

From Lost Love to Discovered Knowledge: The Role of Postgraduate Education in Overcoming Heartbreak

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Abstract

Heartbreak is a profound emotional experience that often results in significant psychological impacts. Although numerous studies have examined the emotional aspects of heartbreak, few have investigated how education, particularly at the postgraduate level, contributes to the recovery process. This article aims to describe the relationship between the experience of heartbreak and engagement in postgraduate education, with a focus on how advanced education helps individuals discover new meaning, enhance personal skills, and foster emotional growth. This study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with postgraduate students who had experienced heartbreak before or during their studies. The findings indicate that postgraduate education can serve as a medium for personal transformation, through which individuals utilize the learning process to overcome feelings of emotional loss and rediscover their identity and purpose in life.

Keywords: heartbreak, postgraduate education, emotional recovery, self-transformation, personal growth

1. Introduction

Heartbreak is an emotional condition that arises from the loss or termination of a meaningful relationship, particularly a romantic relationship. This experience is often characterized by profound grief, sadness, disappointment, and even depression (Crowder et al., 2022). From a psychological perspective, heartbreak can lead to significant changes in an individual's emotional and cognitive functioning, such as loss of motivation, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, and a decline in overall mental health (Slotter et al., 2010). Many individuals feel trapped in a cycle of negative emotions, making

it difficult for them to move forward with their lives and plan for the future. The healing process from heartbreak is not easy and often requires time and sustained effort (Fatimah et al., 2023).

Heartbreak involves various dimensions, including psychological, social, and cultural aspects (Malik & Vo, 2024). Psychologically, heartbreak encompasses a range of emotional reactions experienced by individuals. Research indicates that individuals who experience heartbreak often suffer from anxiety, depression, and a loss of interest in daily activities (Slotter et al., 2010). This finding is consistent with attachment theory, which suggests that

individuals who have strong emotional attachments to their partners experience greater impacts when those relationships end (Aritonang, 2023).

Several factors may influence the occurrence of heartbreak. First, emotional factors, such as emotional dependence on a partner, may make individuals more vulnerable to heartbreak when a relationship ends. Second, situational factors, such as sudden separation, infidelity, or the death of a loved one, may also serve as major triggers (Syafitri & Nurfitri, 2024). In addition, developmental factors, such as emotional immaturity during adolescence, may make it more difficult for individuals to cope with separation (Larson & Sbarra, 2015).

The effects of heartbreak vary considerably and can influence individuals both psychologically and physically. Psychologically, individuals experiencing heartbreak may suffer from symptoms of depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Crowder et al., 2022). Research has shown that heartbreak can trigger physiological responses, such as elevated cortisol levels (the stress hormone), which may negatively affect physical health (Dunlop et al., 2021). Furthermore, heartbreak may also affect individuals' social relationships, causing them to withdraw from social interactions and feel isolated from their surrounding environment (Aritonang, 2023).

In coping with this condition, individuals often seek various ways to overcome these feelings and regain stability. One particularly interesting area of investigation is how education, especially postgraduate education, may contribute to the recovery process from heartbreak. Postgraduate education is often regarded as a means of developing professional and intellectual capabilities; however, the emotional dimension of this learning process has received limited attention (Archer, 2021). For those experiencing heartbreak, education can serve as a tool for redirecting attention, discovering new meaning, and even building a stronger identity.

In recent years, the phenomenon of heartbreak has attracted increasing attention within Indonesian society. With the growing complexity of modern life, many individuals who experience failure in romantic relationships face significant emotional challenges. Amid these dynamics, an interesting trend has emerged among those experiencing heartbreak: pursuing postgraduate

education. In Indonesia, an increasing number of individuals who have gone through a breakup or the end of an emotional relationship decide to pursue a master's degree as a means of coping with sadness and finding a new direction in life.

This trend is viewed as a unique form of coping mechanism, in which individuals use education as a means of shifting their focus away from emotional pain while simultaneously building a new foundation for their lives. Postgraduate education offers opportunities for deep self-reflection, through which individuals not only develop academic and professional competencies but also discover new meaning and restore identities that may have been destabilized by heartbreak. By pursuing a master's degree, they not only redirect their attention from painful emotional experiences but also explore new ways to grow intellectually and emotionally. This creates opportunities for more positive personal transformation, whereby the pain they experience is transformed into motivation to achieve greater goals.

Postgraduate education is a stage of higher education undertaken after the completion of undergraduate studies. These programs are designed to provide more advanced knowledge and specialized skills in a particular field while preparing individuals to contribute significantly to professional and academic domains (Widodo, 2022). In an increasingly complex global context, postgraduate education has become increasingly important for the development of high-quality human resources (Hill & Heron-Delaney, 2021).

Intellectual development constitutes a primary focus of postgraduate education. Students are expected to engage in a more critical and analytical learning process, in which they not only study existing theories but are also expected to contribute to the development of new knowledge through research (Muda et al., 2020). Academic independence is a crucial element, as postgraduate students must be capable of selecting research topics, designing studies, and analyzing findings independently. This process fosters the development of resilience as well as the ability to think systematically when addressing complex problems (Park & Kim, 2023).

Postgraduate education also functions as a means of acquiring specialized expertise. Unlike undergraduate education, which tends to be broader and more general, postgraduate studies

allow students to focus on more specific and in-depth fields of study that align with their interests and career needs (Archer, 2021). The expertise acquired through postgraduate studies is expected to enhance individuals' competitiveness in the labor market while enriching scientific understanding within the field (Zhang & Zhu, 2022).

Several factors encourage individuals to pursue postgraduate education. One of these is career development, as many professional positions require master's or doctoral qualifications, particularly in fields such as academia, research, and management (Archer, 2021). By obtaining a higher degree, individuals have greater opportunities for promotion, salary increases, and more significant responsibilities in the workplace (Hill & Heron-Delaney, 2021). In addition to professional considerations, postgraduate education often serves as a means for individuals to pursue self-improvement and rediscover their identity, particularly after experiencing emotionally challenging situations such as heartbreak. Heartbreak, which commonly results from the end of a romantic relationship, often leaves deep emotional wounds. For many individuals, pursuing postgraduate studies becomes a positive form of escape, enabling them to focus on intellectual and professional development while distancing themselves from the emotional pain they have experienced.

The trend of pursuing postgraduate studies after experiencing heartbreak has become increasingly prevalent in Indonesia. Education is perceived as a means of diverting attention from painful emotional experiences while pursuing academic achievements that can provide a sense of pride and personal accomplishment. Postgraduate education also creates opportunities to build new social networks, which can support emotional recovery through encouragement from classmates, lecturers, and other academic communities (Koshova et al., 2021). At the same time, postgraduate education presents considerable challenges. Students are often confronted with high levels of academic pressure, particularly when completing theses or dissertations (Muda et al., 2020). These challenges become even greater when students are simultaneously dealing with emotional difficulties such as heartbreak. Nevertheless, many find that these pressures become a source of motivation for growth, transforming pain into

a new strength for achieving greater accomplishments.

Therefore, postgraduate education is not merely about enhancing knowledge and skills; it also plays a role in emotional recovery and personal development. Such programs can help individuals rediscover meaning and purpose in life after experiencing traumatic events such as heartbreak. Through postgraduate studies, individuals can transform feelings of loss into opportunities for intellectual and emotional growth, making education a bridge toward self-recovery and more positive personal transformation. Based on this background, the present study aims to describe how postgraduate education can assist individuals experiencing heartbreak, with particular emphasis on the positive effects of postgraduate education on self-development, attentional redirection, and emotional recovery.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. Qualitative research aims to describe experiences as they are perceived by individuals. This approach was selected to examine a case from multiple sources of data (Willig, 2013). Bennett and Elman (2006) stated that a case study is a "naturally occurring phenomenon with defined boundaries." Case study research seeks to explore phenomena in a focused, intensive, and in-depth manner. Percy et al. (2015) explained that case study research is a model that emphasizes the detailed development and examination of a bounded system involving one or several cases. Data analysis in this study was conducted through several stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and data verification (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

3. Result

This study aimed to explore the role of postgraduate education in assisting individuals who have experienced heartbreak. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, this research involved three Master's students in Psychology at Universitas Airlangga who had experienced heartbreak and subsequently decided to continue their studies. The findings indicate that postgraduate education functions not only as a means of enhancing academic knowledge but also as a tool for emotional recovery and personal development.

3.1 Participant Profiles

The participants in this study consisted of three female Master's students in Psychology at Universitas Airlangga who decided to pursue postgraduate studies after experiencing heartbreak. The participants were identified by the initials ID, aged 25 years; TNH, aged 23 years; and TA, aged 22 years. ID had been in a relationship for four years before experiencing a breakup, TNH had a longer relationship experience of six years before facing heartbreak, and TA had a shorter relationship experience of two years before experiencing a separation.

3.2 Research Findings

This study identified three major themes: shifting focus through education, increased independence and self-confidence, and self-reflection and personal growth.

Theme 1: Shifting Focus Through Education

All three participants reported that postgraduate education provided them with an opportunity to redirect their attention away from the emotional pain they experienced. The feeling of heartbreak made it seem as though their entire world had suddenly collapsed and fallen apart. As a result, each day felt burdensome, making it difficult to get out of bed, while memories continuously haunted their thoughts, leaving all three participants feeling empty and directionless, as if a part of themselves had been lost forever. Deciding to pursue postgraduate studies enabled the participants to find a way to divert their attention from such intense suffering. As soon as they entered the world of postgraduate education, a new sense of hope began to emerge within them. Moments spent attending classes, engaging in discussions with lecturers, and exchanging ideas with classmates made them feel as though they were rediscovering themselves. Whenever participants focused on coursework or research projects, they were able to momentarily forget the pain they had been experiencing.

By engaging in academic activities that required concentration and dedication, they felt more capable of coping with feelings of grief and sadness. Participation in meaningful activities, such as research and classroom discussions, helped prevent them from becoming trapped in negative thoughts associated with heartbreak. When the three participants enrolled in a particularly challenging course and were assigned to groups to complete a project, they initially felt insecure and fearful but gradually became more involved. As they began working

together, sharing ideas, and overcoming challenges, the participants developed strong bonds with their classmates.

Throughout this process, participants not only learned about the subjects they were studying but also gained an understanding of the power of social support and collaboration. The three participants worked hard, laughed, and shared stories with one another within their respective groups. In those moments, they experienced genuine friendship. They felt reconnected with other people, and this was an immensely valuable feeling. When they eventually presented the results of their hard work, they felt proud not only of the outcomes but also of the process they had undergone together. This experience gave them the strength to realize that, despite having experienced heartbreak, they still possessed the ability to achieve happiness and satisfaction in life.

Through postgraduate education, the three participants became more focused and less preoccupied with the past and with the individuals who had caused their heartbreak. They also discovered that education provided opportunities to explore interests and potentials that had long remained dormant. With each step forward in their studies, they felt increasingly empowered. Participants began to understand that shifting focus through education was not merely about leaving sadness behind but also about discovering new meaning in life. As they devoted time to learning and personal development, they felt as though they were rebuilding their lost identities. Previous research has shown that engagement in meaningful activities can help individuals cope with negative emotions (Malik & Vo, 2024). By focusing on their studies, participants felt that they could rediscover their life goals and redirect their attention away from painful emotional suffering.

Theme 2: Increased Independence and Self-Confidence

Through postgraduate education, participants felt that they were able to develop greater independence and self-confidence. When heartbreak struck, life seemed to come to a halt, with every passing second carrying a heavy burden on their hearts. The beautiful moments they had once shared with their partners now left only deep pain. Participants felt like strangers within their own lives, trapped in memories that continuously disturbed their thoughts. During those times, they lost not only love but also their

self-confidence and sense of purpose. Amid this darkness, participants knew they had to rise again. Pursuing postgraduate studies appeared to be a highly challenging step, yet it also felt like a calling to rediscover themselves.

Participants learned how to design research, analyze data, and contribute to academic discussions. As they became involved in the learning process, something remarkable occurred. Although they initially felt like a burden to themselves, they gradually began to experience renewal. In every meeting and every discussion, participants developed a new passion for learning. Tasks that had initially seemed intimidating gradually became challenges they approached with enthusiasm. Participants began to realize that education was not merely about obtaining a degree but also about rediscovering hidden potential within themselves. This process not only enhanced their academic abilities but also provided a sense of achievement that was crucial in rebuilding their identities after experiencing heartbreak. Research by Krypel & Henderson-King (2010) emphasizes the importance of self-development in the process of emotional healing.

Participants came to understand that every step taken to learn and share knowledge represented a step toward rebuilding their self-confidence. Every completed assignment, every discussion they participated in, and every idea they shared made them feel stronger and more independent. Consequently, all three participants learned to rely on themselves. Although difficult moments still occurred, they came to understand that uncertainty is a natural part of the growth process. This educational experience not only provided them with knowledge but also taught them the true meaning of independence. The three participants began making decisions for themselves, designing study plans, and committing to the achievement of their goals. Throughout this process, they discovered strengths within themselves that they had never previously recognized. They learned that they were not only capable of overcoming pain and loss but also capable of rebuilding their lives in a better way.

When reflecting on this journey, the three participants expressed profound gratitude. The process was not always easy, but every challenge they encountered provided an opportunity for growth. Participants learned to accept themselves with all their strengths and weaknesses. Their

self-confidence developed alongside the achievements they attained, making them feel like warriors rising from adversity and preparing to face the world with renewed determination. Although painful memories from the past remained, the participants no longer felt defeated by them. Instead, they felt empowered and more confident. Every step they took in the academic world represented a step toward discovering their true selves. Consequently, all three participants became committed to continuing to learn, grow, and discover their inner strength. They believed that the independence and self-confidence they had developed would enable them to achieve their dreams and confront future challenges.

Theme 3: Social Support from the Academic Environment

Participants also reported that the academic environment within the postgraduate program provided much-needed social support. After experiencing devastating heartbreak, participants felt trapped in a lonely and dark world. The pain they experienced was profound, and they often felt isolated from those around them. Memories of their former partners repeatedly occupied their minds, creating a thick barrier between themselves and the outside world. Although participants attempted to appear fine, deep inside they felt overwhelming loneliness. During such times, they knew they needed support, yet they hesitated to open themselves up to others.

Interactions with classmates and lecturers created a safe space in which they could share experiences and receive emotional support. Upon entering the postgraduate program, participants discovered something different. The academic environment was filled with individuals who shared similar enthusiasm and vision. The three participants began interacting with classmates who not only shared common academic interests but also possessed diverse life experiences. On many occasions, they supported one another and shared stories about the difficulties they faced, including heartbreak and failure. Through these exchanges, participants felt connected and no longer alone. There was a profound sense of mutual understanding, as though everyone carried their own stories and burdens. As a result, participants realized that the social support they needed had been present all along, resembling a new family that supported and understood one another.

Support from lecturers was also highly meaningful to the participants. Lecturers not only taught with dedication but also cared about students' personal development by offering wise advice and encouraging them to continue moving forward. This academic environment was more than merely a place to learn; it was a space where participants could find the support they needed. When lecturers encouraged students to think critically and explore new ideas, it fostered enthusiasm and motivation among the participants to become more reflective and critical regarding themselves and their past experiences. The teaching approach of postgraduate lecturers created an atmosphere in which students felt comfortable sharing, asking questions, and even expressing their concerns. Through this process, participants realized that lecturer support was not solely about imparting knowledge but also about creating a safe space where students could grow and learn from one another.

Over time, the three participants realized that social support from the academic environment not only helped them overcome heartbreak but also provided them with the strength to rise again. Looking back on this journey, they felt deeply grateful for all the support they had received from the academic environment. This social support gave them the strength to confront the pain they had experienced and helped them rebuild their identities. Participants learned that opening themselves to others and seeking support was not a sign of weakness but rather a powerful step toward healing.

The three participants no longer felt isolated. They had developed networks of friends who were always ready to support them, helping them not only face academic challenges but also navigate their emotional journeys. Participants realized that they possessed the strength to move forward, and the academic environment had become a place where they could grow and develop. With such support, they felt stronger and more confident. Participants knew that they could overcome whatever obstacles lay ahead because they were not alone. This social support transformed their lives, and they became committed to appreciating and giving back to those who had helped them throughout this journey. This finding is consistent with attachment theory, which suggests that social support can accelerate the healing process from emotional trauma (Crowder et al., 2022).

4. Discussion

Heartbreak is a complex and often painful emotional phenomenon that can profoundly affect individuals (Larson & Sbarra, 2015). In this context, postgraduate education emerges as an effective coping mechanism. This study demonstrates that postgraduate education functions not only as a means of enhancing academic knowledge but also as a tool for emotional recovery and personal development. Through education, individuals who experience heartbreak can rediscover meaning and purpose in life, which in turn helps them recover from emotional distress (Giawa & Telaumbanua, 2023).

One of the major themes identified in this study is the redirection of focus through education. The three participants reported that postgraduate education provided them with an opportunity to divert their attention away from the emotional pain they experienced. When engaged in academic activities requiring concentration and dedication, they felt more capable of coping with feelings of grief and sadness. Previous research has shown that participation in meaningful activities can help individuals overcome negative emotions (Norona et al., 2018). This redirection of focus enabled them to alleviate negative feelings, such as sadness and frustration, and facilitated the process of emotional recovery (Dunlop et al., 2021). This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that engagement in meaningful activities can help individuals cope with emotional trauma (Bravo et al., 2017). Thus, postgraduate education serves not only as a means of learning but also as a space where individuals can rediscover themselves and shift their attention away from painful memories.

Furthermore, postgraduate education also contributes to increased independence and self-confidence (Archer, 2021). As participants became involved in the learning process, they gradually rediscovered personal potential that had long remained dormant. Engagement in demanding academic tasks, such as research and presentations, helped participants rebuild the self-confidence that had been diminished by heartbreak. This process required them to make independent decisions and confidently express their ideas in academic forums, ultimately helping them recognize latent abilities they had not previously acknowledged. Every successfully completed assignment and every discussion in which they participated provided a sense of achievement that was essential in reconstructing

their identities after experiencing heartbreak. The growth of self-confidence throughout their academic journey demonstrates that education is not solely about mastering knowledge but also about character and identity formation (Koshova et al., 2021). The learning process, which involves critical and analytical thinking, provided participants with opportunities to explore their intellectual abilities more deeply, contributing to greater emotional and psychological independence (Hidayati et al., 2020). Research by Aritonang (2023) emphasizes the importance of self-development in the emotional healing process, which is consistent with the experiences of the participants in this study. Therefore, postgraduate education not only imparts knowledge but also teaches the true meaning of independence and self-confidence.

Social support from the academic environment also emerged as an important factor in the recovery process from heartbreak (Field, 2011). Participants reported that interactions with classmates and lecturers created a safe space in which they could share experiences and receive emotional support. An academic environment filled with individuals who shared similar enthusiasm and aspirations fostered a deep sense of mutual understanding (Lapina, 2018). Research indicates that social support can accelerate recovery from emotional trauma (Aritonang, 2023). Consequently, postgraduate education functions not only as a place of learning but also as a community in which individuals can find the support they need to overcome adversity.

In a broader context, postgraduate education also contributes to the development of high-quality human resources (Hill & Heron-Delaney, 2021). In an increasingly complex world, postgraduate education has become more important in preparing individuals to face challenges in professional and academic settings. By obtaining higher academic qualifications, individuals gain greater opportunities for promotion and more substantial responsibilities in the workplace (Sukmawati et al., 2023). Therefore, pursuing postgraduate education after experiencing heartbreak can be viewed as a strategic step not only for emotional recovery but also for enhancing future career prospects.

However, the challenges associated with postgraduate education cannot be overlooked. Students are often confronted with considerable academic pressure, particularly in completing

theses or dissertations (Rioli & Savicki, 2010). These challenges become even more demanding when students are simultaneously coping with emotional difficulties such as heartbreak. Nevertheless, many individuals find that such pressures become a source of motivation for growth, transforming emotional pain into a new strength that drives greater achievement (Malik & Vo, 2024). This finding suggests that postgraduate education can function as a tool for positive personal transformation (Saiti et al., 2017).

Postgraduate education also provides opportunities for deep self-reflection (Shuo et al., 2022). Throughout the learning process, individuals not only develop academic and professional competencies but also discover new meaning and restore identities that may have been destabilized by heartbreak. By pursuing a master's degree, they not only redirect their attention away from painful emotional experiences but also explore new ways of developing intellectually and emotionally. This creates opportunities for more positive personal transformation, in which the pain they experience is transformed into motivation to achieve greater goals (Shuo et al., 2022).

Through postgraduate education, individuals can build new social networks that support the process of emotional recovery. Support from classmates, lecturers, and the broader academic community can provide a sense of connectedness that is especially needed after experiencing heartbreak. Research has demonstrated that social support can accelerate recovery from emotional trauma (Norona et al., 2018). Thus, postgraduate education functions not only as a place of learning but also as a community where individuals can find the support necessary to recover from adversity.

The findings of this study have important implications for the fields of education and psychology, particularly in understanding how education can assist individuals in coping with emotional crises. These findings offer new insights into the role of education as a coping mechanism, whereby academic activities can function as tools for emotional recovery. This study highlights the potential of postgraduate education as an effective means of helping individuals overcome heartbreak and discover new meaning in their lives. Education functions not only as a tool for intellectual development but also as a platform for emotional and personal

growth.

In conclusion, postgraduate education plays a significant role in helping individuals who experience heartbreak. Through the redirection of focus, the enhancement of independence and self-confidence, and the provision of social support from the academic environment, postgraduate education can serve as a powerful tool for emotional recovery and personal development. Therefore, pursuing postgraduate education after experiencing heartbreak can be viewed as a strategic step not only for emotional healing but also for improving future career prospects. This study provides valuable insights into how education can function as a bridge toward self-recovery and positive personal transformation.

5. Conclusion

Postgraduate education plays a significant role in assisting individuals who experience heartbreak, a complex and often painful emotional condition. This study found that education functions not only as a means of enhancing academic knowledge but also as a tool for emotional recovery and personal development. The three major themes identified in this study, namely shifting focus through education, increased independence and self-confidence, and social support from the academic environment, demonstrate how postgraduate education can serve as an effective coping mechanism for individuals facing the distress associated with heartbreak.

First, shifting focus through education enables individuals to redirect their attention away from emotional pain. Engagement in academic activities that require concentration and dedication helps individuals alleviate negative emotions and rediscover meaning in life. Second, postgraduate education contributes to increased independence and self-confidence. Through the demands of the learning process, individuals are able to explore previously untapped potential, thereby rebuilding their identities after experiencing heartbreak. Third, social support from the academic environment provides a much-needed sense of connectedness, creating a safe space for individuals to share experiences and receive emotional support.

Therefore, pursuing postgraduate education after experiencing heartbreak can be viewed as a strategic step not only for emotional recovery but also for enhancing future career prospects. This

study provides valuable insights into how education can function as a bridge toward self-recovery and more positive personal transformation while emphasizing the importance of education as a tool for emotional and personal growth.

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