

Grudge-Holding Tendencies and Psychological Distress among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Persistent resentment toward someone who has caused harm reflects distinct motivational patterns that can shape emotional well-being. This study explored how three responses to interpersonal wrongdoing avoidance, revenge, and benevolence relate to psychological distress in young adults, with special attention to gender-based differences. Participants completed validated self-report instruments, namely the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale (TRIM-18) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21). The data were examined using Pearson's correlation analysis to determine associations among the variables. The analysis indicated a clear positive association between revenge-oriented motivation and levels of psychological distress, with this link appearing stronger among male participants. In contrast, avoidance motivation showed more pronounced connections with symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among female participants. Benevolent motivation, reflecting forgiving or goodwill-oriented responses, displayed inverse but statistically non-significant relationships with distress indicators in both groups. These findings highlight that the ways young adults cognitively and emotionally respond to interpersonal offenses are meaningfully related to their mental health. Moreover, the results suggest that these patterns operate differently across genders, underscoring the importance of considering gender-sensitive perspectives when examining coping responses to interpersonal harm. Overall, motivational reactions to transgressions appear to play a notable role in shaping psychological adjustment during young adulthood.

Keywords: *Grudge-Holding Tendencies, Avoidance Motivation, Revenge Motivation, Benevolence Motivation, Psychological Distress, Young Adults*

In contemporary times, almost everyone has experienced betrayal, cheating, heartbreak, misunderstanding, or trust broken at least at some point in their life, which results in emotional turmoil. A close friend may distance themselves slowly, a partner may cheat on their spouse with another person, a long, healthy marriage may end painfully, or a trusted person may betray one when they need them the most. All these experiences leave one with various feelings such as anger, disappointment, humiliation, or pain. Commonly, some people are able to forgive and move on in their lives without holding any resentment or

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cribbing about it, others may still continue to hold on to the memories of these saddening moments for extended periods of time. Such unresolved emotional experiences often lead to the development of grudges, which may influence mental health and interpersonal functioning.

Grudge holding refers to a person's inclination to retain negative feelings and motivational responses toward someone who has caused harm, typically arising from a perceived injustice or offense. According to McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997), this tendency involves three distinct interpersonal motivations: revenge motivation, avoidance motivation, and benevolence motivation.

Avoidance motivation describes the urge to distance oneself, withdraw, or disengage from the individual responsible for the wrongdoing. Revenge motivation involves a desire for retaliation, reflecting an intention to punish or seek retribution against the offender for the injury suffered. Benevolence, in contrast, represents a constructive and forgiving orientation characterized by goodwill toward the offender, suggesting openness to reconciliation and the rebuilding of the damaged relationship (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003).

Findings suggest that these transgression-related interpersonal motivations lead to psychological distress. As described by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) Psychological distress is referred to as a state of emotional suffering comprising feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Stress is referred to as persistent tension, feelings of irritability, and difficulty in relaxing or winding down. Anxiety is explained as excessive fear, worry, and physiological arousal often centred towards future. Depression refers to low mood, hopelessness, loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, and major reduction in self-esteem. These components are often interrelated and reflect an individual's overall mental health status.

Psychological distress is extremely prevalent among young adults because of excessive academic pressure, uncertainty about career, interpersonal conflicts, social standards, and parental expectations.

Previous research suggests that unresolved interpersonal conflicts and negative emotional experiences are known to contribute to psychological distress. People who recall hurtful events repeatedly and avoid expression of emotions may engage in overthinking about past events, rumination and negative self-evaluation, thereby increasing their susceptibility to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Psychological distress may be intensified by holding on to grudges, maintaining negative emotions, and avoiding emotional closure. Avoidance motivation accompanied by social withdrawal may lead to an increase in feelings of anxiety, revenge motivation may increase stress due to unreleased anger, and low benevolence may contribute to symptoms of depression.

It has been shown in previous studies that males often express emotional distress through seeking revenge and expressing resentment, whereas females are more likely to internalize their distress by withdrawing or cutting off and mentally replaying the incident. These gender differences lead to the creation of distinct patterns of stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults. suggesting that how people hold grudges and experience psychological

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distress may be influenced by different ways of emotional regulation and coping. Therefore, examining how avoidance, revenge, and benevolence vary by gender is important for understanding grudge-holding behaviour.

The present research seeks to examine the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies specifically avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence and psychological distress, reflected in levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults. It also aims to explore whether this association varies across genders. The research is attempted at a deeper understanding of emotional coping and its implication on psychological wellbeing with the use of standardized psychological measures and quantitative analysis.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Interpersonal transgressions are inevitably involved in human interactions, especially during the age of young adulthood, which is a state marked by identity exploration, intense emotions, and dynamic personality. The reaction to these offenses comes in various ways, from forgiveness and reconciliation to holding long-term resentment and grudges. Grudge-holding tendencies are represented by motivation towards sustaining rage, animosity, and retaliatory feelings over time. Grudge holding is also understood as a psychological process that includes being reluctant to let go of hurt, lessened benevolence, avoiding the offender, feelings of seeking revenge, refusal to get closure, and releasing all these negative emotions, rather than just the lack of forgiveness.

Qualitative studies have greatly benefited in understanding the concept of grudge holding and unforgiveness. In exploration of women's inability to forgive, Singh et al. (2022a) described it as a complex experience that includes multiple layers of wrath, hatred, changed perceptions of the offender, and emotional paralysis. Unforgiveness is understood to require prolonged involvement of the mind and avoidance of the offender, backed by participants' reporting of both active and passive attributions towards the offender. Singh et al. (2022b) depicted that unforgiveness isn't only about ruminating or having "cold emotions," but it has other causes and effects too, such as relationship conflicts, a confused state of emotions, and sometimes a heightened sense of self-awareness or self-defence. However, holding on to resentment may cause psychological distress. The sustained maintenance of resentment may cause internal psychological distress.

Empirical studies have further clarified the processes that underlie grudge-holding tendencies. It was discovered in the qualitative analysis of the predicting the strength of grudges and relationship between anger and hurt, that people who felt both anger and hurt at a high level were found to report far stronger grudges than those who felt either of the emotion alone. Li et al. (2026). Importantly, this association between both of these emotions was mediated by the belief that the offender was immoral and wrong, indicating that moral cognition is strengthened by persisting emotional and revenge motivation. This conclusion is especially pertinent to motivational theories of transgression reaction, in which the desire to exact revenge is reflected in revenge motivation, the want to avoid the offender is reflected in avoidance motivation, and lower compassion is reflected in diminished goodwill. Therefore, the co-activation of anger and hurt may perpetuate these motivating states, making it more likely that grudges will be held over time.

Evidence from personality research indicates that the persistence of grudges may be shaped by enduring individual traits. Brazel et al. (2025) reported that higher levels of psychopathic characteristics were associated with lower expressions of benevolence and stronger desires

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for retaliation following interpersonal offenses within romantic relationships. Notably, individuals with elevated psychopathic traits continued to endorse revenge-oriented intentions even after stating that they had chosen to forgive, suggesting that a cognitive decision to forgive does not necessarily eliminate lingering hostile motivations. In a related line of inquiry, Latfa and Al-Asadi (2025) observed a significant positive relationship between grandiose narcissism and tendencies to hold grudges, implying that heightened sensitivity to ego threats and feelings of entitlement may intensify retaliatory thinking. Collectively, these findings suggest that grudge maintenance may extend beyond situational triggers and instead reflect deeper cognitive and emotional dispositions that reinforce withdrawal, retaliation, and reduced compassion.

While a substantial body of research highlights the benefits of forgiveness, comparatively limited attention has been given to the long-term psychological consequences of sustained resentment. Existing evidence consistently demonstrates that forgiveness is linked to improved well-being and lower emotional distress. Kaur (2023) identified a significant positive association between forgiveness and happiness among young adults, indicating that releasing resentment may support healthier emotional functioning. Similarly, Ahuja and Hasan (2025) found a moderate positive relationship between dispositional forgiveness and life satisfaction in youth populations, suggesting that forgiving tendencies may alleviate internal distress and strengthen emotional regulation. Ain et al. (2025) further reported that among working professionals, forgiveness was positively related to happiness and inversely related to emotional strain, with peace of mind serving as an intermediary mechanism. These findings imply that forgiveness may reduce psychological burden by decreasing repetitive negative thoughts and persistent adverse emotions.

Intervention-based studies further reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that reductions in unforgiveness are accompanied by improvements in emotional well-being. Toussaint et al. (2024), in their evaluation of the REACH Forgiveness Intervention with Indian college students, documented declines in unforgiveness alongside increases in forgiveness and positive emotional states. Likewise, Cooke (2021) found that a therapeutic intervention centered on perspective-taking significantly enhanced emotional forgiveness and substantially diminished the intensity and persistence of grudges, particularly feelings of resentment and contempt. Participants also reported improved relational adjustment and a lower emotional burden following the intervention. Together, these findings indicate that prolonged grudge-holding may contribute to emotional distress, and that addressing such tendencies can play a meaningful role in enhancing psychological health.

Prolonged exposure to unpleasant emotional states and maladaptive cognitive habits are closely associated with psychological distress, which is commonly understood through symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Chronic tension and physiological arousal are characteristics of stress; excessive worry and hypervigilance are characteristics of anxiety; and persistent sadness, hopelessness, and lessened interest are characteristics of depression. Stress levels may rise as a result of ongoing hurt and anger, which are essential to grudge-holding behaviors (Li et al., 2026; Singh et al., 2022a). These emotions may also sustain elevated physiological arousal and cognitive rumination. Anxiety symptoms may be exacerbated by revenge motive, which may sustain anticipatory cognition about retribution. Relational withdrawal and social isolation are known risk factors for depressive symptomatology, and they can result from decreased compassion and avoidance of the transgressor.

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Thus, there are several psychological pathways that can be used to describe the relationship between psychological suffering and grudge-holding tendencies. First, emotional persistence prolongs physiological stress reactions by keeping negative affect systems activated. Second, moral rumination and retaliatory cognition can increase cognitive burden, which in turn can lead to intrusive thought patterns and anxiety. Third, social support networks that guard against depression may be undermined by decreased kindness and relational avoidance. These mechanisms collectively imply that psychological distress may be positively correlated with lower levels of benevolence and higher levels of avoidance and retribution impulses.

Examining these correlations is especially important in the context of young adulthood. Increased autonomy, identity consolidation, and heightened sensitivity to romantic and peer connections are all characteristics of this developmental period. Young adulthood is characterized by changing interpersonal relationships and emotional development, according to Ahuja and Hasan (2025). The importance of forgiveness processes in young adult populations was highlighted by studies done by Kaur (2023) and Toussaint et al. (2024). Persistently harboring grudges may have a significant negative influence on psychological health since interpersonal disputes at this phase may carry a significant emotional burden. Despite this, most of the study that has been done thus far has focused on the benefits of forgiving rather than directly analyzing the relationship between young adults' stress, anxiety, and depression and their propensity to bear grudges.

Furthermore, cultural viewpoints imply that moral and social structures are fundamentally rooted in the concepts of forgiveness and emotional control. Agrawal (2021) talked about how forgiveness is conceptualized in traditional Indian philosophical traditions, emphasizing how anger can be transformed into positive emotional states. According to Tiwari et al. (2025), forgiving is a process of moral strength and emotional purification in Indian thought systems. These viewpoints subtly imply that resentment's continued existence could upset internal balance. There hasn't been much empirical research done on the relationship between persistent grudge-holding and quantifiable psychological distress, though.

In conclusion, research shows that while forgiving is linked to better emotional functioning and less pain, grudge-holding tendencies include rage, avoidance, impaired compassion, and motivations for revenge. It is suggested that holding grudges may contribute to psychological stress because intervention studies show that reducing unforgiveness improves emotional states. Research directly examining the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress specifically operationalized as stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults is still lacking, though. To improve knowledge of the effects of unresolved interpersonal offenses on mental health, this gap must be filled. Therefore, by reorienting the attention from the advantages of forgiving to the psychological effects of persistent resentment, this study aims to investigate and assess the relationship between young people' psychological suffering and grudge-holding tendencies.

Research Gap

Existing literature has focused on forgiveness as a positive psychological construct and has established its association with enhanced well-being, improved emotional functioning, and reduced emotional distress. While these findings highlight the beneficial effects of forgiveness, comparatively less attention has been directed toward examining grudge-holding or unforgiveness as an independent psychological construct. Grudge-holding tendencies, characterized by sustained revenge motivation, avoidance of the offender, and

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reduced benevolence, represent a persistent emotional and motivational state that may have significant psychological implications. However, most existing studies have emphasized the promotion of forgiveness rather than investigating the psychological consequences of maintaining grudges.

Furthermore, although unforgiveness has been conceptually explored and linked to emotional persistence, anger, and resentment, there remains limited empirical investigation examining its direct association with psychological distress. Psychological distress, particularly in the form of stress, anxiety, and depression, is strongly influenced by prolonged negative emotional states and maladaptive cognitive patterns. Despite the theoretical relevance of grudge-holding in maintaining such emotional states, there is a lack of focused research examining how motivational dimensions of grudge-holding, such as revenge, avoidance, and diminished benevolence, are associated with psychological distress. Additionally, much of the existing literature has examined related constructs such as personality traits, emotional regulation, or general forgiveness, rather than specifically assessing grudge-holding tendencies as a measurable motivational construct. This limits the understanding of how everyday experiences of holding grudges, as opposed to extreme or pathological personality traits, may contribute to psychological distress in non-clinical populations.

Moreover, young adulthood represents a critical developmental stage characterized by increased interpersonal interactions, emotional sensitivity, and identity formation. Interpersonal conflicts and relational transgressions are common during this period and may have significant emotional and psychological consequences. However, there is limited research specifically examining the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress among young adults. This gap is particularly evident in the Indian context, where empirical investigations on this association remain scarce.

Accordingly, further investigation is warranted to specifically explore how tendencies to retain resentment are linked with psychological distress. In particular, it is important to examine how the distinct motivational dimensions revenge, avoidance, and benevolence relate to indicators of stress, anxiety, and depression in young adult populations.

Rationale of the Study

Grudge-holding refers to the continued experience of resentment, anger, and retaliatory inclinations after an interpersonal offense has occurred. When such feelings are sustained over time, they may keep individuals emotionally aroused, encourage repetitive negative thinking, and promote distancing within relationships. Ongoing preoccupation with hurtful events can place a burden on emotional regulation processes and may heighten vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

Exploring the link between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress is significant because it sheds light on how unresolved relational conflicts may shape mental health outcomes. Although forgiveness has frequently been emphasized as beneficial, focusing on the effects of sustained resentment offers a broader understanding of emotional responses to interpersonal harm. This approach moves beyond highlighting the advantages of forgiveness to also considering the potential psychological costs of remaining entrenched in unforgiving states.

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Young adulthood represents an important developmental phase marked by major emotional, social, and identity-related changes. Relationships during this period strongly influence emotional growth and self-concept. When conflicts remain unresolved, they may carry forward and affect overall psychological functioning. Studying grudge-holding patterns within this age group can therefore assist in identifying emotional vulnerabilities that may contribute to distress.

The present investigation seeks to add empirical insight into how resentment-related motivations relate to psychological strain. By examining these associations, the study aims to deepen understanding of the emotional and motivational mechanisms connected with stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings may also inform intervention efforts by emphasizing the value of addressing persistent resentment and maladaptive coping responses to support healthier psychological adjustment.

Accordingly, this study is conducted to examine the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress among young adults.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research draws conceptually from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations model (McCullough et al., 1998), Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991), and the Response Styles Theory of Rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Together, these perspectives help explain the ways in which lingering resentment and related motivational patterns may contribute to psychological distress during young adulthood.

The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations model proposes that when individuals experience interpersonal harm, they tend to develop particular motivational orientations toward the offender. These commonly include distancing oneself from the person involved, seeking retaliation, or responding with understanding and forgiveness. The first reflects an inclination to disengage or limit contact, the second involves intentions of retribution, and the third represents a constructive stance marked by goodwill and openness to restoring the relationship.

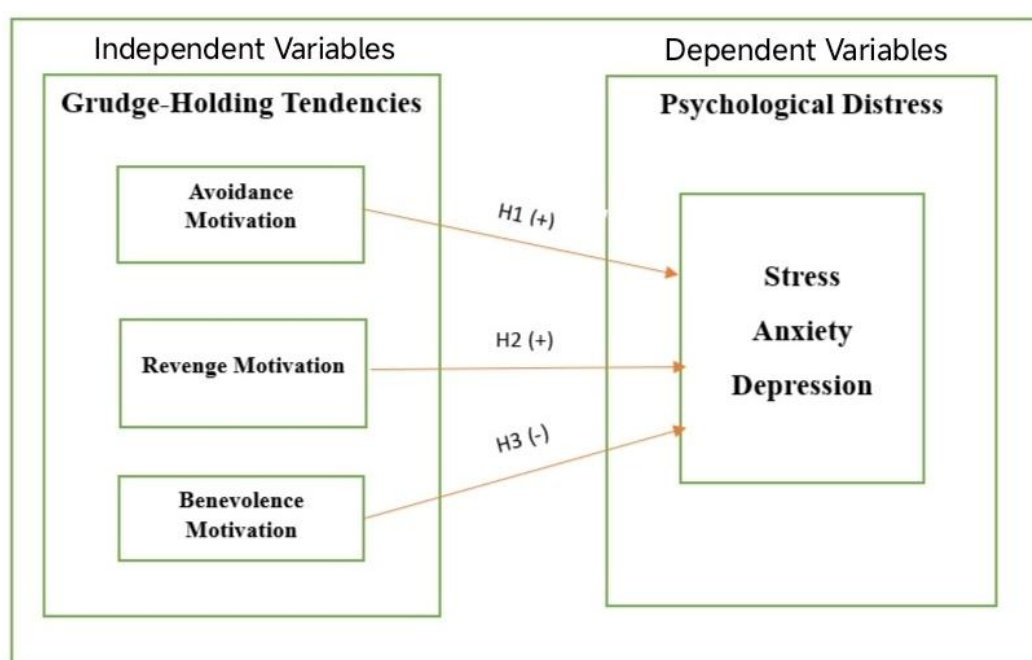
These motivational states represent internal cognitive and emotional processes rather than merely behavioral outcomes. Persistent and enduring revenge motivation may sustain anger and emotional arousal, thereby increasing vulnerability to stress and depressive symptoms. Avoidance may temporarily reduce exposure to the offender but may not resolve the internal emotional experience. On the contrary, benevolence reflects a reorientation toward empathy and forgiveness, which may potentially reduce negative affect.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991) proposes that emotional responses depend on how individuals interpret and evaluate stressful events. When a transgression is appraised as threatening, unjust, or harmful to one's self-concept, it may generate anger, resentment, and heightened physiological arousal. If the negative appraisal remains unresolved, it may lead to prolonged stress, anxiety, or depressive reactions. Benevolence motivation may involve a cognitive reappraisal process, where the individual reconstructs the meaning of the event in a less threatening manner or as a harmless challenge, thereby reducing emotional intensity. Thus, appraisal processes play a crucial role in determining whether interpersonal hurt leads to psychological distress.

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The Response Styles Theory of Rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) further explains how sustained revenge motivation may intensify psychological distress. This theory suggests that repetitive focus on negative emotions and past experiences prolongs emotional suffering and increases the risk of depression and anxiety. When individuals repeatedly think about transgressions and maintain retaliatory cognitions, they may reinforce negative mood states and physiological activation. Also, it explains avoidance may not necessarily interrupt rumination, as individuals may continue to engage cognitively with the event despite physical withdrawal. Benevolence, however, may reduce rumination by facilitating emotional closure and cognitive resolution.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives, the present study conceptualizes grudge-holding tendencies as motivational responses shaped by cognitive appraisals and maintained through rumination processes. Psychological distress emerges when negative appraisals and revenge-related cognitions are sustained over time. This integrated framework provides a comprehensive explanation of how avoidance, revenge, and benevolence motivations are associated with stress, depression, and anxiety among young adults.



Objectives of the Study

The investigation was designed with the following aims:

1. To determine the extent to which young adults exhibit tendencies to retain resentment.
2. To evaluate levels of psychological distress specifically stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults.
3. To analyze the relationship between resentment-related tendencies and indicators of psychological distress within this population.

Correlation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Based on the literature review analysis, the study has proposed the following hypotheses. The figure also depicts the hypothesized model of the study for a better understanding of the relationships between independent and dependent variables. The study hypotheses are mentioned below:

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- **H1:** Avoidance Motivation (TRIM-18) will have a positive correlation with Psychological Distress (Stress, Depression, and Anxiety) among male and female young adults.
- **H2:** Revenge Motivation (TRIM-18) will have a positive correlation with Psychological Distress (Stress, Depression, and Anxiety) among male and female young adults.
- **H3:** Benevolence Motivation (TRIM-18) will have a negative correlation with Psychological Distress (Stress, Depression, and Anxiety) among male and female young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The respondents of the present study comprised young adults (ages of 18 and 30 years). This age group was selected as young adulthood represents a developmental stage characterized by increased interpersonal interactions, emotional sensitivity, and evolving relational experiences, which may influence both grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress. The participants included both male and female respondents from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. The sample consisted of individuals primarily residing in North India, including Lucknow and other nearby regions, as well as participants from different cities across India. The respondents represented a non-clinical population, and participation was voluntary.

The final sample consisted of 200 young adult participants. Initially, responses were collected from 228 participants; however, 28 responses were excluded due to incomplete or incorrect data, resulting in a final sample of 200 valid responses. Purposive sampling was employed for the present study, as the research required participants who met specific inclusion criteria, namely being within the age range of 18 to 30 years and capable of understanding and responding to the questionnaire.

The selection of young adults as the target population was justified based on the relevance of interpersonal relationships and emotional experiences during this developmental stage. Additionally, a sample size of 200 was considered adequate for examining the association between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress, as it allows for sufficient variability in responses and enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the defined population.

Data Collection Process

Information for this research was gathered through an online survey approach. The instruments were converted into a Google Forms format, and the survey link was circulated digitally through social networking platforms and personal contact channels to reach young adults from diverse locations.

Before beginning the survey, participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and informed that their responses would be kept confidential and utilized exclusively for academic purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and consent was obtained prior to responding. The questionnaire first included basic demographic details, followed by standardized tools measuring resentment-related motivations and psychological distress.

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Data collection took place between December 2025 and January 2026. After responses were received, they were carefully reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Any forms that were partially completed or improperly filled out were removed to maintain data quality and ensure dependable findings.

Measures

1. Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18)

Resentment-related motivations were evaluated using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18). This self-report instrument assesses how individuals respond motivationally toward someone who has wronged them. It contains 18 items that capture three dimensions: revenge, avoidance, and benevolence.

Revenge reflects intentions to retaliate against the offender. Avoidance represents the inclination to distance oneself or limit interaction. Benevolence indicates constructive and forgiving intentions toward the person responsible for the offense. Elevated scores on revenge and avoidance, combined with lower benevolence scores, suggest stronger resentment tendencies.

Participants rated each statement based on their feelings toward someone who had hurt them, using a Likert-type response format. Higher ratings corresponded to stronger endorsement of the particular motivational response. The TRIM-18 has been extensively applied in psychological studies and is recognized for satisfactory reliability and validity.

2. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21)

Psychological distress was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), a 21-item self-report measure assessing three domains: depression, anxiety, and stress, with seven items dedicated to each dimension.

Depression includes experiences such as low mood, loss of interest, and sadness. Anxiety encompasses excessive worry, nervous tension, and physiological arousal. Stress involves symptoms such as irritability, tension, and difficulty relaxing.

Participants indicated how much each statement described their experiences during the previous week using a Likert-scale response format. Higher total scores represent greater levels of distress. The DASS-21 is widely used in both clinical and non-clinical settings and has established psychometric strength.

Data Analysis Method and Tools

The collected data were examined using descriptive statistics and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. These techniques were selected to address the research objectives effectively. Since the sample included both male and female participants, analyses were conducted to explore patterns within and across these groups.

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the distribution and variability of the primary variables revenge, avoidance, benevolence, stress, anxiety, and depression. This provided an overview of the general trends within the sample.

To determine the strength and direction of relationships between resentment-related motivations and psychological distress, the Pearson correlation coefficient was applied. This

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statistical method is suitable for examining associations between continuous variables and allows identification of whether higher resentment tendencies correspond to elevated distress levels.

The proposed associations between the three motivational dimensions (revenge, avoidance, and benevolence) and the three distress indicators (stress, anxiety, and depression) were tested using data from a total of 200 young adults, comprising both males and females.

All analyses were performed using the latest version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The software's graphical interface facilitates efficient data handling and offers a comprehensive range of statistical procedures, including descriptive and correlational analyses, ensuring systematic and reliable examination of the study variables.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondent's Demographic Profile

The study collected 200 questionnaire responses from young adults through an online survey. The table revealed that 50% of the respondents were male and 50% were female young adults. This shows that both male and female perspectives were included in the study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the association between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress.

Considering the age group, 100% of the respondents belonged to the age range of 18–30 years, which represents the young adult population. The inclusion of participants within this age range was appropriate, as young adulthood is characterized by increased interpersonal interactions and emotional experiences that may influence grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in the table below.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistics (Table) compare the male and female young adults across six important constructs, namely Avoidance Motivation, Revenge Motivation, Benevolence Motivation, Stress, Depression, and Anxiety, with a sample size of 200 inclusive of both male and female participants.

The results indicate that female respondents have higher mean scores for avoidance motivation (27.18) compared to male respondents (23.92), indicating greater avoidance tendencies among females. Male respondents showed slightly higher mean scores for revenge motivation (13.30) compared to female respondents (12.64), indicating slightly higher revenge tendencies among males. Benevolence motivation was also slightly higher among males (18.21) compared to females (16.89).

With respect to psychological distress, female respondents reported higher mean scores for stress (19.08), depression (18.50), and anxiety (18.06) compared to male respondents (Stress = 16.84, Depression = 17.06, Anxiety = 15.00). This indicates that female participants experienced relatively higher levels of psychological distress compared to male participants. The standard deviation values indicate variability within both groups. Male participants showed standard deviations of 5.51, 4.17, and 4.97 for avoidance, revenge, and benevolence respectively, and 10.81, 12.14, and 10.42 for stress, depression, and anxiety respectively. Female participants showed standard deviations of 4.53, 3.35, and 3.88 for avoidance, revenge, and benevolence respectively, and 10.27, 10.87, and 10.06 for stress, depression,

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and anxiety respectively. Overall, the descriptive analysis shows that female participants demonstrated higher avoidance tendencies and higher psychological distress, whereas male participants demonstrated slightly higher revenge and benevolence motivation.

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistics for Male and Female Young Adults

Constructs	Male Mean	Male SD	Female Mean	Female SD
Avoidance Motivation	23.92	5.51	27.18	4.53
Revenge Motivation	13.30	4.17	12.64	3.35
Benevolence Motivation	18.21	4.97	16.89	3.88
Stress	16.84	10.81	19.08	10.27
Depression	17.06	12.14	18.50	10.87
Anxiety	15.00	10.42	18.06	10.06

Source: researcher's own work

Correlations Analysis

Table 2: Correlations of Male Young Adults on Grudge-Holding Tendencies and Psychological Distress Constructs

Constructs	Avoidance	Revenge	Benevolence
Stress	-.014	.264**	-.047
	.889	.008	.640
	100	100	100
Depression	.125	.251*	-.144
	.217	.012	.154
	100	100	100
Anxiety	.045	.346***	-.003
	.654	<.001	.974
	100	100	100

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's own work

Analysis of Male Correlations

The correlation analysis for male young adults (N = 100) indicates that Avoidance Motivation is not significantly associated with any of the psychological distress variables. Specifically, its correlation with Stress is negligible and non-significant ($r = -.014$, $p = .889$), with Depression ($r = .125$, $p = .217$), and with Anxiety ($r = .045$, $p = .654$), all exceeding the 0.05 significance threshold. These findings suggest that avoidance motivation does not play a meaningful role in predicting psychological distress among male young adults. Therefore, H1 is not supported for males.

In contrast, Revenge Motivation demonstrates significant positive relationships with all three distress variables, though at varying levels of significance. The correlation with Stress is significant at the 0.01 level ($r = .264$, $p = .008$), indicating a moderate association where higher revenge motivation is linked to increased stress. The relationship with Depression is significant at the 0.05 level ($r = .251$, $p = .012$), suggesting a weaker but still meaningful positive association. Notably, Revenge Motivation shows a strong positive correlation with

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Anxiety ($r = .346$, $p < .001$), which is significant at the 0.001 level, indicating a highly robust association. Overall, these findings support the hypothesis that revenge motivation is positively related to psychological distress. Thus, H2 is accepted for males.

Regarding Benevolence Motivation, all correlations with psychological distress variables are negative but statistically non-significant. The associations with Stress ($r = -.047$, $p = .640$), Depression ($r = -.144$, $p = .154$), and Anxiety ($r = -.003$, $p = .974$) fail to reach the 0.05 significance level. Although the direction of these relationships aligns with theoretical expectations (i.e., higher benevolence linked to lower distress), the lack of statistical significance indicates that benevolence motivation does not significantly predict psychological distress in this sample. Therefore, H3 is not supported for males.

Table 3: Correlations of Female Young Adults on Grudge-Holding Tendencies and Psychological Distress Constructs

CORRELATIONS		FEMALE		
Constructs	Metrics	Avoidance	Revenge	Benevolence
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.160	.150	-.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.112	.137	.195
	N	100	100	100
Depression	Pearson Correlation	.142	.253*	-.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	.011	.168
	N	100	100	100
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.236*	.051	-.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.615	.761
	N	100	100	100

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's own work

Analysis of Female Correlations

The correlation analysis for female young adults ($N = 100$) indicates that **Avoidance Motivation** shows mixed associations with psychological distress variables. Its relationship with Stress is positive but statistically non-significant ($r = .160$, $p = .112$), and similarly, its association with Depression is also non-significant ($r = .142$, $p = .157$), as both p-values exceed the 0.05 significance level. However, Avoidance Motivation demonstrates a significant positive correlation with Anxiety ($r = .236$, $p = .018$), which is significant at the **0.05 level**. This suggests that higher avoidance tendencies are associated with increased anxiety among female young adults. Since avoidance motivation is significantly related to only one dimension of psychological distress, **H1 is partially supported for females**.

With respect to **Revenge Motivation**, the correlation with Stress is positive but not statistically significant ($r = .150$, $p = .137$). However, Revenge Motivation shows a significant positive relationship with Depression ($r = .253$, $p = .011$), which is significant at the **0.05 level**, indicating that higher revenge tendencies are associated with increased depressive symptoms. In contrast, the association between Revenge Motivation and Anxiety is negligible and non-significant ($r = .051$, $p = .615$). Given that significance is observed only for depression and not for stress or anxiety, **H2 is partially supported for females**.

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In the case of **Benevolence Motivation**, all correlations with psychological distress variables are negative but statistically non-significant. Specifically, the associations with Stress ($r = -.131$, $p = .195$), Depression ($r = -.139$, $p = .168$), and Anxiety ($r = -.031$, $p = .761$) all exceed the 0.05 significance threshold. Although the direction of these relationships is consistent with theoretical expectations (i.e., higher benevolence linked to lower distress), the lack of statistical significance suggests that benevolence motivation does not significantly predict psychological distress among female young adults. Therefore, **H3 is not supported for females**.

DISCUSSION

The study aims to understand the correlation between grudge-holding tendencies among young adults and its impact on psychological distress. Further, the study also attempts to uncover these relationships at the gender level, i.e., male and female. The study adopted a quantitative method to analyze these correlations. From the analysis, we found interesting results concerning the research objectives.

According to the findings of the study, it is revealed that H1: Avoidance Motivation will have a positive correlation with Psychological Distress was partially supported. Avoidance motivation did not show a consistent and significant relationship with psychological distress among male young adults; however, among females, avoidance motivation was positively associated with anxiety. This finding suggests that merely avoiding a transgressor or distancing oneself from the source of hurt does not necessarily translate into increased stress or depressive symptoms, especially among males. Psychologically speaking, avoidance may function as a temporary emotional regulation strategy, helping individuals prevent confrontation and reduce immediate emotional escalation. However, among females, higher avoidance motivation was linked with increased anxiety, which may indicate that avoidance does not resolve internal emotional processing but instead sustains anticipatory tension or cognitive rumination.

The second hypothesis, H2: Revenge Motivation will have a positive correlation with Psychological Distress, was supported. Revenge motivation showed significant positive correlations with stress, depression, and anxiety among male participants and a significant positive association with depression among female participants. This indicates that revenge motivation is the strongest predictor of psychological distress in the present study. From a cognitive perspective, maintaining retaliatory intentions may sustain hostile cognitive appraisals and reinforce negative emotional states. Persistent revenge thoughts consume psychological resources, increase physiological arousal, and intensify stress reactivity. Among young adult males, revenge appears to have a broader impact across all dimensions of distress. Among females, the effect was more pronounced in depressive symptoms, suggesting that revenge motivation may internalize as emotional burden rather than outward aggression.

The third hypothesis, H3: Benevolence Motivation will have a negative correlation with Psychological Distress, was not supported. Although benevolence motivation showed negative correlations with stress, depression, and anxiety, these associations were not statistically significant. Theoretically, higher benevolence reflects empathy, forgiveness orientation, and reduced retaliatory thinking, which should lower distress. However, the findings suggest that benevolence alone may not be sufficient to significantly reduce general psychological distress. It is possible that individuals may cognitively endorse benevolence while still experiencing unresolved internal emotional strain. Moreover, psychological

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distress as measured in the study encompasses broader emotional states that may arise from multiple domains beyond interpersonal conflict.

Taken together, the findings indicate that revenge motivation plays a more critical role in predicting psychological distress than avoidance or benevolence motivations. Avoidance showed gender-specific effects, particularly influencing anxiety among females, while benevolence did not demonstrate a statistically significant protective effect. These results suggest that the intensity and persistence of retaliatory cognition are more psychologically harmful than distancing or benevolent attitudes in the context of interpersonal transgressions.

The findings can be theoretically understood through cognitive-emotional regulation frameworks and rumination theory. Persistent revenge motivation may sustain maladaptive cognitive appraisals and emotional arousal, thereby increasing stress and depressive symptoms. Avoidance may reduce overt conflict but fail to resolve underlying cognitive processing, particularly among females where anxiety appears heightened. Benevolence, while conceptually aligned with forgiveness and empathy, may require deeper emotional restructuring to produce measurable reductions in psychological distress.

From a cultural perspective, particularly within the Indian social context, young adults are often socialized to maintain social harmony and regulate overt expressions of anger. Males may outwardly endorse retaliatory cognition yet experience internal psychological strain. Females, on the other hand, may experience increased anxiety when avoiding confrontation due to internalized expectations of relational maintenance. Cultural norms surrounding emotional regulation and interpersonal harmony may therefore influence how grudge-holding tendencies manifest in psychological outcomes.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies and psychological distress among young adults is dimension-specific and gender-sensitive. Revenge motivation significantly intensifies psychological distress, avoidance demonstrates conditional effects, and benevolence, despite its theoretically protective orientation, does not independently reduce distress in a statistically significant manner. These findings highlight the importance of addressing retaliatory cognition and unresolved resentment in interventions aimed at improving psychological well-being among young adults.

Implications

The findings of the present study suggest that grudge-holding tendencies, particularly revenge motivation, play a meaningful role in psychological distress among young adults. The significant association between revenge and stress, depression, and anxiety indicates that persistent retaliatory thoughts may act as ongoing emotional stressors. This highlights the importance of addressing unresolved resentment and maladaptive rumination in counseling and mental health interventions. The gender-specific patterns further suggest that emotional processing may differ between males and females, requiring tailored coping and regulation strategies. Overall, the study emphasizes that internal responses to interpersonal transgressions can significantly influence psychological well-being.

Limitations

Several constraints should be acknowledged when considering the results of this investigation. To begin with, the research utilized a cross-sectional approach, which limits

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conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships between resentment-related tendencies and psychological distress. Because data were gathered at a single point in time, it is not possible to determine the direction of influence between the variables.

Another limitation concerns the reliance on self-report instruments. Participants' responses may have been shaped by personal perceptions, response styles, or a tendency to present themselves in a socially favorable manner, which can affect accuracy.

The study sample included only young adults drawn from a particular cultural setting. This restricts the extent to which the findings can be applied to individuals from different age groups or sociocultural backgrounds. In addition, psychological distress was assessed broadly in terms of stress, anxiety, and depression, rather than examining distress specifically linked to interpersonal offenses.

Future investigations could strengthen understanding in this area by adopting longitudinal research designs to examine changes over time, including participants from more diverse populations, and incorporating multiple assessment methods beyond self-report measures. Such approaches would offer a more detailed and comprehensive perspective on how persistent resentment relates to mental health outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between grudge-holding tendencies including avoidance, revenge, and benevolence motivation and psychological distress including stress, depression, and anxiety among young adults, with a focus on gender differences. The findings revealed that revenge motivation was significantly and positively related to psychological distress, particularly among males, indicating that persistent retaliatory thoughts may function as a psychological risk factor. Avoidance motivation showed limited and gender-specific associations, being positively related to anxiety among females. Benevolence motivation demonstrated negative but non-significant relationships with psychological distress, suggesting that while forgiveness-oriented attitudes may be protective in theory, they did not independently reduce distress in the present sample.

These findings can be understood from two perspectives. First, cognitive-emotional regulation frameworks suggest that sustained revenge motivation may maintain heightened emotional arousal and reinforce negative thought patterns, thereby increasing stress and depressive symptoms. When individuals repeatedly engage in retaliatory cognition, they may experience prolonged physiological activation and rumination, which can impair overall psychological well-being. Second, appraisal-based theories propose that psychological outcomes depend on how individuals interpret and process interpersonal transgressions. Avoidance may temporarily reduce overt conflict but may not resolve internal emotional tension, especially among females where anxiety was elevated. Benevolence, although theoretically linked to healthier emotional processing, may require deeper cognitive restructuring to produce measurable reductions in distress. Gender differences observed in the findings may reflect culturally shaped patterns of emotional appraisal and expression among young adults.

Although the present study has certain limitations, including its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report measures, and focus on a specific cultural context, it contributes to the literature by highlighting the psychological significance of grudge-holding tendencies. By integrating motivational and cognitive perspectives within a single study of young adults,

the research advances understanding of how unresolved interpersonal experiences influence mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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