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Willingness to Self-forgive as a Predictor of the Well-being of Young Students

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Abstract: The article considers an important and topical issue in the form of the willingness to self-forgive in young students. The concepts of psychological well-being, forgiveness, and self-forgiveness are considered. The peculiarities of the connection between psychological well-being and willingness to self-forgive in the case of young students are determined. Much attention is paid to the factors of psychological well-being. The study involved 228 people – young students, aged between 20 and 23 years, in the form of 109 men and 119 women. Empirical research was based on the following psychodiagnostic techniques: Flourishing Measure, Hardiness Test, Scale of Psychological Well-being, the Trait Forgivingness (dispositional) Scale, Mental Health Outcome Measures, Scale of Deep Readiness for Forgiveness, Depression and Anxiety (BSI – 12). The high level of willingness to self-forgive in young students is connected with high levels of hardiness and psychological well-being. The high level of willingness to self-forgive in young students is connected with low levels of anxiety and depression. It is indicated that the willingness to self-forgive is a predictor of psychological well-being in young students. The more university students are prone to willingness to self-forgive, the more they are satisfied with self-realization in specific living conditions and circumstances, with the achievement of meaningful goals, and with positive relationships with other people. The more young university students are ready for self-forgiveness, the more they are capable of reflection, the realization of their potential, the effective use of personal traits, self-acceptance, meaningful life, and being more satisfied with relationships with other people.

Keywords: *willingness to self-forgive; psychological well-being; depression; anxiety; young students.*

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1. Introduction

Today's young students suffer from depression to a greater extent than the youth of past generations.

Our perception and interpretation of the most important life events has a profound effect on our personality. Young students often display depressive symptoms: low mood, anxiety, apathy, and misunderstanding with regard to how to live. Depression is not just a constant decline in mood, pessimism, and a desire for solitude. A depressed person loses the ability to enjoy life, and he/she cannot solve difficult problems. Such a person is prone to negative ways out of any situation. Recent research has found a significant correlation between suicide and the symptomatology of stress disorders (Levi-Belz & Gilo, 2020).

In this context, an important question arises regarding psychological well-being in young students.

Scholars consider psychological well-being as an integral systemic state of a person or group. It is a complex relationship of physical, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual factors (Caputo, 2020; Davis & Turner, 2020). Psychological well-being reflects a person's perception and assessment of self-realization in terms of potential opportunities.

Scholars such as Ryff and Keyes (1995) define psychological well-being as the presence of specific, stable psychological traits that allow a person to function much more successfully than they would in their absence. Ryff and Keye identify six main components of psychological well-being: positive relationships with others (concern for the well-being of others; a sense of satisfaction from warm and trusting relationships with others); autonomy (independence; internal control); environmental management (a person's ability to effectively use external resources); purposefulness of life (highly developed ability for reflection, meaningfulness); personal growth (effective use of personality traits; development of talents); self-acceptance (self-recognition; a positive attitude towards one's personality traits).

Bradburn (1969) developed a model of the structure of psychological well-being, which is a balance achieved through the continuous interaction of positive and negative affect. Psychological well-being is considered as a person's realization of his/her own potential, the development of certain psychological traits in respect of certain activities (Rassaby et al., 2020). Scholars associate psychological well-being with the concepts of happiness, life satisfaction and positive emotions (Liu et al., 2020).

We believe that it is important to develop effective strategies in psychological counseling for preventing and reducing depression in the case of young students.

The psychological counseling of young students with regard to personal problems is based on the need to improve the effectiveness of psychological assistance through the integration or synthesis of elements of psychological technologies. The psychological counseling of young students on personal problems involves working with clients, their families and self-help groups. Such psychological counseling involves the use of both personal and social resources for the purpose of psychological assistance.

In our opinion, a willingness to self-forgive is important as a predictor of psychological well-being in the case of young students.

Scholars note that self-forgiveness is a process in which a person accepts his/her mistakes and transgressions, renounces anger, resentment, and self-harm, and encourages positive emotions, thoughts and behavior (Thompson et al., 2005).

We believe that in the psychological counseling of young students with regard to personal problems, it is important to develop a strategy for forming a willingness to self-forgive. In our opinion, the study of the peculiarities of self-forgiveness will deepen our understanding of psychological well-being.

Some studies have shown that forgiveness and self-forgiveness help reduce psychological distress (Raj et al., 2016; Major et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). Consequently, the problem of developing a willingness to self-forgive in the psychological counseling of young students with regard to personal problems becomes especially relevant.

2. Hypotheses

Our empirical hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Willingness to self-forgive, psychological well-being, and hardiness in student youth are positively correlated with human flourishing.

H2: Willingness to self-forgive is a predictor of psychological well-being in young students.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Our empirical study was conducted in the period 2018-2021. The sample of respondents consisted of 228 young students (109 men and 119 women) aged between 20 and 23 years. These students developed a

willingness to forgive themselves as a result of psychological counseling on personal problems.

The empirical study was based on the principles of confidentiality, individual approach, respect for respondents and the responsibility of the researcher.

3.2. Psychodiagnostic techniques

The following study tools were used in the study:

- *Scale of Deep Readiness for Forgiveness* (the authors: L. Y. Thompson, C. R. Snyder, L. Hoffman, S. T. Michael, H. N. Rasmussen, L. S. Billings, L. Heinze, J. E. Neufeld, H. S. Shorey, J. C. Roberts, D. E. Roberts (Thompson et al., 2005);

- *The Trait Forgivingness (dispositional) Scale* (the authors: J. W. Berry, E. L. Worthington, L. E. O'Connor, L. Parrott, N. G. Wade (Berry et al., 2005);

- *Flourishing Measure* (the author: T. J. VanderWeele (VanderWeele, 2017);

- *Scale of Psychological Well-being* (the authors: C. D. Ryff, C. L. Keyes (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

- *Hardiness Test* (the author: S. Muddy (Maddi, 1996);

- *Mental Health Outcome Measures. Depression and Anxiety (BSI – 12)* (the author: L. R. Derogatis (Derogatis, 2001).

3.3. Statistical methods

Pearson's correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis (IBM SPSS Statistics 21) were used.

4. Basic empirical results and discussion

We obtained significant correlations between the willingness to self-forgive and psychological variables in young students (see Table 1).

Table 1. Willingness to self-forgive: Pearson's correlation coefficients

Variables	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Hardiness	.53	$p < .001$
Psychological well-being	.49	$p < .001$
Depression	- .55	$p < .001$
Anxiety	- .58	$p < .001$

Source: Author's own conception

Significant positive correlations ($p < .001$) were found between willingness to self-forgive, hardiness and psychological well-being in the sample of university students. The positive correlations obtained indicate that a high level of willingness to self-forgive in young students is connected with high level of these variables.

The more university students have a willingness to self-forgive, the more successful they are in overcoming the adverse difficulties of life. Scholars note that forgiveness and hope are essential indicators of well-being, and are important aspects of mental health (Malinovic et al., 2016).

Willingness to self-forgive has significant therapeutic potential and preventive and rehabilitative value, because there are significant inverse correlations between willingness to self-forgive and depression and anxiety, as well as positive significant correlations between willingness to self-forgive, hardiness, and psychological well-being (see Table 1).

Negative correlations were found between willingness to self-forgive in young students and anxiety and depression, which means that a high degree of willingness to self-forgive is associated with a low degree of anxiety and depression.

Our results are consistent with the research of other scholars. Self-forgiveness may be a significant protective factor with regard to stressful events (Lijo, 2018; Enright, 2001). The results of one empirical study showed that forgiveness was negatively correlated with psychological distress (Li et al., 2020).

Table 2 shows the Pearson's correlation coefficients between willingness to self-forgive and indicators of human flourishing in young students.

Table 2. The relationship between willingness to self-forgive and indicators of human flourishing in young students

Indicators of human flourishing	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Mental and physical health	.34	$p < .001$
Happiness and life satisfaction	.33	$p < .001$
Close social relationships	.28	$p < .001$
Meaning and purpose	.37	$p < .001$
Financial and material stability	.32	$p < .001$
Character and virtues	.54	$p < .001$

Source: Author's own conception

Significant positive correlations ($p < .001$) were found between willingness to self-forgive and character and virtues, meaning and purpose, financial and material stability, mental and physical health, close social relationships, and happiness and life satisfaction in young students. The positive correlations obtained indicate that a high degree of willingness to self-forgive is associated with a high degree of human flourishing in young students.

Our results are confirmed by the results of research by other scholars. Hall et al. (2020) confirm that self-forgiveness is correlated positively with life satisfaction, while Thompson et al. (2005) have shown that willingness to self-forgive plays an important role in turning a negative experience into a positive one.

Table 3 presents the results of multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable – psychological well-being.

Table 3. Psychological well-being in young students: multiple regression analysis

$R = .735$; $R^2 = .540$; *Adjusted* $R^2 = .425$ $F = 4.690$, $p < .001$					
Regression model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	Criterion t	Significance level
	B	Standard error	*Beta*		
(Constant)	38.056	17.680		2.152	.036 p < .05
Willingness to self-forgive	.506	.141	.240	3.594	.000 p < 0.001
Willingness to forgive others	.353	.165	.200	2.146	.034 p < .05
Willingness to forgive the situation	.604	.288	.259	2.096	.041 p < 0.05
Trait forgiveness	.217	.100	.127	2.167	.031 p < 0.05
Hardiness	.386	.072	.330	5.361	.000 p < 0.001
Human flourishing	.828	.263	.344	3.144	.003 p < 0.01
Depression	-.785	.377	-.246	-2.083	.042 p < 0.05
Anxiety	-.819	.339	-.271	-2.415	.019 p < 0.05

Source: Author's own conception

The regression model obtained is statistically significant ($F = 4.690$, $p < .001$). In the regression model the following are presented as predictors: trait forgiveness, hardiness, human flourishing, depression and anxiety, willingness to self-forgive, willingness to forgive others, willingness to forgive the situation.

High levels of human flourishing, hardiness, willingness to forgive the situation, willingness to self-forgive, willingness to forgive others, and trait forgiveness, increase psychological well-being in young students. Conversely, high levels of anxiety and depression reduce the psychological well-being of young students.

Our results are confirmed by the results of research by other scholars. Raj et al. (2016) and Lijo (2018) demonstrate that forgiveness has been linked to positive outcomes in terms of both physical and mental health. Major, Wade, and Brenner (2020) note that forgiveness might lead to greater emotional well-being. The results of an empirical study by Levi-Belz and Gilo (2020) showed that a low level of self-forgiveness is associated with the highest degree of suicidal behavior. Finally, Hall, Webb and Hirsch (2020) believe that self-forgiveness is the most important protective factor when it comes to suicidal behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study of willingness to self-forgive as predictor of psychological well-being on the part of young students allows us to arrive at the following conclusions:

1. Willingness to self-forgive on the part of young students is a predictor of their psychological well-being. The more young university students are prone to willingness to self-forgive, the more they are satisfied with self-realization in terms of specific living conditions and circumstances, with the achievement of meaningful goals, and with positive relationships with other people. The more such students are self-forgiving, the more they are capable of reflection, realizing their own potential, making effective use of personal traits, being self-accepting, engaging in a meaningful life, and being more satisfied with relationships with other people.

2. The high level of willingness to self-forgive on the part of young students is connected with low levels of anxiety and depression.

3. The high level of willingness to self-forgive on the part of young students is connected with high levels of character and virtue, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, mental and physical health, financial and material stability, and close social relationships.

4. High levels of human flourishing, hardiness, willingness to forgive the situation, willingness to self-forgive, willingness to forgive others, and trait forgiveness, increase the psychological well-being of young students.

5. Low levels of anxiety and depression increase the psychological well-being of young students.

Empirical results were obtained with regard to a representative sample of research participants. Consequently, the psychological patterns revealed can be generalized and extended to other young students.

In our opinion, forming a readiness for self-forgiveness can have significant therapeutic potential, and preventive and rehabilitative value.

We believe that it is very important to create conditions for self-forgiveness and ensuring the secure flourish of young students through the use of psychological counseling, given that it can prevent suicide.

There is a need for further analysis of psychological well-being among young students, including their willingness to forgive, and other indicators of human flourishing.

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