

Conference Paper

The Art of Forgiving the Self: The Prisoners' Self-Forgiveness and Quest for Meaning in Life

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Abstract.

A person serving time in prison may lose their sense of meaning in life. Self-forgiveness is believed to help individuals discover their life's meaning and alleviate intense remorse. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant relationship between self-forgiveness and meaning in life for 96 inmates aged 40 to 65 at Penitentiary (LAPAS) Malang. This investigation used purposive sampling. We used the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and the State Self-Forgiveness Scale (SSFS). In addition, the Pearson Product Moment method of correlation analysis was utilized in this investigation. Findings revealed a significant and positive correlation between self-forgiveness and meaning in life ($r_{xy} = 0.715$; $p = 0.000$). Consequently, if self-forgiveness scores are higher, meaning in life will also score higher.

Keywords: Meaning in life, Self-forgiveness, Prisoners

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1. Introduction

In accordance with Undang-Undang No. 12 Tahun 1995 tentang Pemasyarakatan (Indonesia), prisoners are convicted criminals serving their sentences and relinquishing their independence within the penitentiary institution. Data from World Prison Brief reveals that in 2022, Indonesia ranks fourth as the country with the highest number of prisoners in Asia, with 274,880 detainees (1). The high number of inmates in Indonesia is directly proportional to the crime rate. According to the Central Statistics Agency's Crime Statistics Catalogue, there were a total of 203,604 crime cases in Indonesia in 2022. East Java Province ranked third with 19,257 criminal cases in 2021. In 2018, Class 1 Penitentiary (LAPAS) Lowokwaru Malang ranked fifth in the category of prisons with the greatest number of inmates, with 2,801 individuals (Pratama, 2018). Malang City has two prisons, including Class 1 Penitentiary (LAPAS) Lowokwaru Malang and Class IIA Women's Penitentiary Malang. According to the collected data, there will be

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2,982 inmates at Class 1 Penitentiary (LAPAS) Lowokwaru Malang in 2023, of which 2,571 will be inmates and 411 will be non-inmates. Meanwhile, the population of Class IIA Women's Penitentiary (LAPAS) Lowokwaru Malang is 452, of which 426 residents are prisoners.

In addition, it was discovered that the prevalence of depression among prisoners, which was found to be 75.4%, was divided into three categories: mild depression (28.7%), moderate depression (38.5%), and major depression (8.2%) (3). In 2016, 63 out of 120 fatalities among Indonesian prisoners occurred within prisons. According to a study of 120 cases of death among prisoners, suicide was the second leading cause of death with a rate of 20.8%, as well as depression and guilt about their actions as suspected suicide motives (Wirya & 4). Taylor et al. (1970) found that data from the Social Readjustment Rating Scale confirmed that incarceration rated as the fourth most stressful life event. A stressful life event is a condition in which an individual is confronted with a pressure-filled event or stressor that signifies the emergence of negative changes in daily life (5).

As for the obstacles that prisoners encounter as a result of their prison sentences, negative stigma and an identity crisis are among them. The negative stigma affixed to prisoners stems from the concept of labeling criminals as inmate identities, which breeds prejudice in society and can lead to feelings of inferiority and low social contact among prisoners (6) (7). In addition, prisoners confront the crisis of self-narrative, a condition in which individuals interpret the events of their lives from a negative perspective, thereby lowering their self-esteem (8).

Moreover, traumatic events can obliterate individual meanings and manifest psychological stresses that induce anxiety, hopelessness, powerlessness, and depression (9). In addition, it was discovered that prisoners tend to become irritable, withdrawn, often daydreaming, and filled with feelings of guilt, blame, and despair, so that they lose motivation to live their lives, which can lead to suicidal ideation (10) (11) (12). Regarding one of the psychological effects, namely feelings of guilt, previous research conducted by Riyanti (2019) revealed that prisoners tend to induce a range of feelings of remorse within themselves. Unmanaged feelings of remorse can lead to self-blame and self-punishment, to the point of inducing suicidal ideation if reinforced by shame (13) (14).

Individuals who commit an act of offense and violate moral standards and who are incarcerated or hold the status of a prisoner as a result of their own actions may experience a loss of self-worth and meaning in life (15) (16). Individuals who view themselves as having committed an offense or action that is contrary to self-value and social value will have two options (16). First, the individual will disregard the transgressions and

view himself as a corrupted individual, alluding to the possibility of further harm to the meaning in life. Individuals will seek to discover or reconstruct their life's meaning so that it is more adaptable to future changes. Individuals have a tendency to interpret both positive and negative life events as positive experiences toward achieving a life objective (17)(18). Therefore, the success of prisoners in finding meaning in life can reduce their depressive symptoms.

Prior research conducted by Ranganathan and Todorov (2010) reaffirmed the significance of self-forgiveness as an endeavor to reduce guilt, which can boost self-esteem and acceptance in individuals. This is due to the fact that through self-forgiveness, individuals are led to not only regret their actions but also accept responsibility for their errors and draw positive lessons from them (13). Individuals who are able to absolve themselves have a low propensity for depression and anxiety, whereas those who have difficulty forgiving themselves have a high propensity for depression and anxiety (19). In addition, through self-forgiveness, individuals can rebuild their self-esteem and recognize and accept their errors and flaws (20).

Self-forgiveness enables the reconstruction of meaning (16). It is hoped that through self-forgiveness, individuals will be able to find meaning in past mistakes and events, which will lead them to find purpose and meaning for the remainder of their existence (21). For this reason, self-forgiveness is viewed as a form of readiness for individuals to live a more meaningful and purposeful existence in the future (22). Moreover, two studies discovered that self-forgiveness and life meaning have a significant and positive correlation (23) (24). Indeed, research on the meaning in life among prisoners has been conducted. Manafe (2014), Ferawati and Rahmadani (2000), Handayani (2000), and Razkia, Saitri, and Santoso (2021) were able to identify studies that used variables of self-forgiveness in prisoners but not the meaning in life, such as psychological well-being, guilt, forgiveness, and emotional regulation.

However, no research has been found on prisoners' self-forgiveness or the meaning in life. In some nations, the prevalence of mental health disorders among prisoners is significantly higher than the prevalence of mental health disorders among the general population. This is due to the fact that incarceration can increase vulnerability and suicide risk, both of which are inextricably linked to an individual's mental health (25). This study was conducted to determine whether there is a correlation between self-forgiveness and prisoners' sense of meaning in life. By understanding the relationship between these research variables, it is anticipated that the results of this study will be one of the references or guidelines for intervening related to the ability to forgive prisoners in order to direct or bridge prisoners in finding the meaning in life, thereby

reducing negative impacts that can have an adverse effect on the health and psychological well-being of prisoners.

2. Literature Review

The meaning in life refers to an individual's belief that their existence is significant and meaningful by understanding what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur (26). According to Frank and Steger (2016), the meaning in life is a process involving the interplay of interpretation, aspiration, and evaluation of life experiences. This includes a series of processes, including the process of comprehending a life experience, the process of directing an effort toward the desired future, and the process of imparting the sense that life is meaningful and significant.

Moreover, Steger et al. (2009) mentioned two aspects of meaning in life: the presence of meaning in life and the pursuit of meaning in life. The presence of meaning is defined as the extent to which individuals comprehend, interpret, and perceive changes in life, or the extent to which individuals perceive that their lives have significance. The search for meaning in life, meanwhile, is defined as an individual's motivation or effort to pursue and/or investigate the meaning and purpose of life. Krause and Hayward (2013) noted that stressful life events, lifetime trauma, and changes in the amount of social support can influence the meaning of a person's existence.

Whol et al. (2008), Whol & Thompson (2011), and Whol et al. (2011) define self-forgiveness as a process of positive change in individuals characterized by awareness of mistakes made, understanding that they have done something wrong, and stopping to punish themselves by accepting responsibility to avoid negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to mistakes made. Whol et al. (2008) identify three aspects of self-forgiveness: emotion, action, and belief. First, the feeling aspect encompasses individual emotions associated with past errors. Second, the action component contains the actions or behaviors of individuals in response to previous errors. Finally, the belief aspect incorporates what individuals who have made mistakes believe about themselves.

Beiter (2007) notes that self-forgiveness can encourage individuals to examine themselves and learn to embrace the outcomes of their decisions and actions. Eventually, the process will refer to the accumulation of knowledge about self-worth and the significance of an action, which can be used as a basis for positive life changes. This series of processes ultimately enables individuals to give their lives meaning (27). Self-forgiveness can encourage people to find meaning in past errors and events, which

in turn will lead them to find purpose and meaning in life for the remainder of their lives (21). In accordance with this, Graham et al. (2017) asserted that self-forgiveness can assist individuals in regaining a sense of meaning in their lives after making errors. It was discovered that the logical process in question, namely self-forgiveness, assists individuals in escaping feelings of excessive self-blame, shame, distress, and remorse. This demonstrates that self-forgiveness leads individuals to no longer focus on rationalizing or justifying mistakes they have made but rather on efforts to find meaning for those mistakes so that they can find a new meaning that encourages them to move on to better change. Moreover, two studies discovered that self-forgiveness and life meaning have a significant and positive correlation (23) (24).

3. Methods

This study employed a quantitative method and a correlational research design to examine the relationship between two variables: the meaning in life (x) as a dependent variable and self-forgiveness (y) as an independent variable. The objective of correlational research is to describe the direction and intensity of the relationship between two variables and to predict the extent to which changes in one variable can explain changes in other variables in a study (28).

The population of this research is comprised of prisoners in Class 1 Penitentiary Lowokwaru Malang and Class IIA Penitentiary Malang. This population selection is based on the province in Indonesia with the greatest percentage of prisoner deaths, which is East Java Province with 12.5%. In 2018, Malang City, specifically Class 1 Penitentiary Lowokwaru Malang, ranked fifth in the category of prisons with the greatest number of inmates and prisoners. Using two prisons allows for an even distribution of data between men and women, as there has been no difference in self-forgiveness or the meaning in life between male and female prisoners.

This study utilized non-probability sampling, which is a sampling technique in which not all members of the population have the same opportunity to be sampled, but certain considerations are taken into account when taking samples (29) (30). In addition, this study employed techniques of purposive sampling, or sampling techniques based on specific considerations or objectives (30). The sample will be determined using the criteria of detainees aged 40 to 65. The determination of the sample criteria is based on the assumption that individuals in that age range will be confronted with the reality that they will have less time to live, causing them to evaluate their lives. This is supported by Frankl's (27) assertion that middle-aged adults begin to evaluate themselves by asking

themselves why they exist, what they want in life, and what gives life meaning. In light of this, researchers determined the criteria for samples to be between the ages of 40 and 65. Moreover, the number of samples used in this research was 96, and Roscoe (31) stated that the number of samples suitable for use in the study ranged between 30 and 500 individuals.

This investigation utilized two instruments that were adapted by the researcher. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), developed by Steger (2010) in English, and The State Self-Forgiveness Scale (SSFS), developed by Whol (2008) in English, are the two instruments. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) consists of ten items addressing the presence of meaning in existence and the search for meaning. Presence of meaning assesses the extent to which respondents believe their lives have significance. Search for Meaning measures the extent to which respondents are motivated or engrossed in efforts to find meaning or to deepen their understanding of life's meaning. In addition, the State Self-Forgiveness Scale (SSFS) is comprised of 17 items covering three dimensions: action, emotion, and belief. The total SSFS score ranges from 17 to 68, with higher scores indicating greater levels of self-forgiveness. In this study, each research instrument will be translated into Indonesian to aid respondents' comprehension of questionnaire items.

Initial translation, synthesis of the translations, back translation, expert committee, and pre-final version testing are the steps involved in adapting the instruments (32). The first stage, initial translation, is the stage of translating the scale from its original language, namely English, to Indonesian as the maternal tongue, using specific criteria and two translators. The initial translation is performed by individuals who comprehend the concept of the employed scale. On the basis of these criteria, the first qualified translator has a background in psychology. In contrast, the second translation is performed by individuals with a different background than the first translator who are unfamiliar with the scale's concept. According to these criteria, the second qualified translator has a background in both literature and English.

The second stage, synthesis of the translations, is the process of transforming the scale from the source language to Indonesian by comparing the translation results of two translators in order to produce new translations. The third step of reverse translation is translating the synthesis back into the original language, in this case, English. In addition, the fourth stage is the expert committee, which aims to review all translations from the initial translation process to the back translation so that there are no gaps between the original questionnaire and the translated questionnaire, and then the questionnaire can be utilized in the pre-final test stage. At this time, Aiken's V coefficient on the

scale of meaning in life fluctuates between 0.92 and 1, while it is 1 on the scale of self-forgiveness. This demonstrates that the meaning-in-life scale and the self-forgiveness scale have adequate content validity, as the Aiken V coefficient is less than 0.92.

The final phase of the pre-final version's testing is a field evaluation with 42 research subjects. Before the instrument was administered to respondents, researchers evaluated its legibility. The instrument readability test was conducted by providing measuring instruments and readability forms to five respondents in accordance with the sample requirements. This seeks to determine whether the statements in the questionnaire are clear and easily understood by respondents (33). The readability test results will be used as evaluative data to enhance the item. According to the readability test results for the meaning in life scale and the self-forgiveness scale, all items are comprehensible, and no words are ambiguous or cause other interpretations.

In addition, an item-total correlation test was conducted using criteria with a coefficient limit of 0.30 in order to satisfy psychometric requirements and accurately measure constructs (34). The item difference power index criterion for 42 respondents, based on the r table, was 0.304. In the end, eight items of the meaning in life scale passed the test with an item difference power index ranging from 0.308 to 0.866 and a Cronbach alpha value of 0.707. In addition, fourteen items on the self-forgiveness scale passed the test with an item difference power index ranging from 0.355 to 0.612 and a Cronbach alpha value of 0.833.

The analysis of these research data was done using SPSS 20.0 for Windows. The first stage of data analysis is a descriptive statistical analysis designed to identify descriptions of the two research variables, self-forgiveness and the meaning of existence. Then, a classical assumption test is conducted, which includes tests for normality and linearity. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was utilized to determine that the data were normally distributed with a significance level of > 0.05 (35). Next, a test of linearity was conducted to determine whether there was a significant linear relationship between the self-forgiveness variable and the meaning of existence. The test for linearity is conducted using SPSS 20.0 for windows for the linearity test, with interpretation if the significance value (sign.) $p > 0.05$ indicates that self-forgiveness and the meaning in life have a linear relationship. The correlation or relationship between research variables, specifically the relationship between self-forgiveness and meaning in life for detainees at Penitentiary Malang, was determined by the final hypothesis test in this study. In this instance, Pearson product moment analysis is utilized.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

TABLE 1: Gender.

	Sum	Percentage
Man	50	52,1
Woman	46	47,9
Total	96	100

The subjects in this study consisted of men at a rate of 52.1%, or as many as 50 individuals, and women at a rate of 47.9%, or as many as 46 individuals, as shown in the table above.

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The meaning in life	96	9	56	47,24	8,411
Self-Forgiveness	96	14	56	45,05	7,121
Valid N (listwise)	96				

As shown in Table 2, the mean value on the scale of meaning in life is 47.24, with a standard deviation of 8.411. In the meantime, the mean value on the self-forgiveness scale is 45.05, and the standard deviation is 7.121.

TABLE 3: Subject Categorization.

	Meaning in Life		Presence of Meaning		Search For Meaning		Self-Forgiveness	
	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage	Sum	Percentage
Very Low	3	3,1	2	2,1	3	3,1	1	1
Low	1	1	2	2,1	2	2,1	1	1
Moderat	3	3,1	3	3,1	3	3,1	13	13,5
High	21	21,9	28	29,2	11	11,5	35	36,5
Very High	68	70,8	61	63,5	77	80,2	46	47,9
Total	96	100	96	100	96	100	96	100

As shown in Table 3, 70.8% of prisoners at the Penitentiary Malang, or as many as 68 prisoners, have a very high level of meaning in life. This study also provides additional information regarding the level of meaningful presence in the very high category, which

is 63.5%, or 61 detainees. Similarly, the majority of prisoners' inquiries for meaning are at an extremely high level of 80.2%, or as many as 77 prisoners. Consistent with previous findings, it is known that the majority of prisoners have a very high level of self-forgiveness, as high as 47.9%, or 46 detainees.

In this stage, according to the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z formula test for normality, the significance value is 0.106. As the significance value is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the variables of meaning in life and self-forgiveness qualify as normally distributed. In addition, the results of the linearity test, the meaning in life and self-forgiveness variables have a significance level of 0.540. Meaning in life and self-forgiveness satisfy the requirements for a linear relationship in decision-making, as the significance level is greater than 0.05. In addition, Pearson Product Moment formula used to assess the hypothesis, a correlation coefficient is 0.715 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that the variable of self-forgiveness has a positive and significant relationship with the meaning in life.

TABLE 4: The Hypothesis Test.

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Information
Self-Forgiveness and Meaning in Life	0,715	0,000	Positive relationship Significance value ≤ 0,05 Hypothesis accepted

4.2. Discussion

According to the findings of the study, the majority of detainees at Penitentiary Malang were classified as having high to very high levels of life meaning. King et al. (2016) found that, contrary to the findings of previous research, individuals who have made errors, such as perpetrators of suicides, mass shootings, and terrorism, tend to feel meaningless and that their lives lack significance. There may be variations in the results of this study, one of which relates to social relationships that may contribute to variations in the meaning in life. King et al. (2016) discovered that social relationships positively correlate with life's significance. Attachment, intimacy, and a sense of belonging to family and the surrounding community can increase a person's perception of the significance of his life. In contrast, low social relationships that result in exclusion and neglect can diminish an individual's perception of the significance and value of life.

In addition, the age range of the sample in this study was between 40 and 65 years, or middle maturity. Individuals in middle adulthood will begin to evaluate themselves, which

includes the search for self-existence and the meaning in life, due to the realization that their life expectancy is decreasing (27). This is also explained by Hicks et al. (2012), who state that individuals who realize their life expectancy is decreasing are more likely to succeed in discovering the meaning of their existence. In addition, the tendency of prisoners to view incarceration as a turning point for errors committed will refer to efforts that are more concentrated on reconstructing self-identity and becoming better than they were previously (36).

Scores on the meaning in life can represent how individuals feel about the meaning in life (37). (38) Meaning in life is associated with information that can lead individuals to consider and behave adaptively, which refers to self-control. Moreover, meaning in life can assist individuals in exploring spirituality, developing life objectives, developing optimism, happiness, positive adjustment, and enhancing their sense of self. Increases in self-esteem, self-acceptance, and positive self-image can result from a greater capacity to enhance self-identity through more positive expressions of feelings and opinions. This is supported by Steger (2017), who states that having a sense of meaning in life can aid in the recovery of psychological conditions following traumatic events and psychological disorders, thereby influencing the improvement of an individual's psychological health.

Specifically, the majority of prisoners' searches for meaning and the prevalence of meaning in their lives were both rated as high to very high by the study. This demonstrates that individuals' high pursuit of meaning is consistent with their high presence of meaning. According to Chu and Fung (2021), the quest for meaning can positively predict the presence of meaning. This relationship is supported by Chu and Fung (2021). Individuals will continue to seek meaning as a consequence of their dynamic life experiences rather than a singular event or experience (26). In addition, active efforts in the search for meaning demonstrate that the meaning that has been previously attained may only exist in one aspect of life, despite the fact that there are numerous aspects of life, including family, love, religion, work, and social relationships. This demonstrates that the presence of meaning in life can change over time due to reflection on life experiences, leading to a tendency to remain active in the pursuit of meaning (39).

This is what encourages individuals to continue searching for meaning, which can lead to a greater sense of meaning in various aspects of life (40). Individuals continue to seek meaning in life in order to discover additional meanings that increase their satisfaction with their individual understanding of what gives their lives meaning (41). This arises as a result of individuals' active efforts to discover the meaning in life, and it can lead them to find or alter their individual understanding of the meaning in life.

Consequently, this demonstrates that the presence of meaning is not innate but must be sought out (42).

In contrast to previous research, this study found that the relationship between the search for meaning and the presence of meaning is feeble and negative (40). This is a result of cultural differences, specifically between independent and interdependent cultures (43). When meaning is already present, independent cultures typically view the pursuit of meaning as a less significant endeavor. In this instance, the presence of meaning that has already been established is viewed as stable; that is, when the presence of meaning has been established, that meaning will be believed and maintained. In contrast to interdependent civilizations, the pursuit of meaning and the presence of meaning are related. Active efforts in the quest for meaning are thought to encourage individuals to obtain greater meaning in life and are regarded as a method for enhancing comprehension of life's meaning.

Moreover, individuals with a high presence of meaning profile and a low level of search for meaning are more likely to exhibit difficulties adapting, depressive symptoms, and low life satisfaction (44). In contrast, individuals with equally high scores on the presence of meaning and seeking meaning profiles tend to exhibit life satisfaction. In addition, the existence of meaning in life can prevent crime, contribute to a better life, and inspire gratitude for one's existence as a human (8) (42).

This study revealed that the majority of research subjects, namely prisoners at Penitentiary Malang, also demonstrated high to very high levels of self-forgiveness. According to Davis et al. (2015), a high self-forgiveness score can indicate a sense of social acceptability and support as well as a sense of receiving forgiveness from others. In addition, individuals with high self-forgiveness scores can reduce health problems and enhance their quality of life. In contrast, individuals with low scores on self-forgiveness are more likely to experience health problems, negative thoughts and emotions such as hatred, resentment, remorse, and hostility, and a decline in their quality of life (45). As a result, self-forgiveness practices by prisoners can treat and heal "wounds" for errors or violations committed as well as reduce shame, guilt, anger, regret, and other negative emotions related to mistakes made (16). In addition, increased self-forgiveness coupled with guilt-based regret and acknowledgment of responsibility for errors can assist individuals in avoiding future errors (46).

In addition, the findings corroborated the findings of Wijaya and Shanti (2020) and Saputri (2022), who found that self-forgiveness and the meaning in life purportedly had a positive and significant relationship (46). Self-forgiveness is a series of processes that include accepting responsibility for past mistakes accompanied by feelings of regret as

well as efforts to continue to attempt to correct mistakes by identifying ways to do so and based on personal values. (47), a person's awareness of his or her self-values can lead him or her to realize that he or she possesses many things that can give his or her existence meaning. In other words, self-forgiveness enables individuals to reconnect with their values, which ultimately leads to the discovery of purpose and meaning in life (22).

Graham et al. (2017) demonstrate that self-forgiveness can reduce rumination and increase the focus on efforts to restore damaged or contradictory meaning, purpose, and self-worth resulting from past errors. Not only that, but through self-forgiveness, individuals can also find meaning in past mistakes and events, giving them purpose and meaning for the remainder of their lives after a mistake or event has occurred (21). This implies that self-forgiveness is one form of readiness to live a meaningful life and pursue future objectives (22). Additionally, self-forgiveness can assist individuals in attempting to eliminate thoughts and actions that can lead to errors or violations (48). Finding meaning in life through self-forgiveness is intended to necessitate learning from past experiences and errors. Therefore, when examining a mistake, individuals are expected to concentrate on correctable aspects rather than demonstrating avoidance by rationalizing errors, so that future errors can be minimized.

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