



Forgiveness and its Impact on Life Satisfaction

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Abstract: The present research aims to explore the association between forgiveness and life satisfaction among young adults—a developmental stage marked by emotional maturation, identity exploration, and evolving interpersonal relationships. A total of 110 participants, ranging in age from 20 to 30 years, were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using two widely validated self-report measures: the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), which assesses an individual's general tendency to forgive across three domains—self, others, and circumstances beyond personal control—and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which evaluates overall life satisfaction based on cognitive self-appraisal. To assess the relationship between the two variables, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. The analysis revealed a moderate, statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.484$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals who demonstrate higher levels of dispositional forgiveness tend to report greater satisfaction with their lives. This relationship can potentially be attributed to forgiveness's impact on emotional well-being—it may reduce internal distress, improve emotional regulation, and foster more constructive and harmonious interpersonal dynamics, all of which are key components of a positive life experience. These results align with prevailing psychological theories suggesting that character strengths like forgiveness play an important role in enhancing subjective well-being. Forgiveness

serves as a mechanism for releasing toxic emotions such as anger, resentment, or prolonged rumination, which are frequently associated with psychological discomfort and reduced life satisfaction. By letting go of grudges—whether directed toward oneself, others, or situational injustices—individuals may cultivate deeper empathy, form more meaningful social bonds, and maintain emotional equilibrium. These factors, collectively, contribute to a more fulfilling and satisfying life.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Life Satisfaction, Emotional Well-Being, Young Adults, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, Satisfaction With Life*

1. Introduction

Forgiveness is a concept that resonates deeply across cultures, religions, and personal experiences. It is both a personal journey and a social process, a virtue celebrated in ancient philosophies and modern psychology alike. Whether it involves forgiving others, asking for forgiveness, or even forgiving oneself, the act of letting go of resentment and anger is universally acknowledged as a powerful and transformative experience. Yet, despite its widespread value, forgiveness remains one of the most complex emotional processes a person can undergo. It challenges the heart and mind, especially when the offense has caused deep pain or trauma. This complexity makes forgiveness not only a deeply human subject but also an essential one for understanding relationships, emotional health, and inner peace.

The importance of forgiveness has been emphasized in nearly every major religious tradition. In Christianity, for example, forgiveness is a core principle, reflected in teachings that encourage believers to forgive "seventy times seven" times. Similarly, in Islam, forgiveness is seen as a divine attribute, and believers are encouraged to forgive others as an act of mercy and humility. In Buddhism, the concept of letting go of anger and resentment is seen as crucial to achieving inner peace and enlightenment. These religious perspectives highlight how deeply rooted forgiveness is in moral and spiritual thinking across the world. However, forgiveness is not solely a religious matter; it is also a psychological and emotional one, with profound implications for mental health and interpersonal dynamics.

From a psychological perspective, forgiveness is linked to emotional well-being. Research has shown that individuals who practice forgiveness experience lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Holding onto anger and resentment can have a toxic effect on the mind and

body, contributing to chronic stress, poor sleep, and even physical illness. Forgiveness, by contrast, has been associated with improved mood, healthier relationships, and a greater sense of overall life satisfaction. Psychologists describe forgiveness as a voluntary process that involves replacing negative emotions like resentment and vengeance with positive ones such as compassion and understanding. This shift does not mean forgetting or condoning the offense but rather changing the emotional response to it in order to move forward.

Forgiveness also plays a critical role in conflict resolution and the healing of social wounds. In families, friendships, communities, and even among nations, the ability to forgive has helped people rebuild trust and work toward reconciliation. Historic examples like South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission demonstrate how collective forgiveness can be a powerful tool for social healing. While justice and accountability are vital components of reconciliation, forgiveness allows individuals and groups to release the emotional burdens that prevent growth and peace. In this way, forgiveness becomes not only a personal virtue but also a catalyst for collective progress.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that forgiveness is not always easy or immediate. It can be a long, painful process, especially when the hurt runs deep. People often wrestle with the fear that forgiving someone means excusing or minimizing the harm done to them. Others may feel that forgiving an offender who has not shown remorse is unjust. These concerns are valid and reflect the nuanced nature of forgiveness. It is not a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a deeply individual decision that can vary depending on the context, the nature of the offense, and the individual's emotional readiness.

This paper will explore the multifaceted nature of forgiveness, examining its psychological, emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. It will look at the barriers that prevent people from forgiving, the steps involved in the forgiveness process, and the impact of forgiveness on personal well-being and interpersonal relationships. By understanding forgiveness in its fullness, we gain insight not only into the human capacity to overcome pain but also into the incredible resilience of the human spirit.

1.2 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a concept that lies at the heart of human experience. It represents the degree to which individuals positively evaluate the overall quality and meaning of their lives. Unlike fleeting emotions such as happiness or sadness, life satisfaction is a more stable, long-term

judgment that reflects one's sense of contentment and fulfilment across various areas, including relationships, career, health, and personal values. In an increasingly complex and fast-paced world, understanding what contributes to life satisfaction—and how it can be cultivated—has become a crucial area of study in psychology, sociology, and even economics. It is more than just feeling happy; it is about perceiving one's life as meaningful, purposeful, and worth living.

The interest in life satisfaction has grown significantly in recent years, as mental health, well-being, and quality of life have become central themes in both academic research and public policy. Governments and organizations around the world are beginning to recognize that economic growth alone is not a sufficient indicator of progress. People may live in wealthy nations or possess material comfort, yet still experience dissatisfaction and emotional distress. As a result, life satisfaction is now considered a key component of overall well-being, alongside physical health, emotional stability, and social connection. This shift highlights the need for a more holistic view of human prosperity—one that goes beyond financial success to include psychological and emotional richness.

Life satisfaction is a subjective measure, meaning it is shaped by an individual's perceptions, values, expectations, and experiences. What brings satisfaction to one person may be meaningless to another. For some, a successful career might be the pinnacle of achievement, while others may find the deepest contentment in family life or spiritual fulfilment. Cultural background, personal upbringing, and societal norms all play a role in shaping how people define and pursue satisfaction. Despite these variations, researchers have identified several common factors that contribute to life satisfaction across different populations. These include positive relationships, a sense of purpose, personal autonomy, financial stability, and physical and mental health.

The quality of our personal relationships is one of the strongest indicators of overall life satisfaction. As social creatures, humans thrive on meaningful connections that offer emotional support, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for shared growth. Research consistently finds that people who nurture strong bonds with family, friends, and their communities tend to experience greater happiness and fulfilment. It's not the number of relationships that matters most, but the trust, depth, and emotional security they provide. In contrast, prolonged loneliness and social isolation are associated with decreased life satisfaction and can negatively impact both mental and physical health.

2. Review of Literature

The study conducted by Dahiya and Rangnekar (2019) explores how forgiveness within the workplace relates to overall life satisfaction among employees working in Indian manufacturing companies. Drawing on data collected from 352 participants, the researchers employed hierarchical multiple regression to analyse the results. Interestingly, age was found to play a moderating role in this relationship, with older employees experiencing a stronger connection between forgiveness and life satisfaction than their younger counterparts. In light of these insights, the authors advocate for HR practitioners to design and implement psychological strategies and programs that encourage forgiveness as a means to promote employee well-being. This research adds valuable knowledge to the field by identifying forgiveness as a key element influencing life satisfaction in organizational settings, specifically within the Indian manufacturing sector.

Forgiveness has been widely recognized for its beneficial impact on psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction. Studies suggest a strong positive link between forgiveness and a sense of meaning in life, whether forgiveness is viewed as a personal trait or as a reaction to specific interpersonal transgressions (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). In a longitudinal investigation involving romantic partners, it was found that consistently forgiving one's partner contributed to a growing sense of life meaning over time—an effect especially notable among individuals who encountered frequent offenses from their partners (Van Tongeren et al., 2015). Moreover, research involving students has demonstrated that forgiveness is associated with improved general health and higher life satisfaction (Zare & Amini, 2016). Using structural equation modelling, Zare and Amini (2016) identified both direct and indirect pathways linking forgiveness to better health outcomes, with life satisfaction acting as a mediator. These findings support the view that forgiveness may play a vital role in constructing meaning, healing relationships, and enhancing both mental and physical health.

Forgiveness plays an essential role in preserving and rebuilding a sense of meaning in life, especially within intimate relationships. Van Tongeren et al. (2015) explored this dynamic through two studies. The first study, which included 491 participants, demonstrated that both a forgiving disposition and the extent of forgiveness after being wronged were positively linked to one's perceived meaning in life. In the second study—a six-month longitudinal analysis involving 210 romantic couples—findings showed that individuals who consistently forgave their partners

reported an increase in life meaning over time. This effect was particularly strong among those who experienced frequent transgressions from their partners. These results underscore forgiveness as a mechanism for meaning-making, as it helps mend damaged relationships and reinforces the positive influence close relationships have on one's sense of purpose and meaning in life (Van Tongeren et al., 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

This research seeks to examine how forgiveness impacts an individual's overall satisfaction with life.

3.2 Variables

Independent Variable (IV): Forgiveness

Forgiveness involves the intentional process of releasing feelings of resentment, anger, or the desire for revenge toward someone who has caused harm, including self-forgiveness for personal shortcomings.

Dependent Variable (DV): Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is an individual's overall judgment of the quality of their life, based on their personal criteria, values, and expectations.

3.3 Research Objective

To investigate the relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction.

3.4 Hypotheses

- 1) A significant positive correlation will exist between forgiveness and life satisfaction.
- 2) A significant negative correlation will exist between forgiveness and life satisfaction.

3.5 Participants

Sample consists of 110 individuals and the sampling design will be convenience sampling. The sample mainly consists of people of the age group 20-30 years.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The data in this study will be obtained with the help of the scales named “**Heartland Forgiveness Scale**” and “**Satisfaction With Life Scale**.”

S.No	Name of the test	Developed by	Year	No. of items
1.	Heartland Forgiveness Scale	Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, and colleagues	2005	18
2.	Life Satisfaction Scale	Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin	1985	5

Heartland Forgiveness Scale

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is a self-report measure designed to evaluate an individual's overall tendency to forgive across three key areas: themselves, others, and situations beyond their control. Instead of focusing on specific incidents, the scale assesses dispositional forgiveness, providing insight into how individuals typically react to harm or offense over time. Comprising 18 items rated on a Likert scale, the HFS captures both emotional and cognitive components of forgiveness. This tool is used to differentiate individuals who are more inclined to release feelings of anger and resentment from those who are more likely to hold onto grudges. Frequently employed in both clinical and research environments, the scale is valuable for studying the role of forgiveness in emotional health and interpersonal dynamics. Higher scores on the HFS are linked to improved psychological well-being, including lower stress levels and increased life satisfaction.

Reliability

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is a reliable instrument for measuring an individual's propensity to forgive themselves, others, and situations beyond their control. The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values generally exceeding 0.70.

Validity

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) has demonstrated robust validity in assessing forgiveness. Its construct validity is supported by correlations with other emotional constructs, typically ranging between 0.40 and 0.60, which confirms that it uniquely measures forgiveness, separate from emotions like anger or hostility.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

It is a widely used psychological instrument that evaluates a person's overall contentment with life. It focuses on an individual's cognitive judgment rather than emotional responses, asking them to reflect on how well their life matches their personal ideals. It consists of five items, rated on a Likert scale, reflecting how individuals assess the quality of their lives. It does not measure satisfaction with specific areas like work or health but allows individuals to weigh these aspects according to their own priorities. The SWLS is simple to administer, making it popular in both research and clinical settings.

Reliability

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener et al. in 1985, has demonstrated strong reliability in a range of studies. It shows high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically between 0.80 and 0.90, indicating that the items effectively measure a single construct—life satisfaction.

Validity

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) demonstrates strong validity. Its construct validity is supported by substantial correlations, typically ranging from 0.50 to 0.70, with other well-being assessments. The scale also exhibits predictive validity, with higher scores on life satisfaction being associated with better mental health and reduced levels of depression. These results confirm the SWLS as an effective and reliable tool for assessing life satisfaction.

3.7 Statistical Analysis

To explore the possible connection between forgiveness and life satisfaction, data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a widely recognized and dependable tool in psychological and behavioral research. The study employed a correlational research design, ideal for examining the strength and nature of relationships between variables without manipulating them. This design was specifically chosen to investigate whether a statistically significant association exists between individuals' propensity to forgive and their reported life satisfaction levels. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to evaluate the degree and direction of the linear relationship between these two continuous variables. This method is particularly suitable for investigating associations in psychological studies, where the goal is to identify underlying connections rather than establish causal links. Pearson's r was chosen due to

its reliability and ability to provide clear insights into the closeness of the relationship between these constructs within the sample.

4. Result

In this section, we examine the relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction among individuals aged 20-30, utilizing data obtained from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Pearson's product-moment correlation was used for the analysis (see Table 1).

The correlation analysis, conducted using SPSS, revealed a moderate positive correlation between forgiveness and life satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.484$ and a significance level of $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). This suggests that individuals who demonstrate higher levels of forgiveness tend to report greater satisfaction with their lives.

Table 1: *Pearson Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Life Satisfaction*

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
Forgiveness and Life Satisfaction	0.484	0.000

Note: The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction in young adults aged 20 to 30. Using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the results revealed a significant positive correlation, indicating that individuals with a higher tendency to forgive generally experience greater life satisfaction.

These findings emphasize the role of forgiveness as a psychological strength that fosters emotional well-being and personal fulfilment. By releasing feelings of resentment and adopting a more compassionate mindset, individuals may be better prepared to cope with life's challenges and cultivate a more meaningful, satisfying existence.

In conclusion, this study adds to the growing body of research highlighting the importance of positive psychological traits in enhancing overall well-being. It also suggests the potential benefits

of forgiveness-focused interventions in both clinical settings and daily life, especially for young adults navigating personal growth and emotional development.

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