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Personality, Risk, and Mortality Awareness 2021

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Personality, Risk, and Mortality Awareness 2021

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Has the current pandemic changed the way that people think about their own mortality and influenced their attitudes toward death and dying? Have people changed in terms of their rebelliousness or risk-taking tendencies as a function of living during pandemic times? In 2013, we conducted a study that examined how rebelliousness related to mortality awareness and risk-taking tendencies, using the Multidimensional Mortality Awareness Measure (Levasseur et al., 2015) in a sample of 318 Canadian students. Findings from our previous research showed that proactive rebelliousness was related to mortality disengagement, or a detachment from death awareness, as well as financial and health-related risk taking.

In the present study, we administered the same online questionnaire measures to a Canadian sample of 304 students. We sought to determine whether the relations among rebelliousness, risk-taking tendency, and mortality awareness would show similar patterns to those we previously observed, or whether a cohort of individuals who have been living through the COVID-19 pandemic show a different pattern of relations among these variables. We also explored whether the present sample displayed differences in fearfulness, disempowerment, and acceptance in relation to mortality, relative to the 2013 sample.

Our findings indicated that mortality awareness subscales changed only slightly, with some reduction in fearfulness, and small increases in mortality acceptance and disempowerment. Proactive rebelliousness was the strongest predictor of risk-taking in both our pre-COVID and COVID samples. Results from studies such as ours have implications for considering both attitudinal and motivational shifts that might result from living through a global pandemic.