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A Study on Relationship between Forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being among Adolescents

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Abstract:

Adolescents is a stage of transition and psychological human development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. Forgiveness and gratitude are positive psychological variables that are connected to well-being. Forgiveness can be classified as a human beings strength and virtue (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While forgiveness can be defined as a genuine compassion for those who have wronged us, gratitude can be explained as a person's grateful emotion expressed towards people, situations or circumstances. Experiencing gratitude and forgiveness tend to foster positive feelings, which in turn contribute to one's overall sense of well-being. The central focus of this study is to explore the influence of forgiveness and gratitude among college students in Chennai city. A research was adopted for the study and purposive sampling method was used to draw the sample. Sample in the study comprised of college students (n=112) between the age of 16 to 20 with a combination of adolescent girls (n=71) and boys (n=41). In order to assess forgiveness among the students, The Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, Synder and Hoffman, 2005) was used and gratitude was assessed using, The Gratitude questionnaire- six item form (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2001). The well-being was assessed using the WHO well-being index (5-item). The results of the respondents are discussed.

Keywords: Adolescents, Forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective well-being

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of rapid psychosocial maturation which may be challenging and evoke maladaptive behaviors, but it also presents opportunities for considerable positive growth and developmental achievements (Erickson, 1963). Optimal psychological development during adolescence is important as it contributes to an adaptive transition into adulthood (Bono & Froh, 2009). Adolescence is associated with a unique combination of psychosocial developmental tasks, the outcome of which may have a decisive influence on the individual's functioning in adulthood. Although adolescence has been described as a difficult and stressful period, it also presents opportunities for growth (Erikson, 1963). This study, informed by the paradigm of positive psychology, is concerned with optimal development during adolescence, specifically as it relates to the experience of gratitude and subjective well-being (SWB).

Psychology has traditionally focused on understanding and alleviating mental illness. However, researchers from the recently developed field of positive psychology have argued that enhancing adaptive aspects of functioning is an important part of mental health (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005). One area within the field of positive psychology that has increasingly been the focus of empirical investigation is the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being (SWB). Recent research has found support for a relationship between gratitude and SWB among adolescents (Froh, Sefick & Emmons, 2008; Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009). Furthermore, interventions aimed at fostering gratitude among youths seem to be effective in increasing Subjective Well Being (Froh et al., 2008).

Briefly stated, gratitude may be defined as feelings of appreciation that are evoked through the recognition of positive influences in the environment (Emmons, 2009). Frequent feelings of gratitude have been associated with numerous aspects of adaptive functioning during adolescence, such as establishing satisfying social relationships (Froh, Yurkewicz, et al., 2009), the pursuit of intrinsically rewarding goals as opposed to materialistic attainments (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono & Wilson, 2011), and increased frequency of positive affective experiences (Froh, Yurkewicz, et al., 2009) which, in turn, may be a catalyst for the development

of personal resources (Fredrickson,1998, 2001). Therefore, gratitude appears to be valuable in facilitating positive developmental outcomes in adolescents.

Over the years, growing attentions on possible psychology which shifts the attentions away from the pathology, provides an opportunity for mental health researchers and practioners to explore the role of forgiveness ,gratitude and resilience in predicting one's psychological health. This encourages researchers to identify the resources available on human conjunction with the process involved that are crucial, to nurture human strengths rather than early attending to deficiencies. This strength perspective allows mental health practioners to obtain a more positive approach in order to enhance human's general quality of life in the aspects such as happiness, life satisfaction and well –being, as such the present study examines the relationship of one such aspects that is well-being.

Forgiveness has been previously viewed as a construct related to spirituality or religiosity however research studies had begun to demonstrate that forgiveness offers more than just a spiritual or religious benefit, researchers have found the possibility that forgiveness has implications for emotional and mental well –being (Enright ,2001;luskin,2003).

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) have shown strong evidence for the emotional health benefit of using a road map to learn to forgive someone whose deeply unfair to the participant. Other researchers are also shown positive correlations between forgiveness and well-being (Orcutt, 2006).

When negotiating interpersonal relationships people experience many motives and preferences, some in service of immediate self interest and some in service of broader relationship concerned. By forgiving each other it appears people are able to overcome the negative effects conflict can have on their relationships (Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Tsang, 2003). Maintaining supportive relationships with kin and non –kin is important for mental and physical health in present day(Baumeister &Leary,1995;House,Landis& Umberson,1988),and these salutary effects may mirror the crucial role that such relationships played in the human evolution,(Hamilton,1964;Nesse ,2001;Trivers,1971).

Because forgiveness involves reduction of negative motivations and re-establishment of positive motivation towards transgressors, Forgiveness helps the people to regain the perception that their relationship with their offenders are characterized by closeness and commitment (Tsang et al;2006).The author concludes that forgiving a relationship partner /friend causes people to perceive that they have “reconnected” to an important source of social support and can gain the advantage of the material and emotional resources that supportive social ties confer. With this background, present investigation explores the relationship between Forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective well-being among adolescent students.

2. Methodology

2.1. Objectives

This study aims to:

- Explore the relationship between Forgiveness and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- Explore the relationship between Gratitude and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- Explore the gender differences in Forgiveness among adolescents.
- Explore the gender differences in Gratitude among adolescents.
- Explore the gender differences in Subjective Well-being among adolescents.

2.2. Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis-1:** There will be a significant positive relationship between Forgiveness and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-2:** There will be a significant positive relationship between Forgiveness of self and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-3:** There will be a significant positive relationship between Forgiveness of others and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-4:** There will be a significant positive relationship between Forgiveness of situations and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-5:** There will be a significant positive relationship between Gratitude and Subjective well-being among adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-6:** There will be no significant differences in Forgiveness between male and female adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-7:** There will be no significant differences in Gratitude between male and female adolescents.
- **Hypothesis-8:** There will be no significant differences in Subjective well-being between male and female adolescents.

2.3. Sample

The target group for the study was chosen by purposive sampling method. The sample size involved 112 adolescent students. 112 adolescents of age between 16- 21 were selected from a private higher secondary school in Chennai.

2.4. Research Design

The present study adopted an exposed-factor research design to explore the relationship between forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being among adolescents.

2.5. Tools

For the present investigation, three tools were used namely, (a). The Heartland forgiveness scale by Thompson, Synder and Hoffman, 2005 (b). The Gratitude questionnaire by McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2001 and (c). WHO well-being index (1998).

- **Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, 2005)**

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is an 18-item self-report scale which aims to measure people's dispositional forgiveness of self, others and situations. The scale has three dimensions namely, dispositional Forgiveness of Self, Others, and Situations.

Respondents rate their levels of forgiveness on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 reflects almost always false of me and 7 reflects almost always true of me. Higher scores on HFS indicate higher levels of forgiveness. HFS demonstrates desirable psychometric properties with adequate internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, and convergent validity. The test-retest reliability is .82 and the range of alpha coefficient is .84 to .87 for the total HFS scores.

- **The gratitude questionnaire (McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, 2001)**

The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) is a self-report instrument which consists of 6-item, on a 7- point Likert scale range from 1 which reflects strongly disagree to 7 which reflects strongly agree. Higher scores on GQ-6 signify higher levels of grateful disposition. GQ-6 has strong psychometric properties with high internal consistency and a robust one-factor structure. The alpha coefficient of GQ-6 has been found to be ranged from .76 to .84 and the mean score of GQ-6 on a sample of 238 undergraduate students was found to be 5.92 (SD = .88).

- **WHO well-being index (1998)**

A self-administered five-item scale; each item assesses the degree of positive well-being during the past 2 weeks on a six-point Likert scale graded from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all of the time); the raw score ranges from 0 to 25 of well-being. However, in order to obtain a score on a scale from 0 (worst thinkable well-being) to 100 (best thinkable well-being) these raw scores have been multiplied by 4.

2.6. Procedure

The data collection process took about a week. Permission was obtained from school authorities. The samples of the study were made to sit comfortably before administering the test. The test was administered abiding to all the psychological norms for testing. The test was conducted procedurally as per the manual. The samples were given The Heartland Forgiveness Scale, followed by the gratitude questionnaire and WHO well-being index.

2.7. Statistical Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software package (windows version 16.0) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the baseline data and Pearson product moment correlation and Independent sample t-test was done to determine any significant gender differences.

3. Results and Discussion

Sample Character	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	18.1	1.1

Table 1: Shows the mean age of the sample

From the above table it is inferred that the mean age of the sample is found to be 18.1 with a standard deviation of 1.1. Thus the majority of the Sample is in the age of 18years.

Sample Characteristics	Gender	
	Male	Female
Frequency	41	71
Percentage	36.6	63.4

Table 2: Shows Sample Character

From the above table, it is inferred that among 112 subjects,41 subjects are male and 71 subjects are female.

Variables	Forgiveness of self	Forgiveness of others	Forgiveness of situations	Total Forgiveness	Gratitude	Subjective well-being
Forgiveness of self	-	0.40**	0.26**	0.64**	0.22*	0.29**
Forgiveness of others	0.40**	-	0.20*	0.70**	0.36**	0.15
Forgiveness of situations	0.26**	0.20*	-	0.66**	0.21*	0.17
Total Forgiveness	0.64**	0.70**	0.66**	-	0.37**	0.24**
Gratitude	0.22*	0.36**	0.212*	0.37**	-	0.31**
Subjective well-being	0.29**	0.15	0.17	0.24**	0.31**	-

Table 3: Shows correlation between Forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective well-being
 ** ($P > .01$ level). * ($P > .05$ level)

The inter-correlation between forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being among adolescents indicate a strong positive correlation between forgiveness and subjective well being (0.24). Further in the three dimensions of forgiveness, there exist a significant positive correlation between forgiveness of self and subjective well-being (0.29). However the other two dimensions namely ,forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations do not have significant positive relationship with subjective well-being. The results also indicate a strong positive correlation between gratitude and subjective well-being (0.31) .Similarly there exist a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and gratitude (0.37). Thus, hypotheses 1,2 and 5 were accepted and the hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected. These findings confirm the research study by Simonton & Baumeister, 2005.

Variable	Group	No	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Difference	t Value	Level of Significance
Total Forgiveness	Female	71	82.8	12.2	2.4	1.3	0.9 NS
	Male	41	79.7	12.3	2.4		
Forgiveness of self	Female	71	27.8	5.5	1.1	1.0	1.0 NS
	Male	41	26.7	5.5	1.1		
Forgiveness of others	Female	71	27.9	6.2	1.3	1.7	0.7 NS
	Male	41	25.8	6.7	1.3		
Forgiveness of situations	Female	71	26.8	6.7	1.3	0.2	0.9 NS
	Male	41	26.5	6.6	1.3		
Gratitude	Female	71	31.9	6.0	1.2	1.0	0.8 NS
	Male	41	30.8	5.9	1.2		
Subjective Well-being	Female	71	16.1	5.4	1.1	2.1	0.9 NS
	Male	41	18.3	5.3	1.0		

Table 4: shows gender differences in forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective well-being (NS-Non Significant)

From the above table it is inferred that there is no significant difference in forgiveness ($t=1.3$), three dimensions of forgiveness, namely forgiveness of self ($t=1.0$), forgiveness of others ($t=1.7$), forgiveness of situations ($t=0.24$), gratitude ($t=1.0$) and subjective well-being ($t=2.1$) between male and female adolescents. Thus these results indicate that there were no gender differences in forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being between male and female adolescents. Hence the hypotheses 6, 7 and 8 were accepted.

Results of this research show that gender is not important for adolescents' Forgiveness, Gratitude and Subjective well being. These findings need to be investigated in terms of possible cultural influences. Maybe in Indian culture the children are trained, right from the beginning of their socialization process, to forgive and to express gratitude towards others and both male and female adolescents receive similar training. In addition to this, forgiveness and gratitude have significant positive relationship with subjective well being among adolescent

4. Conclusion

From the above results it can be concluded that there exist a positive relationship between forgiveness and subjective well-being. It is also concluded that there exist a positive relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being.

It is also found that there is no significant difference in forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being between male and female adolescents.

5. Implication of the Study

Studies on adolescents' forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being are scanty. This study will add to the existing knowledge. This study is carried out only in the areas easily accessible to the researchers and needs to be replicated to establish the findings. Since adolescents are similar on forgiveness, gratitude and subjective well-being irrespective of gender, training programs designed to inculcate forgiveness and gratitude may be introduced for the students in adolescence period. Future studies may be directed towards exploring the possible factors responsible for well being. Similar research oriented studies to find out trends in various cultures might be beneficial.

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