



Gen Z's Thoughts and Feelings About Death

A young man with glasses, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket over a light-colored button-down shirt, is looking down at a large bouquet of white flowers. The background is blurred, showing other people in a similar setting, likely a funeral home or a church.

White Paper

For this research paper, our student researchers seek to understand the impact of death on Gen Z.

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Survey Intro

The Research Question and Preliminary Results

In the Fall 2023, one of our Market Research student groups conducted research to understand the impact of death on Gen Z and their experiences with it. Their goal was to ask questions about how Gen Z interacted with death - to everything from their own personal experiences of grief and loss to their exposure to death through various forms of media.

Demographics

They collected 160 survey responses. 58% of respondents were between 18 and 22 years old. 67% of their respondents were female, and 77% of them were White.

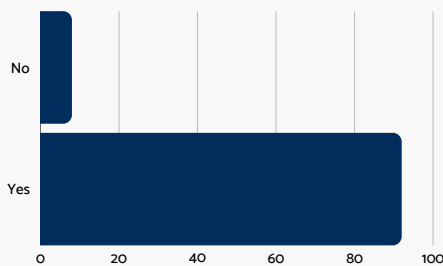
Preliminary Results

The survey results showed that most members of Gen Z have some personal experience with death. Though they had these experiences, a low number of respondents did not feel ready to cope with death. In a generational shift from previous cohorts, most of our respondents were willing to engage in conversations about death.

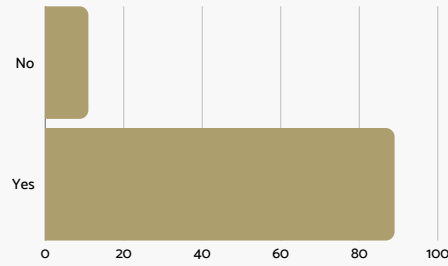


Personal Experiences

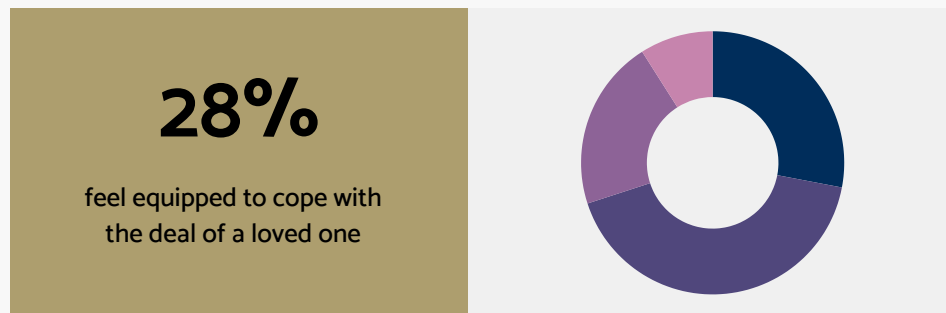
Have you been to a funeral?



Have you experienced the death of a loved one?



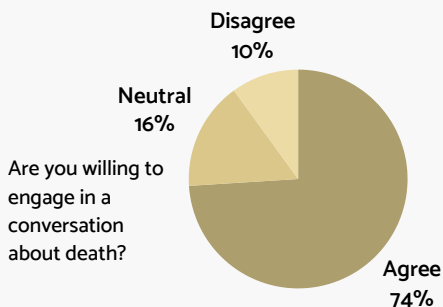
Our student researchers were surprised to receive such high results when it comes to experiences of death. Though most of the respondents had experience with death, the researchers found that those experiences did not correlate to feeling ready to cope with death.



These findings would suggest that even though 64% of our respondents agreed that the topic of death has become desensitized, this does not mean that society as a whole is better at talking about or dealing with death.

Socializing & Social Media

One of the primary questions our student researchers wanted to answer was the level of influence that social media had on Gen Z's feelings about death. Exposure to death in media - especially through video games, online media sources, and social media - has become the default answer in the blame game for gun violence, social unrest, and even domestic terrorism. From a social perspective, our survey found that Gen Z is more willing to talk about and engage with death than previous generations.



80% regularly consumed media featuring themes of death and dying

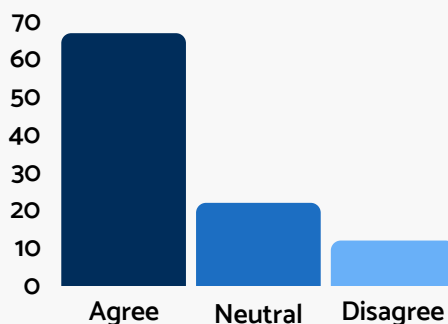
36% affected by portrayal of death in media and entertainment

However, when we looked for other supplementary research, we found that researchers connected Gen Z's high exposure to death and dying, with other health related issues like chronic stress, anxiety, and mental health issues. Though it is generally considered positive that we live in a world where news, information, opinion, and art all exist at the tip of our fingers, some researchers are learning that the prolonged impact of this exposure could be more negative than we know, especially on our physical and mental well-being.



Death & Safety

When we teach about generations, we always reference how the societal changes experienced during adolescence have a huge impact on how generations transition to adulthood. For Gen Z, they have experienced or been exposed to mass shootings, large scale societal protest and unrest, international and domestic terrorism, threats of a world war, and a global pandemic. All of these events shape the way Gen Z sees the world and their relationship to death and dying.



Do you feel the cultural attitudes towards death has changed in recent years?

“These children, adolescents, and young adults believe there are very few environments they can consider ‘safe spaces’.”

A recent study by the Jefferson Educational Society, explored how Gen Z’s experiences of life changing events alter their perception and relationship to death and dying.

The study argued that the negative impact of these environments, this lack of feeling safe in most places, contributes to the high rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues in Gen Z.

The constant exposure to “stressful and anxiety-producing environments” may make them more comfortable talking about death, but it also has a profound impact on their mental and emotional resiliency.



Findings

What does this mean about our understanding of this rising generation and their perspective on death and dying?

Here is what we've learned:

- In part because of Gen Z's high exposure to death in media and entertainment, they are more willing to engage with and talk about death than previous generations.
- Though our survey did find that only 1 in 3 Gen Z members feel able to cope with death, only 36% agreed that they were impacted by portrayals of death in the media and entertainment.
- We also learned that their thoughts and feelings about death cannot be separated from their feelings about safety, especially in certain public environments.

Applications

What does it all mean?

Every research project tells a story, and here's how this story can help you better understand this rising generation in the workforce:

- Regardless of how you feel about gun violence, mass shootings are a reality that deeply impact this generation. Do you have a safety plan for an active shooter at work? Have you communicated this to staff?
- Further research shows that Gen Z may have different perspectives on spending money, saving for retirement, and their lived experiences because of how they think and feel about death.
- Keep these issues in mind when creating any policies or benefits.

How can we help?

This White Paper only scratched the surface of our understanding of Gen Z and how they impact multigenerational workplaces.

If we can help you or your organization reach a fuller understanding of generations, please reach out via the contact information below, or scan the QR code to book a call with us or learn more about the trainings we offer!



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BOOK A CALL



Our Trainings