

## Seeking Forgiveness: Motivations and Benefits

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### ABSTRACT

The topic of Seeking forgiveness being sparsely explored, this article reports the results of a qualitative study designed to explore the motivations that drive the offender to seek forgiveness and if there are any benefits of the act of seeking forgiveness for the offender. Individuals who have gone through a seeking forgiveness experience served as the sample and the data was methodologically collected by interviewing them in order to gain insight into their perspectives regarding the questions in hand. Thematic analysis of the data suggested that the motivations behind seeking forgiveness for the offender were preserving the relationship, communicating with the offended, offloading negative emotions, making amends, moving forward and peace for self. Data analysis displayed the benefits of seeking forgiveness for the offender; it fostered relationships, encouraged self-insight, reduced anxiety, facilitated self-growth, cultivated positive emotions and boosted the self-image of the offender. Seeking forgiveness takes away negative emotions and contributes to the offender's emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** *Seeking forgiveness, Benefits, Motivations*

Thompson et al., (2005, p. 318) defined forgiveness as “the framing of a perceived transgression such that one’s responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequelae of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself, another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone’s control (e.g., an illness, fate, or a natural disaster).”

There are dual sides to the process of forgiveness, one who seeks forgiveness (the wrong doer) and the other who grants forgiveness (the offended). Scientific studies on forgiveness have advanced since the 80’s (Worthington et al., 2005) with a lot of research on interpersonal forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997); (Karremans et al., 2010); (Wieselquist, 2009), self-forgiveness (Snow, 1993); (Mullet et al., 2005); (Wohl et al., 2008), granting forgiveness (Witvliet et al., 2001); (Molden et al., 2010) and benefits of forgiveness (Sapmaz et al., 2016); (Raj et al., 2016). Several studies have been directed on apology over the last several years on how apologising helps the offender experience relief from shame, guilt and lingering emotional burdens (Wang, 2020); on correlation between high and low

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self-control and apologetic behaviour (Guilfoyle et al., 2019); positive correlation between apologising behaviour and guilt dispositions (Chrdileli et al., 2018); gender differences in apologising behaviour with women apologising more than men as they have a lower threshold to perceiving offensive behaviour (Schumann et al., 2010).

The current study is a qualitative study on seeking forgiveness as there are only few studies that can be referred from the past on seeking forgiveness, and exploring the processes and factors that lead to the same would help in its in-depth understanding and conceptualization. Review of literature shows that the perspective and standpoint of the wrong doer needs more exploration, seeking of forgiveness has received scant attention. As per Sandage et al. (2000) seeking forgiveness as a concept has been neglected and scarcely explored. A look at the handbook of forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2005) that consolidates a wide range of research and reviews on the science of forgiveness shows how sparse the work on seeking of forgiveness has been in contrast to granting of forgiveness. The role of the offender's communicative behaviour, precursors and outcomes in the process of forgiveness is under studied (Witvliet et al., 2002). Sandage et al.(2000) and Bassett et al. (2006) also had pointed that the exploration of the concept, the factors and components involved in the process of seeking forgiveness is little, hence needs to be investigated.

According to Sandage et al., (2000, p. 22) “Seeking forgiveness is a motivation to accept moral responsibility and to attempt interpersonal reparation following relational injury in which one is morally culpable”. It involves interpersonal awareness and action. Seeking forgiveness has a remarkable role to play in interpersonal relationships between couples (Kelley et al., 2005) and inter-country relationships from a socio-political angle (Neto et al., 2007) as it leads to re-union between the conflicting parties involved and restoration of damaged relationship. Riek, Luna & Schnabelrauch (2014) asserted that the determinants of seeking forgiveness would overlap that of granting forgiveness such as proximity of relationship, responsibility and severity. Witvliet, Ludwig & Bauer (2002) found that being forgiven after seeking forgiveness, led to increase in basic and moral emotions. According to Sandage et al., (2000) those who don't seek forgiveness may feel distress and low self – esteem as they lack the skills to maintain relationships in a health manner, may experience social isolation and inability to relate to others. Anger, resentment, lack of agreeableness and openness were linked to inability to seek forgiveness (Chiaramello et al., 2008); on the other hand, seeking forgiveness reduces anger and leads to forgiveness (Stouten et al., 2009). Guilt (Riek. et al., 2014) and shame were found to be the motivations and the lack of taking responsibility and having the belief that the victim deserved the harm were the obstacles to seeking forgiveness (Harter, 2012). Training in mindfulness were found to increase seeking forgiveness attitudes and behaviours among young adults (Jeter et al., 2017).

This paper is a part of a study which aims at exploring the factors that lead to seeking forgiveness, its benefits along with exploring if there is a difference between seeking forgiveness and apologising. The results of the study- if there is a difference between seeking forgiveness and apologising shows that, indeed there is a significant difference with the former being profound, an internal as well as an emotional process, a two-way communication, action and goal oriented in comparison to the latter.

The main objective of the current study was to explore the motivations behind seeking forgiveness and if there are benefits of the same and how people who have gone through a seeking forgiveness experience, perceive and comprehend the benefits. This study

incorporated interview as a method to collect data in order to address the research question in hand.

### **METHOD AND PROCEDURE**

#### *Design*

This was an exploratory research design; wherein qualitative study was used to understand and explore the experiences of people who have sought forgiveness and to get insightful information into the participants thoughts and feelings.

#### *Sampling Technique*

Primarily purposive sampling was used in this study, wherein participants who have gone through a seeking forgiveness experience were selected. The existing participants recommended useful potential participants for the study which led to snowballing in sampling (Marshall, 1996). The size of the sample was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation, with no further interviews from participants were found to emerge aspects and properties of a concept (Glaser et al., 1967).

#### *Participants*

37 adults ranging from age 23 years to 52 years participated in the study. They were predominantly females, 9 out of 37 were males and all participants spoke English fluently. All the participants had gone through a lived experience of seeking forgiveness from the one they had hurt intentionally or unintentionally and had vivid memories of the same.

Participants who sought forgiveness were recovered alcoholic; went through a rough divorce; those grieving the loss of a loved one. Participants had sought forgiveness for various intense and impactful reasons: for plagiarism, infidelity, for being physically and verbally abusive, for being accused of molestation, for breaking long-term relationships.

#### *Study Procedure*

Following informed consent participants were interviewed on a call due to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. It included giving consent for recording the interview, analysing the data and violating confidentiality to the extent of publishing verbatim extracts from the interview anonymously without revealing the name, age, location etc. The participants were given the option to exit the interview at any point of time they felt uncomfortable.

All the interviews were recorded by using mobile phone recording device and the interviews were transcribed which were thereafter approved by the respective participants. The participants were asked to provide demographic details of their respective, age, sex and location. Interviews were conducted on dates and time mutually decided by the interviewer and interviewee to explore the perspectives of the participants.

#### *Data Analysis*

Interviews were audio recorded, notes and memos were written during the interview session for analysis and coding. The recordings were transcribed by identifying personal details and removing them to maintain anonymity and the approved transcripts were used for further analysis. The data was analysed inductively by identifying and reporting patterns with respect to the aim of the study and codes were created by using thematic analysis method.

Based on the objective of the study which was to explore and understand the participants point of view on the motivations behind seeking forgiveness and whether or not they

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benefitted from seeking forgiveness; the properties of the data were sorted systematically and initial codes were generated by the researcher. In addition, following initial assimilation and familiarisation with the transcripts the NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2018) was also used for browsing coding and interpreting data by summarizing phrases and sentences. As per Zapata-Sepúlveda et al. (2012), this software facilitates the construction of qualitative themes by coding and analysis of data and promotes validity and reliability of studies. These codes were then plotted in the form of a thematic chart and thereafter placed under relevant potential themes leading to the development of a thematic map wherein similarities and differences of basic themes were logically structured by reviewing and refining them, then further defining and refining the themes resulted in the establishment of the final themes. Thematic analysis is a practical and flexible method for qualitative research in and beyond psychology (Braun et al., 2006).

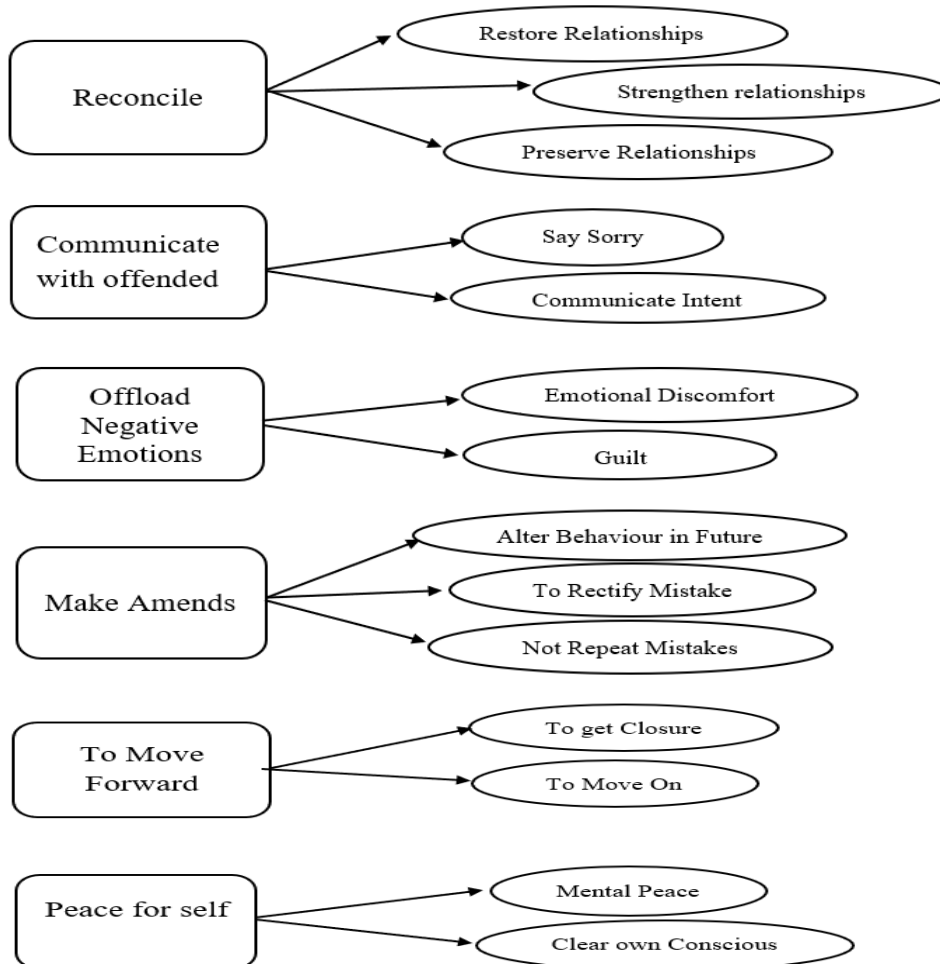
### RESULT

All 37 participants expressed their motivations for seeking forgiveness and shared that they benefitted from the experience of seeking forgiveness.

#### *Themes of Motivations behind Seeking Forgiveness*

The following 6 themes and 14 sub themes were identified in relation to understanding the motivations behind seeking forgiveness. An overview of the same is in the following figure.

*Figure 1: Themes and Sub-themes – Motivations behind Seeking Forgiveness*



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### ***Indicators of the Motivation behind Seeking Forgiveness***

Participants shared during the interview their respective motivations behind seeking forgiveness. Some of their extracts from the interview are mentioned below under relevant themes and sub-themes.

#### **1. Reconcile**

##### 1.1 Restore Relationship

Some participants in the interview communicated that their main motivation to seek forgiveness was to repair and restore the damaged relationship and not give up on it, as it was very valuable to them. *“So my only motivation to seek forgiveness was again I think very self-centred, was my partner because my only aim, vision and mission was to think of a beautiful future with him and not give up on my relationship.”* {Participant(P14)}

##### 1.2 Strengthen Relationship

Participants mentioned that were driven to seek forgiveness in order to make effort to make the relationship with the offended more open and stronger. *“Because I have wronged him, I was like at least I should seek his forgiveness come to neutral ground try to work on the relationship to make it stronger.”* (P24)

##### 1.3 Preserve Relationship

To not lose a relationship, a connection and bond by preserving the relationship was the motivation behind seeking forgiveness. *“So one of the motivation was to not lose a friendship that I had built with so much love and care.”* (P4) *“Main motivation to not lose a relationship because of my own stupidity.”* (P2)

#### **2. Communicate with offended**

##### 2.1 Say Sorry

To communicate how sorry, they were for the actions and accept their fault was a motivating factor for the participants to seek forgiveness. P26 shared, *“As I said I think forgiveness my only motivation to seek forgiveness was to seek forgiveness was to accept that something wrong has been done and I must make amends.”* *“It was just to let the other person know that I am truly sorry.”* (P9)

##### 2.2 Communicate Intent

Communicating the intention behind the action that caused the hurt to the offended was another motive behind seeking forgiveness for some participants. For instance, P4 said, *“I wanted her to know that I did not do it intentionally, I couldn't really halt the hurt, I knew that, apologizing doesn't really help as much but I, I sort of understood that if I if I at least communicate the fact that I wasn't intending on hurting her, it wasn't my intention”.*

#### **3. Offload Negative Emotions**

##### 3.1 Emotional Discomfort

Discharging the emotional discomfort was a motivating factor for the participants to seek forgiveness from the offended. They wanted to get rid of the emotional baggage and resolve the conflict within. *“get a weight off my chest so that I don't associate my personality and my identity with that person that I become sometimes.”* (P36) *“So it was the self-conflict within myself that no I need to rectify this immediately because this is something I am not made to do these things.”* (P23)

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### 3.2 Guilt

The guilt for causing hurt to another was so high that unloading the guilt was a motivation behind seeking forgiveness. P16 conveyed, *“It was guilt it was also a nagging feeling that maybe I left the relationship when it got a little hard. So that feeling which I did not want to identify with that is not how I want to be and guilt for sure”*.

## 4. Make Amends

### 4.1 Alter Behaviour

It was reported by the participants that they were motivated to not behave in the same manner and were driven to change their behaviour. *“the motivation was one, to tell my mum that I am really sorry, to express that to her because I really did feel it and to try and change myself. I have learnt to say what I want to say in a gentler and calmer easy, not get upset.”* (P1)

### 4.2 Not Repeat the Same Mistake

Participants wanted to seek forgiveness as they learnt from their mistake and were motivated to not repeat it in the future. P6 shared, *“I really really regret it I asked for his forgiveness, I told him this will not happen again and the most relevant thing that I could do at that time was asking if there is anything that you would like me to do or have that would that would heal in anyway if there is anything I can do for you.”*

### 4.3 To Rectify Mistake

Making an effort to correct and rectify the mistake was the motivation behind seeking forgiveness. *“I wanted to right what I did wronged. I think I realise the depth of how deep this hurt ran and the role that I had played in how deep it ran.”* (P7)

## 5. To Move Forward

### 5.1 To get Closure

The participants motivation behind seeking forgiveness was to come to terms with the hurt they caused to the offended, they wanted a sense of closure from the past actions. *“I needed to like I needed closure on it.”* (P21) *“so that I can get closure and move on”*. (P15)

### 5.2 To Move On

Seeking forgiveness to move on was the motivation. Some participants expressed that they wanted to make a fresh start and grow. P28 said, *“so that's about it just to grow just to grow and not be where you are.”* *“I want to move ahead, I want to build my children's future now that's my only agenda now.”* (P34)

## 6. Peace for Self

### 6.1 Mental Peace

Desire to be mentally at peace is what motivated some participants to seek forgiveness from the offended. *“mental peace is not there until and unless you seek forgiveness because somewhere and consciously those thoughts are running.”* (P20)

### 6.2 Clear Conscious

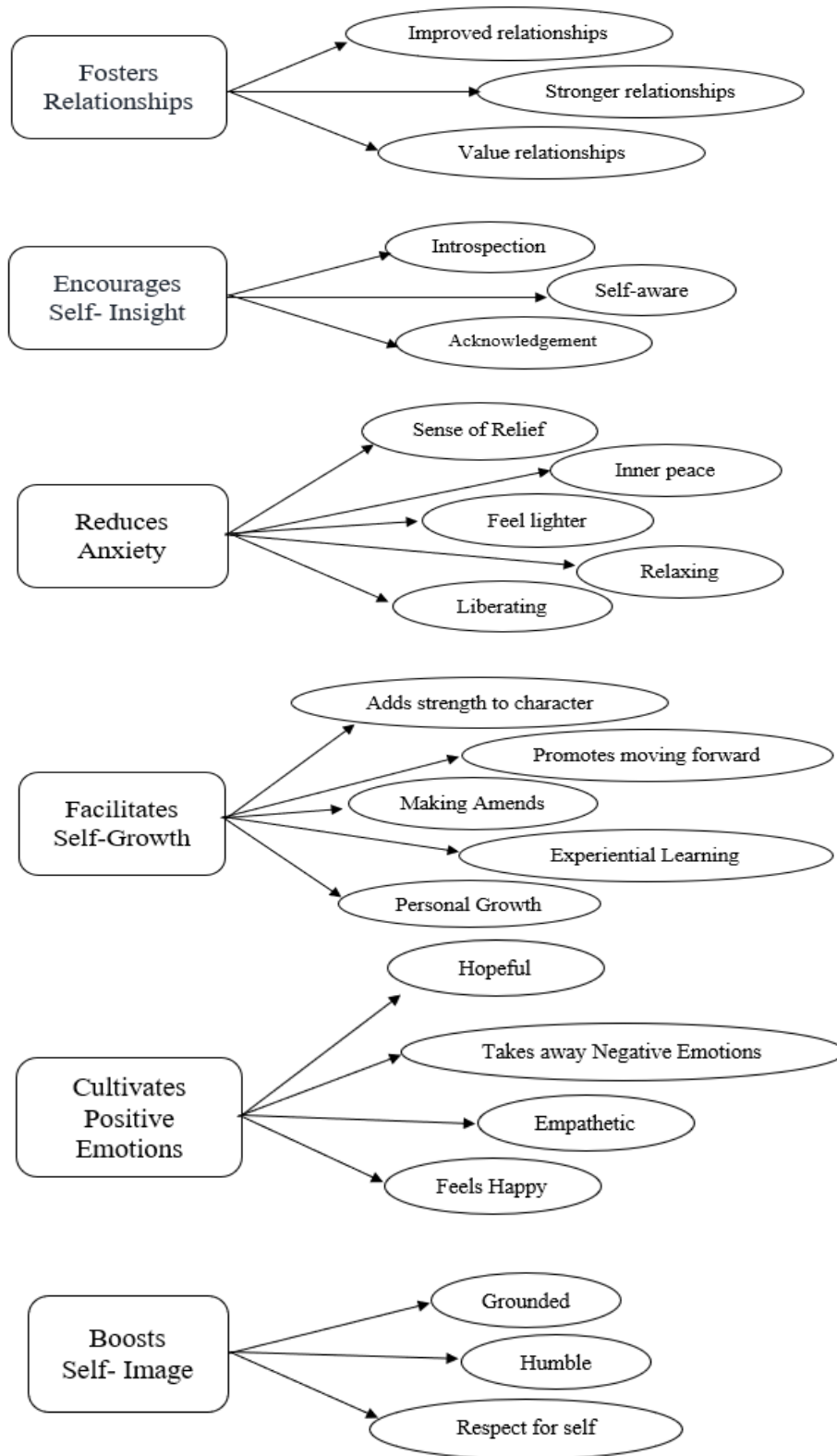
Coming out clean and clearing one's own conscious was a motivating factor for seeking forgiveness for the hurt caused. *“seek forgiveness to clear your conscious.”* (P36). *“like I had to be honest and forthright instead of like a lot of conjecture, so my motivation was too just like come clean in the most like as honest as I can be and I will give my side of explanation.”* (P19)

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### *Themes of the Benefits of Seeking Forgiveness*

The following 6 themes and 23 sub themes were identified in relation to understanding the benefits of seeking forgiveness. An overview of the same is in the following figure 2:

**Figure 2: Themes and Sub-themes – Benefits of Seeking Forgiveness**



## Seeking Forgiveness: Motivations and Benefits

### *Indicators of Benefits of Seeking Forgiveness*

Participants shared during the interview how they benefitted respectively after seeking forgiveness from the offended. Some of their extracts from the interview are mentioned below under relevant themes and sub-themes.

### **1. Seeking Forgiveness Fosters Relationships**

#### 1.1 Improved Relationship

Some participants in the interview expressed how after seeking forgiveness they felt that their relationship with the one they had hurt improved. *“it has helped the quality of the relationship and has taught me about other relationships”* (P{Participant}1). *“Yes, tremendously a lot of relationships that were damaged have come back. A lot of relationships whether deceit, lies they have kind of sorted themselves out you know”* (P6).

#### 1.2 Stronger Relationships

Participants shared that after seeking forgiveness the relationship grew, the bonds become stronger and took the relationship to another level. *“I have been benefited from seeking forgiveness. Just one thing that I had already mentioned, I have these stronger bonds because I sought forgiveness. I think it bought us closer. I have definitely felt closer, like this entire exercise has got people closer I have sought forgiveness from.”* (P4).

#### 1.3 Value Relationships

Another benefit after seeking forgiveness as revealed by some participants was that they started to value relationships in their life and not take them for granted. *“It was also one of the most humbling experiences, because like you, when you are love the way, I am loved, I am very blessed to be loved like that you take it for granted and I don't take it for granted anymore.”* (P13). Some participants also communicated that post seeking forgiveness they tried to nurture relationships by reaching out to those who matter. *“I atoned for my mistake and tried to nurture good relationship which benefit me as well so that's the benefit.”* (P24).

### **2. Seeking Forgiveness Encourages Self-Insight**

#### 2.1 Introspection

Seeking forgiveness encouraged participants to think deeper and opened channels to self-reflection and self-questioning. *“I got into a very contemplative thinking mode, it just made me think deeper on what I did. It just made me think deeper into whether going through all of this was worth it. And I realized that it just wasn't. It was just so mentally tiring and emotionally exhausting.”* (P5).

#### 2.2 Self-awareness

According to some participants, seeking forgiveness as an experience made them more mindful, conscious, thereby facilitated self-understanding. *“Lot of insights about myself and if not fully at least, I am making an effort to bring some changes in my personality.”* (P2). *“has helped me a lot in expressing and being myself and umm being emotionally more, more present, I am aware about my emotions all the time now.”* (P3)

#### 2.3 Acknowledgement

The act of seeking forgiveness has benefitted participants as it inspired acceptance of self and the situation. Participants 35 for instance shared that seeking forgiveness, stimulated less judgement along with the deep realization of their potential to accept mistakes. *“I think as a part of my own self-concept I know I have the potential to go wrong but I also know*



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*that somewhere I have the potential to accept mistake that I have made and try to at least ask for forgiveness if I can't rectify it."*

### 3. Seeking Forgiveness Reduced Anxiety

#### 3.1 Sense of relief

After seeking forgiveness, participant's felt relieved from anxiety and the heaviness they were carrying, there was a release of tension. *"Oh, I was very relieved, it was like I almost came back to life, those 2-3 days were heavy for me like there was lot of anxiety and I didn't know what to really do in those 2 days but then when this happened, I was very relieved."* (P2).

#### 3.2 Inner Peace

Seeking forgiveness was a benefiting as the participants felt inner peace and mentally at peace *"I would always want to seek forgiveness if I know I am wrong it gives me a lot of inner peace."* (P5). *"it is for your own good and for your own mental peace it's not what the other person will think, it's because you genuinely, I want to, you know, ask for forgiveness"* (P31).

#### 3.3 Feel Lighter

Post seeking forgiveness, the participants accepted that they felt like a weight had lifted off from the chest, they felt lighter in their heart. Participant 19 for instance shared that with the burden lifting off they felt they were ready for the next challenge that life would bring in. *"Because at least it took me strength to do it, whatever is hard if you actually able to do it come out and the other end then it does its impact you like it just takes a weight off your shoulder so it does impact you like to feel more lighter you feel ready for the next challenge."*

#### 3.4 Relaxing

Following seeking forgiveness, the participants were at ease and relaxed by releasing the pent-up tension from within and felt like they could be themselves again. *"I felt very much relaxed, I feel like the older kind of person I used to be that total carefree attitude that I used to carry on my sleeve, I am now getting back I am getting in touch with that person again."* (P18). A participant expressed that after seeking forgiveness stress level reduced and felt better and calm. *"I felt so much better, I felt that as a human I have given that respect I think we are all at the end of the day only seeking respect so having given that person that respect for telling her that she is right I went very relaxed, I felt calm and even the stresses that I was in weren't even bothering me"* (P29)

#### 3.5 Liberating

Seeking forgiveness was liberating as it led to a sense of being on even ground with the one who was hurt and made way for a healthy relationship to commence. *"A healthy new relationship and an even ground, I was not lower than them neither were they lower than me, we were all standing on the same ground that was very liberating."* (P6).

### 4. Seeking Forgiveness facilitates Self-Growth

#### 4.1 Adds strength to character

Seeking forgiveness strengthened an individual's character, as indicated by the participants, it was done for self with the intention to do their own task of seeking forgiveness for the hurt they caused which took a lot strength and courage. *"My inside matches my outside, I don't have to act anymore, I don't have to pretend to be somebody and not anymore, I don't have*

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*to keep up the pretence of being a Supergirl. And whether they forgive me or not is not my thing you know they might still hold me in ill view, but my side the street is clean” (P6).*

### 4.2 Experiential Learning

As per the participants, seeking forgiveness expedited learning from the past mistakes and do better in the future. *“you learn from your own mistakes so I will make sure that that I will never repeat this, there is a long way to go, so I will not do something similar ever again in my life, I will be very conscious while speaking, while making decisions” (P10).*

### 4.3 Promotes Moving Forward

Seeking forgiveness facilitated the participants to resolve the discomfort within such that one could move forward in life by clearing the emotional blockages *“It is a wonderful feeling I would say you know, in our lives we actually create emotional blockages when you are not completing this process, is very important if you have done something wrong and especially with the person very near to you then definitely you keep clearing this block, is when you move forward in your life.” (P11).* *“If it's a very deep hurt that affects both parties deeply it helps it helps to be at peace and facilitates the process of moving on.” (P21).*

### 4.4 Personal Growth

Seeking forgiveness accelerated personal growth by making them introspective, generous and empathetic is what was shared by the participants. *“That makes your more and empathetic, more generous towards people and it's a growth it's a lot of personal growth that happens when you seek forgiveness.” (P11).* It encouraged growing up, the experience of seeking forgiveness as it entailed constantly reflecting, pausing before acting. *“Asking for forgiveness sort of helps you build up as a person because you start questioning your actions internally, you start thinking first before acting or reacting to things before using your words.” (P27)*

### 4.5 Make Amends

Seeking forgiveness inspired the participants to make amends and change behaviour in the future by making self-corrections in order to avoid making the same mistake again. *“When I'm actually face to face with people it has also altered my behaviour with them and obviously with other people now I actively take a moment to pause and think” (P8).* *“seeking forgiveness and then doing the right things after that and not repeating what you had done earlier or has helped you move on.” (P23).*

## 5. Seeking Forgiveness Cultivates Positive Emotions

### 5.1 Hopeful

The act of seeking forgiveness gave hope of reconciliation in the distorted relationship. *“in my thought I started thinking that things are ok, I became sure of myself as an individual, I became sure of my partner, I became sure of my relationship with her at some point which again we're still working on” (P14).* Following seeking forgiveness participant P27 for instance, felt hopeful of being able to nurture the relationship. *“So I think there was more of relief that, ok things are sorted I can approach him next time maybe we can give this relationship a try or nurture it better in the future.” (P27).*

### 5.2 Empathetic

After seeking forgiveness, the offender was able to identify with the one they hurt, it gave them a perspective on how the offended must have felt after the hurtful experience. *“you*

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*sort of get a rounder perspective and I think your empathy glands will expand a little bit because then you will understand ok this is why it happened.” (P13).*

### 5.3 Takes away Negative Emotions

Seeking forgiveness relieved the participants from negative emotions of anger, angst, bitterness, guilt, regret and remorse, in turn their thoughts became more positive. *“there was some kind of negativity some kind of a toxicity in me which somehow used to get passed on to my family but now I feel quite lighter. I am more of a I would rather say that my thoughts are more positive now.” (P18).* P6 for instance shared that after seeking forgiveness she did not feel any guilt or regret. *“not feel guilty, regret, remorse, bewilderment and terror and try to avoid people, no, I can walk straight. I'm doing what it takes and if there is anything please let me know and that's how I live” (P6)*

### 5.4 Feel Happy

Participants experienced happiness after seeking forgiveness. *“Yes, because I genuinely ask for forgiveness for that so that felt good, so I was happy that I only ask for forgiveness for what I genuinely felt I did wrong” (P22).* *“I don't know if it was relief or happiness first, so I don't know that was this relief or happiness that I had my brother back talking to me” (P27)*

## 6. Seeking Forgiveness Boosts Self- Image

### 6.1 Respect for self

The experience of seeking forgiveness led to respecting self, participants who sought forgiveness felt that they had sincerely done their part and taken responsibility for the wrong they did. *“Yes I think I'm a little more relieved, I feel little better knowing that I might have done my part, in letting her know that this was just not yours to bear, it's just that it's a personal feeling of responsibility and overall development which is which is benefiting me” (P8).* The incident of seeking forgiveness made the participants feel better about themselves and have a better self-image for having the courage to take the onus and making amends. *“I feel better become a better person by seeking forgiveness, the image of me has improved or I feel maybe ya ya that I become a better person by doing that.” (P25).*

### 6.2 Grounded

Another benefit of seeking forgiveness as conveyed by the participants was that it made them feel grounded and sensible by making them respect other people's perspective and point of view. *“I think it makes you a more grounded person, it makes you realise that, that you are not right always and that your actions have repercussions and you need to be really careful of what you say and do, I think it makes things more real.” (P27)*

### 6.3 Humble

Seeking forgiveness was a humbling experience as expressed by some participants. *“It makes me feel a lot more humble, it makes me feel I am kind of in touch with reality, it just makes me happy that I am not giving into my ego.” (P5).* *“I think it makes you more humble as a person because the act in itself needs you to keep your, in layman terms your ego aside and be vulnerable basically” (P35).*

## DISCUSSION

### *Motivation Behind Seeking Forgiveness*

As communicated by the participants in the interview on the motivations behind seeking forgiveness it was found that most of the motivating factors were intrinsic in nature. Reconciling with the offended by restoring, preserving and strengthening the relationship

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was found to be one of the key motivators; to restore the positive feeling in the relationship, to make the relationship open and stronger and not lose the connection in the relationship by preserving the bond. Reviewing literature on the motivation behind granting forgiveness it was found that the offended was motivated to forgive if they wanted to preserve the relationship with the offender as it was important to them (Younger et al., 2004). Another motivation was communicating the intent, clearing the misunderstanding and saying sorry. Participants shared in the interview that communicating the intention behind their action and communicating how truly sorry they were by acknowledging the hurt they caused, was the motivation behind seeking forgiveness.

It was also found that the offloading of the negative emotions namely guilt, and other emotional discomforts that the offender was carrying such as resentment, regret and emotional baggage was what motivated the participants who had offended another, to seek forgiveness. It was conveyed that they were driven to let go off the negativity and get the weight off their chest. Riek et al. (2014) also found guilt and shame to be the motivations behind seeking forgiveness.

The participants were further motivated to make amends by altering their behaviour, rectifying their mistake and not make the same mistake again in the future. They wanted to try and change their behaviour and become better versions of themselves; they learnt from their mistakes and were driven to right the wrong, take corrective actions and not make the same mistake again in the future. Lastly, the motivating factors for seeking forgiveness as revealed by the participants was, they wanted to clear their conscious, and be mentally at peace. They were driven to move forward and past the experience of the wrong done by wanting to seek forgiveness to get closure and grow. Interestingly in case of granting forgiveness as well, the offended was motivated to forgive for their own personal health and happiness (Younger et al., 2004)

### ***Benefits of Seeking Forgiveness***

As per the information obtained from the participants in the interview on benefits of the experience of seeking forgiveness, they shared that it led to improved and stronger relationships. Seeking forgiveness has a remarkable role to play in interpersonal relationships between couples (Kelley et al., 2005) as it leads to re-union between the conflicting parties involved and restoration of damaged relationship. Furthermore, seeking forgiveness generated introspection, self-awareness and acknowledgement. The experience was beneficial as it facilitated a sense of relief, relaxation and inner peace as well as elicits feeling lighter and liberated. In addition, it promoted personal growth by adding strength to character through experiential learning and encourages making amends and moving forward. The act of seeking forgiveness was beneficial also, as it took away negative emotions making one feel happy, hopeful and empathetic. It further, boosted respect for self and makes one humble and grounded.

The lived experience of seeking forgiveness was beneficial to different participants in different ways and most of the participants confessed to feeling as if, a heavy weight was shed out from their chest leaving them feeling lighter and at ease, they shared that the act was a humbling experience that helped them observe inner peace and encouraged them to value relationships.

Some participants conveyed that they had become more expressive and original after the act of seeking forgiveness; they felt they had become authentic and genuine which contributed

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to their growth and strengthened their character; it added to their sense of self and they felt empowered after seeking forgiveness as they had done their part, their task of sincerely seeking forgiveness for the hurt they caused which in turn enhanced respect for self by boosting their self-image. Furthermore, the participants indicated, that seeking forgiveness gave them a greater sense of hope of reconciling with the one they hurt and repair damaged relationships. Interestingly, granting forgiveness is encouraging, especially in relationships as well, it is constructive and leads to greater satisfaction in the relationship on the part of the offender (Wieselquist, 2009).

The offender also felt grounded and sensible as they had learnt a lot from their past mistakes and its impact on the offended, which in turn inspired making amends and altering behaviour in ways such that the same mistakes would not repeat in the future. As shared in the interviews, participants after seeking forgiveness could let go of the baggage of discomfort and were motivated to do better in the future and move forward in life.

Positive emotions commences and triggers enhanced emotional well-being in the present and the future (Fredrickson, et al., 2002). Seeking forgiveness for the wrong done is beneficial for the wrong doer(offender) as it contributes to their emotional well-being by taking away the negative emotions and enhancing positive emotions by making them feel good. As validated by the participants who have lived through a seeking forgiveness experience, it strengthens relationships along with acceptance of self and the situation by promoting self-analysis and mindfulness. Participants opined during the interview that after they sought forgiveness, they were significantly relieved and de-stressed, which reduced their anxiety, making them feel lighter, liberated, relaxed and at peace. Interestingly, while reviewing literature on the benefits of granting forgiveness it was found that thoughts of granting forgiveness leads to lower physiological stress responses (Witvliet et al., 2001); unforgiving motivations were correlated with more negative affect rather than positive affect in the case of committed relationships (Kluwer et al., 2009) and forgiveness reduces symptoms related to anxiety and depression when it comes to serious offences (Toussaint et al., 2015).

Not all participants were forgiven after seeking forgiveness. Interestingly, it was also found that some participants shared, they could forgive themselves even when they were not forgiven by the offended after seeking forgiveness, as the act of doing their part, cleared their conscious. They expressed that it took time but eventually they could forgive themselves. P29 said, *"It does it does it takes a much longer time it takes a lot more meditation and a lot more calming yourself down that you can't control other people's actions"*. Some also communicated that they could partly forgive themselves, P11 said, *"if you would say that I would have to measure this then I would then I would say 80 percent yes."*

On comparing the results of the motivations and benefits of seeking forgiveness, it can be seen how some factors that were motivating participants to seek forgiveness, actually were beneficial for them too after the act of seeking forgiveness. Participants were motivated to seek forgiveness to restore, preserve and strengthen the relationship also benefited by having improved and stronger relationships after seeking forgiveness. As per the communication during the interview, participants who were motivated to seek forgiveness to be at peace, experienced inner peace after seeking forgiveness. Furthermore, as shared, the motivation behind seeking forgiveness was to make amends, not repeat the same mistake and move forward and the benefits after seeking forgiveness was that it promoted making amends,

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experientially learning to not make the same mistakes and moving forward. Also, the motivating factor behind seeking forgiveness was to offload negative emotions and the benefits of seeking forgiveness was that it took away negative emotions.

Seeking forgiveness commences the process of receiving and granting forgiveness which facilitates mending of distorted relationships (Toussaint et al., 2008). In all important relationships people hurt each other intentionally or unintentionally and relationships wouldn't last without endurance which is possible by granting forgiveness for the hurt one goes through and seeking forgiveness for the hurt one inflicts.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

To the authors knowledge, this is the first study to explore and understand the perspective of those who have gone through a seeking forgiveness experience; what their motivations behind seeking forgiveness were and if in their viewpoint, there are any benefits of seeking forgiveness and what motivates them to seek forgiveness after committing an offense. The use of a qualitative approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of relevant factors that contribute to the motivations behind seeking forgiveness and benefits of going through a seeking forgiveness experience.

A second strength of this study is the use of purposive sampling technique in selecting participants which enabled a diverse sample with a range of rich experiences and viewpoints on the lived seeking forgiveness experience, the motivations behind it and how it is recognized as being beneficial.

A limitation in the study is that since the participants were self- selected, to be aware that perhaps all relevant factors contributing to the motivations and benefits of seeking forgiveness may not have been identified.

Another limitation of this study was that due to the running COVID19 pandemic, face to face interviews could not be taken and hence the body language and other non-verbal communication of the participants could not be observed during the interview which could have contributed to the analysis of the result.

### *Implications*

The themes identified in the research could be further explored and studied in-depth by using focussed qualitative methods like case study with one or two subjects or using unstructured interviews. Further studies may be conducted to construct a scale to measure seeking forgiveness dispositions and develop intervention programs to cultivate practicing seeking forgiveness behaviour in conflicting situations for fostering an individual's well-being. Additionally, the influence of various religious practices on seeking forgiveness and their difference can be researched in detail as well. Also, forgiveness of self, following seeking forgiveness from the offender's perspective, has not been covered in the present study in detail, which can be considered for the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of data in present study produced unique and novel insights into the motivations behind seeking forgiveness and the benefits of seeking forgiveness. Preserving the relationship, communicating with the offended, offloading negative emotions, making amends, moving forward and peace for self were found to be the motivations behind seeking

forgiveness. The benefits of seeking forgiveness are that it fosters relationships, encourages self-insight, reduces anxiety, facilitates self-growth, cultivates positive emotions and boosts self-image. The findings are likely to be valuable for researching and exploring the subject of seeking forgiveness and will stimulate additional theoretical and empirical research.

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There is no Conflict of Interest, relationship, financial or otherwise, that influenced the author's objectivity. We have no conflict of interest to declare whatsoever.

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