

# A qualitative study to explore the experience of sibling bereavements among Hindus - PhD Research in Progress

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## INTRODUCTION

- **Sibling bereavement** is the deeply emotional and challenging experience of losing a brother or sister (Heiney, 1991).
- **Cultural contexts** highlight that **religious teachings, rituals, social norms, and legal regulations** significantly shape grieving processes (Firth, 1994; Franks & Worth, 2014).
- Hindus cope better with grief when death is perceived with **religious meaning**, depicted through **rituals and teachings**, leading to **resilience and positive coping outcomes** (Firth, 1994; Foxx, 2022).
- Research underscores the importance of cultural customs, but often overlooks Hindu culture. Hindu grieving customs differ between India and Western countries, **influenced by Western society**; practices of Hindus in Britain and other Western countries **lack the same meaning or relevance** as those in India (Laungani, 1996; Elmore, 2014).
- There is a gap in understanding how Hindu religion and culture influences their bereavement experiences, and thus these challenges may arise in counselling and bereavement support of Hindus living outside India.

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

**Aim:** to explore how bereaved Hindus experience the premature loss of a sibling by learning about their retrospective experience at the time of bereavement and the ways in which they cope with their loss.

**Research Question:** What are the experiences of Hindus who lose a sibling prematurely?

- How are relationships mentalized in the experience of sibling-bereaved Hindus?
- How does culture, faith, and community affect the experience of sibling-bereaved Hindus?
- How do these experiences shape individuals' perspectives on life, death, and spirituality?



## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

- 24 participants to be recruited & split into 2 groups:
  - (1) **Residents** (born and living in the UK)
  - (2) **Immigrants/Migrants** (born in India and living in the UK).
- Inclusion Criteria: minimum age of 18 years; identify as Hindu; experienced a premature loss of a sibling (deceased's age below 70 years).
- Recruitment via convenience sampling; English & Gujarati posters advertised on social media & open-access Hindu community groups, including 1 closed community group.

### Method

- Qualitative study: semi-structured interviews to gather lived experiences, exploring thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on sibling bereavement.
- Participants will take part in one audio recorded interview via Microsoft Teams.



## EARLY FINDINGS

4 out of 24 interviews have been conducted, transcribed and are in the preliminary stages of analysis. Initial themes identified so far include the following under the meta-theme of **Hindu Teachings as a Tool for Coping**:

### 1. Comfort in the Universality and Inevitability of Death

"it is going to happen.. even us, one day, we are going to die. And we... if we have that clarity in our minds, then a lot of it becomes a bit easy."

"in our Hindu religion, one main book called Shrimad Bhagvad Gita. After reading that, or according to the quotes in there, if I respond, I want to say, death is inevitable, it will definitely happen, nobody can intervene."

### 2. Comfort in Knowing that Death is not the End for Loved Ones:

"Bhagvad Gita... in there, it is said that this body, according to the Hindu religion, what you see physically is not your body, what is inside your body, which we call the atman, we call it soul, that is what you are, you are not physical"

### 3. Learning from Spiritual Masters and Senior Elders:

"started listening to more like sermons ... on the topic by, like masters by people who have attained God and who have a much deeper understanding about death and loss than I do"

"without Hinduism and like practices I've learnt, I don't think I would be able to handle the death of my sibling as as good as I have"

## ANTICIPATED ANALYSIS

- Audio recordings will be transcribed, and Gujarati interviews translated to English.
- **Constructivist Grounded Theory:** Preferred inductive, analytical approach for data collection, analysis, and theory development.

## CONCLUSION

- Preliminary findings indicate that Hinduism serves as a coping tool, with teachings and practices providing bereaved Hindus with knowledge and meaning of death and afterlife, aiding in more effective healing.
- This research can enhance literature and develop tailored Western grief therapy for Hindus, incorporating elements like reading sacred texts such as the Bhagavad Gita.
- While ethical concerns limit this PhD research on Hindus in India, future studies could explore their experiences, offering deeper insights into the role of religion and culture in bereavement.

## RELATED LITERATURE

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