

Effect of Forgiveness on Need for Closure

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijhsr.20240515>

ABSTRACT

Aim of the present study is to find the relationship between Forgiveness and Need for Closure and to find the influence of one on the other. Convenience sampling was used to collect data from a sample of 200 young adults from different parts of India, using Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Yamhure Thompson et al., 2002) and Need for Closure Scale (Paliwal & Kumar, 2022) with good reliability and validity. SPSS 29 analysis shows no significant gender differences in forgiveness and the need for closure. Observations suggested a weak negative correlation ($r = 0.161$, $p < 0.05$) between Forgiveness and Need for Closure. Regression analysis further indicated that Forgiveness has a moderate influence on the Need for Closure ($R^2 = 0.025$), emphasizing its role as a coping mechanism that can mitigate the desire for cognitive closure. These findings open the door to future research that can deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between forgiveness and the need for closure.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Need for Closure, Gender Differences, Correlation, Regression.*

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness and Need for Closure

In the complex tapestry of human relationships, the intricate interplay between forgiveness and the need for closure serves as a compelling and understudied facet of psychological inquiry. As society navigates the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics, understanding the impact of forgiveness on the need for closure becomes increasingly relevant.

Forgiveness can be defined as the intentional and voluntary process by which one who initially feels victimized or wronged, witnesses a change in feelings and attitude regarding their offender, and overcomes the damage of the offense. Emotions that contribute to forgiveness include empathy, sympathy, compassion, romantic love, and altruistic love [1]-[2]. The act of forgiveness can be either partial (reducing the lack of

forgiveness) or complete (resulting in an emotionally balanced or even positively inclined stance towards the transgressor).

Another paper [3] asserted that, in certain situations, humans have a propensity to forgive that is just as fundamental to human nature as their propensity to seek vengeance when wronged. A general consensus suggests forgiveness to be intricate [4], encompassing cognitive [5], emotional [6], behavioral [7], motivational [8], decisional [9], and interpersonal e.g., [10] dimensions. However, there exists a lack of unanimity among researchers regarding the relative significance of these different aspects.

A study finds sympathetic nervous system activity and facial muscle tension as indicated by EMG patterns resemble the responses observed in situations of stress and the presence of adverse emotions [11]. A study executed a correlational investigation that

explored the inclination for forgiveness and physiological indicators within a cohort of 68 patients in a Veterans Administration Medical Center ^[12]. Their findings indicated a resemblance between the bioindicators of unforgiveness and the markers of stress and adverse emotion as evidenced by blood chemistry metrics.

A requirement for reliable metrics that can differentiate between decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness, although such metrics are currently absent. Up until now, researchers have primarily employed linear scales to measure degrees of forgiveness and lack of forgiveness ^[13]. Researchers have identified various types or dimensions of forgiveness highlighting different aspects of the forgiveness process and reflect the complexity of human emotions and relationships. Different situations and relationships may call for different forms of forgiveness, reflecting the intricate nature of human emotions and interactions. Here are some notable types of forgiveness:

- a) **Self-Forgiveness:** Self-forgiveness is directed inwardly, addressing the ability to forgive oneself for mistakes, failures, or regrets. It involves acknowledging personal flaws and past actions, releasing self-blame, and nurturing self-love and -compassion. These phases entail accepting responsibility for mistakes committed, owning up to them, and finally completing a motivational transition that lessens negative feelings and behaviors like shame, self-criticism, and self-centeredness.
- b) **Forgiving Others:** This type of forgiveness is relevant in relationships and involves one person forgiving another. It can lead to repairing and strengthening connections, promoting understanding, and fostering empathy between individuals. ^[14] in their study stated that forgiving others counteracts adverse feelings and has the potential to beneficially influence psychological well-being. The act of forgiving others is connected to both physical and mental health outcomes.

- c) **Forgiving Situations:** This type of forgiveness involves making a conscious choice to let go of resentment, anger, and the desire for revenge regarding a particular situation. This type focuses on the emotional journey of forgiveness, where individuals engage in processes like expressing their emotions, sharing their feelings with others, and reflecting on the emotional impact of the wrongdoing. The art of letting go is used for situations that a person has no power over.

Closure, on the other hand, is a fundamental concept in psychology and personal growth, refers to the process of coming to terms with and finding resolution for past experiences or relationships. "Closure is the desire to understand and make sense of a negative event and can be helpful in coping with difficult life experiences". It involves acknowledging emotions, understanding events, and ultimately achieving a sense of completeness

The different types of closure reflect the multidimensional nature of the process, highlighting the various aspects of emotional, cognitive, and practical resolution that individuals may seek in order to find healing and move forward in their lives. Here are some types of closure, including emotional and cognitive aspects, as well as others:

- a) **Emotional Closure:** This type of closure involves processing and resolving the emotional impact of an event, relationship, or experience. It focuses on coming to terms with one's feelings, releasing negative emotions, and finding emotional healing.
- b) **Cognitive Closure:** Cognitive closure centers on achieving a sense of understanding, clarity, or resolution in one's thoughts and beliefs. It involves addressing unanswered questions, gaining insight into the situation, and making sense of complex or confusing experiences.
- c) **Decisional Closure:** Decisional closure involves making a conscious choice to

move forward, letting go of negative emotions or attachments, and deciding to focus on the future rather than dwelling on the past.

The need for closure arises from our natural human tendency to seek resolution and understanding in order to achieve emotional, psychological, and cognitive balance. While the need for closure is universal, the way individuals seek and attain closure can vary widely based on personality, cultural background, and the specific nature of the situation. Closure provides a sense of finality, alleviating uncertainty and helping individuals regain a sense of control and stability in their lives.

Seeking closure helps individuals make sense of complex or ambiguous situations. Closure provides a sense of resolution, enabling individuals to find a state of emotional equilibrium and calm. Closure allows individuals to integrate significant events or experiences into their life narrative, shaping their sense of self and identity. Just as a story needs a conclusion to feel complete, individuals often seek closure to create a sense of closure and resolution in their life's narratives.

When faced with conflicting beliefs or unresolved questions, closure helps to alleviate cognitive dissonance – the discomfort caused by holding contradictory thoughts – by providing answers or reconciling contradictions. The pursuit of closure is often linked to improved mental and emotional well-being. It contributes to a sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment, supporting an overall positive outlook on life.

An intensive review of literature shows that the researches have been done on Forgiveness and Need for Closure separately but the research gap lies in the fact that these two variables are not studied together. Majorly studied variables along with Forgiveness are psychological well-being^{[15],[16]}; post traumatic growth^[17]; subjective well-being^[18]; and reconciliation^[19]. Whereas Need for Closure is studied with religion^[20]; influence of positive mood^[21];

verbal brooding^[22]; and stress and anxiety^[23].

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Design

The research design involved conducting a correlational study to understand the association amid forgiveness and the need for closure and perform a regression analysis to investigate if one can predict the other.

Statement of the Problem

The study was conducted to understand the relationship between Forgiveness and Need for Closure.

Objectives

Based on the literature being reviewed, the following are the objectives:

1. To find the relationship between Forgiveness and Need for Closure
2. To find the impact of Forgiveness on Need for Closure
3. To study the gender difference between Forgiveness and Need for Closure

Hypotheses

H₀₁ - There is no significant correlation between Forgiveness and Need for Closure

H₀₂ - There is no impact of Forgiveness on Need for Closure.

H₀₃ - There is no significant gender difference between Forgiveness and Need for Closure

Operational Definition

Forgiveness- Forgiveness involves willfully putting aside feelings of resentment toward someone who has committed a wrong, been unfair or hurtful, or otherwise harmed you in some way. It is a voluntary transformation of your feelings, attitudes, and behavior, so that you are no longer dominated by resentment and can express compassion, generosity, or the like toward the person who wronged you.
Need for Closure- The degree to which a person has the desire for certainty and dislike ambiguity.

Sample and Sampling

The sample comprised of young adults aged 18 to 25. The sample size of this research was 200 individuals of different genders chosen from the population using the convenience sampling approach. Online google forms were distributed both virtually and in person.

Inclusion criteria

1. People of age between 18-25 were included.
2. People who are currently residing in India.
3. People who are able to read, write, and speak the English language were included.

Exclusion criteria

1. People diagnosed with mental health disorders were excluded.

Tools Used

Heartland Forgiveness Scale [24]: The HFS demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's alpha (total for all the subscales ranged from .86 to .87). The correlations between the HFS total, Self, Other, and Situation subscales administered across a 3-week interval were .83, .72, .73, and .77, respectively.

Need For Closure Scale [25]: The internal consistency of the NFC construct (Cronbach's Alpha) was also checked at both factor and facet levels. Cronbach's Alpha value of NFC at the factor level is 0.68, and at the facet, the level ranges between 0.638 and 0.701. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values near 0.90 or greater, and CFI values around 0.90.

PROCEDURE

The data was collected using online google forms from people aged between 18 to 25

years, from various parts of India. People with diagnosed mental health issues were not taken into consideration.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

IBM SPSS version 29 was used run the statistical analysis of the data. The statistical techniques used were descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson Correlation was used to analyze the relationship between Forgiveness and Need for Closure significant to 0.05 and 0.01 level. Regression Analysis was used to understand the impact of Forgiveness and Need for Closure significance below 0.05 level. T-Test was used to study gender differences significant to level 0.05.

RESULT

Table 1 Showing the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Forgiveness and Need for Closure among young adults (N=200)

Variables	Need for Closure
Forgiveness	- 0.161*
Forgiveness for Self	- 0.039
Forgiveness for Others	- 0.146 *
Forgiveness for Situations	- 0.186 **

Note. * p < .05, **p < 0.01

Table 1 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Forgiveness and Need for Closure. There was negative correlation of - 0.161 significant to level 0.05 between Forgiveness and Need for Closure. It also demonstrates the correlation amongst the dimensions of Forgiveness and Need for Closure. There was also a negative correlation of - 0.039 between forgiveness for self and need for closure; a negative correlation of - 0.146 significant to 0.05 level between forgiveness for others and need for closure; and a negative correlation of - 0.186 significant to 0.01 level between forgiveness for situation and need for closure.

Table 2 Showing the B score, standard error, beta score, F score, t score, p value, R and R square scores between Forgiveness and Need for Closure

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Model Summary
	B	St. Error	Beta	
Forgiveness	-0.133	0.058	- 0.161	F = 5.27 t = - 2.295 Sig = 0.023 R = 0.161 R ² = 0.026

Dependent Variable: Need for Closure

In Table 2, a simple linear regression was calculated to predict Need for Closure based on Forgiveness. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 198) = 5.27, p = 0.023$), with an R^2 of 0.026. The R-squared

Table 3 Showing the Descriptive Statistics (mean and standard deviation) and gender differences in Forgiveness and Need for Closure among young adults (N=200)

Variables	Female		Male		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Forgiveness	80.7	15.6	78.0	12.4	1.349	0.179
Need for Closure	59.3	11.5	56.3	11.8	1.830	0.069

Table 3 shows the Descriptive Statistics (mean and standard deviation) and gender differences in Forgiveness and Need for Closure. The mean for males and females is for Forgiveness is 80.7 and 78.0 respectively and standard deviation for males and females for Need for Closure is 59.3 and 56.3 respectively. There was no significant gender difference found between Forgiveness ($t = 1.349$) and Need for Closure ($t = 1.830$). It displays the independent sample t-test results. It indicates that there were no significant gender differences in both forgiveness and the need for closure, as reflected in the p-values of 0.179 and 0.069, respectively.

DISCUSSION

The results in Table 1 showed a weak negative correlation of 0.161 significant at a level of 0.05 between forgiveness and need for closure. This demonstrates a weak negative relationship between the two variables rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation between forgiveness and need for closure. Therefore, we can agree to take the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant correlation between forgiveness and need for closure. This means that individuals with higher level of forgiveness will have lower need for closure, but not always as the correlation is weak. One possible explanation for this negative correlation is the nature of forgiveness itself.

value of 0.026 suggests that approximately 2.6% of the variance in Need for Closure can be explained by Forgiveness. The negative beta coefficient (-0.133) indicates that as Forgiveness increases by one unit, Need for Closure decreases by 0.133 units.

Forgiveness is often associated with a willingness to let go of negative emotions and thoughts related to a past transgression. Individuals who are more forgiving may be more inclined to accept ambiguity, tolerate uncertainty, and refrain from seeking closure through cognitive or emotional completion. To support this idea, it is important to consider findings from previous studies. There are no research findings for these specific variables that support the results and hence, this study can be used to lay the ground work for future researches. These results suggest that forgiving others or forgiving the situation is more strongly associated with a reduced need for closure than forgiving oneself. This may indicate that the process of forgiving others or forgiving a situation involves a greater degree of acceptance and letting go of the need for complete understanding and certainty. These discoveries are in sync with research [26], who suggested that forgiving others is linked to the reduction of negative emotions and a decrease in the need for cognitive closure.

It also shows the correlation between the dimensions of Forgiveness (forgiveness for self, forgiveness for others, and forgiveness for the situation) and the Need for Closure. While the correlation between forgiveness for self and the need for closure was weak and not significant ($r = -0.039$), the correlations between forgiveness for others ($r = -0.146^*$) and forgiveness for the situation ($r = -0.186^{**}$) were weak but significant to 0.05 and 0.01 level respectively.

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In Table 2, the finding suggests that individuals who are more forgiving tend to have lower levels of Need for Closure. This finding helps us reject the null hypothesis that there is no impact of Forgiveness on Need for Closure accept the alternate hypothesis that Forgiveness will influence Need for Closure.

The significance of the F-statistic ($F = 5.27$, $p = 0.023$) further supports the idea that Forgiveness is indeed associated with Need for Closure in a meaningful way. The t-value of -2.295 also confirms the significance of the relationship, as it falls below the critical value at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. However, it is important to note that the R-squared value is relatively low (0.026), indicating that Forgiveness alone explains only a small proportion of the variability in Need for Closure.

The literature on the topic has shown that personality traits, cognitive styles, and emotional processes can influence the need for closure [27]. This study adds to this body of knowledge by highlighting that forgiveness, as an interpersonal and intrapersonal process, is one of the factors that may contribute to this need for closure. This result is in line with the argument put forth [28], who suggested that forgiveness can serve as a coping mechanism that decreases the need for closure.

In Table 3, the results reveal that, within the context of this study, gender did not have a significant contribution in determining individuals' levels of forgiveness and their need for closure. This outcome challenges previous research that has shown gender-related variations in forgiveness and the need for closure. For instance, research [14] has suggested that women tend to be more forgiving than men, while [27] have indicated that men may have a higher need for closure compared to women.

Mental health professionals could incorporate insights from this research into

their therapeutic interventions. Strategies that promote forgiveness might be integrated into treatments for individuals struggling with unresolved issues or trauma, potentially leading to better mental health outcomes. Educational institutions and community organizations could develop programs that teach forgiveness skills and provide guidance on achieving closure. This could be especially relevant for young people learning to manage conflict and emotional challenges. Insights into forgiveness and closure could influence public policy (criminal justice and restorative practices) and could inform approaches to rehabilitation and reconciliation.

Limitations of the study

- The study utilized self-report measures for forgiveness and the need for closure, which are subject to social desirability and response biases. The reliance on self-reports may impact the accuracy of the data.
- The research, conducted within the context of India, may not be readily generalizable to other cultural or geographical contexts, potentially limiting the universality of the results.
- Participants were recruited by open invitation, so study is not immune to selection bias.

Suggestions for Future Research

Exploring additional dimensions of forgiveness, such as forgiveness for self, others, and situations, and their impact on the need for closure could be a valuable avenue for future research. Future research can explore and design therapeutic interventions centered around forgiveness practices, aiming to reduce the need for closure and enhance emotional well-being. Conducting longitudinal studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how the relationship between forgiveness and the need for closure evolves over time. Given the diverse cultural landscape in India, future research could delve into cultural variations in the relationship between forgiveness and

the need for closure. Also, investigating the intersectionality of forgiveness and personality traits may uncover how individual differences contribute to the relationship with the need for closure.

CONCLUSION

The results unveiled several significant insights into these psychological constructs and their interplay. Firstly, the study revealed that there were no significant gender differences in forgiveness and the need for closure, suggesting that gender may not play a substantial role in shaping individuals' levels of these constructs. These findings challenged previous research that indicated gender-related variations in forgiveness and the need for closure. Secondly, a weak but significant negative correlation ($r = -0.161$) was found between forgiveness and the need for closure, affirming the alternate hypothesis and indicating that individuals with higher levels of forgiveness tend to exhibit a lower need for cognitive closure. Moreover, the study unveiled those forgiving others or forgiving a situation had a more pronounced impact on reducing the need for closure compared to forgiving oneself.

The finding contributes to the existing literature on the factors influencing the need for closure, indicating that forgiveness can serve as a coping mechanism that mitigates the desire for cognitive closure. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting forgiveness as a factor in the need for closure, in alignment with the work [27], [28]. Nonetheless, it is essential to consider the study's limitations, including sample size and potential sampling biases, while recognizing the potential for future research to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between forgiveness and the need for closure.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: Not Applicable

Acknowledgement: I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to several individuals who have contributed to the scientific content and technical aspects of this research. First

and foremost, I would like to thank my research guide for the insights and evaluation of my paper. I am also deeply thankful to my friends Ms. Krinal Mehta, Mr. Pranshu Agnihotri, and Ms. Leandra George whose help has proven invaluable in completion and fulfilment of the work. I am thankful to my parents for helping me financially during the process and publication of my research.

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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- How to cite this article: Manshi Begal, Vignanth Babu K G, Priyanka V R. Effect of forgiveness on need for closure. *Int J Health Sci Res*. 2024; 14(5):135-143. DOI: [10.52403/ijhsr.20240515](https://doi.org/10.52403/ijhsr.20240515)
