
The Living among the Dead: A Phenomenological Study of Cemetery Workers' Mental Health

Shaftain Naseer¹, Ayesha Majeed², Saadia Zia^{3*}**Abstract**

The study aims to examine the way cemetery workers make sense of their experiences at cemeteries and what strategies they incorporate in dealing with the everyday deaths of people. Semi-structured interviews with three cemetery workers ($N=3$) were conducted to explore and understand these workers' intrapsychic and external experiences. The audio interviews were recorded and transcription was done to provide the verbatim for thick and rich description of the phenomena. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used to analyze the data. The analysis generated themes i.e., workplace problems, fear of death, spirituality, coping with fear, relating with the deceased, and uncanny religious and meaningful experiences. There were some over-arching negative emotional features like depression, anxiety, and fear observed in the participants. However, they seemed to use emotion focused strategies in a direct or indirect way to cope i.e., uncanny experiences that are meaningful, escape, support of colleagues, spirituality, and humor. The study concluded that while the cemetery workers incorporated religious coping to deal with their stressors, they were susceptible to mental health issues as they oscillated between anxious and depressive features, hence, requiring psychological assistance. The study encourages to understand how cemetery workers experience the everyday burying of the dead; whether they are desensitized towards their job, as commonly understood, or it is a continued battle for them, and if so, then attention should be drawn towards their need for psychological interventions.

Keywords: Cemetery Workers, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Fear of Death, Lived Experience, Spirituality

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¹MS Scholar, Clinical Psychology Unit, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor, Clinical Psychology Unit, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.

^{3*}Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan.

***Corresponding Author Email:**

ziasaadia9@gmail.com

Introduction

Law Insider describes the workers of cemetery as the people who dig graves to

bury the deceased and manage the system of cemetery (Maynard et al., 2001). In addition to this, Climb (2022) states that these workers not only deal with pain and trauma of the others but they also run the cemeteries as organizations with systematic ways of dealing with various activities. Hence, it is necessary to study how their overall wellbeing and experiences are affected by their work at cemeteries.

Climb (2022) also states that when we take a closer look at the kind of work these workers do, we can see that there are many skills required to be a successful cemetery worker: attention to the details of large and complex spaces, recording every grave's location and maintaining them, guiding customers, skillful communication with the relatives of the

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deceased and general public, an ability to empathize with the mourners, making the customers feel comfortable when they are suffering, physical strength and speed to work in harsh environment because they have to dig, lift, and move heavy materials, and an ability to solve problems effectively because it is their job to trim the trees and mow various sections. The analysis of these skills makes it more necessary that the experiences of cemetery workers should be taken into account.

In addition to this, the emotional aspect of their experience has been studied by Teen Vogue (2022), who states that different cemetery workers perceive pain differently i.e., some workers consider it a usual job and the others find it difficult or different. It has been observed that those who perceive it different may find themselves trapped there as a repercussion to their transgressions, how they have been doing their duties, or feeling that they are supposed to do this job. However, the job must be done regardless of the psychosocial and spiritual aspects of the worker's experience.

However, stress is a common factor in the work environments that have to deal with the pain and suffering of the others. Pinherio et al. (2012) links how stress and burnout are part of these kind of workplaces where pain and suffering are constantly interacted within the occupational duties. There are various professions that have likewise environments and they utilize various strategies to cope with shocking events i.e., team work, catharsis by sharing with each other the feelings regarding work, etc. We can examine how stressful work environments impact the lives of their workers by overviewing various theories of stress.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Model of Stress

As Dewe et al. (2012) gives an account of different theories pertaining to stress and refer to Holroyd and Lazarus (1982) to

explain when an individual perceives that the environmental demands exceed the limits of resources that he or she has to achieve well-being and hence, the feeling of this threat causes stress to the individual. However, according to the theory, individual tries to cope with this stress through the encounter either realistically or emotionally.

Person-Environment Fit Model of Stress

Lewin (1935) and Murray (1938) explain how the environmental interaction of individuals result into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive reactions. According to Dawis and Lofquist (1984), the importance of this theory is evident in its employee adjustment concept, which is crucial for the workers' contentment. So, there must be an agreement between individual's demands and needs as well as environment. Moreover, workplace demands and individual capabilities should align to achieve better performance at workplace because it results in strain and impairment of individual's well-being.

Background

Cemetery workers can face many psychological difficulties and their experience needs considerable attention. Extensively, Figley (1995) explains that these workers are subject to painful and mourning experiences every day. They work in traumatic environment which can lead to emotional disorders and death anxiety (Beck, 2011; Cieslak et al., 2014; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Palm et al., 2004; Tufail et al., 2023). Therefore, according to Bride et al. (2004), the trauma effect becomes a potential factor for people working in these kinds of environments, hence particularly for workers of cemetery. Likewise, similar workplaces have been studied extensively in the literature i.e., health departments, emergencies, and social sections, but not the cemetery worker population.

In opposition to this, Buda (2019) stated his experience with gravediggers as being emotionless while burying the deceased. He

explained that these workers only cared about the incentives they got after burying in the form of money, tips, food, or animals, etc., and called them indifferent towards the suffering of the mourners. However, those who worked in American cemeteries were found concerned about the pain of those mourning compared to the ones who worked in rural area.

However, health and work of these workers has been studied and various themes were generated i.e., dreams in life, defense mechanism, and frustration (Pinherio et al., 2012). These workers seemed to face many issues like physical and mental problems, being invisible to world, and social devaluation of their work. evidently, they suffered from somatic problems. A lot of shared aspects are there between those who work in stress ridden environments like doctors, psychologists, nurses, firefighters, officers that enforce law, and emergency workers, etc., and cemetery workers that can consequently lead the workers towards stress and discomfort. Experiences like these are usually related to others' suffering and death. Furthermore, there are different rites that these workers have to accommodate while performing the burials while they also show sympathy to the mourners. Hence, physical and psychological discomfort can get prolonged for them as can be seen through various behaviors like addiction, counter-productiveness, limited or no motivation, dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and burnout. Also, their personal lives can get affected with these kinds of emotional experiences at workplace (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Hochschild (1983) states that these workers are continuously expected to be compassionate towards the mourners and show their emotions as part of their job. They do not possess the skills to provide grief therapy to people but they still have to do it in the form of support and all arrangements (Jourdain & Chênevert, 2010). In this way,

Zapf et al. (2001) and Zito et al. (2018) have shown, consequently they become dissonant about what they really feel and what they should express towards their customers, hence, conforming them to organizational demands similar to other stressful occupations (Argentero & Setti, 2008; Maslach & Leiter, 2000). It can develop trauma in these workers as they get involved with critical images/scenes or phenomena. It can make them weary and emotionally fatigued to an extent that others' experiences are felt by them as their own, hence, causing discomfort (Bride et al., 2004; Figley, 2013; Lehto & Stein, 2009). As much as death is part of life, it also becomes fear (Mikulincer et al., 1990). According to Hoelterhoff (2015), the fear and thought of death can become pathological because of negativity and apprehensive behavior, therefore making the life of individual dysfunctional.

Additionally, there have been many studies that focus on what cemetery workers in general experience, but very less studies have shown the individual experiences of the workers. Bailey's (2019), however, observed many themes in these kinds of experiences i.e., work-life stability aspects, enjoyment, communication, strategies to deal with problems, career fulfilment, and occupational stressors.

Literature shows that religion has played an important role in overcoming stress and pain. It has been studied that when God is considered as just and a supportive partner, it becomes easier for the believers to cope with their problems i.e., they grow spiritually and positively come out of depression and anxiety (Pargament et al., 1990). Koenig et al. (1988) analyzed in their study a hundred participants on religious coping and found out that 45% of them incorporated religious coping when they felt stressed. Rababa et al. (2021), state that religion impedes the anxiety regarding death, develops optimism and hope (Ai et al., 2008; Vishkin & Tamir, 2020).

Mortality has always been a part of human existence and there is no protection against it be it personal or indirect. Therefore, if an individual tries to break off from this reality, then it is clinically considered maladaptive and pointless (Craver & Connor-Smith, 2010). People use various strategies i.e., rhetoric and certain rituals at cultural as well as individual level, humor, substance use, spirituality, to deal with the finitude of their existence (McLachlan, 2010; Mzamo, 2005). Davies (1997) shows that people also use gallows humor to deal with the fear of their finitude. A study by Arena (2020) shows that these workers manifested greater autonomic drive, higher level of psychological adaptability, direct way of problem solving, neutrality in comprehension of death, and inquisitiveness. Therefore, they were found to show lower level of conflict avoidance and anxiety.

Aim

It was the aim of this study to explore the lived experiences, including mental health, of the cemetery workers. There is a need to provide an in-depth analysis of their experiences to better understand their state of mind and how they cope with everyday stressor of pain, suffering, and death of people. The current study will be providing a novel standpoint to look into the lives of this population and will open the doors of management and intervention of psychological problems faced by these workers.

Method

Design

Interpretative phenomenological Analysis, a type of qualitative research was used to

explore the lived experiences of those who work at cemeteries and to understand how they make sense of this experience. It is a detailed investigation of a person's lived experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017). It tends to describe each participant's experience as it appears and then tries to find shared ground across the cases. This description of experience stems from participant's narration, storytelling, their perception and inference of their experiences. Since comprehending participants' experiences is bread and butter of this method that is why psychologists need expert insight, which is only given by participants. It does not allow the researcher to form hypotheses as the researchers should not study the phenomena with prior assumption. It is because the phenomenological investigation demands the participants' meaning of their experience. Firstly, the participants try to make sense of their experiences and then the researchers do (Reid et al., 2005).

Participants

A sample of three male workers (17-60 years old) of cemetery was identified by using the method of non-probability, purposive sampling, as the study solely revolved around those who work in the cemeteries. The number of participants is within the traditional range of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Its propagators have clearly stated the range of sample to be selected, which can be between 1 and 25 participants (Alase, 2017; Eatough & Smith, 2017; Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). By cemetery workers it is meant that the sample includes gravediggers.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (N=3)

Participants	Age (years)	Years of Experience	Gender
Participant 1	60	30	Male
Participant 2	36	25	Male
Participant 3	17	4	Male

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview was designed based on previous research about the experiences of the workers who deal with everyday deaths of people. The open-ended questions were designed based on broader to specific approach. These questions were then reviewed by the expert scholars to select the appropriate ones pertaining to the research question. Some of these questions are:

What does it mean for you to be a cemetery worker?

How working in the cemetery has personally and professionally impacted you?

How do you perceive the pain of the mourners that come to your cemetery?

How different rites, gravedigging, and suffering of others has impacted you over the period of time?

Data Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the data. It is necessary to closely read the transcriptions and develop themes to get intimate with the person's experience (Smith et al., 1999). The interviews took the time duration between 20-40 minutes and the open-ended questions were asked from the participants. After this, the data transcription was done and the codes were developed by commenting on the data of interviews. They were then transformed into emergent themes and then these themes were interpreted and compared across cases. The procedure of interpretation had different stages: emergent themes of each case was encapsulated in subordinate themes, which were further taken under the magnet of super-ordinate themes. The themes were compared across cases and were encapsulated into super-ordinate themes. The researcher then tried to make sense of participant's experience as it was lived. The themes that were the end results got reviewed by the supervisor.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were briefed about the study and verbal consent was taken from them for the purpose of audio recording. They were assured that the information will stay confidential and only be used for the purpose of research. The rapport was built with the participants and they were briefed about the nature, purpose, and objectives of the research. Additionally, the criteria of reflexivity and rigor i.e., credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, were followed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants resulted in the generation of subordinate and superordinate themes. Apprehension, fear of death, and depressive features were frequent themes in the experiences of the participants.

"Felt being trapped in grave, as death was near. I feel like my time has come. I lay down in mosque and close my eyes. I think whether my relatives will also come on my grave after I am buried."

(Participant 1)

"Felt strange as if I was going to be buried and dreamt of apprehension. Once I dreamed that I was getting buried so I screamed and woke up. My mother asked what happened and I told her that I thought I was dead."

(Participant 3)

"Every day was complicated to survive; I couldn't eat or sleep. In the start I was shocked enough to not eat anything and every day was a struggle. Sometimes I weep for the deceased and I feel the pain of the relatives of the deceased."

(Participant 2)

This explains how death has become so close to them as life could ever be. They feared to be abandoned by people after their death and coped with this fear by family support, escape, humor, and the support of colleagues.

"I fear everybody will leave me and nobody will take care of my grave or pray for me. There are many graves that are not visited ever and they deteriorate in front of our eyes."

(Participant 1)

"My colleagues here take care of me and it feels good to be at work."

(Participant 2)

"I ran out of the cemetery a lot of bodies arrived at graveyard during COVID-19 pandemic and started using useless humor to cope with the anxiety."

(Participant 1)

They also reported some strange, uncanny, supernatural experiences while at work as they felt close to the deceased they buried. They felt their suffering and respected their graves. The participants reported:

"The deceased come into my dreams often and tell me how they are in afterlife... I have seen many bodies while cleaning the destroyed graves, that they were undecayed even after years... if these pious people were not harmed even after death, then I shall also be fine."

(Participant 1)

"I didn't know the deceased and he came into my dream to tell me that my colleague was not clean and did not take bath before burying

him; I didn't know and we prayed for him next day. He came into my dream again and thanked me for it."

(Participant 2)

"We saw a grave bursting with fire and I was horrified by it... how much this person was corrupt to suffer this in grave."

(Participant 3)

The participants sort of connected with the deceased and felt their pain as well as the pain of the mourners. This connection helped them in cleaning and taking care of the graves. Workplace problems were also reported by the participants i.e., helplessness over unsatisfactory remarks of the customers, scorching heat, harshness of work conditions, and lower salary:

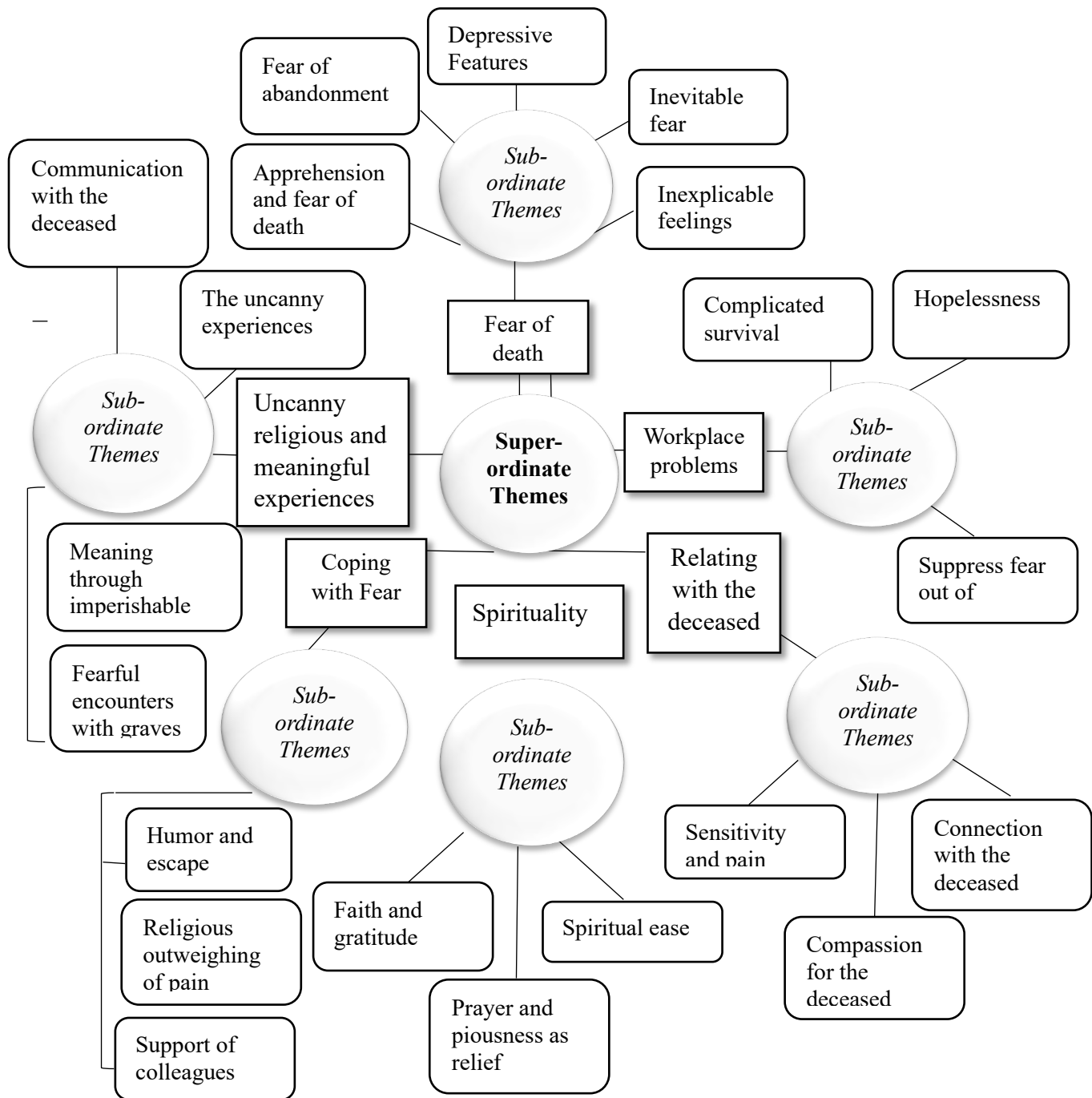
"People come and abuse us when they feel that work is unsatisfactory. It gets harder to work under burning sun and wages are not enough to survive."

(Participant 2)

"We bury our fear in our hearts and keep on working."

(Participant 3)

On the other hand, they accepted death as the utmost reality and a part of life as their faith outweighed the pain. Moreover, spirituality and gratitude gave them ease.

Figure 1*Pictorial Representation of Subordinate and Superordinate Themes*

Note: Heading of Super-ordinate themes is written in bold form and the heading of subordinate themes is written in italics.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore various aspects of the cemetery workers. Experiences and how they managed to cope with their problems considering their workplace environment. Results of this study showed us that these workers have fear of death and are facing various workplace problems that need consideration. However, it is also observed that they manage to survive their problems by adopting psychosocial and spiritual strategies.

Fear of Death

Fear of death, was a common theme found in the workers because of their daily interaction with others' deaths and mourning. One of Pakistani studies explains that amongst traumatic workplace environment workers, cemetery workers were the ones facing much more death anxiety (Tufail et al., 2023). They get apprehensive regarding their own death and their behaviors, feelings, and thoughts were found to be preoccupied by the thoughts of death leading to the feelings of being buried themselves in the graves. This thought process consequently developed anxiety and depression in them. Kahn and Byosiore (1992), Ganster and Schaubroeck (1991), and Bride et al. (2004) have shown that people who experience secondary pain in their environment, they have the risk of developing depression and anxiety. The participants of this study state that one can never overcome the fear of death because it is the reality of our existence. The idea that death is inevitable has always been an enigma for scholars, for instance, Freud (1920) states in his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" that although we continuously act in ways to preserve our lives and push death away, we are never able to forget or disconnect ourselves from the fact that we are all doing it to dodge death or destruction: "aim of all life is death" (p. 70).

However, the fear of death did not vary across the cases. The fear was no different in the

seventeen years old participant than the sixty years old one. There was a feeling of acceptance of death along its fear. On one hand, the fear was out of proportion to dismantle them from normal feelings, but on the other hand their prayers helped them find solace. It is shown in the previous studies that these workers can develop anxiety and depression through the strain of their work. The pain threshold of the participants differed in the perception of pain as one of them manifested depressive features and another one showed anxiety. There are various studies that highlight how appraisal of a person's environment is important in determining their risk for experiencing negative emotions and stress (Lazarus, 2001; Lazarus et al., 2001).

Workplace Problems

The results showed that the workers faced issues in their daily activities in the cemetery like digging, cleaning, and redoing the graves. They gave many reasons especially that the customers were hard to satisfy no matter the effort they put in managing the graves. They explained that they were not paid well for their job and it was difficult for them to survive in such income. Panagiotoglou et al. (2017) states that workers can lead satisfactory lives if their organization support them and promise them an income which provides security. It was hard for them to keep surviving in the scorching heat and less secure environment, yet they made it their duty to take care of the graves and mourners with fear and pain in their hearts. They felt and explained that who else is going to do this job if they did not do it. It shows how they perceive themselves in the eyes of the society that it is only their duty to do this work. It is supported by a study which states that these workers face alienation from the society so they keep each other close and make their environment collaborative so they may not feel alone (Batista & Codo, 2018). They found it

necessary to bury their own fears in order to earn a living out of this work. It is defined as the conflict of role by Kahn et al. (1964) who states that people often feel this conflict when they have to perform a role that goes completely opposite to what they really feel. The cemetery workers seemed to suffer from the similar role conflict as they had to be the empathizer of the mourners as well as live their lives as it was a reality that they had to endure. It was the reason their feelings were not congruent with their psychological health as studies suggest that these workers tend to hide their problems and feelings, and that they do not explain what they actually feel as they give conflicting answers (Campbell, 2022; Petrillo, 1990). Every participant varied on the theme of workplace problems as everyone's stressors are different. One of them often wept for the deaths of people compared to the others. Therefore, Hven et al. (2017) states that people who have lower pain threshold tend to often experience stress or pain.

Uncanny Religious and Meaningful Experiences

This theme revolves around the participants' communication with those they buried, how they found meaning in their experiences with graves that were imperishable, and fearful encounters with graves. These kinds of experiences helped them in self-reflection as well as it instilled fear in them. They believed that people who did not do anything wrong in their lives and were pious, their bodies do not perish.

What was strange for the workers that some of the bodies stayed non-decayed and they were not even embalmed as happens in various cultures. The participants recalled that some of the deceased came into their dreams to let them know regarding their contentment or condition of their graves. It has been seen in the literature that deceased do come into the dreams of those who bury them because they develop certain bond with

them (Gorer, 1965; Kalish & Reynolds, 1976; Marris, 1958). Opposed to this, the participants of this study did not have a closer bond with the deceased and stated that those whom they buried had hardly any connection with them. These experiences built a sense of hope in them and they believed that if the good people are contented in the hereafter, then they would become pious enough to achieve this contentment for their own hereafter. It is part of the religion of these workers to achieve contentment in the hereafter that is why it instils hope in these workers. Religions has always played a role in instilling optimism and hope in its followers (Vishkin & Tamir, 2020). There are other gravediggers in Pakistan that have been interviewed and they were found to experience the similar uncanny phenomena (UrduPoint.com, 2019; 2022). Thus, it also helped them cope with their fear of death. Likewise, Stark (1996) show us that believing in hereafter can lead to the meaningfulness of life.

The participants dealt with their problems in an emotional way as well as directly encountering them, but the research suggests that workers of cemetery tend to be more approach-oriented in their coping. (Arena, 2020).

Coping with Fear

The participants tried to deal with their fear of death regardless of the fact that it was inevitable. One of the participants tried to manage his anxiety through escape and humor when a lot of bodies came into graveyard. He stated that the fear had an impact on his mind so he sometimes had to run away from the graveyard. This happened mostly during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that the pain was unbearable for him during that time. People who work at cemeteries have found to use humor to deal with their pain and fear (McLachlan, 2010). The participants found

comfort in the collaboration with colleagues and support of family from pain and fear.

Moreover, the participants seemed to overcome their pain through various religious beliefs and practices consequently helping them reduce their fear of death. However, participants believed fear of death and pain cannot be avoided but charity and good deeds can extend life. This belief system guided them to overcome the intolerable and constant pain from unremarkable deaths. In their lives act of worshiping always played phenomenal role in managing the suffering, pain and adversity (Pargament et al., 2011). Learning about religion, practicing it and believing it reinforces their belief in God, so they put their trust in ultimate Being in times of difficulty. These practices are considered trustworthy and are being commonly used in Pakistan. (Tufail et al., 2023). Hence, it was observed that, to cope with cemetery work's stressors, these workers often find direct or indirect methods to deal with this fear, by taking these mysterious experiences as having a hidden meaning behind them, in terms of religiosity and emotionality.

Relating with the Deceased

While the participants felt fear regarding the job, they also tried to be good with the deceased and the mourners by connecting with them. Studies have shown that people who work in these kinds of environments do connect with the deceased in various ways i.e., through dreams, or when they visit the cemeteries (Gorer, 1965; Kalish & Reynolds, 1976; Marris, 1958; Parkes, 1970). Grief bonds people, says one of the cemetery workers in a study done by Petrillo (1990) while explaining that pain is something common to people. One of the participants of the in his study explained that it is sometimes hard to bury some people yet they have to do it no matter the feelings. A participant in the current study also stated that the deceased came into his dreams to convey their concerns regarding their graves. He also

stated that there was no previous connection with the deceased and he did not have any idea that his colleague was not clean while burying the deceased, which a deceased mentioned in his dream. The literature, however, does not report on this experience of these workers. Nevertheless, it instilled optimism and contentment in the participants.

Spirituality

Mental exhaustion and physical pain have always been observed to be dealt by spiritual acts, and studies show that it has positive impact on people. When humans form connection with their creator it is observed that they often show a sense of ease and find it beyond their understanding. However, some people of cemeteries using prayer to ease their pain explained that they felt a sense of comfort after act of worshiping. According to the Mzamo (2005), people who were working in cemeteries spiritually tried to ease their minds and always found relief in it. They stated that spirituality guided them to find their ways in times of difficulty. So, in current study, the participants tightly held to the belief that their pain eased when they said prayer and their hardships were only by the will of their creator. This kind of attitude towards pain has been called as positive spiritual management, where individuals accept the will of God and put their trust in Him, rather than having negative attitude towards God's provision. The participants of this study believed that people who are not pious receive a painful death and those who are pious and say prayer may die less painfully. These people seemed to hold themselves together through good acts and faith. The prayer and faith played a role in giving them a purpose of life and helped them adapt to their environment. Likewise, meta-analytical research showed that people who coped religiously tend to overcome their physical problems, depression, and anxiety, and easily adjust themselves in their lives

(Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). The participants hoped that their hereafter may be good, this is why they held gratitude and faith closer to them. One of the participants explained that one must stay faithful and grateful for what one has since death and suffering is from the will of God as much as are food and shelter. Positive religious coping was observed in all participants as they felt supported and loved by God. A study by Rippentrop et al. (2005) shows that people who believe in religious and spiritual practice tend to be affected emotionally, biologically, and cognitively, and they eventually overcome pain.

Conclusively, it was regardless of the years of experience and age that the participants suffered from emotional problems like depressive features, anxiety, and fear which affected them deeply. Death is something commonly found in the workers of cemetery, which is suggested by the literature. The participants reported that they only survived, not lived, at their jobs, and they had to repress their emotions while maintaining their performances. Nevertheless, these workers used various coping strategies to deal with their problems: directly through escape, support of colleagues, spirituality, humor, or indirectly through meaningful experiences.

Limitations and Suggestions

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) highlight a number of constraints, such as participant availability and scheduling constraints, that may impede research using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. These limitations included the participants' incapacity to comprehend the research debriefing, their fear of media intervention, their sense of the researcher as an outsider, their diligent and hectic schedules that limited the time for interviews, and their incapacity to fully describe their experiences due to their inability to confide in the new experience of participation in the study. Because of this, the sample size and wider age gap of the participants are a limitation

that should be taken into account before replication. It was suggested that more research be done on these workers' experiences in order to identify and address their psychological and financial needs.

Implications

In Pakistan, cemetery workers are the most overlooked and underappreciated group of people. Their employment makes them extremely vulnerable to psychological problems. The study has given future academics a headstart so they can better understand the issues these workers face and a peek into the potential interventions for these problems. Additionally, the study suggests that this population needs to be targeted for therapeutic intervention and psychological support. Even though the workers cope with the pain and stress through personal coping mechanisms, extra solutions are needed to help them deal with their work-related issues. These interventions are necessary because, in addition to dealing with people's deaths on a regular basis, these personnel must put in extra effort during pandemics and other disasters. Their memories are already severely damaged by these events, and they appear to revert to their prior, distressing mental condition when funerals occur frequently. The current study has provided a framework for future research to develop therapies and management resources by closely examining their experiences and how they cope with pain, tension, and terror. As a result, the study has highlighted and made relevant the experience of an unseen member of society.

Conclusion

Cemetery workers have been found to be influenced by the secondary pain of the deceased and mourners, just like other workers who have to deal with deceased people as part of their work. It has been one of Pakistan's most overlooked populations, and no thorough examination of their experiences has been done in earlier works.

As a result, the current study concentrated on cemetery workers' lived experiences and how they interpret their job tenures. The study touched several facets of their lives, both external and psychic. Their exposure to regular fatalities, the suffering of the mourners, and their coping mechanisms were the main themes of the study. The findings showed that, in addition to the inevitable fear of one's own death, there was an increase in sensitivity and pain towards the deceased and the mourners, workplace issues, and ongoing attempts to combat this fear through psychological coping mechanisms, and meaningful spiritual and religious experiences. Therefore, given that cemetery workers in Pakistan are prone to psychological issues, further research on this population is necessary.

Ethics Statement

All the ethical standards of APA were met. Informed consent was taken in written form from all the respondents to participate in this study.

Contribution of Authors

Shaftain Naseer: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Ayesha Majeed: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Saadia Zia: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [S.N.] upon the reasonable request.

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