



Tracing Masters & PhD Suspensions in Education 2016-2022

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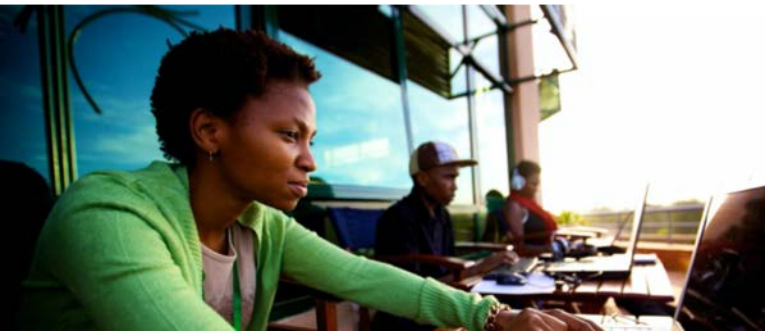
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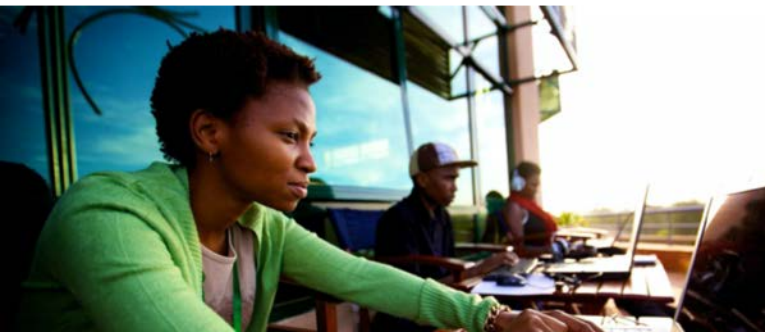
Why this study?

- Larger number of requests to suspend studies around 2020
 - Was this part of a trend? Should we be worried?
 - Especially in light of the IDP and Faculty Strategy to “grow” through our PG programme
 - The need for a vibrant, viable Faculty,
 - Producing much needed relevant, well-informed educational scholarship, and
 - Capacitating stronger educational leadership in South Africa, Namibia & beyond
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- Would growing our PG numbers result in greater number of students failing to complete?
 - What can we do to reduce/prevent wasted hopes, time, efforts, money



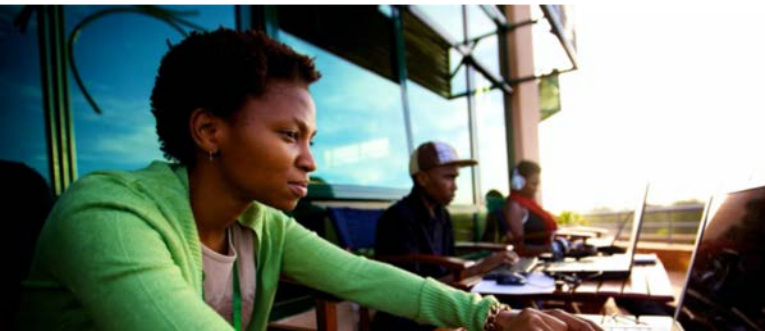
Methodology

1. Identified students who requested to suspended registration for a year (after which they either went on to complete OR failed to return)
2. Sampled from all students registered for M.Ed. or PhD and who suspended during 2016-2022 (N=446) – data from Natalie Ripley
3. Ethics clearance and permission to contact these students
4. Approach: Via e-mail; follow up calls (especially to Namibia)
5. Total 30 respondents: Interviews & Questionnaires
6. Of the 30 17 were M.Ed's and 13 PhDs; 20 women and 10 men
7. Trend analysis – is there currently an increase? Regression analysis

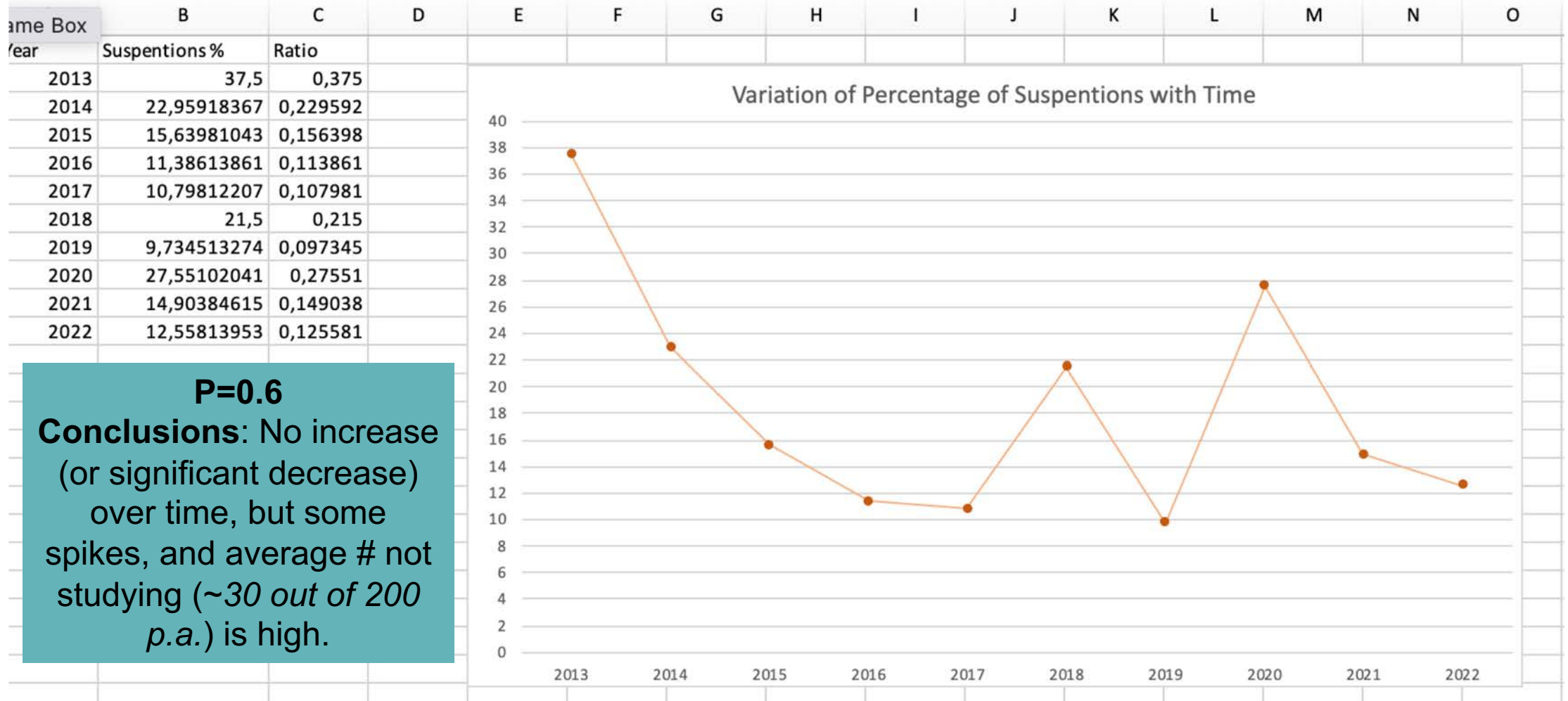


What Motivates them to do an M.Ed. or PhD?

1. Typically our students are early career, mid-career or senior leaders (part-time)
2. Older students often motivated by need for qualification for promotion (esp. Namibia)
3. Many are motivated by desire to contribute to transformation of the field – to answer educational questions
4. Some come from other fields e.g. Science, Technology and may do TD research



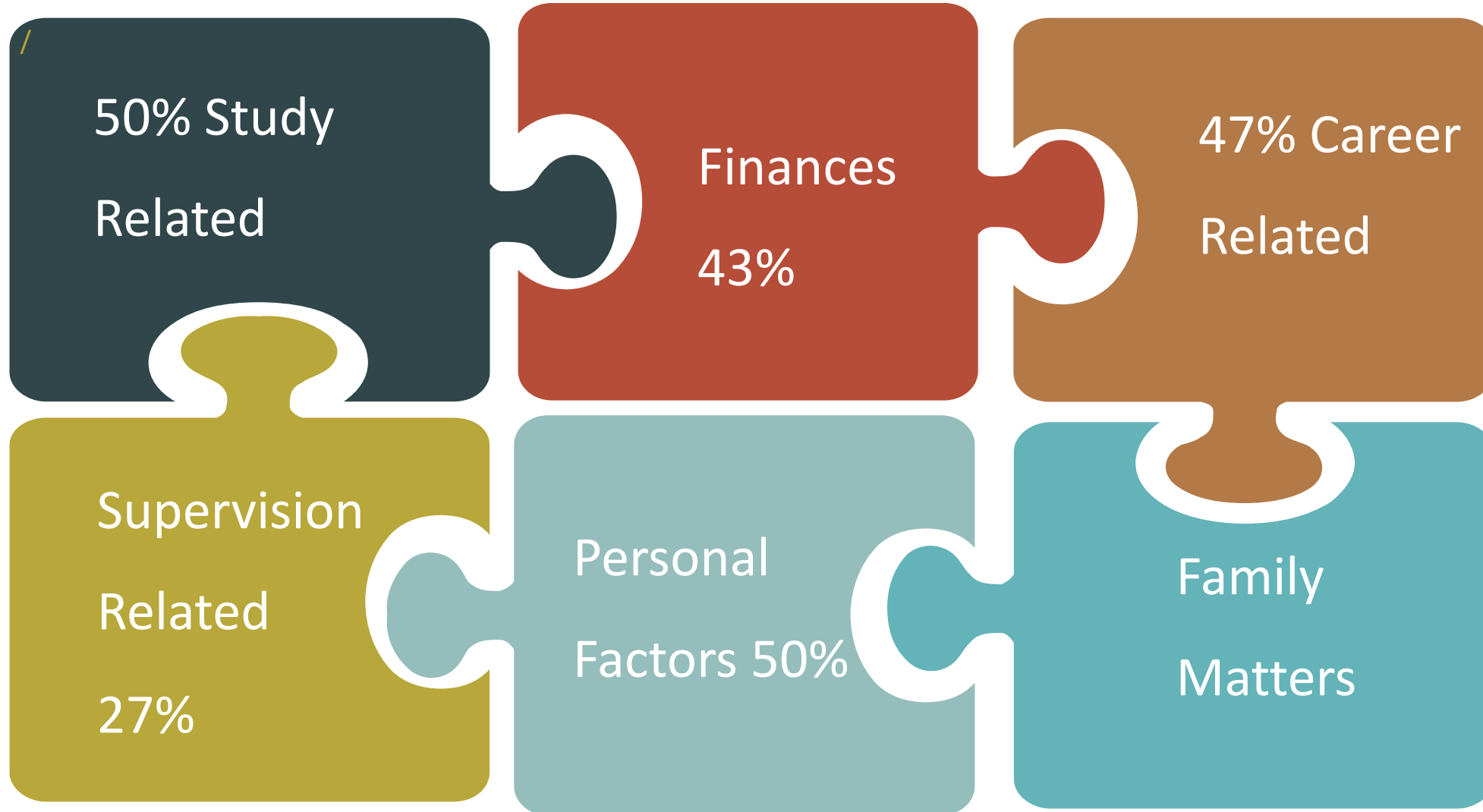
Trend in Number of Suspensions 2013-2022

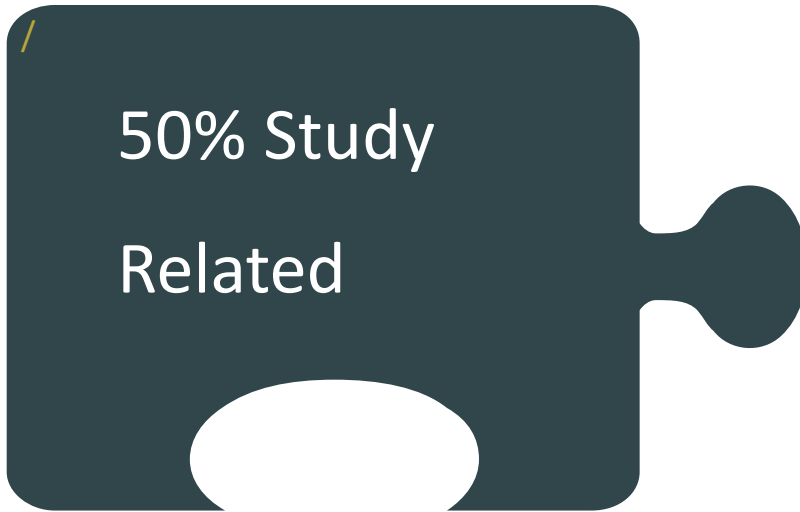


Statistical analysis: The ratio was calculated by dividing the # of students who suspended in a specific year by the # who were registered in that year. A regression line of this ratio against the year for which it was obtained was fitted automatically using a residual least squares algorithm. The fit of this model was analysed automatically in R. The graph is in % Suspensions because it is more readable but the regression results relate to a raw ratio between 0 and 1.

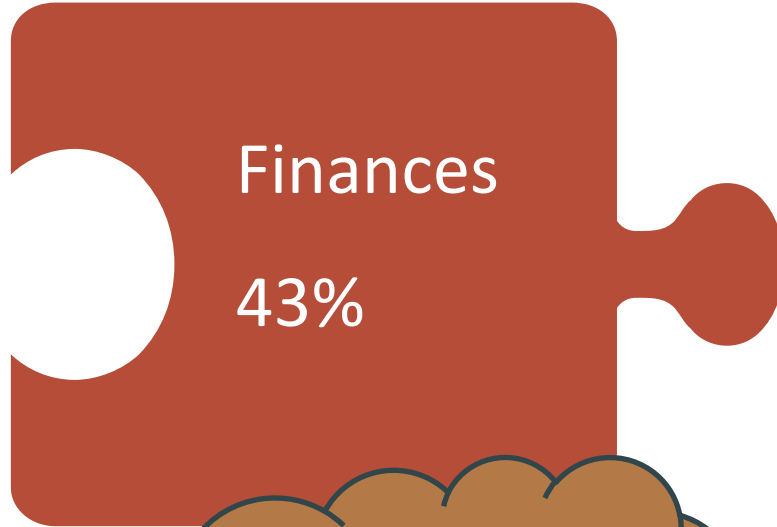
Why do M.Ed. & PhD students withdraw from their studies?

Respondents identify 6 sets of Interconnected Causes:





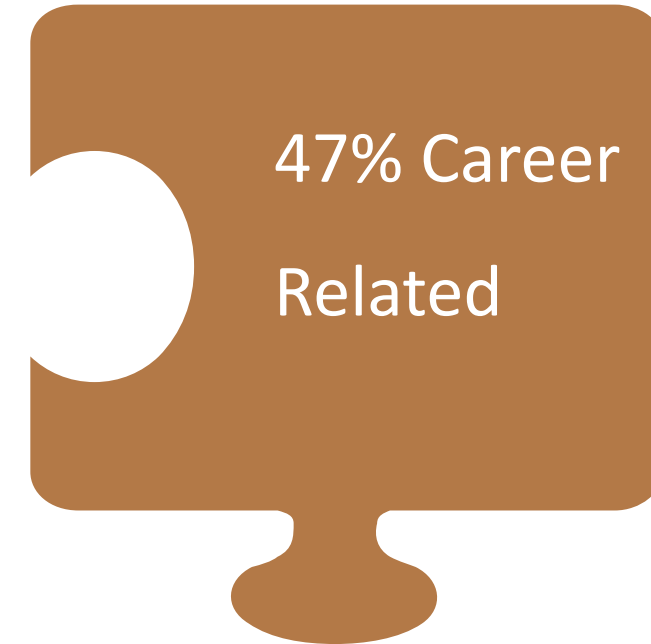
1. Did not realise how much work, reading, application was required
2. Transitioning from science to education was hard; unable to grasp concepts & academic (writing) conventions of social sciences
3. Proposal was repeatedly rejected; lost momentum and interest
4. Could not formulate a research question or focus the study – it kept expanding or changing (sometimes linked to supervision)
5. Unaware of requirements or options (connectivity?) – “isolated”



"I could have pushed had there been financial assistance"

1. Had funds (savings or bursary) that did not last long enough
2. Could not complete the study before the bursary ran out
3. Had funding but it was unexpectedly withdrawn (from work or funder)
4. Part-time work in order to manage the studies meant reduced income which became an issue
5. Being in school for a long time without income – needed to go work
6. Lost a job (e.g. during Covid) and could no longer afford to pay for self

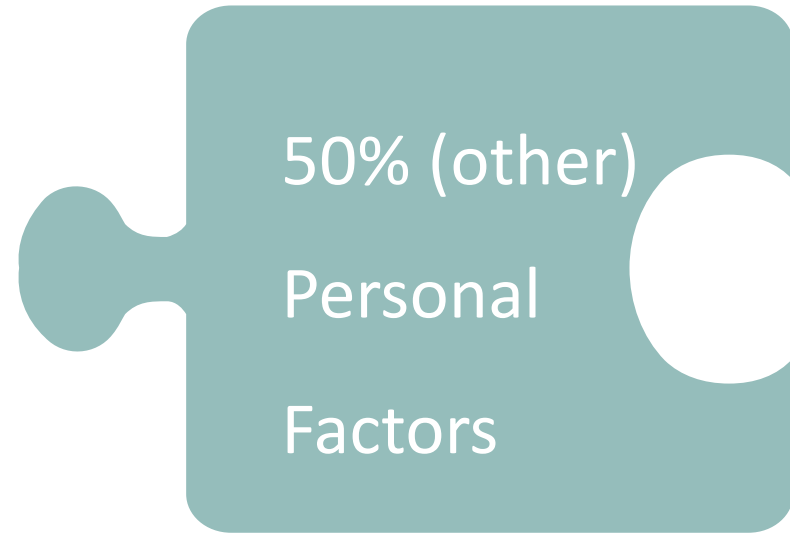
1. High workload – not enough time for (part-time) studies
2. Increased pressure at work during Covid
3. Changed jobs – promoted – needed to prioritize the new job or fail at it
4. People at work actively undermined the student; “toxic work environment”
5. Realised the study would not support their work (close to retirement)
6. Teacher took time off from teaching to collect data –nearly lost the job – withdrew

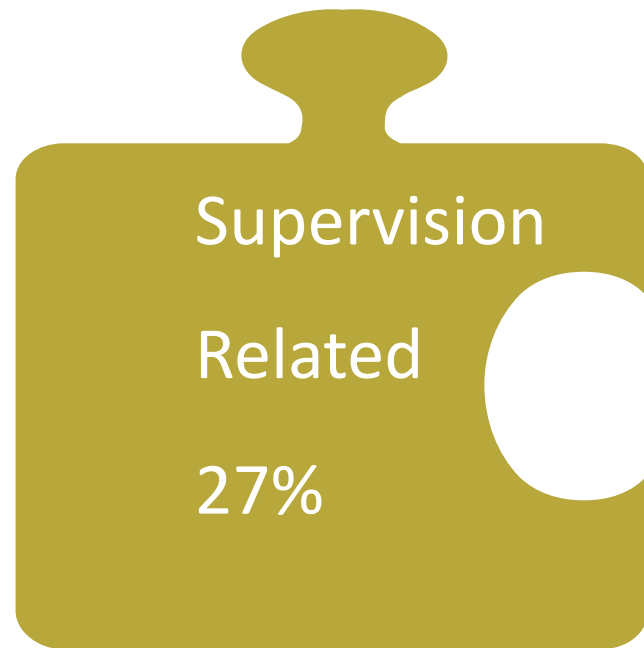


1. Childcare and other responsibilities at home
2. Family health challenges required a lot of attention; e.g. deaths and illness during Covid
3. Relationship challenges



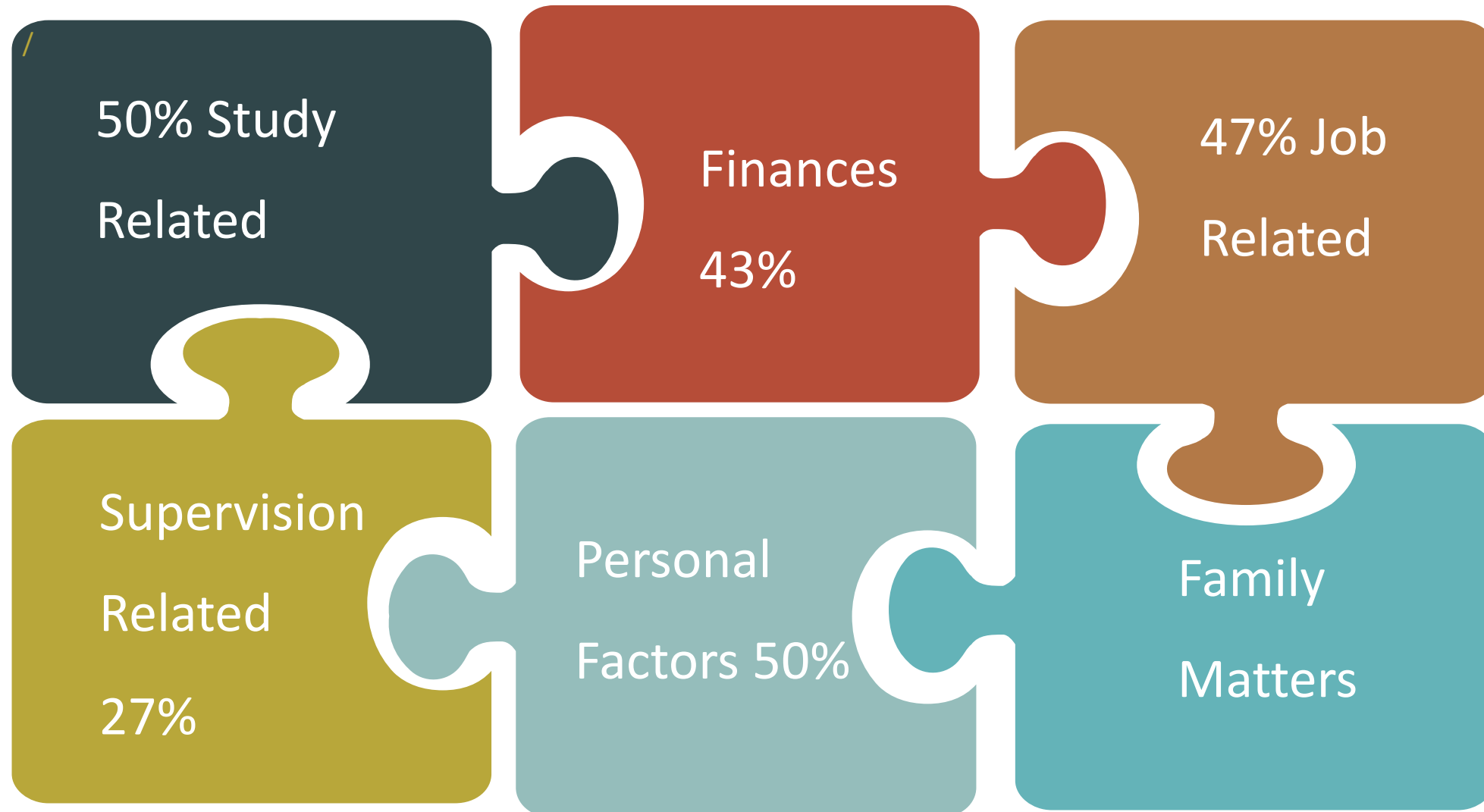
1. Personal health and mental health challenges
2. Despondent after several rejections of proposal
3. Supervisor not aware of or sympathetic to personal circumstances – “frustrated” with deadlines being missed
4. Difficulty to renew study permits





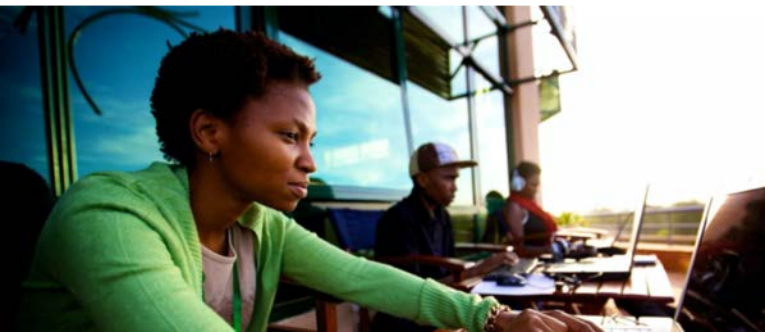
1. Supervisor left Rhodes and no alternative was provided
2. Limited supervision support; supervisor not forthcoming; delays in feedback; overloaded
3. Did not have an effective working relationship with supervisor, e.g. felt used; “kept changing the topic”
4. Supervisor did not have a good grasp of the method or theory to be used
5. Did not make the requirements clear
6. “told me to withdraw because I was not making the deadlines”
7. Was reluctant or lacked opportunity to communicate challenges to supervisor

How to respond to these (interacting) causal factors?



Former Students' Tips for Faculty & RU

1. *"Make sure that the students have the capability"*
2. Make students aware of the regulations and options
3. Maintain ongoing, good contact with students
4. "[The study] should have clear time frames and once a student goes beyond a year without progress on the proposal the university should intervene, remind the student and supervisor of their obligations; work with the departments on tracking students' progress"
5. Create spaces where students can network; encourage students to talk about their challenges and to not be left on their own in isolation
6. Assign two supervisors - to see things differently; if one is oversubscribed and becomes overwhelmed then there is always support; they can share responsibilities; have a back-up if one leaves
7. Assist with funding; connect students with funders; have a practical payment plan
8. Create opportunities for part-time students to write and complete their studies
9. Have the right people in offices, who understand and support the academic project
10. *"The university is doing a good job overall"*



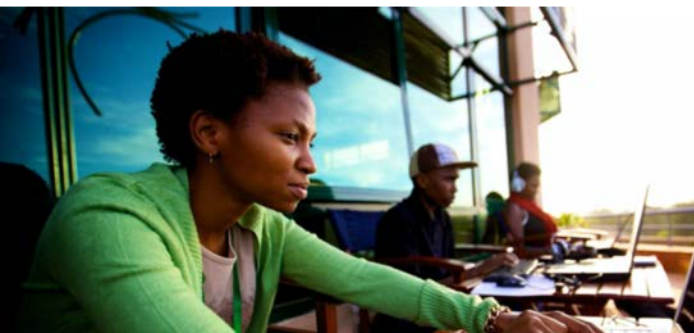
Recommendations to Supervisors:

1. Offer “assertive” directions, deadlines, explain the consequences, send reminders [but reminders make some students sick – CB]
2. *Also* offer support; help the student make the connections you require them to make, and to navigate academia
3. Be sympathetic to students’ circumstances, diverse backgrounds, language challenges
4. Pay attention to the quiet students and find ways to help
5. Supervisors need to be emotionally (& culturally) capable
6. Supervisor should not be the sole source of direction and support; student support group, PG Friends, writing groups
7. Assist with funding; connect students with funders

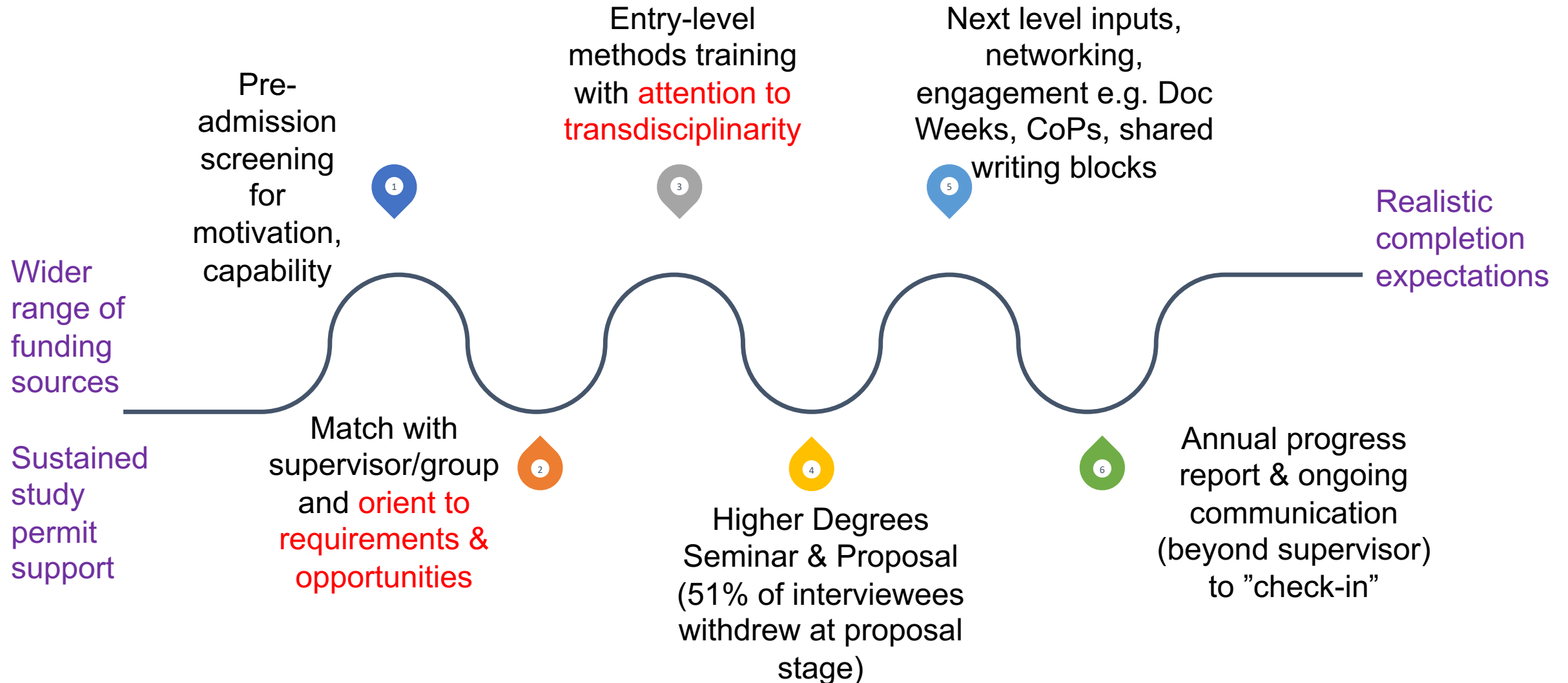


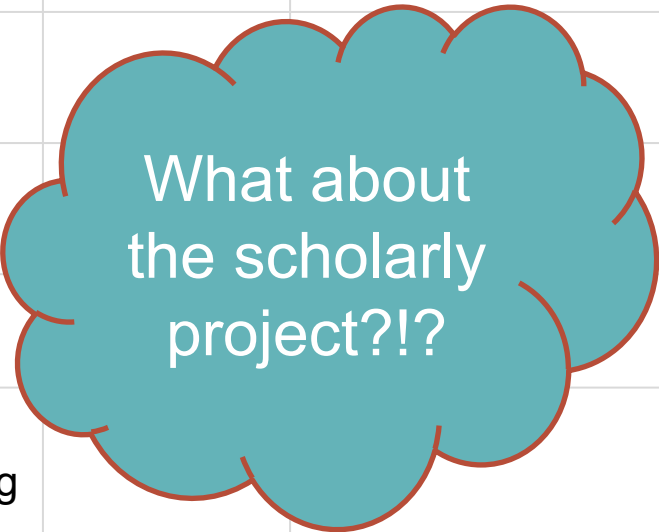
Former Students' Tips to Prospective Candidates:

1. PG require a mind shift; you must be self-motivated and push yourself; be clear why you want this and you are ready - it can be overwhelming
2. Do your homework before you enrol; be ready in terms of resources- finances and time;
3. Find a knowledgeable supervisor (two is better) & understand what is expected in the supervision relationship
4. Do not rely solely on the supervisor for direction and support; form or join support groups of peers, PG Friends; find someone to walk with
5. Acknowledge your shortfalls and seek help; “do not hide”; “speak up early enough to get help”
6. Do not be intimidated; you should be able to voice your opinions. Be careful of connections who try to quieten you. Do not agree to terms and conditions that retard your growth
7. Do it because you want to; “don’t make decisions that are influenced by lack”



Towards Conclusions: How to better support the research journey



Practical Actions:	Dean's Suggestion	IDP Link?	Your Suggestion?
Wider range of funding sources	Work with DVC and Student Funding on more funding sources, beyond NRF & RSA	Yes	
Pre-admission screening for motivation, capability	'Stream 4' application process – requires good website content; clarify role of coordinators		
Sustained study permit support	Work with Global Engagement	Yes	
Match with supervisor and orient to requirements & opportunities	Use Mailchimp and Research Methods courses to disseminate		
Entry-level methods training with attention to transdisciplinarity	Publish a scholarly text to orient the Research Design courses		
Higher Degrees Seminar & Proposal	Working well due to sterling Faculty efforts		
Next level inputs & engagements	Create, fund, advertise networking forums, engagement e.g. Doc Weeks, CoPs, writing blocks		
Annual progress report & PG Students Database for Mailchimp type communication	Complement with regular 'check-in' and information sharing communications (beyond supervisor) – need		
Realistic completion expectations?	Revise Higher Degrees Guide & Calendar		