

# DON'T FEAR THE REAPER: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY INTO THE DEATH TABOO

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## (1) Introduction

- Death is a fact of life; however, many in the UK still consider death a taboo subject<sup>1</sup>.
- The UK's biggest survey into death, dying and bereavement has revealed that nearly 18 million people in the UK are uncomfortable with talking about death<sup>2</sup>.
- This might suggest that there is a crisis of communication within the UK when it comes to thinking about death and dying.
- Research into the death taboo has mostly come from a sociological perspective of how society has developed a "death denying culture"<sup>3</sup>. Little research has been conducted on what affects the death taboo may have on individuals.
- Therefore, a deeper understanding is needed as to why we avoid the topic of death and if it has become one of societies last taboos.

## (2) Aims

The aim of this study was to examine people's knowledge and attitudes towards death and dying to provide a richer explanation of the relationship between people's perceptions of death and the death taboo. To gain further insight into this issue, two research questions are proposed; 1) Does the UK have a death taboo? 2) If so, how has this come about?

## (3) Method

A constructivist grounded theory method was employed to explore the knowledge and attitudes towards death and dying of six interview participants, ranging in age from 22 to 25.

## (4) Results

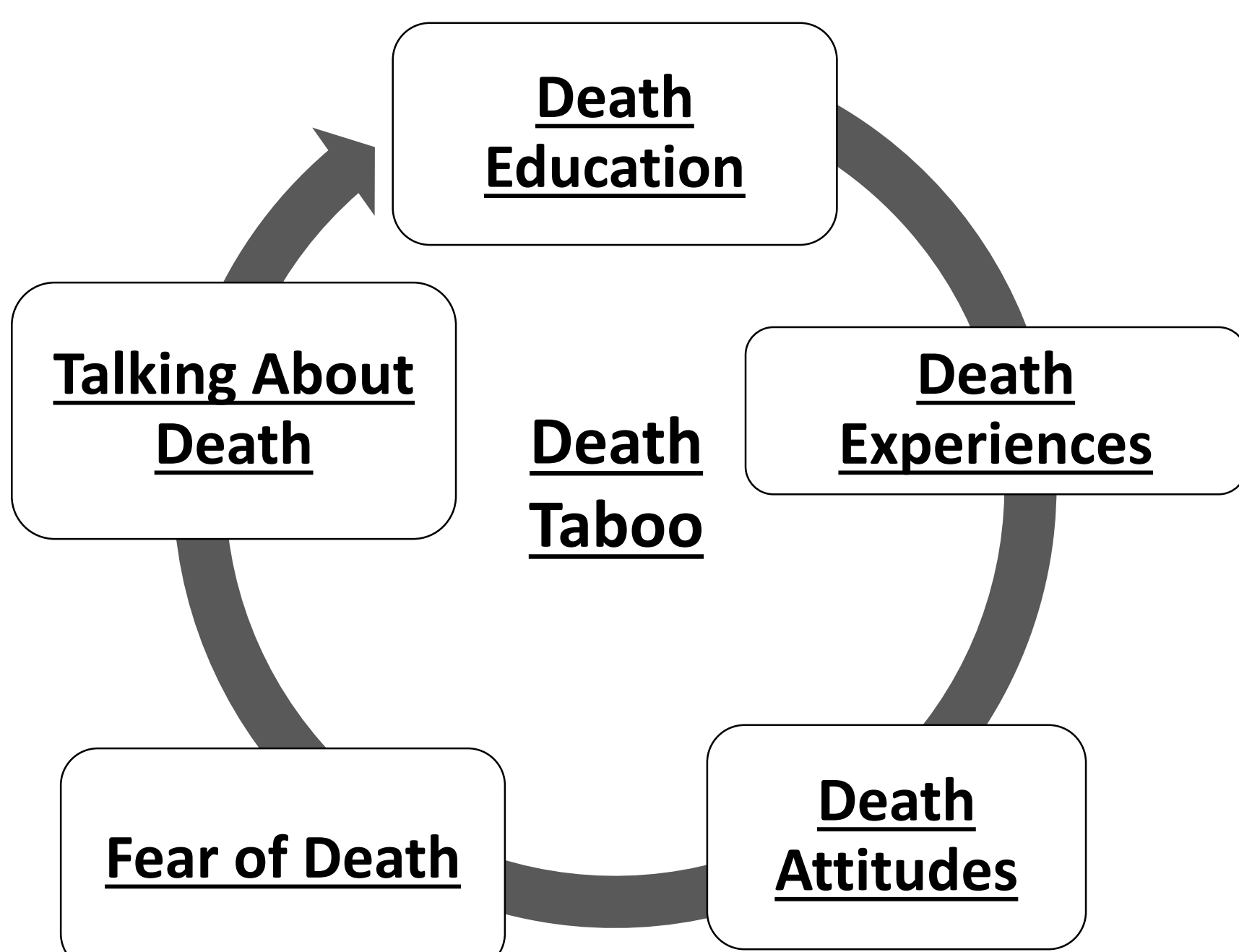
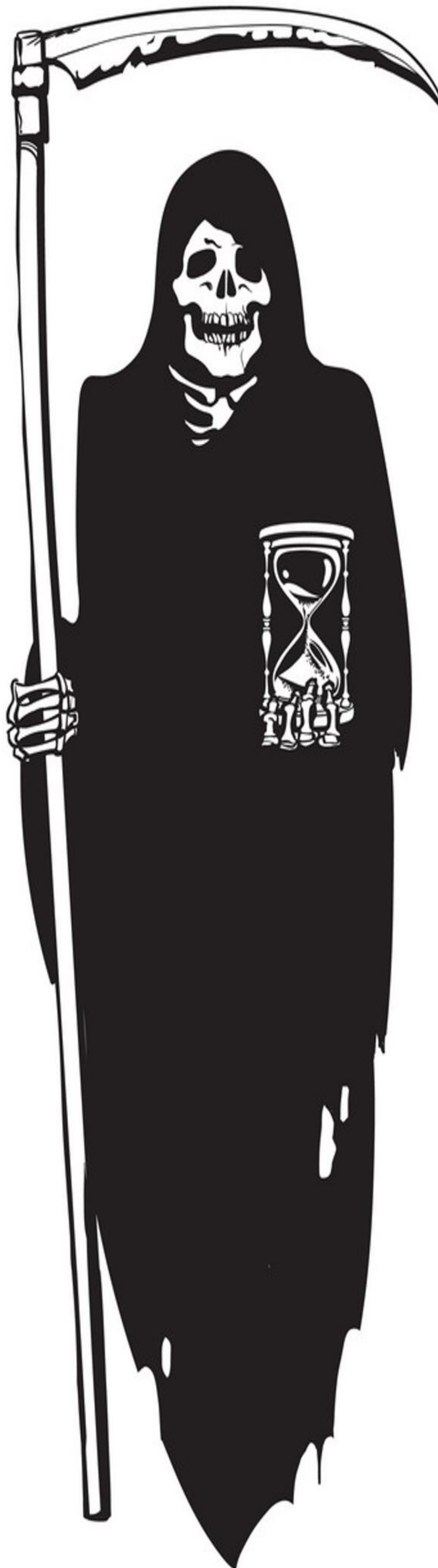


Figure 1. The theoretical model of death as a taboo



## (5) Conclusion

- Many participants experienced death during childhood. What is apparent, is that how a child experiences and understands death can have an impact on the way they will deal with death in later life.
- Children cannot be protected from death, however, open and honest discussions about it can help them to deal with death in a practical and healthy way.
- All participants stressed the importance of parental communication regarding the fears and understanding of death related issues. However, due to the death taboo, death is seen as uncomfortable, awkward and a topic to be avoided.
- Death education would benefit people of all ages. By educating children we can ensure that they have the skills and coping strategies to death with their death experiences.
- Children have a certain knowledge and experience with dealing with death related issues as at young age. Death education in the early years will enhance the discourse and discussion on death and loss and then when it occurs it will not be treated with such shock and awe.
- By showing children from a young age that death is not something that should be avoided but understood as a natural part of life will thus lessen the taboo that surrounds death.
- Establishing death education programs, in the UK and elsewhere, will help people to better cope with grief, bereavement, the fear of death, and ultimately remove the taboo around death in the UK.

## (6) Further Research

This research has been developed further into a PhD. I am currently looking into the process by which individuals become able to think and talk about death and dying.



### References

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