



A STUDY ON SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS, OPTIMISM, AND FLOURISHING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

Through our choices, we constantly make our way across the ebbs and flows of life. Positive psychology continues to expand our understanding on how complex human experiences are, what psychological resources we possess, and what makes life worth living. We no more just want to survive through, but are in the search of what really makes us happy. We want to work in a manner that leads us to our highest potential, in other words flourish in our chosen walk of life. The present study aimed to explore the relationship of flourishing with forgiveness and optimism among emerging adults. Optimism refers to an attitude about the future that all outcomes will be favourable. Forgiveness is a psychological process involving a change in negative emotions, as a response to hurt or offence which was undeserved, to a sense of acceptance and empathy. For the study a total sample of 30 young adults aged 18 to 35 years was collected and administered on the standardized Flourishing scale, State Optimism Measure, and Trait Forgiveness scale. Results found a significant positive correlation of flourishing with both, forgiveness and optimism. However, no significant

correlation was found between optimism and forgiveness. To lead a life of high worth, sometimes one need to shift their focus from what all is wrong to what's still good and learn to appreciate it, whether in a situation or a person. Mindful dealing with negative emotions, positive self-talk, working toward self-betterment, and living with a sense of acceptance and gratitude can help.

Keywords: *optimism, forgiveness, flourishing, young adults*

Introduction

For each of us the stage of young adulthood, i.e., the age between 18 to 35 years, is an important phase of life. It marks the beginning of a new journey wherein one is finally ready to step out of their 'learning phase' to create their own place in the world. It is a crucial phase of life where one begins their walk alone in search for their real identity and what purpose they hold in life. Apart from our social connections at school and college, we step into new roles- our personal and professional self which also demand s new responsibilities and come with their own challenges.

Common stressors reported by emerging adults have been found to be high expectations of themselves, issues revolving around social relationships, low sense of self-worth, and family problems (Gupta & Dutt, 2024). Often, these individuals have been found prone to suffer from stress and negative emotions, which might directly impact their decision-making behaviour, mental and physical well-being, cognitive functioning, social relationships, and overall performance (Bakshi & Imran, 2024). Positive Psychology talks about the importance of character strengths and psychological resources as building blocks of a successful life (Peter et al., 2015). During this period, qualities such as faith, courage, forgiveness, compassion, and gratitude are emerging into awareness more than ever, and

potentially giving a positive direction to expand our knowledge about the intricate ‘process of life.’

Flourishing

Flourishing is a focal point in positive psychology. Humans are constantly led by a deep desire to do better and attain a sense of ‘authentic happiness’, where they can finally feel in congruence with their true inner self and the world around. Some are happy living a simple life, whereas some strive to achieve more. Seligman (2011), a pioneer researcher in positive psychology, coined the term ‘flourishing’ defines it as “finding fulfilment in our lives, accomplishing meaningful and worthwhile tasks, and connecting with others at a deeper level - in essence, living the good life.” Huppert and So (2013) simply states flourishing as “a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively.” VanderWeele (2017) adds by explaining it as “a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good. We might also refer to such a state as complete psychological well-being.”

Deb (2017) conducted another study to explore the role of meaningfulness, resilience, and grit in shaping flourishing ability on a sample of 101 post graduate students. Results showed females were higher on meaningfulness, flourishing, and grit, whereas males were higher on resilience. Additionally, meaningfulness, resilience, and grit positively contributed to flourishing among both genders.

Narang (2024) conducted a study on flourishing on a sample of 200 young adults using standardised measures and observed a significant positive correlation of flourishing with thriving, mindfulness, and vitality. A significant negative correlation was found between emotional dysregulation and flourishing. Moreover males and females differed in their ability to flourish. Positive thinking, learning to manage our negative emotions, conscious-living, and sense of life purpose are some initiatives that might foster greater flourishing.

A study by Berend et al. (2020) studied the role of flourishing and positive emotions in resiliency against stress symptoms. A sample of 128 university students were administered on the standardized scales. Results indicated that both higher flourishing and positive affect were linked with lower levels of perceived stress and stress symptoms- issues with concentration, irritability, lack of initiative, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, thus emerging as resilience factors.

Optimism

The term ‘optimism’ has its roots in the philosophical realm, implying that although there is evil and suffering in this world, but the higher forces function to bring about the best possible consequence for every individual, out of all other potential options. Leibniz (1759) first coined the term in literature defining it as “best of all possible worlds.” Seligman (2007, p.52) refined the idea from the perspective of positive psychology by stating that “the basis of optimism does not lie in positive phrases or images of victory, but in the way you think about causes.” Carver et al. (2010, p.879) defined optimism as “an individual difference variable that reflects the extent to which people hold generalized favourable expectancies for their future.”

Mishra (2012) in their study examined the role of optimism in predicting a good life comparing rural and urban groups of residents in Varanasi. A sample of 426 participants aged 15 to 70 years was administered on the WHO Quality of Life-Brief scale, Satisfaction with Life scale, and Life Orientation Test-Revised. Results showed optimism positively correlated to physical health, psychological states, social relationships, and overall quality of life. Additionally, life satisfaction was positively correlated to quality of life. For both groups of people, rural and urban alike, optimism was found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction and quality of life.

Gowri and Nair (2024) studied the relationship between psychological distress, spiritual well-being, and optimism among 30 young adults using the Kessler Psychological Distress scale, Spiritual Well-being Slovak version scale, and State Optimism Measure. The study found a negative correlation between psychological distress and spiritual well-being, and a positive correlation between optimism and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between optimism and psychological distress. Practices contributing to stress management and optimism evidently contribute to greater spiritual well-being.

A study by Yildirim (2020) investigated optimism as a predictor of flourishing over dimensions of personality on a sample of 240 university students, using the 10 item-Big Five Inventory, Flourishing scale, and Life Orientation Test. Results concluded optimism to be significantly correlated to flourishing and the Big Five personality traits. Optimism was found to be predictive of human flourishing despite the effect of individual differences in personality traits.

Forgiveness

Positive psychology talks about the virtue of Forgiveness as an expression of altruism and a way to cope with life's unjustness, but with morality. Thompson et al. (2005) defines forgiveness as "freeing from a negative attachment to the source that has transgressed against a person." McCullough (2000) explored forgiveness and explained it as "a pro-social motivation which is expressed through decreased desire to avoid the transgressing person and to harm or seek revenge, and increased desire to act positively toward the same person." According to Rye et al. (2001) "forgiveness includes two aspects: absence of negative emotion and presence of positive emotion toward the offender."

Raj, Elizabeth and Padmakumari (2016) studied mental health through forgiveness by conducting semi-structured interviews on adults who scored high on Heartland Forgiveness

Scale. The study concluded that forgiving behaviour was associated with enhanced physical and psychological well-being, greater self-acceptance, and higher competence to deal with challenges. Moreover, religiosity, parents, teachers, and mental health professionals played a role in motivating a forgiving attitude.

Lipat et al. (2022) explored forgiveness, hope, and optimism on a sample of 250 college students using the Herth Hope Index, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, and Wagnild & Young's Resilience Scale. Results showed a significant positive relationship between hope and resilience, but forgiveness and hope had no significant correlation, for both genders.

Another study was conducted by Mróz (2022) to assess the mediating role of self-compassion between forgiveness and flourishing on a sample of 300 young adults and adults, using standardised measures. It was found that forgiveness and self-compassion had a significant positive correlation with flourishing. Self-warmth positively favoured the link between forgiveness and flourishing, whereas self-coldness had no contribution towards the same.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between optimism, forgiveness, and flourishing among young adults.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between flourishing and optimism.
2. There will be a significant positive relationship between flourishing and forgiveness.
3. There will be a significant positive relationship between optimism and forgiveness.
- 4.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total sample of 30 young adults in the age range 18-35 was collected from Tricity.

Measures

1. *The Flourishing Scale*

The scale developed by Diener et al. (2009) includes 8 items to measure respondent's self-perceived success in life areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and positive-thinking. Responses are collected on a 7-point Likert scale, scored as: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (slightly disagree), 4 (mixed or neither agree nor disagree), 5 (slightly agree), 6 (agree), and 7 (strongly agree). A high score represents a person with strong psychological resources.

2. *Trait Forgiveness Scale*

The scale by Berry et al. (2005) is designed to assess an individual's self-appraisal in forgiving interpersonal transgressions. It has 10 items, five among which are negatively worded, and uses a 5-point Likert scale, marked as Strongly disagree=1, Mildly disagree=2, Agree and disagree equally=3, Mildly agree=4, and Strongly agree=5. High score indicates a more forgiving attitude.

3. *State Optimism Measure*

The scale developed by Millstein et al. (2019) measures the level of optimism at the current moment, using 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), and Strongly agree (5). Higher the final score, greater is the state optimism.

Procedure

A google form containing the standardized scales was shared with participants and consent was taken. After submission the respondents were thanked for their contribution in the research.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results

Table 1: *Mean, & standard deviation for optimism, forgiveness, & flourishing*

	Optimism	Forgiveness	Flourishing
N	30	30	30
Mean	3.97	31.8	37.8
Standard deviation	0.678	6.47	9.50

Table 2: *Correlation matrix*

	Optimism		Forgiveness		Flourishing
Optimism	—				
Forgiveness	0.234		—		
Flourishing	0.732	***	0.425	*	—
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$					

Discussion of Results

The aim of the current study was to understand the relationship between optimism, forgiveness, and flourishing among young adults. Table 2 shows a significant positive correlation between flourishing and optimism ($r=0.732$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that moving forward with a positive mindset towards future events evidently leads to a better and happier living. These results are shared by Shehata (2024), Sharma and Mohan (2021), Yildirm et al. (2024), and Banares (2022) who studied optimism and flourishing among people of different age groups. We also found flourishing significantly positively correlated to forgiveness

($r=0.425$, $p<0.05$). This means that higher an individual is in the ability to forgive, more likely they perceive to do well in life. Yilmaz (2023); Tessy et al. (2022); and VanderWeele (2020) who conducted analogous studies on forgiveness with flourishing also found similar results. This implies that individuals who are high in flourishing often tend to look at the brighter side of life and have a greater spirit of forgiveness. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 and 2 are accepted in this study.

Additionally, the correlation between optimism and forgiveness was positive but not significant ($r=0.234$). This shows that for the current sample optimism and forgiveness might be independent of each other. An optimistic mindset does not necessarily make an individual more forgiving, or vice-versa. There may be other factors contributing to the presence of a forgiving attitude. As a result Hypothesis 3 is rejected for this research sample. This is in contradiction to the previous literature where in forgiveness has been found positively correlating to optimism. A possible explanation for current findings could be that emerging adulthood can be an age when individuals might approach life with greater optimism, but are in a process of understanding the real idea and meaning behind the virtue of forgiveness.

Conclusion

After adolescence, the stage of young adulthood marks the beginning of a journey to discovery and life purpose. We desire to attain the best, i.e., what we envision ourselves capable of. This requires constantly challenging self to be better and make peace with the world around. The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between optimism, spirit of forgiveness, and flourishing among young adults. A sample of 30 young adults aged 18 to 35 years was collected and administered on the Flourishing scale, State Optimism Measure, and Trait Forgiveness scale. Results found a significant positive correlation of flourishing with both, forgiveness and optimism. However, no significant correlation was found between optimism and forgiveness.

The study provides strong evidence on the role of positive thinking in creating a life we deeply desire. Problems are countless and always bring discomfort, hence, we need to sometimes recognise the good across all situations, and learn to move forward with positive expectations. The study also effectively highlights on the importance of sense of forgiveness as a psychological strength. We are the ones who allow guilt and resentment to make place within us, only we can free ourselves from it. Forgiving means we take the necessary action, but do not hold on to the pain and move towards new beginnings. This requires replacing criticality with appreciation for the good, practising positive feedback towards self and others, recognising our responsibility in situations that happen to us, and having place for meaningful goals in life.

Directions for further Research

Studying on human virtues like courage, wisdom, compassion, and gratitude, with differences in gender, cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, or socio-economic status can give a deeper understanding about thriving and human excellence.

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