

## Study on Forgiveness and Feeling Forgive among Early Adulthood and Late Adulthood

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### ABSTRACT

This present research examined age differences in forgivingness, defined as an enduring tendency to forgive others. They are 60 adulthood persons. From this population 30 early adulthood and 30 late adulthood persons were selected with incidental sampling method. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) was used. Results showed that people who are older are more likely to forgive as compared to people who are younger and also forgiveness can be a critical resource for health in later life.

**Keywords:** *Forgiveness, early adulthood, late adulthood, age*

**F**orgiveness involves willfully putting aside feelings of resentment toward someone who has committed a wrong, been unfair or hurtful, or otherwise harmed you in some way. Forgiveness is not merely accepting what happened or ceasing to be angry.

Forgiveness is a complex construct with an important role in religious traditions worldwide, and is associated with mental and physical health outcomes. Forgiveness is important in old age because it can improve health and well-being, and it can help people form a new identity.

Forgiveness is a complex emotional and psychological process that involves letting go of resentment or anger towards someone who has wronged you. It is a fundamental part of human relationships and plays a significant role in mental well-being. The concept of forgiveness can be influenced by various life stages, particularly early adulthood and late adulthood. This article explores how forgiveness manifests and evolves during these two stages of life, drawing on psychological theories and research.

### Forgiveness in Early Adulthood

Early adulthood is typically defined as the period between the ages of 18 and 40. During this stage, individuals are navigating significant life transitions, such as developing career paths, building relationships, and establishing independence. The search for identity, coupled with heightened emotional and social challenges, can influence how forgiveness is experienced and practiced.

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## **Study on Forgiveness and Feeling Forgive among Early Adulthood and Late Adulthood**

### **Identity and Self-Esteem**

Early adulthood is a critical period for identity development, as theorized by Erik Erikson. Young adults may be more prone to forgiveness as they seek harmony in relationships and strive to define their values and beliefs. Forgiveness, in this sense, can be seen as a tool for building stronger social connections and improving one's self-concept. However, young adults may also struggle with forgiveness when they are still in the process of shaping their personal identity. A lack of emotional regulation and heightened emotional responses to injustice can make forgiving more difficult during this stage.

### **Peer Relationships and Romantic Bonds**

Relationships with peers, romantic partners, and even family members are central in early adulthood. The intensity of these relationships means that conflicts are frequent, and forgiveness becomes a vital skill for maintaining harmony. In romantic relationships, forgiveness is often linked to the ability to maintain long-term commitment and resolve conflicts constructively. However, young adults may sometimes view forgiveness as a sign of weakness or vulnerability, leading to difficulties in letting go of grudges.

### **Emotional and Cognitive Development**

Young adults are still developing their emotional and cognitive skills. The ability to understand and process complex emotions like hurt, betrayal, or anger plays a pivotal role in whether forgiveness occurs. Cognitive maturity allows for a more nuanced view of the person who has caused harm, making forgiveness easier over time. Additionally, psychological theories like the social exchange theory suggest that young adults may consider the benefits of forgiveness—such as reduced stress or the chance for reconciliation—when deciding whether to forgive.

### **Forgiveness in Late Adulthood**

Late adulthood, generally defined as the stage beginning around 65 years of age, brings different life circumstances that affect how forgiveness is perceived and practiced. At this stage, individuals are often dealing with retirement, health issues, and reflection on their life's journey. Forgiveness may take on a new significance during this time.

### **Life Reflection and Wisdom**

Research suggests that individuals in late adulthood often experience a shift in perspective, which allows for greater compassion, empathy, and a broader understanding of others' actions. As people age, they may feel a sense of urgency to repair relationships and resolve past conflicts, as they recognize the value of emotional peace in the face of life's impermanence. The accumulation of life experiences and wisdom can foster a greater ability to forgive, as older adults tend to value emotional well-being and the healing effects of letting go of past wrongs.

### **Decreased Emotional Reactivity**

Older adults often experience reduced emotional reactivity to stressful or negative events. This change in emotional regulation may make forgiveness easier, as they are less likely to hold onto anger or resentment. Additionally, late adulthood is marked by a decrease in the need for social approval, which can make it easier for older individuals to forgive others without the fear of being judged or taken advantage of. In this sense, forgiveness may become a way of preserving inner peace rather than a tool for maintaining social harmony.

## **Study on Forgiveness and Feeling Forgive among Early Adulthood and Late Adulthood**

### **Health and Well-Being**

Studies show that forgiveness is linked to better mental and physical health, and this relationship becomes more pronounced in late adulthood. Older adults who practice forgiveness report lower levels of stress, reduced risk of depression, and better overall health. The act of forgiving can promote a sense of emotional closure and reduce the cognitive load associated with holding grudges. This health-related benefit makes forgiveness a crucial practice for older adults seeking to maintain well-being in their later years.

### **Loss and Regret**

As individuals approach the end of life, they often reflect on missed opportunities, regrets, and unresolved conflicts. These reflections can prompt a desire for reconciliation and forgiveness. Older adults may become more inclined to forgive past wrongs as they seek closure and peace before they die. They may also become more empathetic to the flaws of others, recognizing that human life is complex and everyone makes mistakes.

### **Comparing Forgiveness in Early and Late Adulthood**

While forgiveness is important at both stages of life, the motivations and processes surrounding it can differ significantly. In early adulthood, forgiveness may be driven by a desire for social connection, personal growth, and the maintenance of romantic or peer relationships. However, in late adulthood, forgiveness is often associated with emotional well-being, life reflection, and the desire to make peace with the past.

In early adulthood, individuals are still learning emotional regulation and are more likely to see forgiveness as a tool for strengthening social bonds. In contrast, older adults, with their greater emotional stability and wisdom, tend to view forgiveness as a means of achieving emotional peace and reducing the psychological burden of past grievances.

Forgiveness can also be a disposition that can come about through nature or nurture. Worthington argues that a biological disposition toward forgiveness might be apparent soon after birth.

While studies like these provide important insight into the ways that forgiveness functions in older adults. Studies have found that some people are just naturally more forgiving. Consequently, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives and to have less depression, anxiety, stress, anger and hostility.

Recent research has shown that forgiving others is associated with a range of beneficial health outcomes including better mental health (Maltby, et al., 2004), better physical health on dimensions including cardiovascular reactivity (Friedbery, et.al., 2007), and lower mortality risk (Toussaint, Owen, & Cheadle, in press).

Studies on Examining the relationship between forgiveness and age, those that exist have found that older people are generally more likely to forgive than younger people. This pattern holds both in comparing young adults with those in mid-life (Subkoviak et al., 1995), and in studies of the broader population showing that members of the oldest age groups are the most forgiving of others (Mullet et al., 1998; Toussaint et al., 2001). Few studies have been conducted on the relation between age and forgiveness. Available empirical research has confirmed that forgiveness varies as a function of age, with young children and

## Study on Forgiveness and Feeling Forgive among Early Adulthood and Late Adulthood

adolescents, on average, being least willing to forgive and older adults being most willing (Enright et al., 1992, Girard and Mullet, 1997, Subkoviak et al., 1995).

Subkoviak et al. (1995) studies found that late adolescents (college students) to be less prone to forgive than their middle-aged parents. In an US probability sample, Toussaint et al. (2001) found middle-aged (45–64 years) and older adults (65 years and older) being more willing to forgive others as compared to a younger age group (18–44 years). Recently, Lawler-Row (2006) found an age effect in forgivingness in a study of adults ranging from 50 to 95 years, with older adults describing themselves as more forgiving than the middle-aged.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### *Objectives of the study*

- To study the level of forgiveness among early adulthood and late adulthood persons.
- To compare the early adulthood and late adulthood persons on the forgiveness scores.

#### *Hypotheses of the study*

- Level of forgiveness will be high among late adulthood persons.
- There will be significant differences between early adulthood and late adulthood persons on the forgiveness scores.

#### *Sample of the study*

The sample for the present study consists of 60 persons, where 30 from early adulthood age range 20-40 and 30 from late adulthood age range 60-80, selected purposively from different area of Ranchi town.

#### *Design and Method*

The research design used for the study was cross-sectional research.

#### *Tools of the study*

- **Personal Data Questionnaire:** Designed by the researcher, the personal data-sheet comprised details of the sample such as age, gender, education, occupational history, family relations etc.
- **Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS):** The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) was developed by Laura Yamhure Thompson in 2005, is an 18-item, self-report questionnaire that measures a person's dispositional forgiveness (the general tendency to be forgiving), rather than forgiveness of a particular event or person. The HFS consists of 18 items, 6 items for each sub-scale (Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations) which are responded on 7-point scale range from 1-7 (almost always false of me as 1 to almost always true of me as 7). The HFS report satisfactory internal consistency reliability is 0.84-0.87 and a correlation is administered as 0.77.

#### *Procedure*

The total sample was divided two sub groups i.e. early adulthood and late adulthood persons. The sample were administered the Heartland Forgiveness scale (HFS) with proper instruction. Data was checked and scoring was done with the help of scoring key.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To verify the proposed hypotheses, the obtained data were analyzed in terms of percentage, mean, SD, and t-value. Analysis the results are recorded in following Tables. An inspection of the result contained in Tables and Figure, shows that in the total sample of 60.

*Table 1. Percentage distribution of low and high scorer on Heartland forgiveness scale in early adulthood and late adulthood persons.*

Groups	Low (0-87)		High (88 & above)	
	Response	%	Response	%
Early adulthood	16	53.33%	14	46.67%
Late adulthood	11	36.67%	19	63.33%
Total	27	45%	33	55%

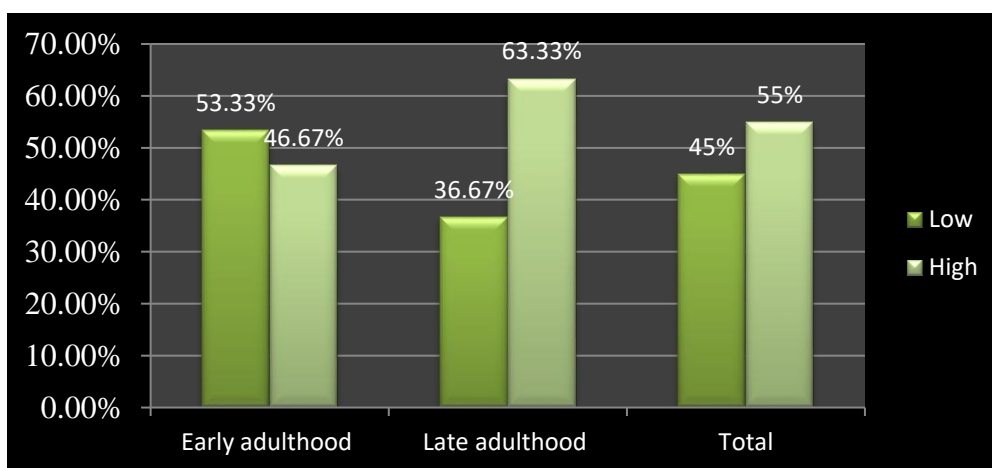
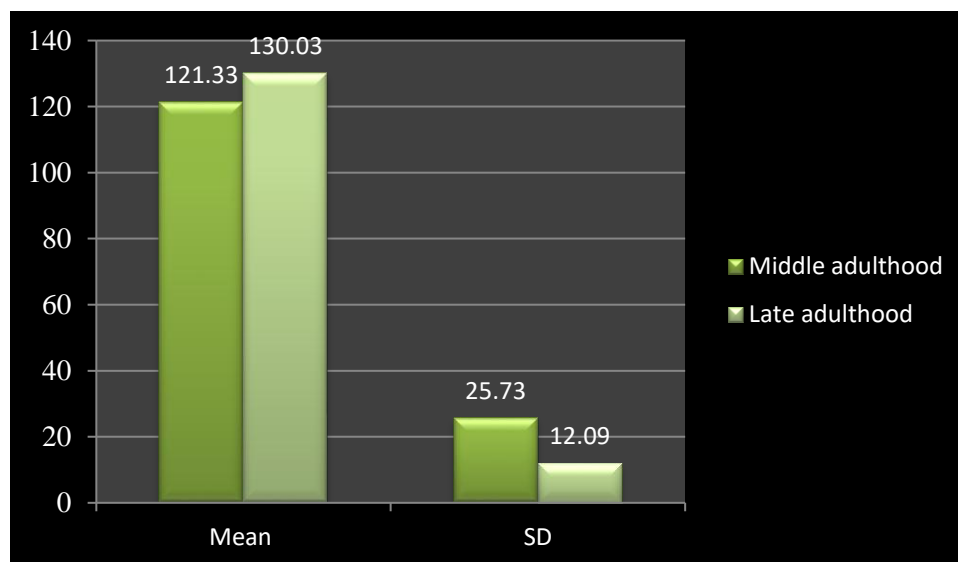


Table 1 shows that maximum percentage of late adulthood persons (63.33%) had high score in forgiveness as compared to early adulthood persons (46.67%).

*Table 2. Early adulthood and late adulthood differences in Forgiveness scores.*

	Mean	SD	t-value
Early adulthood	121.33	25.73	0.07 <sup>NS</sup>
Late adulthood	130.03	12.09	



## Study on Forgiveness and Feeling Forgive among Early Adulthood and Late Adulthood

Table 2 displays mean of younger age group was 121.33 and SD is 25.73 and the mean and SD of late adulthood was 130.09 and 12.09 respectively, there are no significant differences between scores of early and late adulthood persons.

### CONCLUSION

Forgiveness evolves throughout the lifespan, with distinct characteristics and motivations during early and late adulthood. While young adults may grapple with emotional reactivity and the desire to prove their strength, older adults tend to approach forgiveness from a place of wisdom, emotional regulation, and a desire for peace. Regardless of age, forgiveness remains a powerful tool for improving mental health, fostering empathy, and healing relationships. In this study result showed that, the quality of forgiveness is mostly seen in late adulthood people. because forgiveness is a skill that can improve with age.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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