

Forgiveness, Self Esteem and Subjective Well-Being among Females across Age.

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Abstract: The present study was done to find out the interrelationships between different variables viz. forgiveness, self esteem and subjective well-being in females of different age groups. The differences between the different age groups of females were also explored on forgiveness, self esteem and subjective well-being. To fulfill these objectives a sample of 120 females were taken between the age ranges of 20 to 59 years, having been divided into four age groups subsequently. Each group consisted of 30 participants. Self esteem was found to be significantly correlated with forgiveness and subjective well-being in the females of first age group (age range 20 to 29 years). Self esteem was significantly and positively correlated with subjective well-being in second group (age range 30 to 39 years) of females too. The results yielded the significant positive correlation between self esteem and subjective well-being and between forgiveness and subjective well-being in females of third age group (age range 40 to 49 years). Positive significant correlation was also obtained between self esteem and forgiveness in females of fourth age group (age range 50 to 59 years). While no significant differences were found between all the age groups in terms of forgiveness, self esteem and subjective well-being except in one i.e. between 20 to 29 years and 50-59 years' age groups of females on self esteem only.

Key Words: forgiveness, self esteem, subjective well- being.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Virtually all of human disturbances are the result of blaming others, society or the self for things that have happened. From such blaming the need for forgiveness arises (Beck, 1995; Ellis and Dryden, 1997). Gable & Haidt (2005), Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) described one reason why forgiveness attracts attention might be its pro-social character, making it a focus of the positive psychology movement. Forgiveness is a natural part of the human experience. It is one of the many interpersonal processes and intrapersonal reactions to an offense. According to Exline, Worthington, Hill & McCullough (2003) the concept of forgiveness has received attention by researchers in personality and social psychology during the last decade. Birditt and Fingerman and Almeida (2005) found that relative to younger adults, older adults were more likely to use passive constructive strategies (e.g., not saying anything) in response to interpersonal tensions. Older adults were also less likely than younger adults to use active destructive strategies (e.g., arguing). These age differences in reactions to tensions were independent of the frequency of exposure to such tensions. Thus, even when exposed to multiple interpersonal tensions, older adults still responded less destructively, relative to younger adults. A number of studies by Girard and Mullet (1997), Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard (1998) explored age-related differences in forgivingness (i.e., cross-situational propensity to forgive) and limits to forgiveness. Their work has suggested that the overall propensity to forgive may be greater in older adults (66+ years old) than in young and middle-aged adults, with a high percentage of the oldest age group (75+ years old) being unconditional forgivers. A study by Subkoviak et al. (1995) compared college aged students and their parents on a series of forgiveness items with regard to an offense they had recently experienced. The parent group reported greater forgiveness, suggesting that they were able to forgive more quickly. However, the mean age of the parent group was 49 years, a middle-aged sample. It means the degree of forgiveness is influenced by age. A study by Jaquish and Ripple (1981), Gove, Ortega and Style (1989), Lall and Johnson (1996) and Galambos, Barker & Krahn (2006) shows that young adults have lower self esteem than do middle aged adults. Some researchers have shown that self esteem increase across adulthood. A Study by Helson and Wink (1992) Roberts and Bengtsons' (1996) longitudinal research shows the increase in self esteem from age 43 years to age 52 years. A study by Robins, et al. (2002) in a sample of individuals aged 9 to 90 years found that self esteem was high in the youngest age group, declined over the loose of childhood and adolescence, decreased gradually

throughout adulthood and declined sharply at the beginning of the mid 60s. Several cross-sectional studies showed that middle-aged adults had higher self-esteem than did older adults (Jaquish & Ripple (1981), Ranzjin, et al. (1998), Tiggemann & Lynch, (2001) Ward 1977). A study by Herzoy and Rodgers (1981), Horley and Lavery (1995), Larsen (1978), Stock, Okum, Haring and Witter (1983) found that subjective well being does increase or often does not decrease with age.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness describes that it is a moral virtue in which an unjustly treated person offers mercy and love toward the one who did wrong. Forgiveness differs from such concepts as excusing, forgetting and reconciling because the latter three are not moral virtues. According to Rye and Pargament (2002) forgiveness is letting go of negative affect (hostility), negative cognitions (e.g. thoughts of revenge), and negative behavior (e.g., verbal aggression) in response to considerable injustice and also may involve responsibility positively toward the offender (e.g. compassion). A Correlational study by Berry & Worthington (2001) shows that forgiveness is positively associated with mental health. A study by Thompso, Synder and Hoffman (2005) posited that forgiveness has positive effect on mental health. A study by Brown & Phillips (2005), Row & Piferi, (2006) and Thompson et al., (2005) found that forgiveness is positively related with life satisfaction and negatively associated with depression. A Study by Exline, Yali, & Lobel (1999), Brown (2003), Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade (2005) and Orcutt, (2006) revealed that forgiveness is negatively related with rumination.

Self esteem

Self-esteem is an evaluation of our worthiness as individuals, a judgment that we are good, valuable people. According to James (1890) self-esteem is a product of 'perceived competence in domains of importance. This means that self-esteem is derived from thinking we're good at things that have significance to us, but not those we don't personally value (e.g., one teen male may invest his self-esteem in being a good football player but not a high-achieving student, whereas the opposite may be true for another teen). Rosenberg (1965) defined self esteem as the subjective life of the individual, largely one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Malbi and Reasoner (2000) put self esteem as "The overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way. It indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself/ herself to be competent and worthy of living". Simply, self esteem is essentially one's feeling of self- competence and self worth.

Subjective well being

Subjective well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives, and includes variables such as life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, lack of depression and anxiety, and positive moods and emotions. According to George (1981) "Subjective well being is the individual's perceived state of being and evaluation of one's life situation." A study was conducted by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1991) on "The Moral Development of Forgiving" which revealed positive results, indicating that the promotion of forgiveness enhances psychological well-being among individuals coping with a variety of serious offenses (e.g., incest, deprivation of love from parents). A study by Karremans et al. (2003) and McCullough (2000) revealed that forgiveness also reduces the individual's anger level, and thereby decreases the frequency of negative-affect. Within close relationships, forgiveness may help restore relationship quality and thereby increases well being. Kelley & Thibaut (1978) through a study revealed that forgiveness is associated with enhanced levels of psychological well-being. When a person experiences strong commitment to the offender, whereas this association should be less pronounced or absent when a person experiences weak commitment to the offender. Toussaint, Williams, Musick, and Eversons' (2001) study on "Forgiveness and health: Age differences in a U. S. probability sample" showed that forgiveness of self and others was associated with less distress and greater well-being. Toussaint & Webbs' (2005) study says that forgiveness has direct and indirect associations with mental health. Berry & Worthington (2001) study opined that forgiveness is positively associated with mental health.

Objectives

- 1) To study the significant differences on variables of Forgiveness, Self Esteem and Subjective Well Being between females of different age groups.
- 2) To study the inter-correlations between the variables of Forgiveness, Self Esteem and Subjective Well Being in females of different age groups.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 females with age ranging between 20 to 59 years. Further the sample was divided into four groups on the basis of age i.e. Group I - 20 to 29 years, Group II - 30 to 39 years, Group III - 40 to 49 years, and Group IV - 50 to 59 years. Each group consisted of 30 females.

Tools

1. **The Forgiveness Scale** was given by Thompson et al. (2005). It has 18 statements and three categories that measures forgiveness of oneself, others and various situations. Each category has 6 items. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from almost always of me to almost always true of me. This scale has .72-.87 reliability and convergent and discriminant validity with other measures of mental health, beliefs and forgiveness etc. (Thompson et al. 2005).

2. **The Self-Esteem Questionnaire** by Rosenberg, (1965). It is one dimensional questionnaire to measure global self esteem. It has ten questions related to the value a person attributes to him/ herself. Responses were given on a four-point scale ranging from ‘Disagree completely’ to ‘completely agree’. Score range of this scale between 10 to 40, higher score means higher the level of self esteem. Rosenberg (1965) found the internal consistency of this scale range from .85 to .88 on college students. Construct validity of this scale was found to be .72.

3. **The Subjective Well-Being scale (SWB)** was given by Sell and Nagpal (1992). It has 40 items that measure the feelings of well being/ ill being as experienced by an individual or a group of individuals in various day to day concerns. Responses were given in a three point scales. For positive items the values are 3, 2 and 1 and for negative items the values are 1, 2 and 3. Thus the score range is 40 to 120. The 40-items total score give the overall subjective well-being score. It consists twelve categories that are general well-being, positive-affect, expectation-achievement congruence, confidence in coping, transcendence, family group support, social support, primary group support, inadequate mental mastery, perceived ill-health, deficiency in social contacts, general well being negative-affect. Sell and Nagpal (1992) analyzed different samples in different languages, and from varied areas of India by factor analysis. It showed stability in content of factors as well as stability over time of 18 months when re- tested. This scale has high inter-rater, inter-scores and test-retest reliability. It has also significant and satisfactory validity. Patil and Halyal (1999) have reported that the test retest reliability is 0.79 and validity is 0.86.

Statistical analysis

t -test

Pearson Product Moment Method of Correlation.

Procedure

First of all the sample was taken purposefully from different areas of Hisar, a city of Haryana. After that the subjects were approached one by one and rapport was established. Two scales were administered on 120 female participants of different age group range 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59 years. Scoring was done according to the respective manuals of the scales.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained data was analyzed in terms of t-test and Correlation.

Table 1: Significance of difference between means on variables of self-esteem, forgiveness and subjective well-being between groups of females. (Total N=120; N=30 in each group)

Variables → Groups	Self Esteem			Forgiveness			SWB		
	Mean	SD	t-value	Mean value	SD	t-	Mean	SD	t-value
I II	19.70 21.00	3.83 4.21	1.43	82.13 82.83	8.05 8.10	0.27	87.63 87.13	9.20 8.93	0.20
I III	19.70 20.56	3.83 4.10	1.00	82.13 86.33	8.05 9.20	1.50	87.63 87.36	9.20 9.23	0.09
I IV	19.70 22.13	3.83 4.53	3.26**	82.13 82.63	8.05 8.30	0.21	87.63 84.00	9.20 9.24	1.41
II III	21.00 20.57	4.21 4.10	0.43	82.83 86.33	8.10 9.20	1.13	87.17 87.37	8.93 9.23	0.07

II	21.00	4.21	1.23	82.83	8.10	0.07	87.17	8.93	1.20
IV	22.13	4.53		82.63	8.30		84.00	9.24	
III	20.57	4.10	1.79	86.33	9.20	1.26	87.37	9.23	1.02
IV	22.13	4.53		82.63	8.30		84.00	9.24	

**value is significant at 0.01 level.

Table 1 depicts that the t –values are not significant which indicate that there exist no significant differences on the variables of self esteem, forgiveness and subjective well being between four age groups except one i.e. between 20-29 and 50-59 years age group on self-esteem only. The findings are supported by the previous researches on the variable of self esteem where exists the difference between group I and group IV i.e. age group of 20-29 and 50-59 years. Prawat, Jones, & Hampton (1979), McCarthy & Hoge (1982), O’Malley & Bachman (1983), Mullis, Mullis, & Normandin (1992), Helson and Wink (1992), Roeser & Eccles, (1998), Twenge & Campbell (2001) and Pullmann, Allik, & Realo (2009) longitudinal studies have also shown the increase in self esteem from age 43 years to 52 years. Cairns, McWhirter, Duffy, & Barry (1990), Labouvie, Pandina, White, & Johnson (1990) and Huang (2010) found that self esteem changes across the age. Robins et. al., (2002) reported the higher self esteem in the youngest age group which declined gradually throughout adulthood and declined sharply in the beginning of the mid 60s. It means self esteem is constant at the age of 59. A longitudinal study by Galambos, Barker, & Krahn (2006) also supported that self-esteem vary across age. Fritton (2009) also found that self esteem level of college aged girls is significantly different from the middle aged women.

Results laid down in table no. 1 show that t –values are not significant on the variable of forgiveness which indicates that there exist no significant differences between all the four age groups of females on the variable of forgiveness. It may be attributed to somewhat similar kind of exposure of the environment of these subjects. The reason may also be held that these age groups of females have more or less similar kind of responsibilities and have active roles in the family and society. Contrary results were found in the previous studies. Enright et al. (1989) and Mullet et al. (1998) found age difference on forgiveness. Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk (1989) and Girard & Mullet (1997) found significant age differences in the level of forgiveness between different age groups. Girard and Mullet (1997) also found age related differences in the willingness to forgive among a sample of 236 French adolescents, adults and older age (age range 15-96 years) found that older adults reported significantly higher likelihoods of forgiveness in variety of transgression scenarios than did the adolescents and adults.

Table no. 1 reflects the non significant t-values on the variable of subjective well-being also indicating there by that there exist no significant differences between all the four age groups of females on the variable of subjective well-being. These findings are supported by Ryff (1989b) who compared young (18-29 years old), midlife (30-64 years old), and old-aged (65 years old or older) adults and found that there is no significant difference in the level of subjective well being between different age groups. A study by Okma and Veenhoven (1996) also reported that there is no decrement in the level of well being across age. A study by Butt and Beiser (1987) and Veenhoven (1994) further obtained that subjective well-being remains constant with age.

Table No.2 Showing Inter-correlations of Group I (20-29years) on Self Esteem, Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being. (N=30)

Variables	Self esteem	Forgiveness	SWB
Self esteem	1.00	.39*	.47**
Forgiveness		1.00	.15
SWB			1.00

** Value is significant at 0.01 level.

*Value is significant at 0.05 level.

From the above table it is clear that Self Esteem is significantly correlated with Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being. The obtained results show the consonance with findings of earlier studies too as Trainer (1981) found that forgiveness helps to restore a personal sense of power and self-esteem. Further Germezy(1984) and Glick and Zigler (1992) found that there is significant correlation between self esteem and subjective well being and also reported that self esteem is the predictor of well being. Mauger et. al. (1992) also reported that the low score on forgiveness was related to depression, anger, anxiety and low self esteem. Furnham and Cheng (2000) found that self esteem is significantly correlated with happiness: an important determinant of subjective well being. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, (2004) study also lent support to the present findings by stating that people with high self-esteem experience more happiness, optimism, and motivation in comparison to those with low self-esteem, and also have less depression, anxiety and negative mood as well.

Table-3 Showing Inter-correlations of Group II (30-39 years) on Self Esteem, Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being. (N=30)

Variables	Self esteem	Forgiveness	SWB
Self esteem	1.00	.26	.52**
Forgiveness		1.00	.10
SWB			1.00

** Value is significant at 0.01level.

From the above table it is clear that self esteem is significantly correlated with subjective well being. Similar results have also been found by Taylor and Brown (1988) stating that positive self esteem contributes to mental health and well being. Further, Evans (1997) reported self esteem as an important factor in the well being. Zimm (2000) also reported that subjective well being significantly correlates with high self esteem and that self esteem shares significant variance in both mental well being and happiness. Paradise and Kernis (2002) stated that high self-esteem is associated with greater well-being. Mann et al (2004) also showed that self esteem being significantly correlated with subjective well being.

Table-4 Showing Inter-correlations of Group III (40-49 years) on Self Esteem, Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being.(N=30)

Variables	Self Esteem	Forgiveness	SWB
Self Esteem	1.00	.356	.49*
Forgiveness		1.00	.58**
SWB			1.00

**value is significant at 0.01 Level.

*value is significant at 0.05 Level.

Table-4 shows self esteem to be significantly correlated with subjective well being ($r=.49$, $p<.05$). Previous studies also support the present findings. A study by DeNeve & Cooper (1998), Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs (2003) reported that self esteem is positively linked to subjective wellbeing. There is also significant correlation between Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being ($r= .58$, $p<.05$). Many other earlier studies have also reported the similar trend of results with respect to forgiveness and subjective well-being. A study by Hebl and Enright (1984) found that forgiveness is related to better physical and psychological well being in older adulthood. Forgiving is associated with psychological well-being, suggesting that forgiving is a source of human strength by which individuals sustain or improve psychological well-being (Hebl &Enright (1993), Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis (1995), Freedman & Enright (1996) and Coyle & Enright, (1997). Further, Toussaint, Williams, Musick, and Everson (2001) showed that forgiveness of self and others were associated with less distress and greater well-being. Toussaint, et.al. (2001) also found that forgiveness is more strongly associated with mental health outcomes (i.e. psychological distress and life satisfaction) for middle and old age adults than for young adults.

Table-5 Showing Inter-correlations of Group IV (50-59years) on Self Esteem, Forgiveness and Subjective Well Being.

Variables	Self Esteem	Forgiveness	SWB
Self Esteem	1.00	.60**	.26
Forgiveness		1.00	.34
SWB			1.00

** Value is significant at 0.01 level.

As per the obtained results shown in Table-5, self esteem is significantly correlated with Forgiveness. Earlier studies also support the finding. A study by Rhode (1990) reported that self esteem is significantly related with forgiveness. Further, Enright (1991) found that self esteem is significantly correlated with forgiveness. Enright, Freedman and Rique (1998) also found that there is relationship between self esteem and forgiveness.

Conclusively, lack of significant differences between different age groups of females on self esteem, forgiveness and subjective well being can be attributed to relatively similar kind of environmental exposures, roles and responsibilities and environmental reactions in the lives of the females of different age groups. Overall the positive significant relationships exist between variables of self esteem, forgiveness and subjective well-being in all the different age groups of females.

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