

Research Article

The Effect of Forgiveness on the Psychological Well-Being of Students Who Experience Toxic Relationships

Risty Akisan, Hudaniah*, and Aransha Karnilla Nadia Putri

Faculty of Psychology, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

ORCID

Hudaniah: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2875-8561>

Abstract.

A toxic relationship is an unhealthy relationship condition that impacts the psychological well-being of the individual experiencing it. Psychological well-being is known to be improved by various factors, one of which is forgiveness. This study aims to determine the effect of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of students who experience toxic relationships. This research is a quantitative explanatory research using a purposive sampling technique with a total of 344 student participants, consisting of 12 men and 322 women. The measuring instruments used are Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation (TRIM-18) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWBS). The results showed a significant influence between forgiveness on psychological well-being with a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.01$), with a side effect of 3% ($R^2 = 0.030$). This has implications for the granting of forgiveness by students who experience toxic relationships with their partners, which then affects their psychological well-being.

Keywords: forgiveness, psychological well-being, toxic relationship

Corresponding Author:

Hudaniah; email:

hudaniah@umm.ac.id

Published: 27 March 2025

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

© Risty Akisan et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICAP-H Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Dating is considered a form of relationship that is lived by men and women with love, affection, and a sense of belonging to each other, dating is considered not to hurt one or even both people in the relationship. However, it is known that there is a phenomenon that occurs in relationships lived by couples, namely toxic relationships (1). A toxic relationship is an unhealthy relationship condition in which there are various behaviors by one of the partners that cause the relationship to run uncomfortably, and harmoniously, and disturb one of the parties (2).

Toxic relationships have various forms or characteristics, such as one partner feeling uncomfortable and safe, excessive jealousy, difficulty being yourself, isolation from the outside world, a life controlled by one party, negative attitudes, such as criticizing the partner excessively, demeaning the partner, to violence in the form of physical and

OPEN ACCESS

psychological violence (3). Physical and psychological violence experienced by victims in dating is also known as Dating Violence (KDP), which to the Annual Records of Komnas Perempuan and SIMFONI-PPA in 2022, there were 3,950 cases of Dating Violence with victims based on education level in tertiary institutions as many as 2,030 with a percentage of women 80% and men 20% (4).

Toxic relationships have various negative impacts that can be received by victims, such as anxiety, insecurity, stress, difficulty concentrating, trauma, and interference in daily life which makes it difficult for individuals to have a productive life. Furthermore, someone who is in a toxic relationship tends to experience self-confidence, depression, shame, and humiliation, and more extremely can experience social phobia to suicide (5) From the many forms of impact received by victims of toxic relationships, it is known that these various impacts can affect the psychological well-being of the victims (6).

Psychological well-being describes the extent to which individuals feel comfortable, happy, and satisfied with themselves based on various subjective experiences they have gone through (7). Psychological well-being is considered dynamic and is influenced by several factors, such as demographic factors (age, gender, socioeconomic status, and culture), social support, evaluation of life experiences, religiosity, and individual personality (7). Several aspects are considered capable of describing the condition of individual psychological well-being, such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life (8).

Individuals or victims who have low psychological well-being can be improved by forgiving people who have hurt them (9). In previous research, it was found that by providing forgiveness, victims will be able to make their emotional state or condition more positive which will affect the improvement of psychological well-being (9). Furthermore, it is known that forgiveness shows a positive contribution to self-acceptance and improved quality of life in individuals who experience violence in relationships and various traumatic events, whereas individuals who forgive someone or a painful situation will have a more stable emotional condition, which is indicated by the extent to which the individual can accept their various strengths and weaknesses (10).

The research that has been conducted explains that forgiveness has proven to be a useful coping strategy for victims who experience abuse, violence, and other traumatic events (11). Forgiveness itself is known to be able to help survivors of dating violence to relieve negative emotions in victims and foster positive emotions (12).

Forgiveness is defined as a form of individual motivation not to take revenge and reduce the urge to hate the party who has hurt (13). Forgiveness is a process carried out by individuals in accepting mistakes made by others, healing inner wounds, and building new and better relationships in the future (14). Furthermore, forgiveness is the process of releasing pain, anger, and resentment caused by other people or things, to eliminate various negative thoughts and feelings towards the offending party, so that individuals can live with more positive emotional conditions (15). Three aspects can be used in measuring or describing a person's level of forgiveness, including avoidance motivations, revenge motivations, and benevolence motivations (16).

Thus, this study will focus on examining the effect of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of students who experience toxic relationships. This is in line with the various impacts caused and received by victims in toxic relationships which result in low psychological well-being, which is very important to be addressed immediately, where psychological well-being is known to have an important role in the psychological functioning of individuals in carrying out their daily activities.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

In this study, the research subjects were university students in Indonesia with an age range of 18-25 years, who were taken using a purposive sampling method with the following specific criteria 1) the subject is a student who is or has been in a dating relationship, 2) the subject is or has experienced violence, both verbal and nonverbal during the relationship, such as being yelled at, hit, grabbed, insulted, berated, and restricted and overly controlled regarding socializing with friends, 3) the subject was selected through a screening process conducted by the researcher.

The screening process was carried out using a toxic relationship scale (17) based on the concept of toxic relationships (18), namely emotional abuse, physical abuse, and manipulative attitudes. The toxic relationship scale consists of 15 statement items with five answer choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The screening process resulted in 344 subjects, consisting of 12 men and 322 women with the status of having and currently undergoing a dating relationship.

2.2. Research Instruments

The psychological well-being variable was measured using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (RPWBS) based on six aspects, namely self-acceptance, positive relation with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life, which was adapted with a reliability value of 0.87. The scale used has gone through a language translation process from English to Indonesian. The scale consists of 37 statement items with four answers, namely strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Meanwhile, the forgiveness variable is measured using Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation (TRIM-18) based on three aspects, namely avoidance motivations, revenge motivations, and benevolence motivations (13). The scale was adapted with a reliability value of 0.85. The scale used has gone through a language translation process from English to Indonesian. It consists of 17 statement items, with five answers, namely strongly agree to strongly disagree.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis will be in the form of data assumption tests and simple linear regression to determine the effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being in students who experience toxic relationships using statistical tools, namely the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

3. Results

The subjects of this study totaled 344 students who were described by the following demographics.

As presented in Table 1, it was found that participants tended to be female ($n = 322$, 96%), and most participants tended to be 21 years old (27%). Most of them were in a dating relationship at the time of the study ($n = 185$, 55%) and almost half of them experienced toxic relationship conditions in the high category ($n = 146$, 44%). The demographic data were then subjected to descriptive statistical tests to determine the level of each variable, which is found in Table 2.

Table 3 shows the effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being through the ANOVA statistical test, which shows that forgiveness has an influence on psychological well-being with a side effect of 3%.

TABLE 1: Subject Demographics.

Category	Amount	%
Gender		
Male	12	4
Female	322	96
Usia		
18	19	6
19	43	13
20	61	18
21	91	27
22	79	24
23	26	8
24	9	3
25	6	2
Relationship Status		
Have Dated	149	45
Currently Dating	185	55
Screening Toxic Relationship		
Low	188	56
High	146	44

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Category	Frequency	%
Forgiveness	45,12	11,94	Low	166	49,7
			High	168	50,3
			Total	334	100
Psychological Well-Being	101,20	11,02	Low	167	50
			High	167	50
			Total	334	100

TABLE 3: Regression.

Variable	R ²	F	p
Forgiveness	,030	10,441	<,001 ^b
Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-Being			

4. Discussion

The findings produced in Table 3 in this study show that forgiveness has a significant influence on psychological well-being in students who experience toxic relationships. From the statistical data, it is known that forgiveness contributes an influence of 3% to the level of psychological well-being of students who experience toxic relationships. This makes forgiveness have a role in the psychological well-being of individuals, especially those who experience toxic relationships. This is in line with previous findings which show that forgiveness can improve the psychological well-being of individuals (20). In the results that have been found, it is known that 97% is contributed by factors outside the study, such as demographic conditions (age, gender, and culture), socioeconomics, social support, and other factors related to psychological well-being (21).

The high number of toxic relationship cases in the student environment has resulted in various negative impacts on everyone who experiences it, especially on the low condition of psychological well-being. This is indicated by various findings in previous studies where toxic relationships can result in stress, lack of self-confidence, difficulty adapting to new people, difficulty making decisions for oneself, and trauma experienced by individuals (22,23). This is in line with the research conducted, which found that toxic relationships have a significant effect on psychological well-being, noting that relationship status, whether they have been or are currently in a dating relationship, has no significant difference in influencing psychological well-being.

Failure to exercise forgiveness is believed to affect lower psychological well-being. It is explained that someone who fails to forgive will easily experience low self-esteem, stress, depression, and even thoughts of ending their life. Furthermore, it is explained that the lower the individual's forgiveness, the more feelings of emptiness and even difficulty in running his life will appear (24).

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the hypothesis proposed in this study is accepted, namely that there is a significant influence of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of students who experience toxic relationships. This is in line with the theory and findings in previous studies, which state that the higher a person's level of forgiveness, the higher their psychological

well-being. Conversely, the lower a person's level of forgiveness, the lower their psychological well-being.

As for future research, it is expected to be able to expand the scope of research subjects, starting from the age group, and type of experience, and consider the use of measurement methods and statistical approaches to be used. In future research, researchers can develop research in a qualitative direction to truly understand the phenomenon of forgiveness and psychological well-being in toxic relationships. Research that considers a variety of different factors will provide a holistic view of forgiveness, psychological well-being, and toxic relationships.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all the subjects who have participated in this research

Author contribution

RA = Writing and Editing, HN = Directing the research process, Editing, AN = Editing, Proofreading and Translating

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this study

Funding

The authors did not receive any external funding for this research

References

- [1] Salmatuanisa F, Wahyuni T, Siswoyo M, Dian Lestari A. THE PHENOMENON OF TOXIC RELATIONSHIP AMONG STUDENTS. Available from: <http://ijsr.internationaljournallabs.com/index.php/ijsr>
- [2] Wulandari R, Yunindyawati Y, Lidya E. Fenomena toxic relationship dalam pacaran pada mahasiswa universitas sriwijaya [Thesis (Undergraduate)]. Universitas Sriwijaya.; 2021.

- [3] Niman S, Parulian TS, Sibarani D. PROMOSI KESEHATAN JIWA ONLINE TOXIC RELATIONSHIP PADA REMAJA. *Jurnal Abdi Masyarakat*. 2022 Apr 26;5(2).
- [4] Kemenpppa. Sistem Informasi Online Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (SIMFONI PPA). 2023.
- [5] Nadia Nurul Saskia, Fairus Prihatin Idris, Sumiaty. Perilaku Toxic Relationship Terhadap Kesehatan Remaja Di Kota Makassar. *Window of Public Health Journal*. 2023 Jun 30;525–38.
- [6] Safitri WA, Sama'i. Dampak Kekerasan Dalam Berpacaran (The Impact of Violence in Dating). Safitri, W A, & Sama'i (2013) Dampak kekerasan dalam berpacaran Artikel Ilmiah Hasil Penelitian Mahasiswa UNEJ, 1 – 6. 2013;1(1):1–6.
- [7] Ryff CD. Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 1989 Dec;57(6):1069–81.
- [8] Ryff CD, Singer BH. Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being. *J Happiness Stud*. 2008 Jan;9(1):13–39.
- [9] Enright R, al-mabuk R, Conroy P, Eastin D, Freedman S, Golden S, et al. The moral development of forgiveness. In 1991. p. 123–51.
- [10] Angela M, Felicia F, Cipta F. Hubungan antara Forgiveness dan Psychological Well-Being pada Korban Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga. *JURNAL PENELITIAN PENDIDIKAN, PSIKOLOGI DAN KESEHATAN (J-P3K)*. 2021 Apr 1;2(1):61–7. <https://doi.org/10.51849/j-p3k.v2i1.93>.
- [11] Watson H, Rapee R, Todorov N. Forgiveness Reduces Anger in a School Bullying Context. *J Interpers Violence*. 2017 Jun;32(11):1642–57.
- [12] Pariartha NKAMHY, Az Zahra AC, Anggini CT, Eva N. The Role of Forgiveness and Social Support on Psychological Well Being Among Women in Dating Violence. *Jurnal Psikologi Teori dan Terapan*. 2022 Jun 30;13(2):130–43. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jptt.v13n2.p130-143>.
- [13] McCullough ME, Rachal KC, Sandage SJ, Worthington EL Jr, Brown SW, Hight TL. Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 1998 Dec;75(6):1586–603.
- [14] Williamson D, Gonzalez M, Finlay AY. The effect of hair loss on quality of life. *J Eur Acad Dermatol Venereol*. 2001 Mar;15(2):137–9.
- [15] Gani AH. Forgiveness Therapy. Yogyakarta: Kanisius; 2011.
- [16] McCullough ME. Forgiveness as Human Strength: Theory, Measurement, and Links to Well-Being. *J Soc Clin Psychol*. 2000 Mar;19(1):43–55.
- [17] Inrayani D. Analisis perbedaan komponen cinta berdasarkan tingkat toxic relationship. [Dissertation Doctoral]. Universitas Bosowa Makassar; 2020.

- [18] Fuller K. Psychology Today. 2020. Frequently asked questions about toxic relationships.
- [19] Agung IM. Pengembangan dan Validasi Pengukuran Skala Pemaafan TRIM-18. Volume 11. Jurnal Psikologi; 2015.
- [20] Theodora M, Sahrani R, Roswiyani R. The mediating effect of forgiveness on the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being in adults with a history of childhood bullying. *Psikohumaniora. Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*. 2023 Nov;8(2):241–58.
- [21] Trianto HS, Soetjningsih CH, Setiawan A. Faktor Pembentuk Kesejahteraan Psikologis pada Milenial. *PHILANTHROPY: Journal of Psychology*. 2020 Dec;4(2):105.
- [22] Keny WC, Syahputra RF, Pratomo DR. Pengalaman toxic relationship dan dampaknya pada kalangan generasi muda. In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Ilmu Sosial (SNIIS)*. 2023;2:918–26.
- [23] Sánchez-Zafra M, Gómez-López M, Ortega-Ruiz R, Viejo C. The association between dating violence victimization and the well-being of young people: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychol Violence*. 2024 May;14(3):158–73.
- [24] Tacasily YOM. Hubungan Forgiveness dan Psychological Well-Being pada Mahasiswa yang Pernah Mengalami Putus Cinta. *Jurnal Ilmiah Bimbingan Konseling Undiksha*. 2021 Nov 1;12(2). <https://doi.org/10.23887/jibk.v12i2.34199>.