



# Forgiveness and Altruism as a Predictor of Mental Health among Adults

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**Abstract:** Forgiveness and altruism are both correlated with mental health as the previous literature has shown. Forgiveness is related to improved mental health, especially since earlier research showed that self-forgiveness is found to be the best predictor of mental health. The purpose of the current study is to find out the contribution of forgiveness and altruism to mental health. A total sample of 107 participants (male= 39 and female=67) was selected and their age ranges from 15 to 35. All participants completed the Heartland forgiveness scale, Adapted self-report altruism scale, and General health questionnaire (GHQ-12). The data was collected using google forms. The findings revealed that forgiveness for others and for situations is negatively correlated with mental health problems. Altruism does not correlate with mental health as well as with forgiveness. Situational forgiveness and self-forgiveness contribute 16% of the variance in mental health. Altruism does not contribute to mental health problems. Findings related to altruism in the current study are contradictory to the previous findings. It can be concluded that forgiveness could be a good variable to foster mental health among adults.

**Index Terms - Forgiveness, Altruism, Mental health.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

WHO (2014) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to her or his community”. The absence of mental diseases such as depression or anxiety is regarded as mental health. Mental health issues have an impact on one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and social interactions. While not everyone will have a mental illness at some point in their lives, everyone will experience problems with their mental well-being (positive mental health), just as we all experience problems with our physical health. Several studies show that better mental health is characterized by greater forgiveness and high Altruistic behaviors (Rahmandani et al., 2019; Schwartz et al., 2003).

## II. Forgiveness and mental health

It might be challenging and unreasonable to go on after letting go of hurt and fury. In a psychological sense, forgiveness refers to the conscious and voluntary process by which someone who originally feels mistreated modifies their attitudes and ideas about an event and moves past unpleasant feelings like anger and retaliation. Generally speaking, forgiveness is the act of lessening one's avoidance and vengeance impulses toward a transgressor after a transgression has happened (McCullough et al., 1998). Forgiveness has been connected in several ways to health and happiness. According to Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, and Wade (2001), forgivingness can be thought of as a personal disposition. Forgiveness is typically characterized as one's capacity to forgive in a range of contexts and relationships. Both forgiving others and oneself are components of forgiveness.

According to several research, there is a connection between forgiveness and both psychological and physiological aspects (Lawler-Row, Hyatt-Edwards, Wuensch & Karremans, 2011; Webb, Colburn, Heisler, Call & Chickering, 2008). A direct link was found between psychological discomfort and both self- and interpersonal forgiveness (Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001). Self-forgiveness was found to be related to declining disordered eating prevalence (Peterson et al., 2017). By fostering forgiveness, the negative effect of bullying on the mental health of teenagers can be reduced (Barcaccia et al., 2017). Forgiveness and Mindfulness play mediating roles between psychological maltreatment and

internet addiction (Arslan, 2017). If you routinely practice forgiveness meditation, its benefits could be more enduring and stronger. Furthermore, improvements in physical health, adaptive adjustment, and ideal performance are anticipated to go hand in hand with the reduction of distress, which indicates an improvement in mental health (Rahmandani et al., 2019). One study conducted by Toussaint et al. (2019) finds that self-forgiveness and forgiveness for others are both linked with sleep and health.

### III. Altruism and mental health

Altruism is the selfless concern to the welfare of others. It is the motivation to increase another person's welfare by doing something for him/her without expecting any return. "Altruism is behavior motivated by concern for others or by internalized values, goals, and self-rewards rather than by the expectation of concrete or social rewards, or the desire to avoid punishment or sanctions" (Eisenberg et al. 1999). Currently, the mainstream approach to understanding altruism is that altruists benefit physically and psychologically by acting in an altruistic way, either immediately or over time (Wang et al., 2020). Reduced aggressiveness, greater physical and mental health, increased lifespan, and enhanced well-being are all results of altruistic behavior (Dizon et al., 2007; Harmon-Jones et al., 2004).

Both helping others and receiving help were significant predictors of mental health (Schwartz et al., 2003). A study conducted by Feng et al. (2020) explored the influence of altruism on negative affect and mental health when altruists cannot perform altruistic behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the results, persons with high altruism who were unable to practice altruistic conduct during COVID-19 had more negative affect compared to people who have poor altruism, which in turn heightened their feelings of anxiety and depression.

### Rationale for the study

#### Objectives

1. To investigate the connection between forgiveness and mental health.
2. To find out the relationship between altruism and mental health.
3. To examine the contribution of forgiveness and altruism to mental health.

#### Hypotheses

1. There exists a negative relationship between Self-forgiveness, others' forgiveness, and Situational forgiveness with mental health problems.
2. There exists a negative relationship between altruism and mental health problems.
3. Forgiveness and Altruism significantly contribute to mental health problems.

#### Methods

The above studies show that forgiveness is associated with improved mental health. Promoting forgiveness among young adults can help to expand their psychological well-being. Therefore, the current study aims to find out the potential benefits of trait forgiveness in mental health among college students.

#### Participants

The current study consists of 107 participants (males= and females=) of ages ranging between The data was collected online through a google form. The consent form and proper instructions were also written down in the google form. The data was then analyzed by using SPSS Version 26.

#### Tools used in the study

1. **Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)**. A three-dimensional scale was developed by Thompson et al. (2005) that measures the different aspects of dispositional forgiveness of the individual. The three dimensions are self-forgiveness, the forgiveness of others, and situational forgiveness. All three subscales were measured by 18 statements included in the test. Each item is scored on a seven-point Likert style scale, with 1 being "almost always true of me" and 7 being "almost always false of me". The higher score on subscales reflects the greater forgiveness of the participant. The internal consistency of the whole scale was  $\alpha = 0.86$  as reported by Thompson et al. (2005).
2. **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)**. GHQ is a widely used scale for detecting symptoms of mental health problems. This scale was developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). GHQ can be administered to adolescents as well as adults. This scale measures anxiety, depression, somatic

symptoms, and social withdrawal or dysfunction. Each statement can be rated on a 4-point Likert-type scoring method. A Higher score on GHQ indicates mental health problems which mean poor mental health of the individual.

- 3. Adapted Self-Report Altruism Scale (ASRAS).** This scale originally was developed by Rushton (1981) to assess the Altruism of the person. Witt and Boleman (2009) adapted this scale for the youth. The scale's 14 items are intended to measure how frequently people act altruistically. The questionnaire's items include the following, "I would give money to a charity" and "I would give directions to a stranger". The participants indicated how frequently they would engage in the altruistic actions included in the measure by grading each item from 0 (never) to 4 on a 5-point Likert scale (very often). The total of all the statements was used to score the scale, with higher scores signifying higher degrees of altruism. The Self-Report Altruistic Personality Scale has a reliability coefficient of .83, which suggests that the scale has a strong level of internal consistency.

## Results

The intercorrelations between the measures of forgiveness, Altruism, and mental health has been shown in table-1.

**Table 1**

*Correlations between forgiveness, Altruism, and Mental Health.*

| Variables | SF | OF   | SiF    | TotF   | TotA  | TGHQ    |
|-----------|----|------|--------|--------|-------|---------|
| SF        | 1  | .080 | -.158  | .544** | .104  | -.181   |
| OF        |    | 1    | .342** | .726** | .068  | -.236*  |
| SiF       |    |      | 1      | .605** | -.077 | -.326** |
| TotF      |    |      |        | 1      | .054  | -.396** |
| TotA      |    |      |        |        | 1     | .043    |
| TGHQ      |    |      |        |        |       | 1       |

*Note.* SF- Self-forgiveness; OF- Others forgiveness; SiF- Situational forgiveness; TotF- Total forgiveness; TotA- Total Altruism; TGHQ- Total Mental Health.

\*\* significant at .01 probability level

\*significant at .05 probability level.

Mental health problems is negatively correlated with Forgiveness for others ( $r = -.236$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Situational forgiveness ( $r = -.326$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Total forgiveness is also found negatively correlated with mental health problems ( $r = -.396$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It is pertinent to mention that high score on the GHQ measure reflects poor mental health i.e., mental health problems. Here, forgiveness is negatively associated with mental health problems which mean high forgiveness related to good mental health. Altruism is found uncorrelated with mental health as well as forgiveness.

## Regression analysis

The summary of the stepwise regression analysis for mental health (dependent variable) suggests that two variables (Situational forgiveness and Self-forgiveness) emerged as potent predictors of the mental health of adults.

**Table 2**

*Stepwise multiple regression analysis (Dependent Variable).*

| Variables | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F     | $\beta$ | df    | Sig. |
|-----------|------|----------------|-------------------------|-------|---------|-------|------|
| SiF       | .326 | .107           | .098                    | 12.52 | -.364   | 1/105 | .001 |
| SF        | .403 | .162           | .146                    | 10.06 | -.239   | 2/104 | .01  |

Situational forgiveness is the first strongest predictor of mental health which is entered into the equation in step one. The multiple R and R<sup>2</sup> are .326 and .107 respectively. The F-ratio is found 12.52 and the beta value for the variable shows a negative relation ( $\beta = -.364$ ). Self-forgiveness entered the equation at step 2, with this entry, multiple R increased to .403 and R<sup>2</sup> becomes .162. The F-ratio now obtained equals 10.06

and the beta value is ( $\beta = -.239$ ). It can be seen that situational forgiveness and self-forgiveness account for 16% of the variance in mental health.

## Discussion

Previous studies have shown that forgiveness has a positive effect on mental health (Feldman et al., 2004; Long et al., 2020; Maltby et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2010; Rye et al., 2004). For hypothesis one, others' forgiveness and situational forgiveness are found to be negatively correlated with mental health problems which indicate that others' forgiveness and situational forgiveness both improved mental health. In previous findings, Altruism is found positively associated with mental health (Feng et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2003). But in this study, no significant relation is found between altruism and mental health. So, hypothesis two is not proved to be true in the current study. Only two dimensions of forgiveness are found to be contributed to mental health. Altruism does not contribute to mental health for adults and this finding is contradictory to previous findings. So hypothesis three is proved only partly true.

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