

# Health Consequences of a Death Threat: How Terrorist Attacks Impact Drinking

Franziska Pradel<sup>1</sup> and Sebastian Sattler<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Affiliation not available

<sup>2</sup>Bielefeld University

August 7, 2023

## Abstract

Terrorist attacks, war, violent acts, and their media coverage remind us of our own mortality, which may provoke stress and coping mechanisms. The terror management health model (TMHM) proposes that even subliminal thoughts about existential threats trigger worldview defense and self-esteem-related behaviors. Based on the TMHM, our field experiment (N=228) examines the impact of a terrorist attack on death-thought accessibility, the choice between alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, and if the impact on this choice is moderated by the importance of alcohol to one's self-esteem (i.e., alcohol-based self-esteem), and the consciousness of the terrorist attack. Results show that thoughts about the terrorist attack increased death-thought accessibility. The salience of the terrorist attack had no main effect on beverage choice, but alcohol-based self-esteem predicted choosing an alcoholic beverage. However, in the unconscious thought condition, participants who had low alcohol-based self-esteem and were provoked with death-related thoughts about terrorism were more likely to choose an alcoholic beverage. In the conscious thought condition, participants who had high alcohol-based self-esteem were less likely to choose alcohol. This study suggests that thoughts about terrorism and, therefore, the threat of death, can be provoked in everyday situations and affect substance use behaviors with potentially adverse health consequences.

## Hosted file

Health\_Consequences\_of\_Death\_Threat\_MAIN.docx available at <https://authorea.com/users/650223/articles/658812-health-consequences-of-a-death-threat-how-terrorist-attacks-impact-drinking>

## Hosted file

Health\_Consequences\_of\_Death\_Threat\_FIGURE\_1.docx available at <https://authorea.com/users/650223/articles/658812-health-consequences-of-a-death-threat-how-terrorist-attacks-impact-drinking>