

Background

We live in a largely death-denying society, underpinned by medicalisation of ageing, and where death is a taboo topic. Iatrogenesis - or harm inflicted by doctors - not only draws attention to potential harm of medical treatments, it denies natural deaths and undermines traditional ways of coping with suffering (O'Mahony, 2016). For Chinese, talking about death is considered bad luck as it is believed to hasten death (Chan & Chow, 2006).

In a general survey, Lien Foundation (2014) found older and Chinese respondents more comfortable to engage in die-rogues but didn't know how to broach the topic, and were waiting for others to initiate them. Older adults are also prone to reminiscence, a "naturally occurring" life review "prompted by the realisation of approaching dissolution and death" (Butler, 1963, p. 66) Moreover, "a person's thinking and behaviour may be influenced more than we recognised by the views, hopes and fears concerning the nature and meaning of death (Feifel, 1959, p. 116)."

With approximately one million baby boomers (born 1947-1964) making up 30 percent of Singapore's resident population, and one in four citizens turning 65 and above by 2030, it is timely to capture the views of older adults on their views on death as the nation allocates scarce resources for a greying population.

Objectives

This study sought to systematically investigate death attitudes of older Chinese in Singapore, an under explored area of study, to understand how they viewed death, what constituted a Good Death and one's own death preparation. The focus on Chinese was deliberate as their attitudes not only dominated the general discourse, but traditional multigenerational living arrangements have been shifting toward smaller households. Insights gained from this study will hopefully improve the ageing experience, and bring about better or Good Deaths for present and future cohorts of older adults.

Methodology

Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014) was employed as a research design and methodology to interpret data gathered from recordings of one-on-one interviews with fifteen adults, 55-88 years of age. These interviews were loosely structured and modelled after Butler's (1963) Life Review to encourage participants to share their life stories. Their life stories provided windows of opportunity for questions pertaining to death attitudes to be posed. Each respondent was however informed from the start that their views on death will be elicited during this interview.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, following which line-by-line data analysis was conducted especially for the first six interviews. Key concepts were identified to be theoretically sampled in subsequent interviews which were more tightly structured compared to the earlier interviews.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism provided theoretical framework against which personal meanings of death and if, and how, the latter shaped attitudes and behaviours toward death. Making sense of what older adults think, feel and make of death from a "micro, bottom-up approach" further supported the choice of using grounded theory to explore a relatively unexplored area of study.

Overview of

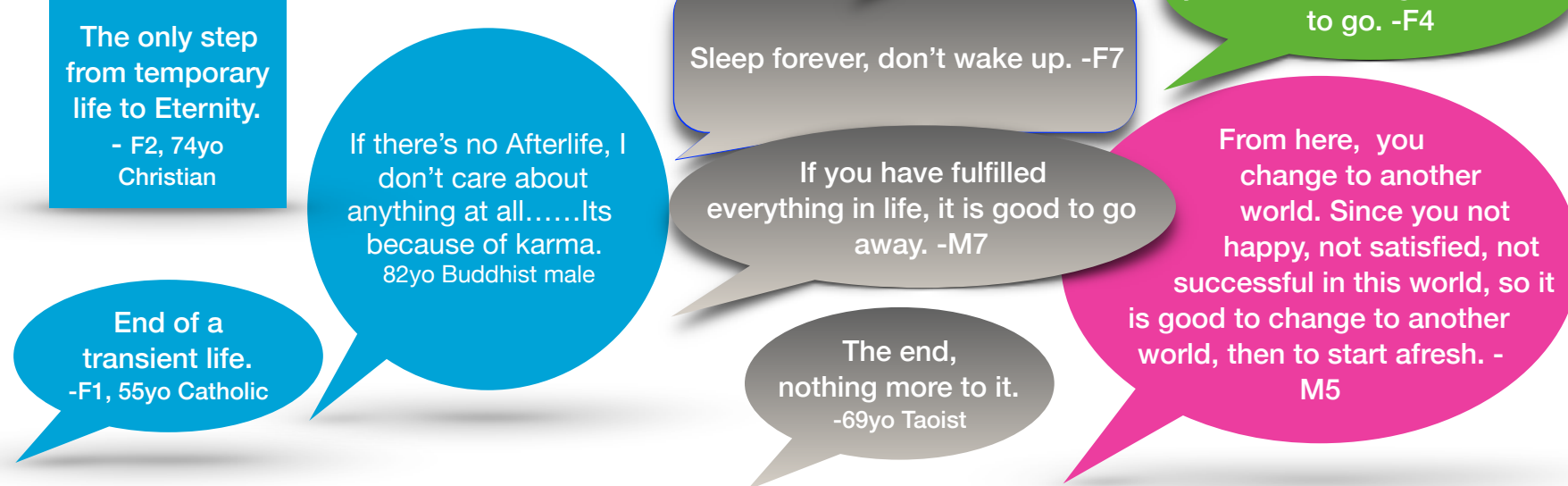
Participants

- Recruited via convenience sampling
- To obtain maximum variation, there was a minimum number of participants across gender, ages, religious affiliation including those with none, social economic status (SES) and education
- Face to face interviews were conducted with every participant
- Each interview spanned 45 minutes to 2 hours
- Of the fifteen, eight lived in government subsidised Housing Development Board flats, six in private housing

Participants	Age	Religion	Education	Occupation	Residence
F1	57	Catholic	Master's	Hospital Director	Condo
M1	55	NR	Degree	Banking Executive	4RM HDB
F2	74	Christian	PhD	Professor @	House
M2	59	NR	Degree	Family Business @	Condo
F3	63	Christian	Degree	Producer @	Condo
M3	88	Christian	High School	Civil Servant@	Condo
F4	74	Taoist-Buddhist	Pri 2	Housewife	3RM HDB
M4	78	Taoist-Buddhist	Pri 3	Boilermaker@	3RM HDB
F5	71	Buddhist	None	Factory worker@	4RM HDB
M5	67	Buddhist	Diploma	Remisier@	Studio HDB
F6	69	Taoist	None	Pork Seller	4RM HDB
M6	82	Buddhist	Secondary	Entrepreneur @	Condo
F7	62	NR	Degree	Varied@	5RM HDB
M7	72	NR	Secondary	Shopkeeper@	4RM HDB
F8	55	Taoist-Buddhist	Diploma	Store Manager	Exec HDB
F= FEMALE M= MALE		NR= NO RELIGION		@ Retired	Condo= Condominium

R1: How do Chinese perceive Death?

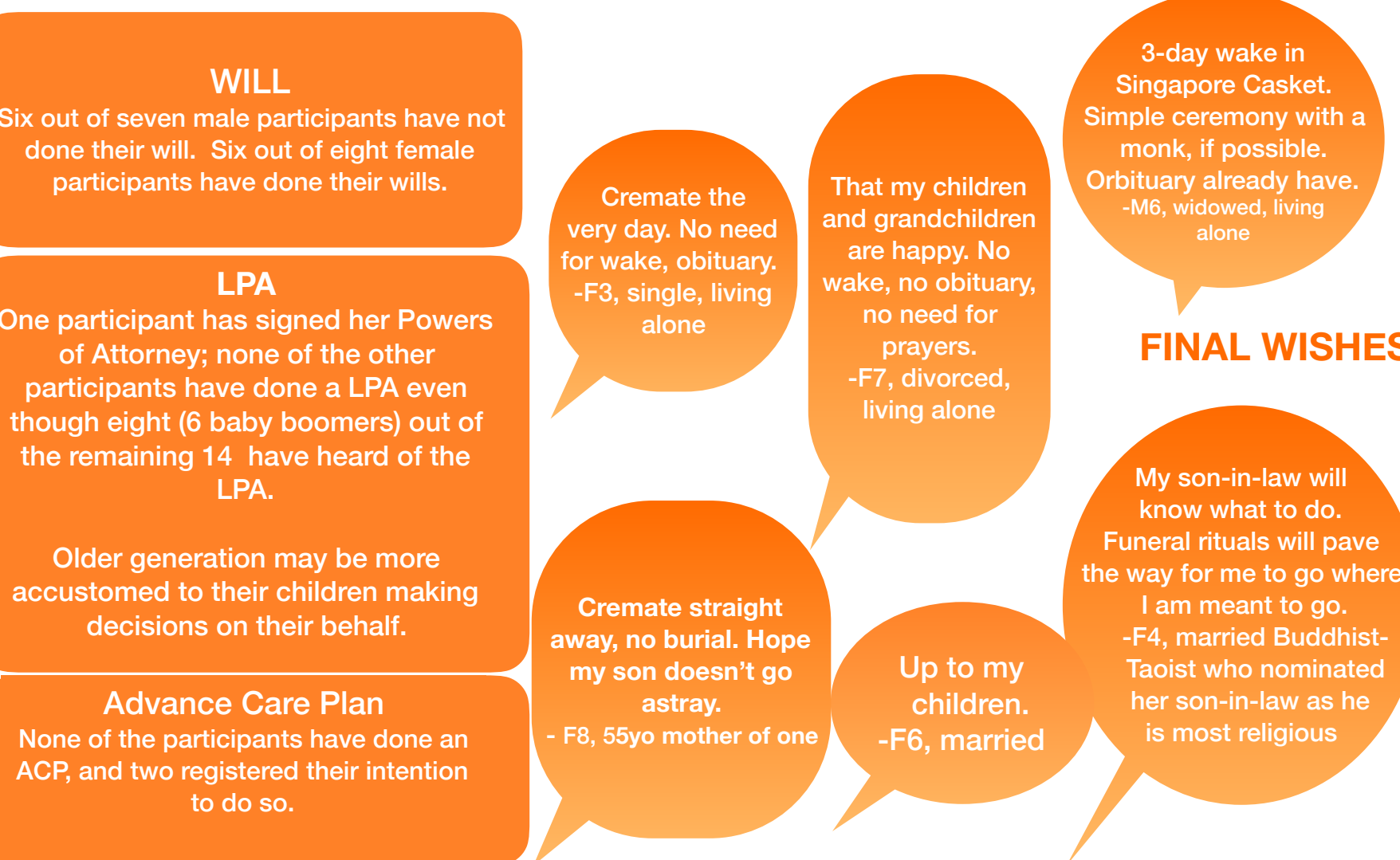
- Natural**
That Death is Natural also overlapped with other themes below:
- A Renewal**
- Expiration**
- Followed by an Afterlife**



R2: What is a Good Death?



R3: What have you done in preparation for your own death?



Discussion

Attitudes Toward Death

- Stoic, Embracing
- Escape
- Conditional

Attributes of a "Good Death"

- Quick
- Painless
- Peaceful
- Old Age
- Not being a burden
- Fulfillment of duty or wishes
- Assurance of wellbeing of loved ones
- Dying naturally
- End of Rebirth

Death Preparation

Participants were probed for the following items: will, Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA), funeral, final wishes, and Advance Care Plan (ACP) for the more prepared.

Closer interactions with deaths of loved ones, or experience with health threats underpinned higher levels of death acceptance, and therefore, greater death preparation.

- Death acceptance is premised on death acceptance of significant others
- Religiosity does not alleviate fears of dying
- Death acceptance can coexist with fears and anxieties of dying
- Pragmatism reigns in death preparatory efforts of the younger cohort
- A quick, sudden death makes a good death
- Dementia justified nursing home care

- Review how suffering associated with pain and prolonged death can be minimised, including a consideration of euthanasia and assisted dying
- Efforts to promote LPA and ACP can be expanded to address fears around dementia and being a burden
- Death preparation vary across life experiences and demographics, efforts to encourage greater preparation need to be tailored accordingly

A Dignified End

Expressed wishes for a quick, painless death warrants further investigation into assisted dying as an end-of-life solution. There are Confucian principles (Li & Li, 2017) that covertly supports euthanasia, and increasingly evidence that an educated ageing population would opt for this route voluntarily. Finally, as evidence shows, most hope to die naturally, and with

References

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