Study of Forgiveness in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT
This research was conducted on a sample of 63 college going students from Jaipur, India, 30 of which were males and 33 were females. The aim of the study was to assess the levels of forgiveness and its nature in young adults. The study used the Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS) developed by Reginald U. Amanze and Jerome Carson in 2019 which assess levels of forgiveness in individuals on three subscales, namely, BFS-ctlg i.e.coming to terms and letting go subscale, BFS-dpf i.e. developing positive feeling subscale, and BFS-gbd i.e. giving benefit of doubt subscale. Statistical measures like t test and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to assess the data. The results obtained were observed for any gender differences and were also compared with previous findings on this topic. The key findings of this research show high levels of overall forgiveness in both males (mean = 60.40) and females (mean = 62.45). The gender differences found in individual subscales were statistically non-significant at .05 significance level.
Keywords: subscales, letting go, positive feeling, benefit of doubt

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Forgiveness refers to the act of decreasing negative feelings toward someone who has hurt or offended the self. Sometimes forgiveness entails replacing negative feelings with positive feelings. However, many researchers believe that the reduction of negative emotions is sufficient.

Scholarly definitions of forgiveness often do not align with definitions held by the lay public, and these different definitions have created confusion. Thus, many researchers who study forgiveness start their writings by describing what forgiveness is not. To forgive someone does not mean forgetting or downplaying an offense. It does not mean behaving in a weak or timid manner, failing to hold offenders accountable or pretending that no offense occurred. People can forgive without trusting their offenders or choosing to have close relationships with them. Forgiveness is best understood as an internal process: a change in emotions, motivations, and attitudes that often leads to behavioural changes.

Angry feelings are a natural response to injustice. When people treat one another unfairly, they create what scholars call an injustice gap, a gap between the way that things are and the way that things would be if everything were fair. If people believe that they have been treated unfairly, they often ruminate about the offense, replaying it in their minds and becoming angrier. However, if the injustice gap can be closed in some way, anger tends to dissipate. Offenders can close the injustice gap themselves by apologizing or making restitution. Victims may also take matters into their own hands by seeking revenge, pursuing legal action, or confronting offenders with wrongdoing. Regardless of whether people take steps to restore justice, they may eventually decide to forgive the offense.

There are several types of forgiveness. Divine forgiveness is forgiveness by God or a Higher Power. Forgiveness of others is about having been offended or wronged. Self-forgiveness is more about the experience of self-condemnation and being able to relieve it. Intergroup forgiveness is about giving up resentment toward an offending outgroup situated in a specific socio-political or cultural context. It happens on a social, not individual scale, and is largely facilitated by admission of guilt from and developing trust in an offending group. Conversely, negative emotions toward the offending group and strong ingroup identity of the victim group inhibit intergroup forgiveness (Van Tongeren et al., 2014).

Prior to the mid-1990s, psychologists devoted almost no attention to the topic of forgiveness. Forgiveness was seen as intimately tied with religion and spirituality, and many scientists considered these topics to be off limits for empirical research. However, with the recent advent of the positive psychology movement, the study of forgiveness and other virtues has become a

rapidly growing area within social psychology. Within the past decade, research on forgiveness has increased dramatically. Social psychologists have studied forgiveness using the perspectives of social exchange theory, self-regulation, and close relationship research, to name just a few.

For the purpose of our research, we are using the Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS) developed by Reginald U. Amanze and Jerome Carson in 2019. It is a 15-item scale that requires response on a scale from 1 to 6. The scale is further divided into 3 subscales: BFS-ctlg i.e. coming to terms and letting go subscale, BFS-dpf i.e. developing positive feeling subscale and BFS-gbd i.e. giving benefit of doubt subscale.

METHODS
Participants

An online survey questionnaire was circulated amongst undergraduate and postgraduate college students. 63 responses were received consisting of 30 males and 33 females who filled out the questionnaires willingly. Using this as a sample group various statistical measures were performed on the participants' responses.

Measures

This research uses the Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS) developed by Reginald U. Amanze and Jerome Carsonin 2019. It is a 15-item scale that requires responses on a scale from 1 to 6. The scale is further divided into 3 subscales: Coming to terms and letting go subscale, developing positive feeling subscale and giving benefit of doubt subscale.

Scoring

Bolton Forgiveness Scale has four scores to be calculated:

1. BFS-Coming to terms and letting go subscale BFS-ctlg = add up items 1,3,6,9,11,13 & 15 = 42 (highest score). 28-35 are high scores, 22-27 are good scores, less than 21 is low and poor.

2. BFS-Developing positive feeling subscale BFS-dpf = add up items 2,4,7,10 &14 = 30 (highest score) 18-23 are high scores, less than 13 are low and poor.

3. BFS-Giving benefit of doubt subscale BFS-gbd = add up items 5,8 & 12= 18 (highest scores) more than 12 is very good, less than 9 is low and poor.

4. Total BFS; add up all the 15 items = 90 (highest score). Score less than 45 is poor, 45-58 is good, 59-70 is very good and 70 and above is excellent (exceptionally forgiving)

(note that high & low scores in each case were worked out using the mean and standard deviation respectively from the original study by Reginald U. Amanze and Jerome Carson)

PROCEDURE

A questionnaire survey method was used in this research to gather data about people's forgiving behaviour using the Bolton Forgiveness Scale. The survey was conducted in an online mode i.e. the participants were sent out questionnaires via email. All those who participated were assured confidentiality and they provided informed consent for the same. Once the data was received necessary statistical measures were calculated and results were analysed.For statistical analysis measures like means, standard deviation scores, t test analysis and Pearson correlation coefficients were carried out on SPSS software.

RESULTS

The participants were rated on 3scales of forgiveness: BFS-ctlg i.e. coming to terms and letting go subscale (mean 31.10), BFS-dpf i.e. developing positive feeling subscale (mean 18.56) andBFS-gbd i.e. giving benefit of doubt subscale (mean 11.83). The total BFS mean score for the sample group was 61.48. Further, gender wise mean scores and standard deviation scores were calculated and a t test analysis was carried out for mean gender differences for each subscale (see Table 1).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and T Test by Gender

Scales	Male		Female				
	M	SD	M	SD	t(61)	p	Cohen's d
Coming to terms and letting go	30.30	7.56	31.82	5.96	.89	.38	0.22
Developing positive feeling	18.63	4.90	18.48	5.06	-.12	.91	0.03
Giving benefit	11.47	3.77	12.15	3.00	.80	.43	0.20

of doubt							
Total BFS	60.40	13.86	62.45	12.58	.62	.54	0.16

The mean scores for each subscale have also been interpreted according to the scoring norms provided by Amanze & Carson (2019) in their studies (see Table 2).

Table 2
Means and Interpretations as per Norms Provided by Amanze & Carson (2019)

Subscales	Gender	Mean scores	Total subscale range	Interpretation & Interpretive range
1.Coming to terms and letting go	Male	30.30	7-42	High (28-35)
	Female	31.82		High (28-35)
2. Developing positive feeling	Male	18.63	5-30	High (18-23)
	Female	18.48		High (18-23)
3. Giving benefit of doubt	Male	11.47	3-18	Good (9-11)
	Female	12.15		Very good (12-18)
4. Total BFS	Male	60.40	15-90	Very good (59-70)
	Female	62.45		Very good (59-70)

Furthermore, the scores on the threesubscales of forgiveness wereinter-correlated using the Pearson correlation coefficient and a significant correlation was found between all three subscales at .01 level of significance (see Table 3).

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for BFS Subscales.

Subscales	M	SD	1.	2.	3.
1. Coming to terms and letting go	31.10	6.76	-		
2. Developing positive feeling	18.56	4.94	.60**	-	
3. Giving benefit of doubt	11.83	3.38	.69**	.58**	-

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to measure the levels of forgiveness in young adults and to explore the nature of their forgiving behaviour using the Bolton Forgiveness Scale (BFS) which is further divided into three subscales. The three subscales of BFS along with their corresponding means are: Coming to terms and letting go (mean 31.10), developing positive feeling (mean 18.56) and giving benefit of doubt (mean 11.83). The total BFS mean score was calculated and it was 60.40 for males and 62.45 for females. Just by comparing the means we can tell that the gender difference is very minute. Even for the subscales the mean scores were more or less the same. On running a t test analysisthe gender differences were found statistically non-significant at .05 level of significance. On comparing the mean scores with the interpretation norms provided by Amanze & Carson (2019) we see that scores in all sub-domains have been interpreted as high scores on forgiveness.

Moreover, the scores on the subscales were inter-correlated using Pearson's r correlation coefficient and significant correlations were found at .01 level of significance. This shows that those participants who scored high in one domain were also quite likely to score high in other domains. However, since correlation doesn't prove causation, any inference must be concluded with caution.

How do these results compare with otherresearch findings? The answer to this question is that largely, the findings of previous studies have been to a great extent ambiguous i.e. showing no clear consistent trends. For instance, Ka et al. (2006) found that women yielded significantly higher scores on the Forgiving Personality Scale. Also, Mullet et al. (1998) found that women, more than men, were prone to forgive rather than to seek

revenge. Toussaint et al. (2008) showed forgiveness of others, feeling forgiven by God and seeking forgiveness to be greater among females than males. In turn, Brown (2003) revealed that women scored lower than men in the tendency to forgive. On the other hand, several studies (Berry et al., 2001; Brose et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2006) found no gender differences in disposition to forgive. Thus, gender differences in forgivingness need to be more directly addressed, the more so that the existing literature provides theoretical and empirical framework for putting forward specific hypotheses. They might be derived from concepts and research on interpersonal orientation and affective traits.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that the participants scored high in all domains of forgiveness and there were no significant gender differences found. Previous studies in this field have not shown much consistency in their findingsi.e. there is ambiguity of results. The implication of this study is that it is a forward approach in the field of positive psychology where studies and experiments are not being conducted as frequently as they should be.

There is certainly room for more research in this area. Future studies could perhaps improve upon some of the limitations of this research by increasing the age range, choosing a bigger and diverse sample group, including more measure variables and produce results that are comparable or contrasting to our findings and we could collectively gain more insight on human forgiving behaviour.

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