

MOTIVES FOR FORGIVENESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS - A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Forgiveness is a basic concept for human survival because without it people would start to hurt each other. Thus, this study focuses on finding out the reasons for forgiving others. For this a set of questions were framed to find out whether people really forgive and what their motives are. A sample size of 30 members are taken who really forgive and their motives are analyzed through qualitative research design. The motives are categorized through concept mapping. The motives for forgiveness as found by this research study are categorized into the following factors. They are relationship, self centeredness, spirituality, empathy, behavior and human nature factor. Forgiving a person wholeheartedly will improve the mental wellbeing of the individual. The interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship will also be well established and can be maintained for a longer period of time. Thus through psycho education one can emphasize the importance of forgiveness and its benefits for improving the quality of life.

Key words: Forgiveness, College students, relationship, Self centeredness, Spirituality, Empathy, Behavior and human nature.

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is an intentional and voluntary process of the victim to let go of the negative feelings that have been developed towards the offender. Forgiveness is completely a different topic from excusing, forgetting etc. Forgiving others will improve the mental well being of the individual.

THE ENRIGHT PROCESS MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS

There are mainly four phases of forgiveness. The first phase is the uncovering phase. In this phase people will realize the consequences of the offense and its impact on his/her life. The second phase is decision phase. In this phase the victim will understand the nature of forgiveness and commit to forgive based on this understanding. The next phase is work phase and in this phase the victim will work in the process of forgiving the offender. The victim will view the offender in some positive aspect. The last phase is the deepening phase. In this the victim will find a purpose for his suffering and meaning in life. He/she will start to look at life in a more optimistic way and will forgive offender and be in a good relationship with them.

The powers of forgiveness are enormous. The common powers are the power to forgive his/her own self and to maintain a harmonious relationship with one another. The anger and resentment will be shed off which will improve the quality of life and transform all the destructive emotions. There are mainly three types of forgiveness and they are unconditional forgiveness, conditional forgiveness and dismissive forgiveness. Unconditional forgiveness is a highest form of forgiveness where the individual forgive the offender and continue to have the healthy relationship with them without any vengeance. Conditional forgiveness is when the victim is able to forgive only when offender seek apology in any form. Dismissive forgiveness is the lowest form because the person avoid the offender and move on but it is still considered forgiveness because the victim do not have any vengeance for the offender.

Toussain. L, Kamble. S, Marschall. JC and Duggi. DB (2016), studied the effects of brief prayer on the experience of forgiveness: An American and Indian comparison. Results suggest that a brief prayer is capable of producing real change in forgiveness and this change is consistent across American and Indian cultures and across three different religious groups in India. Even a Meta analysis study was done by Nathaniel G. Wade, William T. Hoyt, Julia EM. Kidwell, Everett L. and Worthington Jr (2014), about the efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions to promote forgiveness: A Meta analysis. Results suggests that by using theoretically grounded forgiveness interventions is a sound choice for helping clients to deal with past offences and helping them achieve resolution in the form of forgiveness. Similarly Briana L. Root and Julie J. Exline (2011), studied Gender Differences in Response to Experimental Forgiveness Prompts: Do Men Show Stronger Responses than Women?. The study of undergraduates (106 men, 112 women) revealed that relative to men, women put more effort into forgiveness before the study, and they were more likely to view forgiveness as a process requiring healing.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is more important to forgive each other. The examples of unforgiveness are war, acid attack, murder etc. In this research study, thus it focuses to find the reasons for forgiveness. If this study is found effective, it is used for people to really forgive each other by knowing how others really forgive. It can also be thought through psycho education.

METHODOLOGY

AIM

The aim of the present study is to understand the motives of forgiveness for an individual.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- ❖ Qualitative research design.
 - Phenomenological approach (Realistic phenomenology).

METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

The phenomenological approach enables the researcher to understand the nature, significance and perspective of a particular phenomenon for a particular group of people (Moustakas, 1994). This approach encourages the participants in sharing their experiences about the particular phenomenon. This will enable the researchers to understand the subjective nature of the

phenomenon being investigated (Kennedy, Terrell, & Lohle, 2015) by laying aside the prevailing understandings of these phenomena and revisit our immediate experience. This approach will help the researcher in collecting the afresh data which is any times difficult and is also shattered by the researcher who many times intervenes by sharing their own opinions and experiences. Studying through phenomenological approach would give better learning about the phenomenon.

SELECTION OF SAMPLE

Sample size for qualitative studies is generally very much smaller than quantitative studies (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). The sample size selected for the present study is 30. Creswell (2007) indicated that a sample size of about 20 or so individuals, all who share the same experience under investigation, often produces saturation in qualitative research studies. College students who are willing to participate in this study were chosen as samples.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The sampling technique used for the study is Stratified Purposeful sampling technique. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are as follows

Inclusion criteria

- ❖ Individuals of age range- adults (19-23).
- ❖ Individuals who are studying in college.
- ❖ Willingness of the individual to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria

- ❖ Individual of other age range.
- ❖ Individuals who are not studying in college.

PROCEDURE

The participants were selected according to the above mentioned criteria. At the beginning of the study, the participants are briefed about the study. Informed consent is given to the participants as it is an important tool for ensuring respect for persons during research. A list of open-ended questions is asked to elicit the information through individual in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews involve probing questions and bring about the detailed experiences of the individuals. The interview on an average took about 10-20 minutes. After collecting the data, the participant's narratives are analyzed to acquire a feeling for their ideas in order to understand them fully. The second step is to extract significant statements – a process called horizontalization. After horizontalization, for each of the significant statements meanings are formulated. Concept formation is used for presenting the findings of the study. The concept formation is presented in a tabular form to represent the themes related to the phenomena. This consists of the themes (under which the dimensions are formulated) and the excerpts from the respondents to understand the concept clearly and easily.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the responses being collected from various respondents, the responses are then analysed. The participant's verbal stories or narratives or conversations are converted into verbal statements (verbatim). The meaning for each statement is derived from the verbatim. The analysis involves sorting of the responses being verbalized. They are then clustered into different themes to understand the respondent's statements completely. The themes are then integrated according to the phenomenon being studied.

Forgiveness and relationship

In life, each individual has some reasons to forgive each other. One of the common reasons is the relationship factor. People consider the relationship is important and will focus on developing a long lasting relationship. To develop such long lasting relationship people should be able to forgive each other in many occasions. The following are some of the responses who forgive each other considering the relationship.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

"...i consider the relationship is more important to me than the hurt they made..."

"...she is the person am very close with and i respect her a lot, so that i am able to forgive her even when she do wrong for me..."

"...holding a grudge does not allow me to mingle again freely, so that i will forgive them considering our relationship..."

"...i don't want to hurt the person i love by telling them about their behavior .instead i will forgive to have a long lasting relationship..."

"...it is cruel to take revenge on people we love. So i will forgive them..."

"...i will fight for that time and will definitely forgive and join with her and able to love her same way again. Even if it happens for many times, i will repeat the same.

The above mentioned responses show clearly that how much a relationship factor influence in forgiving one another. They consider it is cruel to take revenge on person we love. Holding grudge does not allow the person to mingle again and so the relationship does not exist for a longer period of time. To have a long lasting relationship thus forgiveness has become a mandatory option.

Forgiveness and self centeredness

Forgiving others to maintain a good mental health is the self centered motive. In this the person will forgive others to shed off their anger and bitterness and to feel in a lighter way. When forgiveness does not occur heaviness remains in the heart and that will impair physical and mental health of the individual. Forgiving others for the name sake just to have a companionship does not mean real forgiveness. Thus that kind of responses are not considered as forgiveness and are not included in the study.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

“...the grudge does not give any positive outcome. So to avoid that and to save my mental health i prefer to forgive...”

“...i forgive people because i want to be happy. I can't lose my happiness for them...”

“...i cannot lead my life normally, if i hold on to grudge so that i will forgive...”

The above responses clearly shows that people tend to forgive because they do not want to lose their happiness by holding the grudge. This will help them to lead a good and peaceful life. Their mental well being will be improved when people use this motive to forgive. This is one of the best motives for forgiveness.

Forgiveness and spirituality

Spiritual reason is a major influencing factor in devotional countries such as India. Since this study focus only on college students it does not had so many responses related to spirituality, but it might be a major influencing character among general population. It is like forgiving others for the fear of God and in the belief that God will protect them.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

“...nothing is permanent for us. Everything is for the creator. So i won't keep any offense personal to me and i will forgive...”

“...i will forgive, so that God will forgive me and protect my family...”

“...i try to forgive by praying for them...”

When people completely surrender themselves to God they are able to forgive others easily and are also able to pray for them. When forgiving it gives a sense of satisfaction to the individual.

Forgiveness and empathy

Forgiving others by thinking in their point of view is one good motive for forgiveness. Thinking from others point of view is called empathy. It will lead to think all the possible factors for a behavior. Thus the victim was able to forgive the offender. The victim was able to love the offender in the same way again when he/she forgive wholeheartedly through empathy.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

“...i am able to forgive wholeheartedly thinking that they might feel guilt...”

“...the medicine to any wrongdoing is forgiveness, so that we can heal their hurt...”

“...may be in that situation, i would have also done the same. So considering that, i will forgive the person...”

The respondents clearly state that they are able to forgive when they think from their point of view. This type of forgiveness enables the victim to think in different perspectives. In this type people really wanted to heal the hurt of the offender.

Forgiveness and behavior

The behavior of the people plays a major role in forgiveness. The previous positive behavior of the offender helps the victim to forgive. A person is able to forgive the offender even when he/she does wrong to the person. This is because the person thinks of the offender other positive activities such as how much good they did, how much love and trust they had before. All these factors come into consideration and the victim is able to forgive the offender considering the above mentioned qualities.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

“...they have done a lot of good things to me and so it is not right if i had grudge just because they do something wrong in one situation...”

“...i forgive because they love, trust and gave so much importance to me for the past years...”

The way a person behaves with one another plays a major role in forgiveness. People who behave genuine and kind in almost every situation are more likely to receive forgiveness. Repeated negative behavior does not receive forgiveness whereas rarely done negative behavior is forgiven easily considering all their previous positive behaviors.

Forgiveness and human nature

Mans nature is to do mistakes at times and to forgive those mistakes. Thus the world evolved and continued by forgiving each other. The world exists until humanity and forgiveness exist. People tend to forgive others considering life is too short to take revenge and it is not considered humanity if one takes revenge for all things that happened to them.

Excerpts from participant interview are given below

“...it is natural to do mistakes. if they does a mistake and feel guilt about it, i will definitely forgive them...”

“...man’s nature is to forgive others. it is the need for survival. so when people do some mistakes it should be forgiven...”

“...since we are humans and have humanity within us we should forgive and its nature to give and receive forgiveness...”

“...a man cannot be good in all situations. so that it is natural that they do mistakes and we should try to forgive them. by forgiving them, they will change their nature by time...”

From all these conversation it is clearly understood that people consider that doing mistakes is natural and people should develop a tendency to forgive them. Respondents say that all humans are here to give and receive forgiveness throughout their lifespan. Also they develop a perspective that a man cannot be good in all situations.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The conclusion and suggestions derived from the study entitled “Motives for forgiveness: A phenomenological approach” are as follows:

- Each individual has different motives for forgiveness.
- Respondents do feel that motives for forgiveness vary for the same individual as well as for different individuals in relevance to the situation.
- Forgiveness can also serve as an essential support to a respondent in improving their physical and mental health.
- Forgiveness helps in improving the quality of relationship and to have a long lasting relationship.
- Self centeredness motives in forgiveness helps to maintain a good mental health.
- Some respondents have also said that forgiving for the sake of god gives a sense of satisfaction.
- Forgiveness can also be done by thinking in others point of view.
- From the analysis, it also has emphasized that respondents had the perspective that it is natural to give and receive forgiveness.

These were the factors that were inferred from the present study. All these factors have an in depth association with forgiveness. From the present study, the components or characteristics of forgiveness that has been identified are relationship, self centeredness, spiritual, empathy, natural and positive behavior. From all of the above, people identified forgiveness as a factor that improves our physical and mental well being.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations help in doing further researches which may result in better inferences. The limitations of the present study includes,

- The study focused only among college students. If it has been done to general population, it might have been more efficient.
- The present study used only 30 samples for the study. Extending the sample size would have let to new insights and implications.
- As the study took more time during the interview, respondents felt constrained which affected the qualitative of research.

IMPLICATIONS

- This study may be an initiative for researchers in doing more explorations in profound understanding of motives for forgiveness with varying individuals.
- The current study highlights the idea that forgiveness acts as a concepts that improve the physical and mental health of the individual.

- Future studies may focus on how to teach real forgiveness to individuals through psycho education and to make them realize the importance of forgiveness and its relation with mental health.

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