

# Role of Positive Personality Traits in Fostering Forgiveness in Indian Adolescents

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The current study was conducted to examine the relationship between positive personality traits and forgiveness in Indian adolescents. A sample of 200 adolescents (107 boys and 93 girls) randomly selected from various schools of Lucknow participated in the study. Positive Personality Trait Questionnaire (PPTQ) and Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) along with a demographic schedule were administered. Results suggested a positive correlation between positive personality traits and forgiveness among girls, but not among boys. Moreover, positive self-image in girls significantly predicted forgiveness in them.

**Keywords:** positive personalit; forgiveness, personality; adolescence; pptq; hfs**Introduction**

Positive personality is a very important and contemporary topic in the field of positive psychology. It deals with positive traits in individuals as studied by several researchers [3] including greater life satisfaction, positive affect, optimism, increased self-esteem, coping skills, interpersonal relating abilities, problem solving abilities, increased self-confidence and self-acceptance as well as autonomy. Inspired by Martin Seligman's Value In Action, Inventory of Strength (VIA-IS) which captures universally recognized positive traits in individuals, Singh & Jha developed a questionnaire that has much similarity to this concept, but is culturally dependent with respect to Indian context [21]. After undergoing extensive interviewing and analysis, they extracted four positive personality traits which includes, positive self-image, commitment, people orientation and culture identification, highly valued in the Indian culture. Positive self- image reflects how a person is oriented towards maintaining a positive image of self which includes having a positive attitude towards self and life. A person with high positive self-image looks at relationships in a positive manner, believes oneself to be self-reliant, flexible, honest, spiritual and emotionally intelligent. Commitment indicates the level of honesty and dedication towards self with respect to one's beliefs and goals and that of others with respect to relationships. It is the tendency with which people are inclined towards loyalty, generosity, gratitude, and aspects of goal orientation and resilience. The third trait, people orientation is the measure of the level of confidence a person holds within, while being outgoing and zestful in social situations and leading people with confidence. Culture identification indicates the level of love and patriotism for one's country. Forgiveness on the other hand, is also a very important topic in the field of positive psychology that needs further

research. As one of the positive trait, forgiveness can be described both as an art and a science. It is called an art because of its nature of describing our ability to deal with transgression and offences, personally as well as socially. It heals us mentally and promote our mental health and well-being. It brightens and enhances our transactions within the society affecting our relationships within a group.<sup>26</sup> Forgiveness may be defined as the overcoming of the resentment, not by denying the right to such feelings but by endeavouring to view the offender with compassion [20]. The feeling of resentment is natural and valid when one is the victim of some intentional offence, but when an individual is not able to get over that feeling, that leads to a factor known as lasting resentment, related to the concept of unforgiveness as given by Worthington & Wade.<sup>29</sup> Forgiveness is developed along the same trajectory as does the Kohlbergian moral development. According to this hypotheses proposed, there are three stages of forgiveness. The first stage include revengeful forgiveness and restitutional forgiveness. The second or the intermediate stage include expectational forgiveness and lawful expectational forgiveness. The high level stage of forgiveness talks about forgiveness as social harmony and forgiveness as love. In the first stage forgiveness occurs when the victim has either taken the revenge or the offender or the transgressor has made restitution and did seek for forgiveness. In the second stage, forgiveness is obtained because of the pressures from the society as well as moral and religious compulsivity to forgive. The high level of forgiveness is appropriate because it foster harmony in the society as well as expresses unconditional love.[7] It is also related with personality of an individual. Researchers have found that people high on agreeableness tend to be more forgiving. On the other hand, people high on

neuroticism tend to be less forgiving.[15] Moreover, hostility as well as anger is inversely related to forgiveness.[24] There are several other factors that influence forgiveness. The characteristics of the offence or the transgressor as well as the context in which they occur. The severity of the offence and the consequences related to it affect the nature of forgiveness. If the transgression is very severe and has negative consequences then the chances of forgiveness is low. [2,11] The attitude of the offender is also related to forgiveness. The extent to which the transgressor or the offender put efforts to apologise and seek for forgiveness affect the victim's prospect to forgive. [5,28,11,18,17] The interpersonal relationship between the victim as well as the transgressor also influence the forgiveness process. The possibility of being forgiven is more if the victim share a close, committed and satisfied relationship with the transgressor.<sup>1</sup> Understanding and considering the perspective of the offender or the transgressor, empathizing with him/her has been found to lead towards lower level of vengefulness and transgression, but only in men. [8] The importance of forgiveness has also been emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita (a Hindireligious Text). The Mahabharata, of which the Gita is a small section, has a famous 'hymn to forgiveness' that initiates as follows: "Forgiveness is virtue; forgiveness is sacrifice, forgiveness is the Vedas, forgiveness is the Shruti (revealed scripture). He that knoweth this is capable of forgiving everything". "Forgiveness is Brahma (God); forgiveness is truth; forgiveness is stored ascetic merit; forgiveness protecteth the ascetic merit of the future; forgiveness is asceticism; forgiveness is holiness; and by forgiveness is it that the universe is held together" Mahabharata, book 3, VanaParva, section xxix.[12] Researchers have found that Happiness, a positive emotion, is found to be positively correlated with forgiveness. Individuals who do not engage themselves in negative cognitions about the transgressions tend to be happier and this enhances their subjective well-being.[25] The process works both sided. Happy people and individuals with better subjective well-being tend to forgive more.[13] Forgiveness reduce the experience of negative affect such as hatred, resentment and revenge.[16] The experiences of the positive emotion counteract the effect of negative emotions and lead an individual to cope up with stressful situations effectively, leading to the enhancement in their psychological well-being. The more the positive emotions are experienced, the more is the possibility that the individual would forgive the transgressor.[4] Offences that are interpersonal and not forgiven leads to increased level of stress and poor overall mental health. On the other hand, intrapersonal offences where the person himself is at fault and is not able to forgive himself leads to guilt, regret and shame that has a negative impact on the mental health.[26] Failure to forgive self is highly related with neuroticism, anxiety as well as depression in both males and females. Moreover, failure to forgive others indicate higher depression levels.[16] Therefore, monitoring the relationship between positive personality traits as well as forgiveness in adolescents is of utmost importance as it could provide understanding and solution to behavioural issues and problems faced during this stage of life. Researches and observations reveal that adolescents tend to be very hyperactive and engage in revengeful and violent behaviours. They don't easily forgive the transgressor and tend to seek revenge from them [9] Researches suggests that whether an individual will forgive or not, is highly related with the age group [5]. There are several findings that support the idea that as people grow older, they become more forgiving. [7,11,19,21,23] Girard and Mullet[11] reported that in a variety of transgression situations, older people tend to be more forgiving than adolescents and adults. Also, adults tend to forgive more than adolescents. An overview of previous literature suggests that personality plays a major role in an individual's life by predisposing a person to comprehend a situation in a certain manner which leads to a particular behaviour. Therefore, assuming that positive personality traits would promote other valuable traits in individuals such as forgiveness, which too have a great

value in the Indian culture would not be wrong. Forgiveness fosters one's mental health, psychological well-being and promote one's level of happiness. Positive personality too helps an individual in his overall mental health. But, no direct relationship has been previously established between positive personality traits as well as forgiveness especially in the Indian context. Hence further explorations need to be made on how the two variables have an effect on each other. Therefore, the present study is conceptualized with the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the relationship between positive personality traits and forgiveness in adolescents
- 2) To examine gender difference, if any, in the potential relationship of forgiveness and positive personality

Based on an extensive literature review following hypothesis has been formulated

- H1) There would be a positive correlation between all four dimensions of positive personality and forgiveness.  
 H 2) There must be a significant linear relationship between various dimensions of positive personality traits and forgiveness.

As gender difference in the relationship between forgiveness and positive personality has not been explored in the Indian setting it was not possible to propose a hypothesis for the second objective.

## Methodology

### Sample

With prior permission from the concerned authorities, a total sample of 200 participants (107 males and 93 females) was randomly selected from various English medium schools of Lucknow city, India. The age of the participants varied from 16 to 18 years and from grade 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Research design

Correlational research design has been used in the study. Forgiveness was treated as criterion variables and various dimensions of positive personality traits were treated as predictors.

### Instruments

The following instruments were used for data collection

#### The Positive Personality Trait Questionnaire (PPTQ)

PPTQ has been developed by Kamlesh Singh and Shalini Duggal Jha in 2010. The questionnaire measures the perceived positive personality traits that are relevant in the Indian setting. It consists of 43 items with four components namely: Positive self-image, Commitment, Outward people-orientation and culture identification. The internal consistency coefficients for the four factors are 0.77, 0.80, 0.79 and 0.79 respectively. The internal consistency coefficient for the overall questionnaire is 0.91. The questionnaire is valid with both convergent and discriminant validity.

#### Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

The HFS has been developed by Thompson, Syner and Hoffman in 2005. It is an 18 item scale that measures an individual's general tendency to forgive. It consists of three subscales; forgiveness of self ( $r = 0.80$ ), forgiveness of others ( $r = 0.77$ ) and forgiveness of situations ( $r = 0.82$ ). The scale has convergent validity and satisfactory internal consistency and strong test-retest reliability of 0.81.

**3)Demographic Record Schedule**

A demographic record schedule was used to keep relevant information about the participants.

**Procedure**

Proper consent was taken from the participants before the administration of the scales and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Only after establishing a healthy rapport, the participants were administered the scales. Their responses were recorded on SPSS data file for further analysis. Data was then screened for outliers and missing values were identified. Total missing value was less than 5 percent of all the cases,

including all the variables. The missing values identified were then replaced with the mean value for each particular scale. Correlation and regression analysis were performed to find out the relationship. The results are represented in the following section.

**Result**

Hypothesis 1 states that there would be a positive correlation between positive personality traits and forgiveness. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product-moment r was computed among all dimensions of PPTQ and forgiveness scale separately for males and females. The output is summarized in table 1.1

PPTQ dimensions	HFS dimensions					
	Forgiveness of self		Forgiveness of others		Forgiveness of situations	
	Female	male	female	male	female	male

HFS

**Table 1.1:** Summary of correlations between dimensions of positive personality traits and heartland forgiveness scale

Positive self-image	.148	-.114	.233*	.153	.414**	.017	.366**	.045
Commitment	.246*	-.089	.209*	.140	.299**	.021	.338**	.051
People orientation	.139	-.169	-.034	.089	.309**	-.075	.177	-.060
Culture identification	.030	-.057	.154	-.098	.266**	.048	.213*	-.053
Total score of PPTQ	.177	-.136	.156	.091	.411**	-.001	.336**	-.007

**Notes:** \*\* p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Abbreviations:** PPTQ, Positive Personality Traits Questionnaire; HFS, Heartland Forgiveness Scale

Table 1.1 clearly represents that there is a significant positive correlation between total score of positive personality traits and forgiveness among female participants with correlation coefficient of .336 at 0.01 level of confidence, but the correlation is poorly insignificant for the male participants where the correlation coefficient is -.007, also indicative of negative correlation. Moreover, various dimensions of PPTQ and HFS reveals some interesting findings. The first dimension of HFS i.e., forgiveness of self is significantly positively correlated with only one dimension of PPTQ i.e., commitment, but only in female participants. This is suggestive of the fact that for females, forgiving oneself is very much related to how one is committed towards self, others and goals. On the

other hand, the second dimension of HFS i.e., forgiveness of others is significantly positively correlated with two dimensions of PPTQ i.e., positive self-image as well as commitment only among females and not among male participants. The third dimension of HFS i.e., forgiveness of situations has a significant positive correlation with all the dimensions of PPTQ among female participants, suggesting it to be an important dimension. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported by the data, where the relationship is significant only for female participants. Stepwise regression analysis was performed to test the linear relationship between positive personality traits and gratitude.

Model	Sex	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	F	Beta	t
(constant) Positive self-image	Females	.366	.134	.124	14.043**	.366	3.747**

**Notes:** \*\* p<0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Dependent variable:** Heartland Forgiveness Scale

**Table 2.2:** Summary of stepwise regression analysis with forgiveness as criterion variable and positive personality trait as predictor variable

**Excluded variables**

**Females:** Commitment, People Orientation, Culture identification

**Males:** Positive self-image, Commitment, People Orientation, Culture identification

The above regression model clearly specifies that out of four dimensions of positive personality trait questionnaire, positive self-image significantly predicted forgiveness among females (R<sup>2</sup> = .134, β = .366, t = 3.74\*\*). The rest of the predictors were excluded from the analysis as their model statistics could not meet the required criterion.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the role of positive personality traits in fostering forgiveness in Indian adolescents. Two important issues has been addressed by the study; first is the relationship between positive personality traits and forgiveness, and second is the gender differences in the pattern of this relationship. It was hypothesised that positive personality traits would be positively correlated with forgiveness (H1) but there could be different dimensions of positive personality that significantly contributes to forgiveness in males and females (H2). Pearson product-moment  $r$  and stepwise regression analysis was performed to test both the hypothesis respectively. However, the hypotheses were only partially supported by the sample as there is a positive significant correlation between positive personality traits and forgiveness in females, but not in males. Moreover, one dimension of PPTQ, i.e. positive self-image significantly predict forgiveness only in females whereas none of the dimensions of PPTQ predicts the same in males. Considering the history, it could be traced that males have always been the dominating and the powerful member of a community, and females have been a submissive one. This one reason alone suggests why forgiving does not have much impact on the positive personality of males, but on females. Males tend to be aggressive and revengeful<sup>6</sup> and forgiving the transgressor has been thought to be a quality of a submissive or weak person. Moreover, females are more empathizing<sup>27</sup> and hence they tend to empathize with the transgressor. Not forgiving the transgressor would lead to their disturbance of mental peace and therefore affecting their positive personality traits. Further, positive self-image of females predicting forgiveness in them could be reasoned by their caring and loving nature, accompanied by their higher emotional intelligence than their male counterparts.<sup>9</sup> Comprehending the major findings into a larger perspective of Indian context highlights the importance of positive personality traits and forgiveness. These virtues are highly valued in Indian culture where females specifically are taught to be submissive and forgiving. But the contemporary generation has given the females much opportunities to be self-reliant and confident therefore maintaining a positive self-image and being forgiving of situations that is not under their control. This partial correlation between positive personality traits and forgiveness gives an idea to further integrate forgiveness into a set of positive personality traits by further enquiry. Moreover, previous literature also supports gender and age difference in forgiveness where younger men are more motivated to seek revenge than older ones, and this difference in trend is seen only in men, not in women.<sup>10</sup>

## Implications

The research findings suggests the importance of positive personality traits in nurturing forgiveness in adolescents for utilizing it in designing programs for school and college students in order to enhance their positive personality traits in them and making them learn the art of forgiveness. Furthermore, the techniques designed could also be utilized in the clinical setting for the betterment of client's mental health and well-being.

## Limitations and future suggestions

The study is limited to a small sample size which leads to problems in major generalization. Moreover, as India is a country with a diverse

culture, comparison with respect to different cultures within India could give some different insight in further studies. The present research was limited to a particular age group, and hence comparing the gender difference with respect to different age groups could be done in further studies, while considering other positive psychology variables such as resilience, emotional intelligence, flow, perseverance etc. Since there is not much data available for the concept of positive personality, further studies could elaborate the data through factor analytic studies and more positive personality traits could be explored including forgiveness and gratitude. Many other positive personality inventories and scales could be developed with respect to Indian culture.

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**DOI:10.31579/2637-8892/239**

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