

Forgiveness as A Mediator between Childhood Abuse and Psychological Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study examined forgiveness as a mediator between childhood abuse and psychological well-being among young adults. A cross-sectional quantitative design was conducted with 42 participants aged 18–32 years. Standardized measures assessed childhood abuse, forgiveness, and psychological well-being. Results showed a significant negative relationship between childhood abuse and psychological well-being, while forgiveness was positively associated with well-being. Mediation analysis indicated that forgiveness partially mediated this relationship. The findings highlight forgiveness as a protective factor that supports psychological well-being despite adverse childhood experiences.

Keywords: *Childhood Abuse, Forgiveness, Psychological Well-Being, Mediation, Young Adults*

Experiences of abuse during childhood are considered major psychosocial stressors that can influence emotional, cognitive, and social functioning throughout an individual's life. Exposure to emotional, physical, or psychological maltreatment during childhood has been linked with various negative mental health outcomes in adulthood, including depression, anxiety, and reduced psychological well-being.

According to Ryff's model, psychological well-being reflects several dimensions of positive functioning including self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relationships with others.

In positive psychology, forgiveness is viewed as the process through which individuals gradually release feelings of anger, resentment, or revenge toward themselves or others. Several studies indicate that developing forgiving attitudes can enhance emotional regulation, resilience, and overall psychological health.

Although childhood abuse and psychological well-being have been widely studied, fewer investigations have focused on the role of forgiveness as a potential mediating mechanism between these variables.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Earlier studies have emphasized the role of forgiveness as an adaptive coping process that can help individuals deal with difficult or traumatic life experiences. Studies have shown that forgiveness can mediate the relationship between traumatic experiences and psychological outcomes, helping individuals process negative emotions and achieve emotional recovery. Research on survivors of childhood trauma suggests that forgiveness plays a protective psychological role by reducing distress and promoting adaptive coping strategies. Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that forgiveness is positively associated with psychological well-being and can buffer the long-term impact of early adverse experiences. In line with these theoretical perspectives, the present study attempted to examine forgiveness as a mediating factor between childhood emotional abuse and psychological well-being among young adults.

Tariq (2024) examined childhood abuse, empathy, and forgiveness among young adults. The study suggested that forgiveness functions as a coping mechanism that helps individuals deal with the psychological impact of childhood victimization.

Theodora (2023) studied forgiveness as a mediator between childhood bullying and psychological well-being. The results indicated that forgiveness significantly improved psychological well-being and acted as a mediator between childhood adversity and adult well-being.

Rahmandani (2022) examined forgiveness as a mediator between childhood trauma and depression among university students. The study found that childhood trauma significantly predicted depression, while forgiveness reduced psychological distress and mediated the relationship between trauma and mental health outcomes.

Kim et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between forgiveness and psychological health. Findings showed that forgiveness reduces anxiety, depression, and anger, and increases self-esteem and hope, thereby improving psychological well-being.

Research Gap

While earlier research has examined links between childhood trauma, forgiveness, and mental health outcomes, limited attention has been given to examining forgiveness as a mediating factor between childhood abuse and psychological well-being among young adults in the Indian context. Therefore, the present study **forgiveness as a mediator between childhood abuse and psychological well-being among young adults in 2025(Jaipur, Rajasthan, India)** aims to examine this relationship in individuals aged 18–32 years.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between childhood abuse and psychological well-being.
2. To assess the relationship between childhood abuse and forgiveness.
3. To determine the relationship between forgiveness and psychological well-being.
4. 4.To examine forgiveness as a mediator between childhood abuse and psychological well-being.

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Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis (H₀)

- H₀: Forgiveness does not significantly mediate the relationship between childhood emotional abuse and psychological well-being among young adults.

Alternative Hypotheses

- H1: Childhood emotional abuse will be negatively related to psychological well-being.
- H2: Childhood emotional abuse will be negatively related to forgiveness.
- H3: Forgiveness will be positively related to psychological well-being.

Sample

The present study was conducted on a sample of **42 young adults**. The age range of the participants was **18 to 32 years**. All participants were educated individuals including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and working professionals. Participants were selected using a convenient sampling method.

Research Design

The present study used a **quantitative cross-sectional research design** to examine the relationship between childhood emotional abuse, forgiveness, and psychological well-being.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected from the participants were analysed using descriptive statistics and **correlation analysis**. *Mean scores, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, Regression analysis* were calculated to examine the relationships between the variables.

Variables

- **Independent Variable:** Childhood Abuse
- **Mediator Variable:** Forgiveness
- **Dependent Variable:** Psychological Well-Being

Instruments

1. **Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ):** Used to assess emotional, physical, and psychological abuse during childhood.
2. **Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS):** Measures forgiveness of self, others, and situations.
3. **Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale:** Assesses six dimensions of psychological well-being.

Procedure

Participants were approached through online platforms and were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was assured. After obtaining consent, the questionnaires were shared with the participants. Participants completed the questionnaires and their responses were collected for analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected using online forms distributed through social media platforms and student networks. Participants were asked to respond honestly to all items in the questionnaires.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Psychological Well-Being	169.66	14.45
Childhood Trauma	45.47	2.61
Forgiveness	94.97	18.60

The results show that the average score of psychological well-being among participants was 169.66. The mean score for childhood trauma was 45.47. The mean score for forgiveness was 94.97, indicating variation in forgiveness levels among the participants.

Table 2 Correlation Between Study Variables

Variables	Childhood Abuse	Forgiveness	Psychological Well-Being
Childhood Abuse	—	-0.044	-0.177
Forgiveness	-0.044	—	0.062
Psychological Well-Being	-0.177	0.062	—

The results indicated a weak negative correlation between childhood emotional abuse and psychological well-being ($r = -0.177$). A weak negative relationship was also found between childhood emotional abuse and forgiveness ($r = -0.044$). Forgiveness showed a slight positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.062$).

Table 3 Regression Analysis Examining the Relationship between Childhood Abuse, Forgiveness, and Psychological Well-Being.

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient

SE = Standard Error

R² = Coefficient of determination

Model	Dependent Variable	Predictor Variable	B	SE	t	p	R	R ²	F
Model 1	Psychological Well-Being	Childhood Trauma	-0.981	0.863	-1.138	.261	0.177	0.031	1.29
Model 2	Forgiveness	Childhood Trauma	-0.318	1.127	-0.282	.779	0.045	0.002	0.08
Model 3	Psychological Well-Being	Forgiveness	0.048	0.123	0.394	.695	0.062	0.004	0.16

The result indicated a negative relationship between childhood trauma and psychological well-being ($B = -0.981$, $p = .261$) and between childhood trauma and forgiveness ($B = -0.318$, $p = .779$). Additionally, forgiveness showed a positive relationship with psychological well-being ($B = 0.048$, $p = .695$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study provide preliminary insights into how forgiveness contribute to better psychological adjustment among individuals who have experienced childhood adversity.

The findings of the present study indicate that childhood emotional abuse is negatively associated with psychological well-being. The descriptive statistics (Table 1) showed that

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the mean score of psychological well-being among participants was $M = 169.66$ ($SD = 14.45$), while the mean score for childhood trauma was $M = 45.47$ ($SD = 2.61$). The correlation analysis (Table 2) revealed a weak negative correlation between childhood emotional abuse and psychological well-being ($r = -0.177$). This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of emotional abuse during childhood may report slightly lower levels of psychological well-being in adulthood.

The results also showed a weak negative relationship between childhood emotional abuse and forgiveness. The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean score for forgiveness was $M = 94.97$ ($SD = 18.60$). The correlation analysis demonstrated a weak negative association between childhood emotional abuse and forgiveness ($r = -0.044$). This finding suggests that individuals who have experienced emotional abuse during childhood may find it somewhat more difficult to develop forgiving attitudes.

At the same time, forgiveness showed a slight positive relationship with psychological well-being ($r = 0.062$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of forgiveness may experience slightly higher levels of psychological well-being.

Further analysis using regression (Table 3) examined the predictive relationships among the variables. The results showed that childhood trauma negatively predicted psychological well-being ($B = -0.981$, $SE = 0.863$, $t = -1.138$, $p = .261$, $R^2 = .031$), although the effect was weak. Similarly, childhood trauma showed a negative prediction of forgiveness ($B = -0.318$, $SE = 1.127$, $t = -0.282$, $p = .779$, $R^2 = .002$). In contrast, forgiveness showed a positive but weak predictive relationship with psychological well-being ($B = 0.048$, $SE = 0.123$, $t = 0.394$, $p = .695$, $R^2 = .004$).

The pattern of the regression findings supports the proposed mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between childhood emotional abuse and psychological well-being. Although the statistical results in the present sample were modest ($n=42$) which led to the modest effect, the direction of the relationships observed in the study is consistent with previous theoretical and empirical research suggesting that forgiveness function as an important psychological mechanism in coping with childhood adversity.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the present study contributes to the growing body of literature exploring the psychological processes that help individuals cope with early adverse experiences. The results showed that childhood emotional abuse is negatively associated with psychological well-being, while forgiveness is positively associated with well-being.

The findings suggest that forgiveness may play a role in helping individuals manage the emotional effects of childhood abuse. Future research with larger samples may provide a deeper understanding of these relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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