

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF WISDOM IN RELATION TO FORGIVENESS

NOREEN CHOUDHRI, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, M.PHIL. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY (RCI), JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA.

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to evaluate the influence of Wisdom and Gender on the measure of Forgiveness in a sample of educated old individuals. Since the role of Wisdom in the determination of various positive psychology attributes has greatly been studied earlier, it was thought that Wisdom may also contribute significantly in the determination of Forgiveness in the elderly individuals, who face problems of aging in the later life. A 2x2 factorial design was employed, where two independent variables (viz. Wisdom and Gender) were entertained, each varying at two levels (i.e., High Wisdom and Low Wisdom, Male and Female). Thus, four treatment groups were formed, each consisting of 30 subjects, making a total of 120 respondents in all. The subjects were administered the standardized tests of Three-dimensional wisdom scale (3D-WS) and Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS). Results of the study disclosed that Males have higher Forgiveness compared to their Female counterparts. Similarly, older adults with High Wisdom have obtained significantly higher Forgiveness mean scores than older adults with Low Wisdom. Furthermore, no interaction was found to be significant; it suggests that both Gender and Wisdom have not jointly influenced the measure of Forgiveness in the older aged individuals. It was also found that Wisdom is positively correlated with all the measures of Forgiveness and the relationship is statistically significant. By and large Wisdom appears to be an important contributing factor for Forgiveness in old age because most of the measures were significantly influenced by Wisdom.

Keywords: *Wisdom, Gender, Forgiveness, Old Aged.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginnings of human culture, wisdom has been viewed as the ideal end point of the integrated development of knowledge and character. This makes wisdom almost a prototypical topic of inquiry when interested in adult development and aging. But wisdom also has been described as an elusive construct that is very difficult to capture empirically (Baltes & Smith, 1990).

Wisdom is not a new concept that originated in the technologically advanced information age of today. Rather, wisdom bears the connotations of “ancient” and seemingly transcends time, knowledge, and even culture. All peoples, whether primitive or civilized, have sought to pass their wisdom on to following generations by means of myths, stories, songs, and even cave paintings that date back 30,000 years. The quest for wisdom is roughly as old as humankind. We are able to document this deep human concern for wisdom at least since writing made it possible to later retrieve very early examples of the wisdom literature dating back as far as the third century B.C. (e.g., Mesopotamia, Egypt). Similarly, an interest and a concern for wisdom have accompanied the rise of modern psychology from its early days. G. Stanley Hall (1922), in his pioneering conceptual piece on senescence, was probably the first psychologist to mention the concept of wisdom. He associated the development of wisdom in a person with the emergence in later adulthood of a meditative attitude, philosophic calmness, impartiality, and the desire to draw moral lessons. In other words, in early psychological writings, wisdom was described as an ideal endpoint of human development. It was not until the 1970s that empirical wisdom research began (Clayton 1982).

The concept of wisdom as a human attribute has undergone changes as societies have evolved. During the last quarter of the 20th century, it has become a topic of research in the social and behavioral sciences. In contemporary empirical science, wisdom has come to be regarded as a trait that is ascribed to persons making wise decisions. Thus, the trait of wisdom is expressed in the process of making decisions, or having an effective

decision-making style. In this sense, wisdom is a very broad trait of the highest level of mental functioning. Wisdom requires that an individual must have experience, seek information, and weigh alternative outcomes of a decision through complex or dialectical reasoning. Furthermore, the concept has evolved in psychological literature to include control over one's emotions and over any tendency toward hasty conclusions or actions. In this sense, the contemporary use of the term wisdom in psychology suggests that high intelligence and knowledge are not sufficient in and of themselves to lead to wise decisions. Having the intention to rise above one's tradition or self-interest is required in making wise decisions. Thus, broadly defined, wisdom is a difficult trait to evaluate in experimental designs that use prearranged decisions to be made in problem solving contexts.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF WISDOM

Indeed, the emergence of work on wisdom during the recent decade's fits well with the continuous dynamic between understanding the positive and efforts to compensate for a dominance of concerns for understanding and repairing deficits in human behavior. Interest in the concept of wisdom emerged because of a one-sided focus on the negative in gerontological research in the 1960s and 1970s (Baltes and Smith, 1990; Baltes and Staudinger, 2000). The dominant focus of aging research during that period was on counting "the wrinkles and failures" of humans as they grow older. There were very few instances in which aging was examined in its potentially positive manifestations. Perhaps the best known exception was Erik Erikson's (1968) theoretical work focused on generativity and wisdom as central tasks of adult life (M. Baltes and Baltes, 1977; Baltes and Labouvie-Vief, 1973; Clayton and Birren, 1980; Labouvie-Vief, 1982; McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1998; Perlmutter, 1990; Ryff, 1987, 1995). A major reason to articulate a psychological theory of wisdom, therefore, was the explicit commitment to understand what might be positive in adult development and aging. There were not many domains on which we could orient our microscope. One was wisdom, in research on subjective beliefs about aging, wisdom turned out to be one of the very few characteristics for which people expect a positive trajectory in late adulthood (Heckhausen, Dixon, and Baltes, 1989). Actually, first exploration into the positivity of old age involved cognitive training studies to understand the role of practice deficits and the latent learning potential of the older population in the sense of plasticity (Baltes and Lindenberger, 1988; Baltes and Willis, 1982; Willis and Baltes, 1980). In this research, we demonstrated that at least up to age 80 or so, many older adults possess more cognitive reserves (plasticity or learning potential) than we typically expect, although we need to acknowledge that we also observed definite losses in plasticity with advancing old age. Greatly influenced by the work of Vivian Clayton (Clayton and Birren, 1980), the concept of wisdom became the rallying point for our subsequent search for the hidden treasure of old age (Baltes, Dittmann-Kohli, and Dixon, 1984; Baltes, Smith, and Staudinger, 1992; Dixon and Baltes, 1986). Meanwhile, our work on wisdom is not only informed by the study of positive aspects of human aging. On the contrary, we presently conceptualize wisdom as an instantiation of a construct that, for all phases and contexts of life, offers the potential for defining the means and ends toward a good or even optimal life. Based primarily on philosophical work, our challenge has been to extract statements about the means and goals of life that imply a value position (Kekes, 1995). From such extra psychological analyses, we specified a psychological theory of wisdom. Accordingly, it is the intermarriage of philosophical and psychological perspectives around the concept of wisdom that permits us to revisit the century old question of optimal human development.

DEFINING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a process (or the result of a process) that involves a change in emotion and attitude regarding an offender. Most scholars view this intentional and voluntary process, driven by a deliberate decision to forgive. This process results in decreased motivation to retaliate or maintain estrangement from an offender despite their actions, and requires letting go of negative emotions toward the offender. Theorists differ in the extent to which they believe forgiveness also implies replacing the negative emotions with positive attitudes including compassion and benevolence. In any event, forgiveness occurs with the victim's full recognition

that he or she deserved better treatment, one reason why Mahatma Gandhi contended that “the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong”.

Forgiveness is one of the structures that has been the center of attention of many researches during the last decade, and most of the researches have focused on the medical interventions of forgiveness (Ross, Hertenstein and Wrobel, 2007), because it has an effect on the individuals' functions and on their relationships (Volkman, 2009). Clinical interviews with the individuals that have gone through the meander of forgiveness showed that the forgiveness results in peace and release of the person from hatred and loathing, and makes fundamental changes in the thoughts and change the negative and destructive thoughts to constructive thoughts. It also makes the criminal to be more ashamed of his/her crime and put a side hurting others, ultimately resulting in moral and spiritual development (Ghobari Bonab, 2009). Forgiveness has physical, mental, social and spiritual benefits as well, and researches have shown the influences of forgiveness on the regulation of blood pressure, reduction of cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic illnesses and generally have shown its influence on the health. Health is a broad concept, and its definition varies under the influence of awareness and the society's attitudes with different geographical and cultural situations (Jane and Jennie, 2000), and the mental health which is considered as one of the dimensions of health, is a state of welfare by which the person can understand his/her or others abilities, work beneficially, endure the life pressures and contribute with the society (World Health Organization, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The data was collected using the Random Sampling Technique; the sample consisted of 120 older adults – 60 Males and 60 Females with an age limit ranging from 60-65 years. The data was collected from various residential areas, old age clubs and activity centers for senior citizens.

The Mean age of the Male participants was 62.25 (Standard Deviation (SD) = 1.77, Mode=60), there were 14 (23.33%) older adults with an age of 60 years, 10 (16.67%) older adults with an age of 61 years, 10 (16.67%) older adults with an age of 62 years, 7 (11.67%) older adults with an age of 63 years, 11 (18.33%) older adults with an age of 64 years and 8 (13.33%) older adults with an age of 65 years.

Out of all the participants 38 were married and 22 were widowers, they could read and write basic English fluently and were with a minimum education till 10th standard.

The Mean age of the Female participants was 62.15 (Standard Deviation (SD) = 1.76, Mode=60, 62), there were 15 (25%) older adults with an age of 60 years, 8 (13.33%) older adults with an age of 61 years, 15 (25%) older adults with an age of 62 years, 7 (11.67%) older adults with an age of 63 years, 5 (8.33%) older adults with an age of 64 years and 10 (16.67%) older adults with an age of 65 years.

Out of all the participants 31 were married, 4 were unmarried, 8 were divorced and 17 were widowed, they could read and write basic English fluently and were with a minimum education till 10th standard. Most of the persons were retired from administrative, accounts, teaching (college and universities) and engineering services.

The sample of 120 was divided into 60 Males and 60 Females which were further divided into 4 groups on the basis of the cut off score of the Wisdom as High and Low in both Males and Females.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A system of procedures and requirements were designed to create a parameter in which to examine the participants. The following was the list of said procedures: -

Inclusion Criteria: -

1. Participants in the age range of 60 to 65 were included in the study.

2. Participants without a history of psychiatric illness, neurological disorders, substance abuse impaired sensory functions and any other severe general medical conditions were included in the study.
3. Participants with a basic knowledge and fluency in English language were included in the study.
4. Participants with at least the highest level of education till 10th standard were included in the study.
5. Taking into account the ethical considerations, first the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and the procedure of data collection. Following this discussion, the participants who were willing to participate were only included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria: -

1. Participants in the age range lesser to 60 and greater to 65 were excluded from in the study.
2. Participants with a history of psychiatric illness, neurological disorders, substance abuse impaired sensory functions and any other severe general medical conditions were excluded from the study.
3. Participants without a basic knowledge and fluency in English language were excluded from the study.
4. Participants without at least the highest level of education till 10th standard were excluded from the study.
5. Taking into account the ethical considerations, first the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and the procedure of data collection. Following this discussion, the participants who were not willing to participate were also excluded from the study.

Materials Employed

1. **Demographic Details Questionnaire** developed for the research purpose. It included name, age, sex, religion, educational qualification, present marital status, level of fluency in English, number of children, currently living conditions, presence of any disease or disability and the total income.
2. **Three-dimensional wisdom scale (3D-WS)** developed by Ardelt's (2003) was used to assess Wisdom. This self-report measured three components of wisdom: reflective, cognitive, and affective. Question stems of "How much do you agree or disagree" and "how much are the following statements true of you" were self-rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree/definitely true) to 5 (strongly disagree/not true). Questions on the reflective scale included, "Things often go wrong for my by no fault of my own" and "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision." Questions on the cognitive scale included, "Ignorance is bliss" and "A problem has little attraction for me if I don't think it has a solution." Questions on the affective scale included, "I am annoyed by unhappy people who just feel sorry for themselves" and "Sometimes I feel a real compassion for everyone." Some items were reversed coded. The 3D-WS measure rates high in reliability ($\alpha = .71$ to $.85$) and construct and content validity (Ardelt, 2003). This measure was chosen due to its empirical validation within the field (Taylor, Bates, & Webster, 2011; Ardelt, 2003).
3. **Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)** developed by Thompson et al. (2005) was used to assess dispositional forgiveness (i.e., the general tendency to be forgiving), rather than forgiveness of a particular event or person), in which forgiveness is defined as one's tendency to reassociate a negative transgression as neutral or positive. The 18 item scale is made up of three subscales measuring forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of the situation while providing a global measure of one's disposition to forgive. The HFS has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas ranging between $.72$ and $.82$ on the subscales and $.87$ for the entire measure, while also showing good test-retest reliability ($r = .83$).

Research Design

The research design is the detailed plan of the investigation. In fact, it is the blueprint of the detailed procedures of testing the hypotheses and analyzing the obtained data. The research design, thus, may be defined as the sequence of those steps taken ahead of time to ensure that the relevant data will be collected in a way that permits objective analysis of the different hypotheses formulated with respect to the research problems. Thus research design helps the researcher in testing the hypotheses by reaching a valid and objective conclusions regarding the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

To investigate that whether having Low or High Wisdom and differences in gender can lead to differences in the factors like Wisdom and Forgiveness and to understand the relationship between Wisdom and Forgiveness in males and females the research design employed to the current study is a Quantitative Research Design in which it is a Between Group Design. There are two separate groups of High Wisdom and Low Wisdom older adults; Female and Male, interactive effect of Wisdom and Gender on the above specified constructs was studied using a 2x2 ANOVA factorial design.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered both individually and in a group. Before participating in the study all the participants were required to read and sign the informed consent form. They were told that the study was conducted to understand the relationship between Wisdom and the role of Gender on the factor like Forgiveness. Then the demographic details form was then given to fill out their details. Participants were assured of the confidentiality. It was stated that no identifying information would be needed to complete the test. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary and confidential and that they could withdraw at any time.

After they filled their demographic details they were asked their preferences that whether they would want to answer all 6 questionnaires one after the other or do they want a considerable amount of rest pause and then return to answering the questionnaires.

According to their liking and comfort one by one each questionnaire was given to the participant. The order of presenting the questionnaires was not the same for all the participants, counterbalancing technique was used in the presentation of the questionnaires to control the order effects.

Instructions were given before starting a questionnaire. All the doubts were made clear before the commencement of the test. The subjects were requested to give honest and frank responses and were asked not to contemplate much over every question or statement as they were supposed to give their spontaneous response.

RESULTS

Table-1 Shows the Socio-Demographic Attributes of the Sample

Variable	Group	Old Age Population (60- 65 years)	
		N	Percentage
Sex	Male	60	50
	Female	60	50
Religion	Hindu	78	65
	Muslim	22	18.3
	Christian	20	16.7

Educational Qualification	XII	66	55
	Graduate	41	34.2
	Post Graduate	13	10.8
Marital Status	Married	77	64.2
	Unmarried	17	14.2
	Divorced	10	8.3
	Widowed	6	5.0
	Widower	10	8.3

Table 1 shows the Socio- Demographic Attributes of the sample collected. The study consisted of 60 males and 60 females (50% each). There were 78 individuals from Hindu religion (65%), 22 from Muslim religion (18.3%), 20 from Christian religion (16.7%). The educational qualification of the sample consisted of 66 individuals with XII standard qualification (55%), 41 individuals who were Graduates (34.2%) and 13 with Post Graduation (10.8%). The marital status of the sample consisted of 77 Married individuals (64.2%), 17 were Unmarried (14.2%), 10 Divorced (8.3%), 6 were Widowed (5.0%) and 10 were Widowers (8.3%).

Table-2 Shows the Mean Scores and the Standard Deviations (S. D's) for Forgiveness of the Four Groups (Male High and Low Wisdom and Female High and Low Wisdom; N=120) *

GENDER	HIGH WISDOM	LOW WISDOM	TOTAL
MALE	96.16 (12.27)	88.70 (10.21)	92.43 (11.24)
FEMALE	89.50 (11.58)	86.20 (9.77)	87.85 (10.67)
TOTAL	92.83 (11.92)	87.45 (9.99)	90.14 (10.95)

*S.Ds are given in the

parentheses.

Table 2.1 ANOVA for Forgiveness

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	d.f	Mean of Squares	F
Between Gender (Male vs. Female)	630.21	1	630.21	5.17*
Between Wisdom (High vs. Low)	869.41	1	869.41	7.22**

Interaction (Gender x Wisdom)	130.21	1	130.21	1.08 (n.s)
Total	15690.59	119		

$p < 0.05^*$, $p < 0.01^{**}$, n.s= not significant

The mean scores on Forgiveness of the four groups and the F values are given in the Table 2 and 2.1. The mean difference between Males and Females (92.43 vs. 87.85) is significant ($F=5.17$, $p < .05$). Thus, it can be safely inferred that Males have higher Forgiveness compared to their Female counterparts.

Similarly, older adults with High Wisdom have obtained significantly higher Forgiveness mean scores (92.83) than older adults with Low Wisdom (87.45). This mean difference is statistically significant ($F=7.22$, $p < .01$). Therefore, it can be concluded that older adults with Higher Wisdom have greater Forgiveness compared to individuals with Low Wisdom.

Furthermore, interaction effect which is 1.08 is not significant; it suggests that both Gender and Wisdom have not jointly influenced the measure of Forgiveness in the older aged individuals.

DISCUSSION

As regards to the influence of Wisdom and Gender on Forgiveness in the old aged individuals, it was found that Males have higher Forgiveness compared to their Female counterparts. Similarly, older adults with High Wisdom have obtained significantly higher Forgiveness mean scores than older adults with Low Wisdom. Therefore, it can be concluded that older adults with Higher Wisdom have greater Forgiveness compared to individuals with Low Wisdom.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Conclusion

It was observed that Males have higher Forgiveness compared to their Female counterparts. Similarly, older adults with High Wisdom have obtained significantly higher Forgiveness mean scores than older adults with Low Wisdom.

Furthermore, no interaction was found to be significant; it suggests that both Gender and Wisdom have not jointly influenced the measure of Forgiveness in the older aged individuals.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

First limitation is concerned with the sample size of the study. A sample of 120 adults is not sufficient for any generalization on all adults of similar age groups. It would be more acceptable and representative if the samples are taken from diverse localities with adults of diverse backgrounds. Sampling across wider strata of the population would be necessary in a future study.

The second limitation is the design of the demographic data from which should be modified to allow for individual inclusion of their socio- economic status and the nature of work they are currently or previously involved.

Third limitation of this study is the lack of qualitative information. A narrative component, for instance, would enhance our understanding of differences in the scales.

Fourth limitation is that the measure used for assessing Wisdom is an exceptional scale but we cannot be completely sure that a combination of cognitive, reflective and affective qualities is indeed the measure of Wisdom. But whatever it is, a high score of all these indicators seems to have a powerful impact on the other attributes of Forgiveness.

Fifth, limitation is the use of self-report measures in this study. Self-report measures can be influenced by social desirability bias.

Finally, longitudinal data are necessary to resolve the nature of causality in Wisdom and Forgiveness in old age.

Such future directions are necessary in the field of wisdom research in order to truly understand how an individual with High Wisdom uses wisdom and various other traits of their personality in order to achieve higher levels of Forgiveness. Through such knowledge, all people can begin on their journey of self-actualization and working towards the common good of humanity.

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