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Research Paper

The Healing Power of Letting Go: Investigating Forgiveness as a Predictor of Psychological Well-being among University Youth

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the role of forgiveness as a predictor of psychological well-being among university students. It looked at how different degrees of forgiveness affect important dimensions of well-being as they are conceived in Ryff's psychological well-being model. The study used a comparative cross-sectional design. Using the percentile rank method, forgiveness was categorized into two groups: High Forgiveness (HF) and Low Forgiveness (LF) based on Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) scores. N = 120 postgraduate students (age 21-25 years) from Himachal Pradesh University were included in the sample; 60 participants were chosen at random for each forgiveness category. The results showed that students who were more forgiving reported higher levels of emotional stability, self-acceptance, and positive relationships, all of which are important components of psychological well-being. Forgiveness, on the other hand, demonstrated weaker ties to autonomy, personal development, and life purpose, all of which might be more dependent on personal drive and life experience. Therefore, this study suggests incorporating positive psychology techniques and forgiveness-based approaches into university counselling and student support programs to provide significant assistance for students' emotional and mental health. However, promoting young adults' long-term well-being still requires a comprehensive strategy that considers more general developmental objectives.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Psychological Well-Being, Emotional Resilience, Resentment, University Students*

Forgiveness is the act of letting go of anger, resentment, or the need for revenge after being hurt. It is not about excusing wrongdoing, but about releasing the emotional weight it carries. It can help people, especially young adults, cope with painful experiences and restore inner peace and relationships. Forgiveness takes different forms: forgiving others, forgiving oneself, or even forgiving life's circumstances like illness or loss (Flanigan, 2008; Jacinto & Edwards, 2011; Flanagan et al., 2012; Pereboom, 2021). While it is often rooted in religious or philosophical traditions, forgiveness is also a psychological process linked to improved mental and physical health, including lower stress, better heart health, and emotional strength. Although humans may be naturally inclined toward revenge when hurt, choosing forgiveness instead can reduce anxiety and promote physical health and

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longevity. Over time, psychology has increasingly recognized forgiveness as a valuable therapeutic tool, with research showing its power to heal and improve quality of life (Friedberg, Suchday & Srinivas, 2009; Norman, 2017; Rashid & Seligman, 2018).

Forgiveness is a core principle found across many world religions, each linking it to personal growth and emotional well-being (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2005). In *Hinduism***,** forgiveness (*kshama*) is promoted as a virtue that fosters peace and detachment from anger, as reflected in texts like the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana*, where divine figures forgive even grave offenses (Corduan, 2019). *Buddhism* emphasizes compassion and patience, with self-forgiveness being a foundational step toward inner peace, and forgiveness seen as a release from suffering and negativity (Moran, 2024). *Sikhism*, through the *Guru Granth Sahib*, teaches that forgiveness purifies the mind and frees one from anger and resentment, which are considered signs of spiritual ignorance (Singh et al., 2025). In *Islam*, the *Quran* encourages believers to emulate Allah's compassion by forgiving others, even when wronged, describing it as an act more virtuous than charity (Khan, 2024). *Christianity* portrays forgiveness as essential to spiritual life; Jesus' own example of forgiving his crucifiers and teachings like "forgive seventy times seven" highlight the importance of unconditional forgiveness (Thompson, 2014). *Daoist philosophy,* particularly in *Dao De Ching*, also upholds forgiveness as a path to spiritual freedom, with Lao Tzu advocating for letting go of ego, practicing acceptance, and achieving harmony (Hung, 2020). Across these traditions, forgiveness is not just a moral ideal but a profound mechanism for healing, peace, and human flourishing (Davis et al., 2012; Sandage & Crabtree, 2012).

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond physical health, encompassing mental clarity, emotional balance, fulfilling relationships, and a strong sense of purpose (Ng & Fisher, 2013). Both philosophers and psychologists have long emphasized that well-being is not a fixed state but one that evolves with our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and the resources we can draw upon (Haybron, 2008; Bishop, 2015). Diener's tripartite model, which emphasizes overall life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotions, and the relative absence of negative emotions, is a well-known framework for comprehending subjective well-being (Diener & Suh, 2003). In positive psychology, "eudaimonia," or a life full of purpose, fulfilment, and engagement, is frequently linked to well-being (Ryff, 2013).

One important factor that supports psychological well-being, especially among youth, is forgiveness. Studies have found that adolescents who are more forgiving often report feeling happier, more at ease, and less stressed in their daily lives (Wulandari & Megawati, 2019). Choosing to forgive can ease feelings of anger and support emotional recovery, making it a valuable way to cope with challenges. It not only benefits individuals' mental health but also contributes to more positive and peaceful relationships with others (Rana et al., 2014; Pareek et al., 2016). However, young people may struggle with forgiving others due to egocentric thinking, often seeing themselves as righter than others. Encouraging forgiveness can therefore play a key role in building resilience and improving overall well-being in university students (Riek & DeWit, 2018; Vera Cruz et al., 2024).

Studies have increasingly pointed to the vital role that psychological well-being plays in shaping students' academic success, especially during adolescence—a time when young people are particularly sensitive to emotional and mental health challenges. Research has consistently shown that stress, anxiety, and depression not only affect students' overall well-

being but also hinder their academic performance (Zinta, Azad & Singh, 2017; Azad, , 2020; Azad & Kumar, 2023; Azad, 2024; Azad & Kaur, 2024).

These insights highlight the importance of integrating mental health and well-being strategies into educational settings. Even so, much remains to be understood about how positive traits like forgiveness can support students in managing emotional challenges. Forgiveness is often viewed not just as a personal virtue but also as a practical tool for handling difficult emotions. It has been associated with improved mental health, reduced emotional distress, and a deeper sense of satisfaction with life (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007; Dahiya, 2022). Studying forgiveness within the larger picture of adolescent well-being may offer valuable direction on how young individuals can build inner resilience and better navigate the psychological challenges that can impact both their education and personal growth.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to measure the level of forgiveness and, consequently study the effect of forgiveness on the psychological well-being among university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted over the past two decades consistently underscores the pivotal role of forgiveness in enhancing psychological well-being. Forgiveness—whether directed toward oneself, others, or situations—is associated with reduced emotional distress, improved mental health, and enhanced interpersonal functioning. Holding onto unforgiveness can result in persistently bad emotions, mental stress, relationship issues, and personal distress.

According to Boon, Stackhouse and Lozano (2025), psychological research should take a more balanced approach to understanding forgiveness and unforgiveness. The researchers pointed out that although forgiveness is frequently viewed as advantageous, there are situations in which being unforgiving can also be acceptable and adaptive. They urge a more thorough investigation of its psychological and moral aspects, stressing that understanding the complexity of both reactions could improve theory and practice in applied and clinical contexts.

Kaur (2023) investigated the relationship between happiness and forgiveness in a sample of N = 100 young adults (50 male, 50 female) between the ages of 18-25 years. The study used standardized instruments and found no gender differences and a strong positive correlation between happiness and forgiveness, claiming that forgiveness increases happiness by promoting empathy and compassion.

Mullen et al. (2023) emphasized the therapeutic value of forgiveness in nursing practice. Forgiveness has been explained as a deliberate, emotional change that promotes compassion and mental calm rather than forgetting or justifying wrongdoing. The researchers contended that forgiveness has both psychological and physiological benefits, including decreased stress, blood pressure, and heart rate, as well as decreased depression, anxiety, and aggression. The claim is based on the Enright process model of forgiveness and the pyramid model of forgiveness. To improve the overall patient well-being, the study advocates for incorporating forgiveness facilitation into holistic nursing care, particularly in acute and end-of-life contexts.

Batik et al. (2022) conducted a study among university students (N = 828) and found that subjective happiness is increased by forgiveness in a small but meaningful way. Seniors,

theology majors, and those with democratic or protective parental backgrounds all showed higher levels of forgiveness. Furthermore, forgiveness was found to be a significant predictor of subjective happiness.

Song, Yu & Enright (2021) investigated how forgiveness therapy might be used with marginalized groups, particularly those who are homeless or incarcerated. According to their findings both groups frequently endure trauma from unfair treatment, which can result in excessive rage and poor mental and physical health. The effectiveness of current interventions in resolving this type of anger is evaluated. Forgiveness therapy has not yet been used extensively in these situations, but previous research indicates that it can considerably lower depression, anxiety, and resentment. In order to help these vulnerable populations heal emotionally and transform their lives, the researchers suggested forgiveness therapy as a pioneering but underutilized strategy.

Barcaccia et al. (2019) in a sample of N = 773 teenagers investigated the function of dispositional forgiveness in adolescent well-being by looking at its association with anger, depression, and hedonic balance (HB). Anger completely mediated the association between forgiveness and depression and HB, using structural equation modelling. More forgiving teenagers reported lower depression and higher HB. The findings further established that forgiveness is a critical protective factor during adolescence and that it may have therapeutic benefits for lowering depression and fostering emotional health in counselling and therapy settings.

Hasan and Tiwari (2019) investigated the relationship between forgiveness and psychological well-being among 150 teenagers (71 boys and 79 girls) by using the Heartland forgiveness scale (HFS) and Ryff's psychological well-being scale (RPWB). They discovered that all six aspects of RPWB had a positive correlation with the HFS. Forgiveness was a significant predictor of psychological well-being, and emphasize the role of forgiveness for fostering teenage mental health.

To assess the efficacy of process-based forgiveness interventions in enhancing psychological well-being among adolescents and adults who have experienced various forms of interpersonal hurt or violence, Akhtar and Barlow (2018) carried out a systematic review and meta-analysis. The findings are based on randomized control trials, and revealed that forgiveness therapy improves positive affect and both state and trait forgiveness while significantly lowering depression, anger, hostility, stress, and distress. Although more research is advised to confirm and broaden these findings, the study offers reasonably strong evidence for the positive effects of forgiveness interventions on mental health across a range of populations.

Singh and Sharma (2018) discovered a strong positive association between the Heartland forgiveness scale and Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being in a sample of N =50 female college students in Chandigarh, ages 18-21 years. The study found a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.46$, $p <= 0.01$) between forgiveness and psychological well-being measures, indicating that young women who are more forgiving have higher psychological well-being.

Akhtar, Dolan and Barlow (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with 11 adults in England and Ireland from both religious and secular backgrounds to investigate the relationship

between state forgiveness and psychological well-being. The study, which used grounded theory, discovered that forgiveness was associated with better emotional states, less negative affect, spiritual development, and a greater sense of purpose. Emotional distress and cognitive barriers were linked to unforgiveness. Spiritual beliefs, blame, the need for restitution, and prayer and other practices were among the factors that influenced the relationship between forgiveness and well-being.

Shourie and Kaur (2016) examined the connection between adolescents' well-being, forgiveness, and gratitude, identifying these traits as key character strengths within positive psychology. The study used t-test and Pearson correlation to analyse data from a sample of N =250 adolescents (125 boys and 125 girls). The results showed that these character strengths were negatively correlated with negative affect and had a positive association with psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The study also examined the gender differences, contributing to the growing evidence that fostering these character strengths during adolescence can enhance subjective well-being.

Raj, Elizabeth and Padmakumari (2016) conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study to investigate the advantages of forgiveness for mental health. Interviews were conducted with twelve adults (ages 25-40) who scored highly on the Heartland Forgiveness Scale. Thematic analysis showed that forgiveness was shaped by early factors like parental guidance. A positive emotional state, religiosity, and empathy were important indicators. Increased resilience, self-acceptance, and well-being were among the benefits mentioned. With ramifications for mental health practitioners, educators, and religious leaders, the study emphasizes forgiveness as a useful tool for both psychological and physical health.

Liao and Wei (2015) examined in a sample of N = 403 undergraduate students how forgiveness of oneself and others moderates the association between depressive symptoms and insecure attachment. The results showed that self-forgiveness significantly moderated this relationship. A higher level of self-forgiveness reduces the correlation between depressive symptoms, avoidance and attachment anxiety. Forgiveness of others, on the other hand, was not a significant moderator. These findings demonstrate how self-forgiveness can help lessen the negative psychological effects of insecure attachment.

Gobodo-Madikizela (2015) examines the potential for psychological repair through forgiveness and remorse following mass atrocities, within a dialogic space between victims and offenders, facilitated by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The study emphasized how these interactions promote intersubjective understanding and the development of new identities. The study investigates the emotional dynamics involved in trauma testimony and the empathy-remorse-forgiveness cycle, drawing on psychoanalytic concepts. The researchers demonstrated through detailed case studies how empathy and compassion for others can manifest even in post-trauma settings, opening doors to recovery and peacemaking.

Using the fMRI brain imaging technique, Ricciardi et al. (2013) discovered that participants felt more positive emotions when they pictured forgiving someone following an emotionally distressing incident as opposed to harbouring resentment. The precuneus, inferior partial lobule, and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex were the brain regions associated with empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation that were activated by forgiveness.

Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag (2010) carried out a thorough meta-analysis of 175 studies with 26, 006 participants. They examined 22 psychological constructs from a variety of subfields and proposed a tripartite model: cognition, affect, and constraints. Intent (r = -0.49), state empathy (r = 0.51), apology (r =0.42), and state anger (r = -0.41) were important predictors of forgiveness. Dispositional traits were not as good predictors as situational factors. Age and gender had insignificant effects, in contrast to earlier assumptions. The findings highlighted the intricate, multifaceted character of forgiveness and offer a cohesive framework for further study.

Research Gap

While current research clearly shows that forgiveness contributes significantly to emotional and psychological well-being across different age groups and clinical populations, there is still limited focus on university students. This group, situated at a formative stage of life, often faces unique challenges such as stress, anxiety, identity struggles, interpersonal conflicts, and academic pressure. Although existing studies have identified correlations between forgiveness and psychological well-being, few have examined forgiveness as a potential predictor of psychological well-being specifically within student populations.

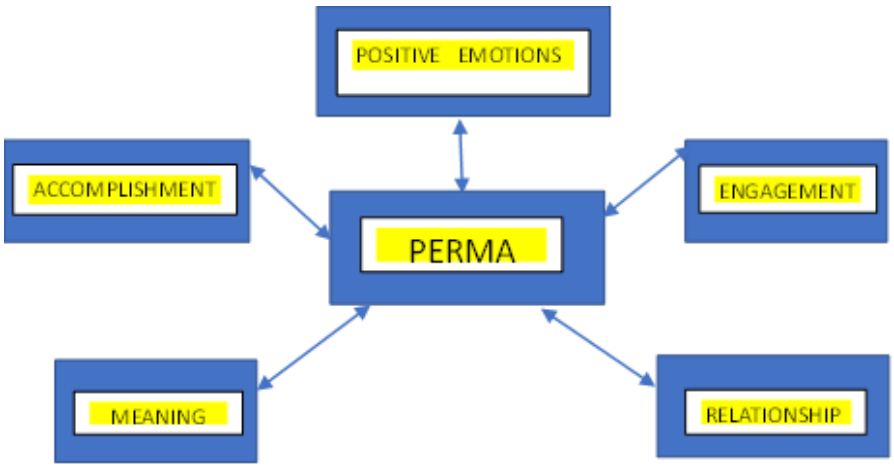
Moreover, much of the research has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how forgiveness operates within non-Western cultures, such as India, where social and familial expectations may shape emotional experiences differently. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating how forgiveness may predict psychological well-being among university students. The findings aim to inform culturally relevant strategies for promoting emotional resilience, conflict resolution, and psychological growth in higher education settings.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

PERMA Theory of Well-being

Martin Seligman's PERMA model (2011) offers a well-rounded approach to understanding psychological well-being by identifying five core elements: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Each component contributes in its own way to a fulfilling life and can be assessed independently. Positive emotions such as joy and gratitude help build emotional resilience; engagement refers to becoming fully absorbed in activities that challenge and interest us; relationships emphasize the value of meaningful social connections; meaning involves a sense of purpose or belonging to something greater than oneself; and accomplishment reflects the pursuits and achievement of personal goals. Together, these dimensions provide a foundation for individuals and communities to thrive. Rather than defining well-being simply as the absence of negative experiences, the PERMA model underscores the importance of cultivating positive, growth-oriented experiences across different areas of life (Forgeard et al., 2011).

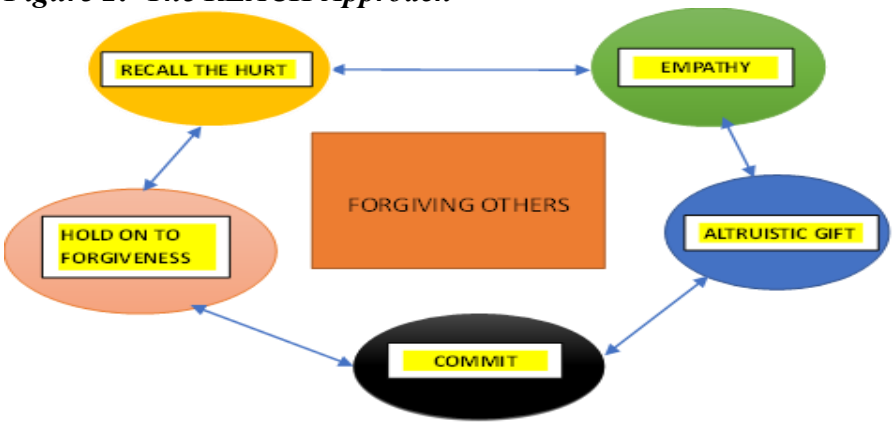
Figure 1 The elements of PERMA Model



The REACH Approach to Forgiveness

The REACH model of forgiveness, developed by Worthington and Scherer (2004), conceptualizes forgiveness as an emotion-focused coping strategy aimed at replacing negative emotions with positive, prosocial feelings. This approach encourages individuals to extend forgiveness as a moral and altruistic gift to the transgressor, rather than condoning the harmful act. The model involves a deliberate process where individuals recall the hurt, empathize with the offender, offer Altruistic forgiveness, commit to forgive, and hold on to that forgiveness. This intentional transformation of emotion helps reduce anger, bitterness, and resentment, promoting emotional regulation and psychological healing. The REACH approach is not about forgetting the offense but about reducing the emotional burden associated with it, thus contributing to better psychological outcomes.

Figure 2: The REACH Approach

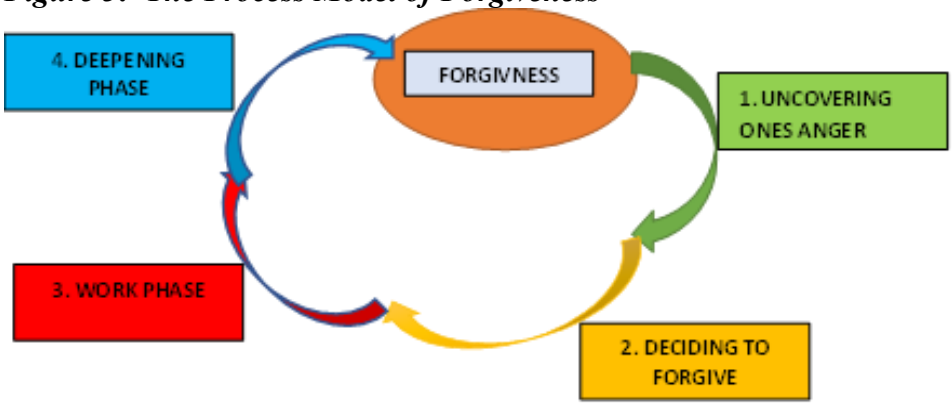


The Process Model of Forgiveness

The process model of forgiveness was created by Robert Enright and his associates as an organized framework to comprehend how people go through the forgiving process. The four main stages of the model are Uncovering, Decision, Work, and Outcome. During the uncovering phase, people acknowledge feelings like anger, hurt, and betrayal as they consider the suffering brought on by the transgression. Emotional awareness and healing start at this point. The next stage is the decision phase, during which the person starts to see that clinging to these negative feelings could be detrimental and explores forgiveness as a worthwhile

substitute. The work phase entails actively attempting to comprehend the viewpoint of the offender, which could foster empathy or a feeling of humanity. People frequently report emotional relief, a renewed sense of peace, and even personal growth as a result of the process in the last stage, the outcome phase. The model highlights the transformative potential of forgiveness by emphasizing that it not only helps the offender but also frees the person from the emotional burden of the offense (Freedman, Enright & Knutson, 2007; Enright, 2019).

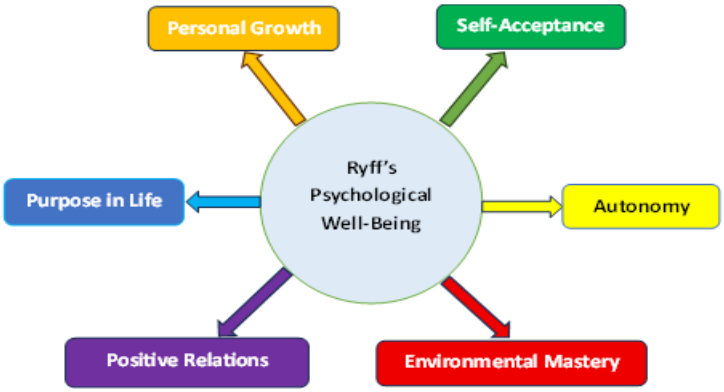
Figure 3: The Process Model of Forgiveness



Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being

Carol D. Ryff's idea of psychological well-being goes beyond just feeling happy or experiencing pleasure. Instead, she looks at well-being as something deeper—about becoming the best version of ourselves and finding meaning in life. According to her model, there are six key areas that help people feel truly well: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Each of these areas reflects something important about living well. For example, self-acceptance means being at peace with who you are, including your past. Positive relationships involve having close, trusting bonds with others. Autonomy is about thinking and acting independently. Environmental mastery means feeling capable of handling everyday responsibilities and shaping your life. Having a purpose gives you direction and goals, while personal growth is the ongoing journey of learning and improving yourself. Ryff's model brings together ideas from different fields like psychology and philosophy to suggest that well-being isn't just about feeling good—it's also about growing, learning, and finding meaning as life unfolds. It is a rich and realistic view of what it means to thrive as a person (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2014; Ryff, 2016; Ryff, 2018).

Figure 4: Ryff's Psychological Well-Being



Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant difference in the level of forgiveness (High and Low) and psychological well-being among university students.
2. There will be a significant effect of forgiveness behaviour on the psychological well-being among university students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised 120 postgraduate students, 60 in each forgiveness category, between the ages of 21 and 25, who were selected from Himachal Pradesh University to make up the sample. To guarantee an equal chance of selection and to reduce sampling bias, a straightforward random sampling technique was used. All participants completed the HFS before being divided into HF and LF groups. Group-wise segregation was then carried out according to each participant's percentile rank.

Design

A comparative cross-sectional research design was used in this study to evaluate the impact of forgiveness on university students' psychological health. Based on participants' scores on the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), forgiveness was conceptualized as the independent variable and divided into two levels: High Forgiveness (HF) and Low Forgiveness (LF). Participants who scored higher than the 75th percentile were categorized under HF, and those who scored lower than the 25th percentile were categorized under LF, according to the percentile rank method. The comparison of psychological well-being characteristics between these two forgiveness groups was made easier by this design.

Instruments

Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

This scale was developed by Thompson, Snyder, and Hoffman et al. (2005) to assess an individual's general proclivity to forgive rather than forgiveness of a specific event or person. This scale is a 7-point Likert-type scale consisting of 18 items with three subscales (forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations), each having six items. Items 1-6 represent the statements related to the forgiveness of self, items 7-12 measure the forgiveness of others, and finally, items 13-18 measure the forgiveness of situations. Item number 1,3,5,8,10, 12, 14, 16, and 18 were scored in the same way as the answers are written by the respondents (e.g., if the response is rated as 1, it was scored one, and if the answer is rated 7, the score will be 7). On the other hand, the item numbers 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17 were reversed for scoring (e.g., the answer marked as 1 was scored 7 and the answer marked as 7 was scored 1). For calculating the total HFS (HFS of self, Others and situations), a sum of scores was calculated. The total score of an individual on HFS (Total as well as each subscale) shows the level of forgiveness. A higher score indicates a higher level of forgiveness. The score ranges from 18 to 126 for total HFS (18-54, unforgiving; 55-89, Likely to be forgive, and 90-126. Usually forgiving), and for each subscale the score ranges from 6 to 42 (6-18, Unforgiving, 19-29, likely to be forgive, and 30-42, Usually forgiving).

Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being

This Psychological well-being (PWB) scale was developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff (1989), and assesses six elements of happiness and well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, healthy relationships with others, life purpose, and self-acceptance on a response scale of 1 to 7. In the response format, 1 means agree; 2 means slightly agree;

3 means a little agree; 4 means neither agree nor disagree; 5 means a little disagree; 6 means substantially disagree; and 7 means strongly disagree. Positive items on the scale are rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, whereas negative ones (3, 5, 10, 13,14,15,16,17,18,19, 23, 26, 27, 30,31,32, 34, 36, 39, 41) are scored in opposite order, as 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Procedure

At first, the questionnaires were assembled in the following order: Demographic profile sheet, informed consent form, The Heartland Forgiveness Scale, Ryffs Psychological well-being scale. Secondly, the eligibility requirements were confirmed, i.e., male and female university students, the voluntary nature of participation, and the method was explained to the participants participating in the study. Following this, the questionnaire was distributed to the individuals. They were instructed to fill out the scales truthfully and properly. The investigators communicated in English and, where necessary, used regional languages. There was no time limit. The participants were debriefed shortly after completing the measures. The study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical protocols. All participants gave their informed consent after receiving guarantees of their voluntary involvement, anonymity, and response confidentiality. The goal of the study, the non-invasive nature of the procedures involved, and the participants' right to withdraw at any time without incurring penalties were all explained to them.

RESULTS

Table No. 1: The values of various dimensions of psychological well-being against the levels of forgiveness among university students

IV (Forgiveness)	DV	N	Mean	SD	T	Table Value	Sig
HF	PWBAU	60	27.13	7.37	1.02	1.98	NS
LF		60	25.75	7.49			
HF	PWBEM	60	28.65	6.97	2.15	1.98	<.05
LF		60	25.83	7.36			
HF	PWBPG	60	27.18	7.49	1.7	1.98	NS
LF		60	24.78	7.96			
HF	PWBPR	60	26.68	7.72	2.62	1.98	<.05
LF		60	23.08	7.33			
HF	PWBPL	60	26.73	6.82	1.2	1.98	NS
LF		60	25.05	8.44			
HF	PWBSA	60	27.93	6.7	2.43	1.98	<.05
LF		60	24.55	8.43			
HF	PWBT	60	164.15	27.91	2.76	1.98	<.05
LF		60	149.05	31.98			

***Notation:** SD = Standard Deviation, HF = High Forgiveness, LF = Low Forgiveness

The mean scores, standard deviations, and t-values for different dimensions of psychological well-being (PWB) across two groups of university students categorized by their level of forgiveness—High Forgiveness (HF) and Low Forgiveness (LF). The data reveal both significant and non-significant differences across the six dimensions and the total score of psychological well-being.

There was no significant difference between HF and LF groups on the Autonomy dimension of PWB ($t = 1.02$, $p > .05$), although the HF group ($M = 27.13$, $SD = 7.37$) showed a slightly higher mean than the LF group ($M = 25.75$, $SD = 7.49$). Similarly, Personal Growth ($t = 1.70$, $p > .05$) and Purpose in Life ($t = 1.20$, $p > .05$) did not significantly differ between the two groups, although again, the HF group reported slightly higher mean values in both cases.

In contrast, significant differences emerged in other dimensions. Participants in the HF group scored significantly higher on Environmental Mastery (M = 28.65, SD = 6.97) compared to the LF group (M = 25.83, SD = 7.36), with a t-value of 2.15, $p < .05$. Positive Relations with Others also showed a significant difference ($t = 2.62$, $p < .05$), with the HF group (M = 26.68, SD = 7.72) outperforming the LF group (M = 23.08, SD = 7.33). A similar pattern was observed in Self-Acceptance, where the HF group (M = 27.93, SD = 6.70) scored significantly higher than the LF group (M = 24.55, SD = 8.43), with a t-value of 2.43, $p < .05$.

Most notably, the total psychological well-being score was significantly higher in the HF group (M = 164.15, SD = 27.91) compared to the LF group (M = 149.05, SD = 31.98), with a t-value of 2.76, which was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Overall, the findings suggest that higher levels of forgiveness are positively associated with better psychological well-being, particularly in areas related to environmental mastery, positive social relationships, and self-acceptance.

Therefore, Hypothesis No.1, which stated that: "There will be a significant difference in the level of forgiveness (High and Low) and Psychological well-being among university students." is partially accepted. As the results revealed a significant difference between high and low forgiveness in Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, Self-Acceptance, and Overall PWB, no significant difference was observed for Autonomy, Personal Growth, and Purpose in Life dimensions of Ryff's PWB.

Table No. 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Effect of Forgiveness on Psychological Well-being among University Students

Predictor/ Independent variable	D. V.	R	R2	R2 Change	Beta Weight	T	F	P
HFST	PWBAU	0.092	0.008	0	-0.092	-0.998	0.997	NS
HFST	PWBEM	0.194	0.038	0.03	-194	-2.152	4.631	<.05
HFST	PWBPG	0.15	0.023	0.014	-0.15	-1.653	2.731	NS
HFST	PWBPR	0.234	0.055	0.047	-0.234	-2.619	6.858	<.05
HFST	PWBPL	0.107	0.012	0.003	-0.107	-1.174	1.379	NS
HFST	PWBSA	0.217	0.047	0.039	-0.217	-2.418	5.847	<.05
HFST	PWBT	0.243	0.059	0.051	-0.243	-2.724	7.418	<.05

***Notation:** HFST = Overall Forgiveness, PWBAU = Psychological well-being Autonomy, PWBEM = Psychological well-being Environmental Mastery, PWBPG = Psychological well-being Personal Growth, PWBPR = Psychological well-being Personal Relations with Others, PWBPL = Psychological well-being Purpose in Life, PWBSA = Psychological well-being Self-Acceptance, PWBT = Overall Psychological well-being.

Linear regression was used to analyse the data collected from university students to assess the effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being. The table shows that the impact of overall forgiveness on psychological well-being (autonomy) was found to be non-significant, F = 0.997, the Beta weight being -0.092 also supports the non-significance. This non significance of the result is also shown by the insignificant variance (R^2 Change = 0.000), and the t-value (- 0.998) also depicts the same.

The impact of Overall forgiveness on environmental mastery of psychological well-being was found to be statistically significant, F = 4.631, $p < 0.05$. Beta weight (- 194) also supports the

same. It can also be confirmed from the high variance (R^2 change = 0.030). The t-value (-2.152) reveals similar significance.

The impact of overall forgiveness on the third dimension of psychological wellbeing (personal growth) was found to be non-significant and is confirmed by the values of (F = 2.731), Beta weight (-0.15), and low variance (R^2 Change = 0.014), and t-value (-1.653) also revealed the same.

The impact of overall forgiveness on personal relationship with others (dimension of psychological wellbeing) was found to be significant, and is confirmed by values of (F= 6. 858, $p < 0.05$), it is also supported by the value of Beta weight (-0.234), and high variance (R2 change 0.047), the t-value (-2.619) also revealed the same.

The impact of overall forgiveness on the Fifth dimension of psychological wellbeing (purpose in life) was found to be non-significant and is confirmed by the values of (F = 1.379), Beta weight (-0.107) and low variance (0.03) and t- value (-1.174) also revealed the same.

The impact of overall forgiveness on personal relationship of (self-acceptance) was found to be significant, and is confirmed by values of (F= 5. 847, $p < 0.05$), it is also supported by the value of Beta weight (-0.217), and high variance (R2 change 0.039), the t-value (-2.418) also revealed the same.

The impact of overall forgiveness on personal relationship of (overall psychological wellbeing) was found to be significant, and is confirmed by values of (F= 7.418, $p < 0.05$), it is also supported by the value of Beta weight (-0.243), and high variance (R^2 change 0.051), the t-value (-2.724) also revealed the same.

Therefore, Hypothesis No.2, which states: “There will be a significant effect of forgiveness behaviour on the psychological well-being among university students” is partially accepted. As forgiveness behaviour was found to have a significant effect on specifically, Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, and Self-Acceptance out of six dimensions of Ryff’s Psychological well-being and forgiveness did not demonstrate a significant effect on Autonomy, Personal Growth, and Purpose in Life dimensions of PWB.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore how forgiveness influences the psychological well-being of university students by comparing individuals with high and low levels of forgiveness. It also looked at whether forgiveness could predict specific aspects of well-being. The results revealed some compelling patterns, reinforcing the idea that forgiveness is a powerful psychological strength, especially in the lives of young adults navigating academic and personal challenges.

Students who scored higher on measures of forgiveness showed significantly greater levels of environmental mastery, positive relations, and self-acceptance. In other words, these individuals appeared to have a stronger sense of control over their lives, more supportive social connections, and a more accepting attitude towards themselves. These outcomes align with earlier research linking forgiveness to emotional stability, improved interpersonal functioning, and greater overall life satisfaction. Moreover, individuals who are more forgiving often report experiencing less stress and demonstrate greater emotional resilience in

the face of life's challenges (Toussaint et al., 2001; Seybold et al., 2001; Luskin, 2002; Kaleta & Mroz, 2018; Stephanou & Giorgali, 2020; Ahuja & Hasan, 2025).

However, no significant differences emerged between high and low forgiveness groups in the domains of autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life. This suggests that forgiveness may be more closely associated with emotional and relational aspects of well-being than with qualities related to independence, long-term goals, or a sense of direction. Previous studies support this interpretation, indicating that factors such as autonomy and purpose tend to stem more from personal values and internal motivations than from emotional traits like forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005; Worthington et al., 2007; Lee & Enright, 2014).

Nonetheless, when considering overall well-being, students with higher levels of forgiveness consistently demonstrated significantly better psychological well-being. These findings are in line with previous research (Carson et al., 2005; Singh, 2023), which shows that forgiving individuals often experience lower levels of negative emotions, greater emotional stability, and better adjustment in both personal and academic life.

Further, our regression analysis confirmed that forgiveness could reliably predict outcomes in the areas of Environmental Mastery, Positive Relationships, and Self-Acceptance. These findings are in line with the work of Friedberg, Suchday & Srinivas (2009) and Hannon, Finkel & Rusbult (2011), who found that forgiveness can act as a psychological resource that helps people feel more in control, more connected to others, and more accepting of themselves. It also emerged as a strong overall predictor of well-being, emphasizing how deeply it can shape one's mental and emotional health.

However, it's worth noting that forgiveness did not significantly predict levels of Autonomy, Personal Growth, or Purpose in Life. These aspects of well-being might rely more on one's internal drive, values, or life goals—factors shaped by long-term experiences, education, and one's social environment, rather than emotional states alone.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with a substantial body of research that highlights the positive impact of forgiveness on emotional recovery, reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and increased life satisfaction. In light of these benefits, integrating forgiveness-based approaches and positive psychology strategies into university counselling and student support services may offer meaningful support for the emotional and psychological well-being of students.

Research Implications

The findings of this study underscore the important role that forgiveness plays in influencing the psychological well-being of university students. Those who demonstrated a greater capacity to forgive reported higher levels of emotional stability, more meaningful social relationships, and a stronger sense of self-acceptance. These outcomes align with dimensions of Ryff's model of Psychological Well-being, particularly in the areas of Positive Relations and Self-Acceptance, and with the PERMA model, which emphasizes the value of positive emotions and relationships in fostering human flourishing.

The process of forgiveness, as outlined in Enright's Process Model, may help explain how individuals move through emotional pain towards healing, allowing them to develop empathy and ultimately achieve personal growth. This progression reflects the therapeutic nature of

forgiveness as both an emotional and cognitive transformation. Similarly, the REACH approach, which involves recalling the hurt, empathizing, offering altruistic forgiveness, committing to forgive, and holding onto that forgiveness, provides a structured method for promoting emotional resilience, particularly in educational settings where interpersonal conflicts are common.

However, the results also imply that forgiveness might not have a significant impact on other facets of well-being, like independence, personal development, or a distinct sense of purpose. These essential elements of Ryff's model, as well as the "Meaning" and "Accomplishment" components of the PERMA model, may be more directly influenced by personal objectives, inner drive, and life experiences in general. This highlights the value of approaching student well-being holistically, striking a balance between efforts to promote long-term purpose, independence, and self-directed growth and emotional healing.

Although this study advances the conceptual understanding of forgiveness as a psychological strength rather than merely a moral virtue. A more emotionally resilient student body may be supported by incorporating forgiveness-based techniques, such as those based on the REACH or Process Model frameworks, into character development programs, university counseling, and positive psychology interventions. By doing this, organizations can foster an atmosphere in which young adults are better able to handle stress and conflict while also creating fulfilling lives based on emotional health and personal fulfillment.

Limitations

Despite providing insightful results, the study has a number of limitations that should be noted. The results' wider applicability may be limited because the sample was solely taken from postgraduate students at one university. Students' perceptions of forgiveness and well-being may be shaped by local cultural and regional factors unique to the study area, which may not apply to other populations or educational settings (Amanze & Carson, 2024).

Additionally, it is challenging to draw conclusions regarding causality because a comparative cross-sectional design only records one point in time (Sedgwick, 2014). Potential biases are also introduced by the use of self-report measures, such as the impact of social desirability or participant self-awareness limitations (Van de Mortel, 2008).

Future Scope

To increase external validity, future research would benefit from using a more representative and diverse sample, which would include students from various academic institutions and cultural backgrounds. This variety would make it easier to understand the ways in which psychological health and forgiveness interact in various settings (Krupnikov & Levine, 2014). A more nuanced understanding of how the propensity to forgive evolves over time and influences mental health outcomes may be possible with longitudinal research designs (Bono, McCullough & Root, 2008). Future studies could also look at how forgiveness relates to other psychological concepts like spiritual well-being, emotional intelligence, or resilience (Rey & Extremera, 2014; Amani, Shiri & Rajabi, 2017). Furthermore, there is room to investigate how well-structured interventions, like mindfulness exercises, positive psychology-based programs, or forgiveness training, can promote forgiveness and improve university students' well-being (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018).

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