used to reveal the cultural practices of the participants in the death and mourning process in depth, as this method provides the researcher with interaction, flexibility, and opportunity to explore. In-depth and semi-structured interviews explore the experiences of respondents and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. In the interviews, six open-ended questions in the interview form were asked to evaluate in detail the cultural practices of the participants regarding death and mourning. The face-to-face interview with each participant started with the question “What does death mean to you?”. During the interview, when necessary, alternative questions were asked of the participants for a single purpose without a guiding approach for each question, and additional questions were asked to obtain more in-depth information.

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, and they were held in a suitable room at the Family Health Center by paying attention to the facemask use, social distancing, and hygiene precautions that were in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before recording, the participants were asked permission to use the recorder, and all participants gave permission. The responses of the participants were also written down by the researcher on the interview form. Prior to data collection, to allow each participant to answer the questions sincerely and without reservations, the researcher explained to the participant that they would be given a number based on the order of their interview (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, ...), and their identifying information would not be collected. The in-depth interviews took approximately 45–60 min for each participant.

Ethical Considerations

Before the study was conducted, written permission was obtained from the Provincial Directorates of Health in the two provinces where the study would be conducted, and approval (decision no: 2020-07/22) was obtained from the Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the university in the province where the principal investigator is located. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, that the information obtained in the study would not be used outside the study, and that the confidentiality of their personal information would be protected. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study. The Principles of the Declaration of Helsinki were followed at each stage of the study.

Data Analysis

First Stage of Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data obtained in the research was carried out in two stages: the written documentation of the data collected by the researcher and content analysis. **At the first stage of the analysis**, the data obtained as a result of the interviews were transcribed down. First, the interviews that were recorded on the audio recorder were transferred to the computer, the recordings were listened to, and they turned into a written document in the Word document format.

Second Stage of Data Analysis

At the second stage, “the content analysis” method was used to analyze the qualitative data saved as a Word document on the computer (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The steps of the content analysis were as follows: coding the data, finding the relevant themes, organizing the results, and interpreting the resulting codes and themes. The codes were created by the researcher, who is a doctoral expert in qualitative research, by reading the entire written document twice from the beginning to the

end. These codes, which were created to reach thematic categories, were compared in terms of similarities and differences, and themes were determined.

Themes that Emerged as a Result of the Analysis

As a result of the content analysis, three main themes consisting of five sub-themes emerged from the participants' thoughts about death. Two main themes emerged regarding cultural practices for the dying individual, consisting of five sub-themes. Eight main themes, consisting of thirteen sub-themes, emerged from cultural practices regarding the deceased individual.

Results

It was determined that most of the participants were between the ages of 40 and 55, female, married, had a nuclear family, their income was equal to their expenses, they lived in the city center, they had a diagnosed disease, and they did not work. Nearly half of the participants were primary-secondary school graduates (Table 1).

Participant Statements on “Their Thoughts on Death”

Five sub-themes and three main themes emerged on the participants' thoughts on death: the main theme of “**optimistic thinking**” formed by the sub-theme of a new beginning-transition to a real and permanent life, the main theme of “**pessimistic thinking**” formed by the sub-themes of fear, darkness-uncertainty and separation, and the main theme of “**acceptance**” formed by the sub-theme of the inevitable end-Allah's command (Table 2).

Main Theme 1: Optimistic Thinking

A New Beginning and Transition to a Real and Permanent Life

Most of the participants defined death as the transition from this transient (mortal) world to a permanent (real) world. The participants stated that death is the beginning of a new life as follows:

“People think they live in this world or this life, but for a believer, death is essentially the beginning of a real and permanent life.” (Participant 16; male, 55 years old).

“Death is the end of this life we live, the beginning of the real life.” (Participant 23; female, 49 years old).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (*n* = 31)

	Age	Gender	Education	Employment status	Marital status	Family type	Income status	Place of residence	Has a diagnosed disease
Participant 1	52	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	County	Yes
Participant 2	54	Male	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 3	44	Female	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	No
Participant 4	55	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	Village	Yes
Participant 5	46	Female	High school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	County	Yes
Participant 6	48	Female	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	Yes
Participant 7	46	Female	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 8	56	Female	High school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	County	Yes
Participant 9	68	Female	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Extended	Income equal to expenses	Village	Yes
Participant 10	66	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	County	Yes
Participant 11	42	Female	High school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	No
Participant 12	60	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	Village	Yes
Participant 13	53	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 14	41	Male	High school	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	No
Participant 15	41	Female	High school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	No
Participant 16	55	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 17	48	Male	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	Yes

Table 1 (continued)

	Age	Gender	Education	Employment status	Marital status	Family type	Income status	Place of residence	Has a diagnosed disease
Participant 18	59	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Extended	Income less than expenses	County	Yes
Participant 19	55	Male	University	Working	Married	Extended	Income equal to expenses	City	No
Participant 20	56	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 21	55	Male	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	Yes
Participant 22	44	Male	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	No
Participant 23	49	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 24	56	Male	University	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 25	62	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Extended	Income less than expenses	City	Yes
Participant 26	75	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Single	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 27	55	Male	Primary-secondary school	Retired	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes
Participant 28	41	Male	High school	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	No
Participant 29	56	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	Village	Yes
Participant 30	47	Male	University	Working	Married	Nuclear	Income more than expenses	City	Yes
Participant 31	60	Female	Primary-secondary school	Homemaker	Married	Nuclear	Income equal to expenses	City	Yes

Table 2 Codes, Sub-Themes and Themes Obtained from the Statements of the Participants on Their “Their Thoughts on Death”

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
Theme 1	Optimistic thinking	A new beginning and transition to a real and permanent life (16 participants)	Seeing death as the beginning of a real and permanent life Expressing the belief that an essential and eternal life begins after death Expressing the belief in the afterlife
Theme 2	Pessimistic thinking	Fear (8 participants)	Expressing fear due to one's actions Stating fear of losing relatives and loved ones Stating fear of being tormented in the grave
Theme 3	Acceptance	Darkness and uncertainty (6 participants) Separation (5 participants) Inevitable end and Allah's command (6 participants)	Expressing that one's does not know what will happen after death Expressing death as separation from loved ones Defining death as separation Expressing death as Allah's command-will Expressing death as an end that cannot be escaped

*Participants reported multiple opinions on death

Main Theme 2: Pessimistic Thinking

Fear

Most of the participants stated that they were afraid of death both because of their actions and their considerations about being tormented in their grave as follows:

“I’m afraid of the torment of the grave, death reminds me of a grave, and it reminds me of the torment of the grave.” (Participant 7; female, 46 years old).

“I’m always afraid of death, even when walking through a graveyard...” (Participant 27; male, 55 years old).

Some participants stated that they were very afraid of the death of their relatives and loved ones as follows:

“I’m very afraid of my husband’s death, of losing him. I’m very afraid of losing my husband, my children, that they will die.” (Participant 6; female, 48 years old).

“People are more afraid of losing their loved ones sometimes you say I wish I were dead, and [I wish] she or he lived.” (Participant 18; male, 59 years old).

Darkness and Uncertainty

Some participants expressed their views on the uncertainty after death and the darkness of what happens to people after death as follows:

“In fact, we fear as we do not know what awaits us after death rather than fearing death itself...” (Participant 19; male, 55 years old).

“If a person I know passes away, when he is put in the cemetery, I always wonder what he encounters and what awaits us from now on...” (Participant 25; female, 62 years old).

Separation

When some participants expressed their thoughts about death, they often expressed death as separation from this world, from their loved ones:

“*Death means separation and sadness for me.*” (Participant 29; female, 56 years old).

“Death is the end of our life, separation from this world, from your family and loved ones.” (Participant 31; female, 60 years old).

Main Theme 3: Acceptance

Inevitable End and Allah's Command

Some participants stated that death will happen to everyone, there is no escape from death, and death is Allah's command as follows:

“Death is a command by Allah, a situation that every person will eventually encounter, its date is not clear, its hour is not certain, maybe we will die when we leave here, who knows?” (Participant 24; male, 56 years old).

Participant Statements on Cultural Practices “Carried out for People Who Are About to Die or Dying”

Five sub-themes and two main themes emerged from the opinions of the participants on cultural practices carried out for individuals who are about to die or dying: the main theme of “**providing comfort**”, formed by the sub-themes of providing mental comfort and providing physical comfort, and the main theme of “**preparing for the burial**”, formed by the sub-themes of preparing burial materials, determining the burial place, and learning the will of the deceased (Table 3).

Main Theme 1: Providing Comfort

Providing Mental Comfort

Most of the participants stated that they carried out practices that would enable the individual about to die to spend their last moments in a spiritual and peaceful manner:

“People who are about to die go from house to house and receive blessings from their relatives. Even if the person is on their death bed, their loved ones are invited home, their blessings are taken, and they read the Qur'an for the individual.” (Participant 7; female, 46 years old).

“If the person who is about to die is in the hospital, they are visited frequently, and prayers are made for them.” (Participant 28; male, 41 years old).

Providing Physical Comfort

Most of the participants stated that they carried out practices that would enable the individual who are about to die to spend their last moments in a physically comfortable and clean manner:

“Comfort is provided for the person who is about to die if they are staying at home, their bed is made in a suitable room, they are not disturbed, they are covered, and care is taken to have someone stay with them. They are cleaned, and their clothes are changed. Their mouth gets wet occasionally.” (Participant 25; female, 62 years old).

Table 3 Codes, Sub-Themes, and Themes Obtained from the Statements of the Participants on Cultural Practices “Carried out for People Who Are About to Die/Dying”

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
Theme 1	Providing comfort	Providing mental comfort (28 participants)	Making relaxing and consoling conversations Reading the Qur’an and saying prayers for the dying person Giving/receiving blessings Reciting the Shahadah/ helping the dying person recite the Shahadah Not leaving the dying person alone
Theme 2	Preparing for the burial	Providing physical comfort (14 participants)	Body cleansing Giving water-wetting lips with a piece of cotton Providing a comfortable bed Alleviating pain-ache
		Preparing burial materials (19 participants)	Preparing the shroud
		Determining the burial place (7 participants)	Asking the place where the dying person wants to be buried
		Learning the will of the dying person (5 participants)	Determining the burial place-digging the grave Asking about the will of the dying person
		Some religious practices performed for the individual who is about to die	Reading the Qur’an and saying prayer for him/her- Saying Salawat

*Participants provided more than one opinion on cultural practices carried out for people who are about to die/dying

Main Theme 2: Preparing for the Burial

Preparing Burial Materials

All participants stated that they are starting to prepare the burial materials for individuals who are about to die, determine the burial place and learn the will of the individual as follows:

“The person who will die can be noticed, we understand that they will die, then we keep the shroud and everything else ready at home.” (Participant 8; female, 56 years old).

Determining the Burial Place

“We ask [the person about] the location of their grave, wherever they want, we will bury our relative there.” (Participant 7; female, 46 years old).

Learning the will of the Dying Person

“People who are about to die are asked if they have a request or a will.” (Participant 7; female, 46 years old).

Participant Statements on Cultural Practices “Carried out for the Deceased Person”

The cultural practices that the participants would perform for the deceased were discussed under six headings: at the time of death, during washing, during shrouding, during carrying the coffin, during burial, and after burial.

In the in-depth interviews, six sub-themes and two main themes emerged from the participants’ views on cultural practices at the time of death: the main theme of “**maintaining body integrity**” formed by the sub-themes of tying the deceased person’s chin and feet, closing their eyes, removing their clothes, putting a knife on their stomach and covering them with a white sheet and, the main theme of “**suffering of the loss**” formed by the sub-theme of lamenting-crying (Table 4).

Cultural Practices Carried out at the Time of Death

The participants expressed the cultural practices they carried out at in the home environment at the time of death if the person died at home as follows:

Main Theme 1: Maintaining Body Integrity

The participants stated that when a relative dies at home, before the body of the deceased contracts, they would tie their chin and feet with a piece of cloth and close their eyes so that they would not remain open, take off their clothes thinking that it

Table 4 Codes, Sub-Themes and Themes Obtained from the Statements of the Participants on Cultural Practices “Carried out for the Deceased Person”

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
<i>Cultural practices carried out at the time of death</i>			
Theme 1	Maintaining body integrity	Tying chin-feet of the deceased (26 participants) Putting knife on their stomach (20 participants) Closing their eyes (18 participants) Removing their clothes (10 participants) Covering them with a white cover (6 participants)	Tying the chin and feet of the deceased with a piece cloth Putting a metal object such as a knife on the stomach of the deceased so that the stomach does not swell Closing the eyes of the deceased by touching if they are open Removing the clothes of the deceased before their body hardens Covering the deceased person with a white sheet so that the people around them are not affected
Theme 2	Suffering of the loss	Lamenting-crying (19 participants)	Crying of the relatives and loved ones of the deceased to mourn Call for funeral prayer Saying prayers next to the deceased Preparing the grave
Some religious practices performed at the time of death			
<i>Cultural practices performed during washing</i>			
Theme 1	Providing physical hygiene	Washing the whole body with warm water and soap (18 participants)	Adding rose water and Zam-Zam water to the washing water to have the deceased smell nice
Some religious practices performed during washing			Covering the private parts of the deceased with a cloth Washing of the deceased by a person of religion of their own sex and their relatives Performing ablution for the deceased Praying for forgiveness of the deceased during washing

Table 4 (continued)

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
<i>Cultural practices performed during shrouding</i> Theme 1	Providing physical cleansing	Good smell of the body (11 participants) Protecting the body from infestation (8 participants)	Pouring rose water, henna, camphor, Zam-nice
			Zam water into the shroud to make it smell nice
Some religious practices performed during shrouding			Putting black cumin and some spices in the shroud to protect the body from infestation by insects
			Shrouding of the deceased by a person of religion of their own sex and their relatives
<i>Cultural practices performed during the funeral ceremony and while carrying the coffin</i> Theme 1	Saying goodbye to the deceased	Giving blessings (24 participants)	Using a 5-piece shroud for a deceased woman and a 3-piece shroud for a deceased man
			Tying the head and foot ends of the shroud to prevent it from opening
Some religious practices performed during the funeral ceremony			Praying for the forgiveness of the deceased during shrouding
			Bringing the body in front of their house in a coffin
			Giving blessing to the deceased in a Mosque or Cem Evi (djemevi)
			Putting a scarf, jacket, fez, etc. on the coffin that reveals the sex of the deceased
			Performing the funeral prayer with jamaat
			Carrying the coffin with the head of the deceased ahead

Table 4 (continued)

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
<i>Cultural practices performed during burial</i>			
Theme 1	Burying at an appropriate time	Burying during daytime (12 participants)	Waiting for the attendance of distant relatives of the deceased for burial Not burying the deceased in the evening Taking the body out of the coffin and burying with the shroud by loosening the ties at the head and feet ends of the shroud Reading the Qur'an during burying In the grave, placing the head of the body towards the qiblah and slightly tilted and throwing soil after wooden or concrete blocks are placed on it The relatives of the deceased throw soil into the grave with a shovel in turn After the grave is covered with soil, suggestion (taqwa) is given to the deceased by the imam, and then, prayers are said
	Some religious practices performed during burial		

Table 4 (continued)

Themes	Main theme	Sub-themes*	Codes
<i>Cultural practices performed after burial</i>			
Theme 1	Mourning for the deceased	Suffering the pain of death or loss (21 participants)	Avoiding entertaining or happy occasions for a certain time Postponing upcoming activities such as engagements, weddings for a time Not laughing Not wearing make-up, not wearing new clothes, not shaving for a while Not cooking in the funeral house for 7 days Neighbors and relatives cooking-bringing food Not sweeping the funeral home for a while Crying-lamenting after the deceased Not turning on communication tools such as the TV-Radio for 40 days in the funeral home
Theme 2	Charity for the deceased	Forgiveness of the sins of the deceased, and doing favor in the name of the deceased for their soul to be at peace (16 participants)	Accepting condolences Visiting the grave Giving food to the people coming to offer their condolences Cooking and distributing halvah Giving the shoes of the deceased to people in need Giving the clothes and belongings of the deceased to poor people Providing food, clothing, etc. aid to people in need on behalf of the deceased in line with the financial resources of their relatives

*Participants provided more than one opinion on cultural practices performed in the name of the deceased

would not be possible to remove them later, and put a knife on their stomach to prevent swelling thinking that if the body gets swollen, it will not fit in the coffin, and cover the deceased with a white sheet.

Some statements of the participants were as follows:

“If they died at home, we put a knife on their stomach so that their body will not swell, and we tie their chin and mouth.” (Participant 5; female, 46 years old).

“The eyes of the deceased are closed as it is said that if their eyes remain open, there will be another death in that house.” (Participant 30; male, 47 years old).

Main Theme 2: Suffering from the Loss

Lamenting and Crying

Most of the participants stated that they try to cope with the sadness and pain they experience by crying and lamenting after lost relatives at the time of death as follows:

“I cry, I cry too much when I lose one of my relatives, of course, I cry, how else can we cope with it?” (Participant 30; male, 47 years old).

As follows, one participant expressed her view that the crying after the deceased is a necessity of fulfilling society’s expectation of crying and even lamenting after the deceased rather than the sadness felt:

“Crying out loud shows how great the pain is and how much the deceased is valued, and if people do not cry and scream, they will be condemned. Crying is a virtue” (Participant 15; female, 41 years old).

Cultural Practices Performed During Washing

In the in-depth interviews that were conducted, the main theme of “**providing physical hygiene**” formed by the sub-theme of washing the whole body with warm water and soap emerged from the views of the participants about cultural practices performed during washing before the funeral.

The participants expressed the cultural practices they would perform regarding the funeral washing process, which is carried out to clean the body of the deceased and send them off on their last journey in a clean and ablated state as follows:

Main Theme 1: Providing Physical Hygiene

Washing the Whole Body with Warm Water and Soap

The participants mentioned some cultural practices related to washing the deceased person as follows:

“While washing the body, warm water and soap are used and the person who washes takes a piece of cloth in their hand and washes the body by soaping and foaming this cloth, and at the same time, the person who washes prays for the forgiveness of the body.” (Participant 16; male, 55 years old).

Cultural Practices Performed During Shrouding

In the in-depth interviews, the main theme of “**providing physical cleansing**”, formed by the sub-themes of the good smell of the body and protecting the body from infestation, emerged from the views of the participants on cultural practices performed during the shrouding of the body.

The participants expressed the cultural practices they would perform regarding the process of washing the body, which is carried out to clean the body of the deceased and send them to their last journey in a clean and abluted manner as follows:

Main Theme 1: Providing Physical Cleansing

Good Smell of the Body

The participants mentioned some cultural practices carried out to make the body smell good during the shrouding of the deceased as follows:

“Nowadays, rose water and Zam-zam are poured on the shrouds to make them smell beautiful, black cumin or henna or something is also put, and this way, the body is prepared for the burial.” (Participant 18; male, 59 years old).

Protecting the Body from Infestation

The participants expressed some practices carried out to prevent the body from becoming infested with insects while shrouding the deceased as follows:

“At some funerals I attended, I witnessed that black cumin and some spices were thrown inside the shroud, I know that black cumin was used to prevent insect infestations.” (Participant 16; male, 55 years old).

Cultural Practices Performed During the Funeral Ceremony and While Carrying the Coffin

The main theme of “**saying goodbye to the deceased**”, formed by the sub-theme of giving blessings, emerged from the views of the participants on cultural practices performed during the funeral ceremony and while carrying the coffin.

Main Theme 1: Saying Goodbye to the Deceased

Giving Blessings

The participants stated that they would say goodbye by giving blessings while the deceased is being sent off on their last journey as follows:

“After washing, the body is brought to their house, and blessings are taken from those there.” (Participant 3; female, 44 years old).

Cultural Practices Performed during Burial

From the opinions of the participants about cultural practices that are performed during the burial of the deceased, the main theme of “**burying at an appropriate time**” formed by the sub-theme of burying during daytime emerged.

Main Theme 1: Burying at an Appropriate Time

Burying during Daytime

The participants expressed their views that daytime is preferred for the burial of the body and that distant relatives of the deceased are expected to attend as follows:

“Since it will get dark, if there is no substantial necessity, the deceased is not buried after the evening prayer, and the funeral is postponed to the next day.” (Participant 16; male, 55 years old).

Cultural Practices Performed after Burial

Two sub-themes and two main themes emerged from the views of the participants on cultural practices carried out after the burial of the deceased: the main theme of “mourning for the deceased” formed by the sub-theme of suffering the pain of death or loss and the main theme of “charity for the deceased” formed by the sub-theme of “forgiveness of the sins of the deceased and doing favors in the name of the deceased for their soul to be at peace”.

Main Theme 1: Mourning for the Deceased

Suffering the Pain of Death or Loss

The participants stated that they mourned the loss of their deceased relatives for a certain period after burial as follows:

“We don’t turn on the TV or listen to music. We don’t participate in weddings or events. It actually depends on the deceased. If the deceased was old, life returns to normal after 15–20 days, but if the deceased was young, the mourning period lasts longer.” (Participant 5; female, 46 years old).

Main Theme 2: Charity for the Deceased

Forgiveness of the Sins of the Deceased, and doing Favors in the Name of the Deceased for their Soul to be at Peace

The participants stated that after the deceased is buried, charity is performed for the spirit of the person to be at peace as follows:

“On the 3rd, 7th, 40th and 52nd days of the death of the deceased, the traditional Mevlid is read, and food is given [to neighbors and relatives] in their name.” (Participant 22; male, 44 years old).

“The relatives of the deceased do good for [in the name of] the deceased; they make children happy and read the Qur’an as much as they can.” (Participant 25; female, 62 years old).

Discussion

In most cultures, death is conceptualized as a transition or travel, and such a transition is seen as a journey to a final or inevitable destination that can result in rebirth, reunion with nature or god, or indeed complete oblivion (Rashid, 2020; Ünal, 2017; Yılmaz, 2019). In this study, it was seen that most of the participants described death as a new beginning, a transition to a real and permanent life, and the inevitable end. Accordingly, they viewed death from an optimistic angle. In a previous study, it was similarly stated that most of the participants saw death as a passage to a happy life (Wang et al., 2018). In two separate studies, it was determined that the majority of the participants considered death a normal part of life (Ohr et al., 2017; Strupp et al., 2021). In another study, it was emphasized that death is an inevitable end and that it is an experience that every family will encounter and mourn many times in their lifetime (Droser & Seurer, 2022). The results of this study and most studies in the literature reveal that death is perceived by people as an inevitable end and indeed a new beginning.

The participants of this study stated that they gave comforting and reassuring speeches, prayed next to the deceased, received and gave blessings, had the deceased recite the Shahadah, performed body cleansing, and gave them water. The phenomenon of death, which means the end of human life, brings with it many beliefs and rituals (Ünal, 2017). It is known that some practices such as reading the Qur'an (special surahs such as Yasin), praying and making the patient recite the Shahadah help the deceased spend his last moments in spiritual peace (Ahaddour et al., 2017; Güven, 2019; Ünal, 2017). It is reported that the Crusaders performed some rituals while living in Islamic lands so that the person on his deathbed would not go to the hereafter as a sinner (Istek, 2020). In the literature, in addition to similar practices to those identified in this study, it is reported that the deceased's face is turned slightly to the right towards the qibla (Ahaddour et al., 2017; Choudry et al., 2018; Güven, 2019; Sever, 2016; Yılmaz, 2019). It is thought that such practices, which are believed to alleviate the pain and suffering of the deceased person and their family, are carried out to finalize the death of the person and provide an easier passage for their soul.

In this study, the participants reported that when a relative died at home, they took off their clothes, tied their chin and feet, closed their eyes, and covered their body with a white sheet by putting a knife on their stomach. According to previous studies, it is believed by some cultures that if the eyes of the deceased are left open, there will be another death in that house. So, the eyes of the deceased are closed, their dentures are removed, their chin is tied, their arms and feet are straightened parallel to the body, they are covered up, and a knife or pair of scissors is placed on the sheet so that their belly does not swell (Ünal, 2017). There is abundant data in the literature that support the information on all these practices (Güven, 2019; Rahimi, 2019; Rashid, 2020; Sever, 2016). It is thought that the chin and feet of the deceased were tied to protect the body's posture for its easier placement in the coffin, with the thought that the dead body would swell and harden after a certain period of time.

The participants in this study stated that after covering the private parts of the deceased with a cloth, they washed their whole body with warm water and soap, added rose water and Zam-Zam water to the washing water, and made ablution. They also stated that they added rose water, camphor and Zam-Zam water to make the shroud smell good, and that care was taken to wash the deceased person's relatives. It is stated in the literature that the dead were washed by their relatives (www.kulturportali.gov.tr), they sprinkle the fragrant resin and Zam-Zam water they brought from the Kaaba on the shroud, they wash the deceased with soap and water, that musk is applied to the parts of the deceased that would touch the ground while praying, and cotton is placed in their rectum (Ahaddour et al., 2017; Sever, 2016). According to Hindu belief, after the body of the deceased is washed with a mixture of milk, oil, honey, and yogurt, ash or sandalwood is applied to the forehead if is the deceased is a man, turmeric is applied to the forehead if they are a woman, and sacred herbs are thrown into the fire (Rashid, 2020). In some societies, instead of being shrouded after washing, the dead are dressed in all their clothes and placed in a coffin (Meriç, 2018). It is thought that the practices carried out for the body of the

deceased take place to clean the dead, turn them back against Allah and purify them from their sins.

One of the cultural practices performed after burial is to mourn the deceased. In this study, it was concluded that the duration of mourning varies according to the age of the deceased and one's degree of closeness to the deceased, and the average mourning period is 40 days. It was stated by the majority of the participants that entertaining or happy occasions, such as watching the television, listening to music, weddings, and celebrations were not held during the mourning process. In the literature, it is stated that the mourning period is usually 40 days, entertainment activities are avoided, men do not shave, women do not wear make-up, and the duration of mourning varies according to the age of the person (Aslan, 2017; Güven, 2019; Rashid, 2020; Yılmaz, 2019). Unlike the results of our study, there is also information in the literature that people do not mourn after their deceased because it is believed that the deceased suffers if they do (www.kulturportali.gov.tr). Although mourning rituals differ from society to society, it can be claimed that the pain of loss is experienced in general after death.

Another cultural practice mentioned by the participants of the study for the period after the burial is charity on behalf of the deceased. Activities such as giving the deceased person's clothes and shoes to the needy, giving food to those who come to condolences, fulfilling the will of the deceased, giving alms to reduce the debts of the deceased in terms of prayer and fasting, if any, reading the Qur'an and reciting the mawlid on the third, seventh and fortieth days of their death, included in the mentioned charitable activities. Consistent with the results of this study, it has been reported that the practice of giving money to the poor for the days when the dead cannot fast and the prayers they cannot perform in the provinces of Diyarbakır and Mardin in Turkey (Aslan, 2017). It is stated that the rewards of these practices, which are called charity in Islamic cultures, will reach the dead (Ahaddour et al., 2017, 2020; Aslan, 2017; Dikmen, 2015; Güven, 2019; Rashid, 2020; Sever, 2016; www.kulturportali.gov.tr). In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the belief that the souls of the dead continue to live and that they expect charity and prayers from their living relatives is also thought to be effective in the practice of charity.

Limitations of the Study

Since the study period coincided with the period of restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the data on cultural practices related to death and mourning are limited only to Muslims living in two different provincial centers in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. For this reason, cultural practices related to death and mourning in other parts of Turkey could not be discussed in the study. The data obtained in the in-depth interviews with the participants are based on the self-reports of the individuals.

Conclusion

Regarding the phenomenon of death, it has been revealed that there are some cultural practices and rituals performed at the time of death, as well as before, during, and after burial in almost every society, and most of these practices are performed for similar purposes. It was determined in this study that there are both optimistic thoughts involving a new beginning and pessimistic thoughts involving fear, darkness, and uncertainty regarding death in the Central Anatolia Region where the study was conducted. In the study, the process of mourning and religious and cultural practices in the form of burial of the deceased in a short time, fulfillment of the deceased's will, making alms, giving food to others, grieving, and visits for offering condolences were identified. This study also revealed that the cultural practices of Muslim individuals before the death of a person, at the time of their death, and after their death are integrated with their religious beliefs and practices.

It is possible to say that rituals associated with death and cultural practices are also an indicator of social integration, solidarity, and social support mechanisms, as well as communication between individuals in a society. Knowing what the cultural practices of individuals who make up a society are, the reasons for these practices, and how these practices affect the health and well-being of people will be guiding for primary healthcare workers in general and public health nurses in particular in terms of getting to know the society in which they will provide services to individuals. It is thought that knowing the society in terms of cultural characteristics and respecting the cultures of individuals will contribute to the holistic approach of healthcare professionals to individuals while providing services and to the society's more effective access to healthcare services.

Future research should address the death-related cultural practices of Muslims in other parts of Turkey. Additionally, since religious and cultural practices differ according to religions, studies should be conducted on the religious and cultural practices of people belonging to other religions in Turkey regarding death and mourning.

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Code Availability Not available

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors have no conflict of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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