

Echoes of death: an autoethnography of a father–son odyssey in marketing academia

Southeast Asia: A
Multidisciplinary
Journal

Muhammad Kashif

International Institute of Science, Arts and Technology, Gujranwala, Pakistan

Received 16 December 2024

Revised 25 September 2025

3 June 2026

Accepted 25 June 2026

Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the inner feelings of a marketing doctoral student coping with socio-emotional issues arising out of the trauma of experiencing the death of a loved one (i.e. a son dealing with the sudden death of his father).

Design/methodology/approach – By employing the “dialogue with the deceased” technique, the study presents reflections and narratives that might help doctoral students and university administrators to better understand the struggles of doctoral students belonging to the Global South while experiencing the death of a loved one.

Findings – A mechanism that might help university administrators to better understand the grief experienced by doctoral students, the role of PhD supervisors, intellectual yoga in isolation and communal support as a social event for doctoral students coping with trauma are the key takeaways.

Originality/value – The use of autoethnographic reflection as a method of inquiry to study the death of a loved one and its implications for success in doctoral education and social studies is unique to this study.

Keywords Death, Father–son, Higher education, Autoethnography, PhD, Talking to the deceased, Pakistan

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Doctoral students face the challenge of obtaining a degree within a particular timeframe (Skopek, Triventi, & Blossfeld, 2022) but a large number of doctoral students withdraw (Phan, 2024) due to a lack of belonging (Matheka, Jansen, Suhre, & Hofman, 2024), and limited family support (Holmgren, 2022). Another factor highlighted is academic rigor (Jaksztat, Neugebauer, & Brandt, 2021), along with a lack of socialization (Paucsik, Leys, Marais, Baeyens, & Shankland, 2022) and a weak rapport between students and their supervisors (Skopek *et al.*, 2022).

Although these are important dimensions, another perspective is personal – the life (i.e. the occurrence of critical incidents) of a doctoral student which can drain energy and motivation to cope with the challenges facing doctoral students (Phan, 2024). These incidents can take several forms, including positive events (i.e. marriage or the birth of a baby), as well as negative events (i.e. death or divorce) (Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; Carpenter, 2022; Ridgway, 2023). Although there is extant research on the challenges facing doctoral students, our understanding of how they cope with the life events while pursuing doctoral degrees remains limited (Carpenter, 2022; Mulligan, n.d.; Mulligan, 2023; Ridgway, 2023).

In this regard, some event-driven emotions (i.e. the feeling of joy and/or grief) can easily shake the focus of doctoral students (Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.) but they remain hidden within the mind of the individual (Ridgway, 2023). The character of doctoral studies is masculine, thus leaving little margin to exchange and understand such experiences and emotions during the span of the degree (Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; De Stefano *et al.*, 2021). In this vein, some researchers have highlighted grief as an important emotion (De Stefano *et al.*, 2021).



© Muhammad Kashif. Published in *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/>

Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary
Journal
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2948-0426
p-ISSN: 1819-5091
DOI 10.1108/SEAMJ-10-2024-0088

Grief is defined as an experience where individuals cope with the loss of a beloved. It is an emotion affecting our natural state of being, which can also divert the focus as a doctoral student (Stewart, 2020; Patel, 2023). Threatening well-being might result in self-isolation (Reza & Islam, 2025) and ultimately lead to withdrawal (Alves, Lopes, Cruz-Correia, & Menezes, 2023; Hadjar, Haas, & Gewinner, 2023). Interestingly, sharing grief within a community can lessen the negative impact of such emotions (Lee, 2022). Although it is a social practice, it has never been institutionalized (i.e. through an institutional response to grief). Ultimately, such practices can become an integral part of a mechanism devised by universities to help students cope with such emotions (Larcombe, Ryan, & Baik, 2022; Noreen *et al.*, 2023; Woolston & O'meara, 2019).

Fortunately, there is some research that outlines grief within Western traditions (Carpenter, 2022; Macarthur, Kirby, & Mowll, 2023; Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; Patel, 2023; Stewart, 2020), but the voices from the Global South are limited. Universities require a close interaction with their students which is a product of openness and dedication, rather than merely rigor (Carson & Niklasson, 2023; Ta, Hoang, Khong, & Dang, 2024).

Dealing with grief: rationalizing a Southeast Asian perspective

In this context, the focus of this study is to explore the life event of grief among doctoral students, reflecting on essays representing a non-Western world where family traditions and relationships are deeper (Jaksztat *et al.*, 2021; Noreen *et al.*, 2023; Nori & Vanttaja, 2023). For instance, there are several Asian countries where parents, until their last years, live with their children and influence their decision-making, reflecting a unique bond among them as a family (Silverman, Baroiller, & Hemer, 2021; Hidalgo *et al.*, 2021; Okumura, Feeney, & Claridge, 2024). In European traditions, grief is dealt differently comparable to the East-Asian countries (Okumura *et al.*, 2024). In Southeast Asia, family responsibilities and care are the main agenda and focus of life (Zhuang, Liu, & Ding, 2022). Institutional differences also exist. A lot of universities in the Southeast Asian region are dealing with a lack of research culture and student engagement issues (Ge, 2024; Zheng & Cai, 2024; Rubel, Rumi, & Ripon, 2024). Moreover, the decision-making in Southeast Asian societies is based on religious principles (Mathews, Yang, & Kwong, 2023). Grief and its handling are also inspired by cultural and religious connotations. Pragmatically, a lot of doctoral students struggle to complete their doctoral degrees on time in Southeast Asian countries (Chen & Le, 2021; Vigil Avilés, Jang, & Urban, 2024), which adds to the existing situations while handling grief. Above all, the traditional togetherness, collectivism in dealings and religiosity make grief a special case in Southeast Asian society (Sarkar, Gupta, Sahu, Anwar, & Sharan, 2023). All these challenges qualify Southeast Asia as a unique case to study doctoral degree progress and scholarship.

Research methods

This article presents my personal handling of grief arising out of the death of my father while using autoethnography as a method of inquiry. This technique refers to understanding socio-cultural systems with the help of narrative writing (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This technique acknowledges an individual as a socially conscious self. It is absolutely necessary when an individual recognizes himself/herself as being divided into different conscious selves through life events (i.e. love, pain and the like) (Bochner, 1997). The process starts with a realization of the self (i.e. existentialism), using memory combined with emotion to narrate the feelings, hidden within an individual. However, it is an iterative process and an individual's reflection strengthens self-awareness (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017).

Pragmatically, autoethnography comprises a deep-down cultural analysis with interpretations through personal stories and reflections (Carpenter, 2022; Carson & Niklasson, 2023; Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; Ridgway, 2023). It is a useful methodological approach to examine psychosocial issues (i.e. grief and mental health issues)

(Grant, 2023). Grief has been explored while using autoethnography as a method of inquiry. Researchers have presented their confessional stories in an organized prose, positively impacting both themselves and the readers (Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; Stewart, 2020). Since personal reflexivity is important for higher educators, autoethnography offers this advantage and enhances learning and educational skills among individuals (Stewart, 2020). It has the power to bring clarity of thought while rejuvenating individuals coping with negative experiences of life (Cupit, Wilson-Doenges, Barnaby, & Kowalski, 2022; Holmgren, 2022; Lee, 2022; Macarthur *et al.*, 2023). Extending these ideas, I present an autoethnography of grief arising out of the death of my beloved father while using dialogue with the deceased as a technique. This technique is used by researchers as a therapeutic strategy to cope with deep emotional issues such as grief (Harris, 2021).

Family, traditions, death and PhD: an autoethnography

In Pakistan, gender roles are strict, and the father is an important figure in the family. Men in a family go out to work while women spend time at home, performing housekeeping tasks (i.e. cooking, dishwashing, cleaning). Usually, one person (most of the time, the father) earns for the family. Since men have greater work exposure, they guide their children to join different careers, and in return, the children idealize their father. Hence, without a doubt, the father is an important figure in the household. We lived in a village situated in the suburbs of Sialkot and Gujranwala (i.e. cities with a strong family business history and tradition) within the province of Punjab.

In a joint family system, values are shared among the members of a family. My father, the most highly educated individual among his siblings, was fond of reading books and initiating social dialogue. He always stressed the need to read books and newspapers and to spend time with elders. In addition, his focus remained on friendly, respectful discussions with his children. I can recall that, while attending various functions (i.e. weddings), my father used to discuss societal issues. An open dialogue along with a way forward of life was always advised. He was always open to sharing his observations about society, his conversations with his parents, his life events and his belief in the oneness of Allah Almighty. We always had beautiful conversations from my high school years onward. We traveled together, ate together and had several friendly conversations. I was always receptive to several pieces of his advice. Ranging from my school choice to joining a college and the university, and even while selecting my first job, he played an important role. I considered him my *parking space* for all the worries and problems related to my studies and career, and personal life. While at home, we spent time watching TV together. Sometimes, he made me a cup of tea late at night. During those moments, we mostly discussed sports, politics, religion, self-concept and personal life. When I went abroad for my doctoral studies, he always encouraged me with positive words. His body language during video calls and his words were like a shining star – paving a path for me to remain successful. Although, during this time, he was diagnosed with diabetes, he never shared this and always hid information related to his health. As a person, he was strange at times. For example, despite being diabetic and being 72 years old, he never shared anything about his illness. We always found him working on something, i.e. gardening, cleaning his room or doing other tasks. He was very obedient and respectful toward his parents, and we observed this throughout our childhood.

It was a hot summer day in July 2021. Since he was not feeling well, I requested that he see a doctor, but he refused and said that he was fine. Till late at night, when I went upstairs to see him, I asked the same question and received a similar reply. As I came down the stairs, he also came down and lay down flat on the floor. This was quite unusual. A person with his manners would never lie on the bare floor in front of all the family members. I came out of my room, took his head in my lap, and asked, “*Bismillah, what happened to you Abbu Ji (my beloved father)?*”, “*Nothing, just feeling a bit dizzy, give me some water, and I will be ok,*” he replied. I requested my wife to bring some water. She went to get it from the kitchen. Within a minute, I

noticed that my father started breathing quickly, and his eyes started to lose their usual shine. Then, within those few moments, he took a deep breath and his soul departed toward its ultimate destination. I sat there silently, looking at him while observing the most unforgettable event of my life.

The death of my father and my motivation

Although his death was not unexpected because he was 73 years old and had diabetes, he always gave us the impression that he was perfectly fine. During the dry winter evenings, while living in a small town located in the suburbs of Lahore, I felt the pain. My health started to deteriorate, and I was diagnosed with serious stomach issues due to stress caused by the death of my father. I went through some medical examinations, and the doctor asked me several questions while I was depressed.

Doctor: Don't you believe in Allah Almighty? This world is temporary, and we all will depart someday. Kindly be brave (as he thought I was stressed, and thinking too much about the death). What are your activities these days, he asked.

Me: I visit his grave to pray for him. However, I feel I can talk to the grave and can feel the warmth of my father when I touch the grave with my hands. One day, I felt as though I heard an unheard voice from the grave telling me silently, *sit a bit longer*; do not go yet.

Doctor: Oh, you are hallucinating. It would help if you had some psychological treatment as well, and I am going to start you on this medicine to get you out of all this, he said. These are illusions, my dear. Later, I started taking the medicine.

Every day, while coming back home, I searched for him in his reading room. The small library was a clean and tightly managed place. Moreover, while watching cricket, I tried to concentrate on the game, but memories of him grew stronger every day. I thought about what an experience it would have been to watch it in his presence. During all these moments, I tried my best to cope with all that was going on through interactions with students, friends, family members and some yoga exercises, but I was struggling. I spoke with my supervisor. Her kindness and motivating voice – those encouraging words she offered – were amazing. Still, I kept recalling the moments I had shared with my father. With all this on my mind, I wanted to talk to him but could not.

His words started echoing again in my ears: “Beta (my son), complete this PhD project successfully; you are a star product; carry on with the same spirit with which way you started.” I continued asking some religious and spiritual experts about the dreams I was having, and I also consulted a few close friends and even the relatives of my extended family. They were supportive and gave life to my thoughts – “Keep moving. Your father wanted you to finish it on time, and you started your PhD journey with this motivation.”

My supervisor from the University of Colombo, whom I spoke to on a regular basis, gave me beautiful lessons about life as well as a lot of encouragement. She always tried to lessen the burden I was feeling during those years. My wife, through her carefulness, and my children supported and consoled me. A family friend in Australia, another PhD student at a university, shared her own experiences with me and by comparing our circumstances, I found some motivation.

Imagining my father around me

The prose below is imagined while visiting the grave of my father (see [Appendix A](#)). Whenever my work was published, I had the habit of sharing a copy with him to read. My father offered valuable suggestions to improve my work. I always felt that he was the one who was a guiding star in this temporal world. I wonder, if he was alive, I can imagine some words he would have uttered:

Father: “Beta (my son), this life is temporary, but we are blessed with the responsibilities, relationships, events and occasions. You should try to embrace all these blessings manifested in the form of responsibilities. I remember you were so curious and passionate about starting a PhD. Would you miss this opportunity that has come your way? Do you want this to happen? (I hope not.)”

Suddenly, while sitting near the grave, these words echoed, and I replied:

Me: “No, Abbu Ji (father), I will try to embrace the opportunities and will try to serve others, trying to become more transcendent by transforming the lives of others through helping them (i.e. to identify their purpose(s) in life). I will not leave. I will do that; yes, I will. This is why I joined academia and started teaching, and I remember you motivated me to read and write during my childhood. Although I was never comfortable reading newspapers and writing a summary of them, which you always advised me to do, later, I realized how helpful and inspiring this practice was in shaping me as an individual, as well as an academic”.

Father: Do you know the familial traditions we have? Your maternal grandmother, paternal aunt and grandfather had one thing in common: a love for reading and writing.

Me: “Yes, Father, I know, and I can recall all the inspiring stories you used to share. I remember you motivated me to read a wide array of literature and then to extract stories from it. And how can I forget that, on many occasions, I noticed you reading and writing when I got up at night. I know you wanted me to delve deeper into literature while developing a profound love for reading, reflecting and writing”.

Father: You must talk to me often. It will lessen your burdens, psychologically and emotionally, while strengthening you spiritually.

Me: “Abbu Ji, I do not know. I can do it daily, but I will try to talk to myself too. But what should I talk about? What does this talking have to do with my PhD? I feel like I am going on a path with a gloomy destination”.

Father: Beta, recall your aims in life. Also, remember that this life is temporary, and that we shall depart sooner or later. Recall, you aspired to make all of us proud of your achievements. What about your family and your students? Still, this should remain on your mind, but you are upset due to my death. Should it be taken this way or should it be something you need to manage in a much better manner?

Me: “But Abbu Ji, when I sit and try to read and write, especially at night, I recall that we used to sit together and you were always discussing the literature you had recently read, even my PhD thesis, which was halfway complete. Why and for whom should I write and finish the PhD now? I deeply miss the companionship we had”.

Father: Beta, this PhD journey is not just for you, it is more than that, with a value hidden in realization. It is for your mother, to make her proud and for your students, to feel that their teacher is a self-driven and motivated individual. Do one thing: write on areas of interest and email a close friend, telling him/her how important they are to you. Find a person in grief and try to help them recover them from this situation. We get what we give, sometimes”.

Me: “Abbu ji, my mind is so fragmented. I cannot forget the memory of when you were in my lap, breathing for the last time. Whenever I start writing, I can easily recall that moment. I am unable to figure out what I need to write”.

Father: Beta, sit back and relax. Kindly try to recite the Holy Quran, do some charity in my name, help and mentor others and try to control your emotions. Everyone is with you, your

family, students, friends and your colleagues at work. Also, remember that your existence is an existence is for others, my son. You know, I tried to teach you this through my deeds and words. I am confident you have the voice and the words, spread them throughout this world to enlighten others. Write regularly, the more you write, the more energy you will get. If you remember, I used to write letters. Now, you may understand the hidden purpose.

Me: *"I am so disappointed, Abbu Ji. I am mature now; what should I do about this PhD? Life is so uncertain, and I am already late. Someone commented negatively about my research, writing and career"*.

Father: Beta, when and why have the negative comments of others become so important to you? People have their own problems (i.e. psychological, emotional as well as personal). Thus, try to remain more thankful to them, recall the time they supported you and try to forget the negative comments they made. Also, write positive prose about such people, it will help you. I am sure your fingers will dance on the keyboard and while writing positive prose about them, move forward and focus on writing your thesis. When you feel you are in a flow state, swiftly move to writing your dissertation. However, you need to find time, it will not happen when you want, it might happen when Allah is willing, believe in this fact.

Me: *"Abbu Ji, if this world is temporary, then what is the point of having this PhD, and doing it without you?"*

Father: Beta, this life has a cycle. Remember, Allah has sent us into this temporary world with a purpose. And the higher aim is to live a life for others. For that, work hard and try to raise your bar. This way, you can also contribute to the lives of others, including all concerned. Never allow such thoughts to grow your mind that you should not remain motivated".

Me: *"Abbu Ji, I have lost motivation; I know how to write, but when I, sit and lose my sight,"*

Father: "Beta, try writing in the simplest form of language, leaving fashion and glamor aside. You remember, I told you to write diaries? In case you have kept a record of those diaries, do read them from time to time. Moreover, I remember you always spoke about your supervisor – talk to her, seek advice and follow it. Finally, remember, asking the same thing from so many people might cause confusion, so listen to your supervisor carefully and seek her inspiration".

Discussion

Given the increase in the PhD withdrawals (Phan, 2024; Wollast *et al.*, 2023), alarming mental health situations (Noreen *et al.*, 2023; Paucsik *et al.*, 2022), rising uncertainty in personal and social life and the lack of research using personal reflexivity as a method of inquiry (Carson & Niklasson, 2023; Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.), this study has value. There are a number of studies that have reported the use of autoethnographic reflections to understand grief (Blalock & Akehi, 2018; Carpenter, 2022; Ridgway, 2023). However, none of the studies presented voices from the Global South, a culture which is distinct from other cultural contexts. The role of parenting is different in this part of the world, as are parent–child relationships, their nature, intensity, scope in life and the belief system.

The personal reflection highlights the important role of living with the memory of the deceased. However, while there are studies where autoethnography is used as a method of inquiry to record student voices, continuous imagined dialogue should also be reported this way (Carson & Niklasson, 2023; Mulligan, 2023; Mulligan, n.d.; Patton, n.d.; Ridgway, 2023). In a way, it gives strength to live a life that transforms individual thoughts and provides greater strength to individuals because forgetting a beloved is not a natural way of life anywhere in the

world. A continuous dialogue while visiting the grave of the beloved is an important intervention in seeking strength in the face of death.

Another unique intervention is the identification of selflessness. The doctoral journey is perceived and acknowledged as an individual achievement; however, the dialogue suggests it is not merely a personal gain. This way current study contradicts and extends on the existing literature while representing PhD as a collective gain. Previous researchers reported and glorified attaining a PhD as a personal gain. However, it is more like a collective achievement of a shared dream (Carson & Niklasson, 2023; Paucsik *et al.*, 2022). This way it also opens some venues for marketing and management of doctoral degree programs offered by universities. Doctoral studies in collectivist cultures do not hold individual agendas. As stated earlier, a few in the family work while others are dependent. In a way, educated people of a family share the financial and psycho-emotional burdens while considering these as an opportunity to serve the family. Again, this is a unique perspective from the global South.

Interestingly, the dialogue presents the simplest ways to draft and finish the PhD dissertation. In previous research studies, a different (instrumental) approach has been adopted. For instance, the importance of rigor, institutional standards (Phan, 2024) and formal supervision (Le, Pham, Kim, & Bui, 2021; Wollast *et al.*, 2023) has been highlighted, which is true. However, coping with events such as the death of a beloved requires a different capability. It requires more compassion and simplicity. This is yet another point researchers should have addressed while presenting autoethnographic reflections.

Unexpectedly, the current study highlights the power of self-belief. Self-belief is closely tied to one's self-concept. Although there are important interventions in the form of grief studies, an explicit demonstration of how self-belief can be established is presented. For instance, continuous reading, consistent dialogue concerning career and personal life, acknowledgment of the advice of elders and writing to reference group members in a social group are unique contributions of this study. Previous researchers highlighted the role of family members, peers and supervisors in offering emotional support (Le *et al.*, 2021; Bakelants *et al.*, 2023; Macarthur *et al.*, 2023). However, an individual's emotional and spiritual awakening from near failure to complete success is also reflected.

Uniquely, volunteerism and its various forms are presented in this study. Previous researchers highlighted the role of institutions in listening to their students (Skopek *et al.*, 2022; Ta *et al.*, 2024). However, the prospect of offering help to others is an important intervention. In this dialogue, the help is narrated in different forms, i.e. doing charity work, teaching and mentoring students and rendering some help among the family members. Moreover, the perspective is more normative rather than instrumental. Finally, the mental health of a PhD student is highlighted in this dialogue. Previously, a dominant emphasis was placed on improving doctoral students' mental health and emotional well-being, where the role of a supervisor was highlighted (Le *et al.*, 2021). However, this study differentiates itself by presenting a spiritual perspective on a PhD student struggling to find meaning in life.

Implications of the study

Interestingly, this dialogue presents useful advice (i.e. various techniques) that can be used by PhD students, supervisors, doctoral program administrators and higher education policymakers in general.

First, there is a need to listen to PhD students carefully. With an increase in student diversity, universities should understand how people from diverse backgrounds conceptualize and cope with the death of a beloved. In this regard, there is a strong need to spend some time with such students. As highlighted in this personal reflection, the role of a supervisor is to establish strong moral support. A PhD supervisor is an ideal candidate to provide this support, given the relationship between supervisors and their students.

Second, advise and positively motivate PhD students to share their feelings regularly. It can be through writing emails to colleagues/friends, holding a few informal gatherings among the

PhD community within a university (sharing some memories) and asking people to offer consolation. A good gesture can be maintaining consistent contact, not leaving an individual alone to cope with the situation. Regular meetups can be very useful and will bring the community closer to each other. Extending this idea, such closeness can lead to greater volunteerism within the PhD community. Third, offer some courses or seminars on the power of self-belief and persistence. This way it will strengthen self-belief and help PhD students cope with diverse life situations. Finally, artwork and spiritual awakening are valuable during the PhD dissertation. Students can be motivated to spend some time with themselves. This can be an interesting way to strengthen them from the inside. This form of intellectual yoga can build their capacities in life while enabling them to handle trauma.

Limitations and future research directions

First, an autoethnographical approach is used for this study. PhD students, their problems and motivations can be studied via other means of qualitative research. For instance, it would be interesting to employ a grounded theory approach and interview PhD students, asking how they are coping with challenging situations in life. Another limitation is focus on the incident of death, while there are other critical incidents that can hinder the progress of doctoral students. For instance, divorce and even the death of any other family member (i.e. wife, husband or even a close friend) can be investigated. The third limitation is gendered nature of the inquiry. Only father–son relationships are studied. There are incidents where opposite-gender investigations can also be conducted. It would be interesting to see how daughters cope with the death of their father and how a son copes with the death of his mother. Finally, everything is said about a student's experience as a PhD candidate. However, our knowledge of supervisors also needs to be more robust. Similar events can occur during the span of PhD supervision. Thus, it would be fascinating to understand how PhD supervisors, while supervising PhD candidates, recover from the trauma and grief caused by critical incidents in their lives.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

References

- Adams, T. E., Ellis, C., & Jones, S. H. (2017). Autoethnography. In *The International Encyclopedia Of Communication Research Methods* (pp. 1–11).
- Alves, P., Lopes, A., Cruz-Correia, R., & Menezes, I. (2023). The interrupted journey: Factors and processes related to withdrawal, re-enrolment and dropout from doctoral education. *Higher Education*, 88, 1–18. doi: [10.1007/s10734-023-01113-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01113-w).
- Bakelants, H., Van Droogenbroeck, F., Chambaere, K., Vanderstichelen, S., De Donder, L., Deliëns, L., ... Dury, S. (2023). A compassionate university for serious illness, death, and bereavement: Qualitative study of student and staff experiences and support needs. *Death Studies*, 48(5), 1–12. doi: [10.1080/07481187.2023.2233495](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2023.2233495).
- Blalock, A. E., & Akehi, M. (2018). Collaborative autoethnography as a pathway for transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(2), 89–107. doi: [10.1177/1541344617715711](https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344617715711).
- Bochner, A. P. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(4), 418–438. doi: [10.1177/107780049700300404](https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300404).
- Carpenter, R. E. (2022). An autoethnographic reflection of adult learning and paternal grief. *Adult Learning*, 33(2), 71–81. doi: [10.1177/10451595221074731](https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595221074731).
- Carson, J., & Niklasson, M. (2023). The struggle to get A PhD: The collaborative autoethnographic accounts of two 'Journeyman'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 47(5), 1–12. doi: [10.1080/0309877x.2023.2222363](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2023.2222363).

- Chen, S., & Le, T. T. (2021). *The Tesol research Training journey: Voices from International Phd students*. Routledge.
- Cupit, I. N., Wilson-Doenges, G., Barnaby, L., & Kowalski, D. Z. (2022). When college students grieve: New insights into the effects of loss during emerging adulthood. *Death Studies*, 46(9), 2123–2133. doi: [10.1080/07481187.2021.1894510](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2021.1894510).
- De Stefano, R., Muscatello, M. R. A., Bruno, A., Cedro, C., Mento, C., Zoccali, R. A., & Pandolfo, G. (2021). Complicated grief: A systematic review of the last 20 years. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 67(5), 492–499. doi: [10.1177/0020764020960202](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020960202).
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273–290.
- Ge, Y. (2024). Career trajectory and cross-system mobility: Career planning of doctoral students in Macao. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 78(2), 488–504. doi: [10.1111/hequ.12474](https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12474).
- Grant, A. J. (2023). Crafting and recognising good enough autoethnographies: A practical guide and checklist. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 27(3), 196–209. doi: [10.1108/mhsi-01-2023-0009](https://doi.org/10.1108/mhsi-01-2023-0009).
- Hadjar, A., Haas, C., & Gewinner, I. (2023). Refining the spady–tinto approach: The roles of individual characteristics and institutional support in students' higher education dropout intentions in Luxembourg. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(4), 409–428. doi: [10.1080/21568235.2022.2056494](https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2056494).
- Harris, J. (2021). The literature of loss: Elegy writing as A therapeutic strategy for coping with grief. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 49(6), 853–865. doi: [10.1080/03069885.2021.1983771](https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2021.1983771).
- Hidalgo, I., Brooten, D., Youngblut, J. M., Roche, R., Li, J., & Hinds, A. M. (2021). Practices following the death of A loved one reported by adults from 14 countries or cultural/ethnic group. *Nursing Open*, 8(1), 453–462. doi: [10.1002/nop.2.646](https://doi.org/10.1002/nop.2.646).
- Holmgren, H. (2022). Social support in bereavement: The experiences of support following spousal loss in families with dependent children. In *Facing Death: Familial Responses To Illness And Death*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Jaksztat, S., Neugebauer, M., & Brandt, G. (2021). Back out or hang on? An event history analysis of withdrawal from doctoral education in Germany. *Higher Education*, 82(5), 937–958. doi: [10.1007/s10734-021-00683-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00683-x).
- Larcombe, W., Ryan, T., & Baik, C. (2022). What makes Phd researchers think seriously about discontinuing? An exploration of risk factors and risk profiles. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 41(7), 2215–2230. doi: [10.1080/07294360.2021.2013169](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.2013169).
- Le, M., Pham, L., Kim, K., & Bui, N. (2021). The impacts of supervisor–Phd student relationships on Phd students' satisfaction: A case study of Vietnamese universities. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 18(4), 18. doi: [10.5376/1.18.4.18](https://doi.org/10.5376/1.18.4.18).
- Lee, H. (2022). Death, dying, and bereavement around the world: Theories, varied views, and customs. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 65(8), 904–907. doi: [10.1080/01634372.2022.2084195](https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2022.2084195).
- Macarthur, N. D., Kirby, E., & Mowll, J. (2023). Bereavement affinities: A qualitative study of lived experiences of grief and loss. *Death Studies*, 47(7), 836–846. doi: [10.1080/07481187.2022.2135044](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2022.2135044).
- Matheka, H. M., Jansen, E. P., Suhre, C. J., & Hofman, A. W. (2024). The influence of supervisors and peers on Phd students' sense of belonging and their success at Kenyan universities. *Studies In Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*.
- Mathews, G., Yang, Y., & Kwong, M. Y. (2023). *Life after death Today in the United States, Japan, and China*. Routledge.
- Mulligan, D. L. (n.d.). Anthropomorphising self-narrative as A researcher's autoethnographic tool when writing her thesis and conducting grief work.
- Mulligan, D. L. (2023). *Thesis writing as grief work: An autoethnographic journey into identifying and positioning the bereaved self in doctoral scholarship*. University of Southern Queensland.

- Noreen, R., Zafar, A., Waheed, T., Wasim, M., Ahad, A., Coelho, P. J., & Pires, I. M. (2023). Unraveling the inner world of Phd scholars with sentiment analysis for mental health prognosis. *Behaviour and Information Technology*, 44(10), 1–13. doi: [10.1080/0144929x.2023.2289057](https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2023.2289057).
- Nori, H., & Vantaja, M. (2023). Too stupid for Phd? Doctoral Impostor syndrome among Finnish phd students. *Higher Education*, 86(3), 675–691. doi: [10.1007/s10734-022-00921-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00921-w).
- Okumura, K., Feeney, S. L., & Claridge, A. M. (2024). Coping following bereavement: Comparing European American and Japanese emerging adults. *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*. doi: [10.1177/00302228241237557](https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228241237557).
- Patel, S. V. (2023). Balancing growth and grief: Narratives of an immigrant doctoral student navigating academia during the covid-19 pandemic. In *Research And Teaching In A Pandemic World: The Challenges Of Establishing Academic Identities During Times Of Crisis*. Springer.
- Patton, K. (n.d.). No longer will I suffer in silence: The use of autoethnography as qualitative method to study doctoral students and mental health.
- Paucsik, M., Leys, C., Marais, G., Baeyens, C., & Shankland, R. (2022). Self-compassion and savouring buffer the impact of the first year of the covid-19 on Phd students' mental health. *Stress and Health*, 38(5), 891–901. doi: [10.1002/smi.3142](https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.3142).
- Phan, H. P. (2024). Narratives of 'delayed success': A life course perspective on understanding Vietnamese international students' decisions to drop out of Phd programmes. *Higher Education*, 87(1), 51–67. doi: [10.1007/s10734-022-00992-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00992-9).
- Reza, M. M., & Islam, M. R. (2025). Silent struggles for well-being: Unraveling the hidden plight of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 26, 1–14. doi: [10.1108/seamj-09-2024-0068](https://doi.org/10.1108/seamj-09-2024-0068).
- Ridgway, A. (2023). Love, loss and A doctorate: An autoethnography of grieving while writing A Phd. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 42(1), 230–243. doi: [10.1080/07294360.2021.2019202](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.2019202).
- Rubel, M. A. I., Rumi, M. H., & Ripon, M. A. (2024). Empowerment through engagement: Assessing the female university students' involvement in volunteering activities. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 24(1), 69–81. doi: [10.1108/seamj-08-2023-0062](https://doi.org/10.1108/seamj-08-2023-0062).
- Sarkar, S., Gupta, P., Sahu, A., Anwar, N., & Sharan, P. (2023). A qualitative phenomenological exploration of prolonged grief in New Delhi, India. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 60(6), 929–941. doi: [10.1177/13634615231213838](https://doi.org/10.1177/13634615231213838).
- Silverman, G. S., Baroiller, A., & Hemer, S. R. (2021). *Culture and grief: Ethnographic perspectives on Ritual, relationships and remembering*. Taylor & Francis.
- Skopek, J., Triventi, M., & Blossfeld, H. -P. (2022). How do institutional factors shape Phd completion rates? An analysis of long-term changes in A European doctoral program. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(2), 318–337. doi: [10.1080/03075079.2020.1744125](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1744125).
- Stewart, T. J. (2020). Hard grief for hard love: Writing through doctoral studies and the loss of my mother. In *Narratives Of Hope And Grief In Higher Education* (pp. 27–37).
- Ta, B., Hoang, C., Khong, H., & Dang, T. (2024). Australian Phd graduates' agency in navigating their career pathways: Stories from social sciences. *Higher Education*, 88(4), 1–21. doi: [10.1007/s10734-024-01181-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01181-6).
- Vigil Avilés, D. J., Jang, Y., & Urban, M. (2024). 'Take A break, you'll Be able to work more': Convergent mixed methods analysis of Phd students' blog posts. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 47, 1–18. doi: [10.1080/0158037x.2024.2319806](https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037x.2024.2319806).
- Wollast, R., Aelenei, C., Chevalère, J., Van Der Linden, N., Galand, B., Azzi, A., . . . Klein, O. (2023). Facing the dropout crisis among Phd candidates: The role of supervisor support in emotional well-being and intended doctoral persistence among men and women. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(6), 813–828. doi: [10.1080/03075079.2023.2172151](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2172151).
- Woolston, C., & O'meara, S. (2019). Phd students in China report misery and hope. *Nature*, 575, 711–714.

-
- Zheng, G., & Cai, Y. (2024). Collaboration between Europe and China in doctoral education: Historical development and future challenges. In *International Status Anxiety And Higher Education: The Soviet Legacy In China And Russia*. Springer.
- Zhuang, T., Liu, B., & Ding, R. (2022). University insiders' perceptions of doctoral education development in five East and southeast Asian countries: An institutional logics perspective. *European Journal of Education*, 57(3), 469–483. doi: [10.1111/ejed.12516](https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12516).
- Southeast Asia: A
Multidisciplinary
Journal

Corresponding author

Muhammad Kashif can be contacted at: kashifsaeedjanjua33@gmail.com