

## Forgiveness and Its Relationship with Social Connectedness and Subjective Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The construct forgiveness has gained immense attention in recent times among the positive psychology researchers, considering the innumerable benefits that an individual can have due to the virtue. The present study was carried out to investigate whether forgiveness has any significant relationship with social connectedness and subjective well-being and to check whether forgiveness predicts social connectedness and subjective well-being among the college students of Kerala. **Method:** The sample of the study consisted of 531 college students (male=163; Mage=20.36, female=368; Mage= 20.18) from Kerala. The statistical analysis used were Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis. **Results:** The results of the study indicated there exist a significant positive correlation between forgiveness and social connectedness and between forgiveness and subjective well-being. The results further suggested that forgiveness significantly and positively predicted both the dependent variables, that is social connectedness and subjective well-being. **Conclusion:** As forgiveness is helpful in predicting social connectedness and subjective well-being, more focus can be given to the virtue, as the variables measured in the study is significant in promoting positive mental health.

**Keywords:** *Forgiveness, Social Connectedness, Subjective Well-Being, College Students*

A virtue that has caught the global attention of researchers recently, is that of forgiveness, due to its unassailable contribution towards positive mental health. The experience of physical or emotional abuse, as well as conflicts resulting from feelings of rejection or lack of acknowledgement, can all lead to interpersonal hurts, which are rather common (Diblasio, 1998). And this in turn can lead to the development of anger and hostility and this as a domino effect can lead to the multiple psychological and physical problems (Goldman & Wade, 2012).

Forgiveness, which comprises releasing the feelings of persistent bitterness, enmity, or the desire for vengeance and deciding on to cultivate empathy, understanding, or pity for an offender, is one strategy for handling such hurt and its adverse implications (Wade & Worthington, 2005). Forgiveness seeks to lessen adverse thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

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brought on by interpersonal injuries, so researchers, clinicians, and legislators interested in advancing population welfare are becoming more and more intrigued about the health advantages of this practice (Akthar, Dolan & Barlow, 2016).

An individual's assessment of how meaningful and close their relationships are to others in their social surroundings is known as social connectedness (Seppala, Rosomando & Dotty, 2013). Because they are social creatures, humans typically reside in societies. A happy life should be lived by strengthening social ties and connections. Social connectedness is essential to people's well-being and health (Uchino, Cacioppo & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Conversely, a dearth of social connectedness may result in stress, sadness, and depressive symptoms (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). Researchers have pointed that forgiveness has a positive relationship with social connectedness (Alam, Rafique & Anjum, 2016) and that young adults who have more number of social connections tend to have an increased well-being (Jose, Ryan & Prior, 2012).

Subjective well-being has been defined as an individual's assessment of their life satisfaction with respect to different aspects of life, including relationships, employment, health, significance, and meaning. (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Better subjective well-being has been linked to improved interpersonal relationships, longevity and health, productivity at work, and creativity (Diener, Oishi & Tay, 2018). Previous studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between forgiveness and subjective well-being. Maltby et al. found a strong correlation between forgiveness and well-being in the short and long term (2005).

### ***Rationale of the Study***

While previous research has examined the relationship between forgiveness and social connectedness, as well as the relationship between forgiveness and subjective well-being, there is a lack of studies that examined the predictive capacity of forgiveness towards the abovementioned variables. Furthermore, a sample drawn from India has insufficiently examined the relationship between the variables. Examining the correlation that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being, as well as the influence of forgiveness as a predictor variable that fosters social connectedness and subjective well-being, can guide future research regarding the application of interventions centered on forgiveness to foster well-being and social connections, which in turn, will have significance on interpersonal relationships, general health of the individuals and community harmony as a whole.

### ***Research Questions***

- What is the relation that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being of college students?
- Can forgiveness predict social connectedness and subjective well-being of college students?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Type of Study***

The present study follows the correlational design and aims to analyse the relationship between forgiveness and social connectedness as well as subjective well-being and to gain insight into how forgiveness affects the aforementioned variables.

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### *Study Population and Sample*

A sample of 531 college students from the Indian state of Kerala were used in this study. There were 368 female participants ( $M_{age} = 20.18$ ) and 163 male participants ( $M_{age} = 20.36$ ) in the sample.

### *Instruments Used*

- **Personal Data Sheet:** Participants are asked to provide details about themselves, including name, age, gender, family structure, and number of years of education.
- **Rye Forgiveness Scale:** The 15-item scale was created by Rye (2001) and has two subscales: five items on the positive subscale and ten on the negative subscale. Each item has a five-point rating system, with one being strongly disagreed with and five being strongly agreed with.
- **Social Connectedness Scale Revised:** created by Lee and Robbins (1995), the 20-item test was used to gauge people's social connectedness. Each item was given a 6-point Likert scale score.
- **Satisfaction with Life Scale:** Diener et al. (1985) created the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale, where each item is scored on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree.

### *Procedure*

The main source of data for the study was 531 students from different institutions in the Indian state of Kerala. The researchers apprised the participants of the study's purpose and obtained their informed consent after seeking consent from the college principals to gather data from the students. The Rye Forgiveness Scale, Social Connectedness Scale Revised and Satisfaction with Life Scale were used in that order to gauge the students' levels of forgiveness, social connectedness and subjective well-being, respectively. They were also given a personal data sheet, which was meant to collect demographic data. The debriefing for the study was completed at last.

### *Data Analysis*

The statistical package for social sciences, or SPSS 25, was used for analysing the data. The relationship that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being was determined using the Pearson correlation analysis. Furthermore, the effect of forgiveness on these variables was ascertained through the application of linear regression analysis.

## **RESULT**

### *Sample Characteristics*

**Table 1**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Number of Participants	163	368
Percentage	30.69%	69.30%
$M_{age} \pm SD$	$20.36 \pm 1.46$	$20.18 \pm 1.18$

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample. There were 531 participants in the sample overall, 163 of whom were men and 368 of whom were women. 30.69% of the sample was made up of men, and the remaining 69.30% was made up of women. The mean age of the whole sample was  $20.27 \pm 1.32$ , with the mean age of the male participants being  $20.36 \pm 1.46$  and the female participants being  $20.18 \pm 1.18$ .

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**Table 2 Correlation of Forgiveness with Social Connectedness and Subjective well-being**

	Social Connectedness	Subjective Well-being
Absence of Negative Emotions	0.40**	0.19**
Presence of Positive Emotions	0.23**	0.16**
Total Forgiveness	0.41**	0.22**

\*\* $p < 0.01$

The relation that forgiveness and its subdimensions have with Social Connectedness and Subjective Well-being is shown in table 2. It is clear from the table that, both the sub-dimensions of forgiveness (absence of negative emotions and presence of positive emotion) as well as the total forgiveness is significantly and positively related to social connectedness and subjective well-being,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3 Linear Regression results of Forgiveness with Social Connectedness**

	Beta Coefficient	t	p-value
Social Connectedness	0.77	10.38	.000**

$R^2 = .412$

$F(1,529) = 107.87$

\*\* $p < .01$ : Significantly high

Table 3 shows the results when forgiveness is regressed against social connectedness scores of college students. It has been found that patience significantly predicted social connectedness, which is shown by  $F(1,529) = 107.87$ ,  $p < .01$ . Moreover, the  $R^2 = .412$  depicts that the model explains 41.2% of variance in social connectedness.

**Table 4 Linear Regression results of Forgiveness with Subjective well-being**

	Beta Coefficient	t	p-value
Subjective Well-being	0.13	5.24	.000**

$R^2 = .049$

$F(1,529) = 27.53$

\*\* $p < .01$ : Significantly high

Forgiveness significantly predicted subjective well-being, as shown in Table 4. A close examination of the shows  $F(1,529) = 27.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ; additionally, the  $R^2 = .049$  indicates that the model explains 4.9% of the variance in subjective well-being.

### DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being. The results indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation of forgiveness (including Absence of Negative Emotions and Presence of Positive Emotions sub-dimensions) with social connectedness and Subjective well-being. Additionally, the results of the regression analysis demonstrated that forgiveness was a key component in predicting social connectedness and subjective well-being of the participants.

Since forgiveness promotes an atmosphere of comprehension, empathy, and reconciliation in interpersonal relationships, it is closely related to social connectedness. People who choose to forgive put aside their grudges and foster a cooperative and trustworthy environment. This forgiveness not only ends disputes but also shows a commitment to preserving and enhancing social ties. Within a community or group, forgiveness fosters a positive feedback loop that strengthens shared values and a sense of belonging. Because individuals who are skilled at forgiving are more likely to create and maintain meaningful relationships, which contribute to

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a peaceful and interwoven social fabric, forgiveness therefore acts as a catalyst for the establishment and maintenance of social connectedness. Similar findings were reported by the researchers, which suggested that forgiveness towards others was significantly and positively related to social connectedness (Alam, Rafique & Anjum, 2016). Laifa, Akrouf & Mammeri (2018) reports that in order to preserve positive online relationships—which are essential to social dynamics ranging from collaboration to social cohesiveness—forgiveness is a crucial component. Also, there are research evidences, suggesting that Social support increases with one's capacity for forgiveness, both of others and of oneself, and this raises one's degree of life satisfaction (Tian & Wang, 2021). Moreover, researchers have ample evidence that forgiveness interventions are effective in improving the social connectedness of the participants, thus giving evidence for the predictive capacity of the virtue (Louden-Gerber, 2008).

As it releases people from the emotional weight of bitterness and grudges, forgiveness opens the door to greater psychological and emotional harmony and is intimately linked to subjective well-being. Forgiveness allows people to let go of unfavourable feelings and thoughts, which fosters inner contentment and serenity. Reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms is linked to forgiveness, which enhances mental well-being in general (Friedberg, Suchday & Srinivas, 2009). Moreover, people who are inclined to forgive are also likely to have higher subjective well-being in the long run because they are better able to let go of past wrongdoings and concentrate on the positive aspects of relationships, which increases their general happiness and life satisfaction. Forgiveness develops emotional resilience and a positive outlook, which in turn serves as a solid predictor and facilitator of subjective well-being. In a study by Gao, Li & Bai (2022), it has been reported that more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions were experienced by those who were forgiving, along with increased life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that forgiveness is positively related to satisfaction with life and subjective happiness (Alam & Ansari, 2019; Batik et al., 2017).

To summarize, the current study sheds light on the relationship that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being. It is always believed that forgiving with others' transgression is a virtue that should be instilled and that it greatly enhances one's sense of wellbeing. The current study emphasises the value of forgiveness because it enhances social connectedness and subjective well-being, both of which are important for leading a healthy life. Understanding and practicing forgiveness can significantly improve one's sense of general contentment and wellness.

### *Limitations*

The current study has certain limitations despite having a large sample, a well-organized research protocol, and well-organized findings. The study's sample was initially drawn from colleges in Kerala; if the sample were enlarged to include students from throughout the nation, more accurate generalisations could be made. The study's capacity to measure values for complex and multidimensional constructs like forgiveness, social connectedness and subjective well-being appears to be limited because these constructs cannot be measured exclusively with scales. Mixed-method studies might produce more fruitful outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this research has shed light on the intricate connections between social connectedness, subjective well-being, and forgiveness. Our findings unequivocally support the hypothesis that a person's ability to exercise forgiveness is strongly correlated with their

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level of social connectedness and well-being. Not only was there a clear relationship that forgiveness has with social connectedness and subjective well-being, the data also showed how important forgiveness is in foretelling both of these traits. In other words, rather than viewing forgiveness as a virtue in and of itself, this study asks people to adopt a new perspective in which they view it as a crucial element that supports other desirable virtues like social connectedness and subjective well-being. Building forgiveness may result in better mental health, closer social ties, and a more resilient and forgiving society.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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