Political attitude and fear of death

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Background:
It is well established in social psychology that conservatives can have problems to cope with death and uncertainty [Jost 2003]. Reminding fear of death can change attitudes and behaviour [Pyszczynski 2006]. These cognitive patterns are mirrored in brain structures of conservatives and liberals [Kanai 2011].

Methods:
(1) Existing American conservatism scores will be used as a base to develop a Norwegian Conservatism score.

(2) In a qualitative approach Norwegian conservatives and liberals will be included in an interview study to identify relevant associations and coping methods.

(3) In a fMRI study, liberal and conservative participants will be primed to reflect on death “Please, briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you” and “Tell down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die.” (or with a control condition remembering a dentist treatment, according to [Pyszczynski 2006]). They will then be confronted in a block design with different images related to death and dying. Activation patterns in amygdala and anterior cingulate cortex will be investigated.

Results:
A social dominance questionnaire in Norwegian was identified and tested in different people (health professionals, and secondary school students).

Statistical results are pending. After completing the questionnaire I conducted interviews. Most participants (n = 15) considered the language as difficult and had problems to answer the questions.

Discussion:
Terror management theory proposes that different cultural worldviews serve to buffer anxiety arising from the thoughts humans have about their own mortality [Rosenblatt 1989]. When mortality salience is provoked this might have consequences for political behavior. Mortality salience is necessarily provoked in palliative patients. If patients with conservative background cope different, these might change the therapeutic approach in palliative psychology.

References:

