INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON THEIR TENDENCY TO FORGIVE

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Abstract

The rationale of this paper was to examine the influence of students' personal characteristics, that is gender and age on forgiveness. With two investigative groups and one non-experimental group, the study employed a quasi-experimental design. A random sample of sixty second-year college students was employed for the research. The baseline data and post-test data were collected using the Enright (2001) Forgiveness Inventory. A two-way Covariance Analysis (ANCOVA) at a significance level of 0.05 was used for testing the two hypotheses formulated. The research discovered that sex and age were not substantial factors influencing forgiveness among college students. Regarding the results, it was suggested that counsellors provide clients with forgiveness counselling without taking age or gender into account, as these factors do not significantly affect forgiveness at post-test.

Keywords: Forgiveness, Gender, Hurt, Age, Quasi-experimental

Introduction

All individuals, including students of all levels of education, despite their ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds, need forgiveness therapy to cope with emotional, physical, social, and psychological distress associated with unforgiveness (Baskin & Slatin, 2010). Using REACH and process treatments will have a positive influence on individuals' forgiveness and rage levels (Ho et al., 2023). REACH is an abbreviation that signifies: Remember the pain, Empathise with the transgressor, Altruistic or selfless act of forgiving, Commitment to forgive, and, Holding on to forgiveness. Empirically, studies utilising REACH and process therapies were discovered efficient in enhancing forgiveness and decreasing depression, anxiety, and, anger (Kankpog, 2020; Barimah, 2018; Recine, 2015), improving emotional health (Lijo & Annalakshimi, 2017; Nation et al., 2017) in experimental studies in Ghana, USA, and UK. The therapies were also found to be empirically effective for gender in all age groups irrespective of their life status (Lundahl et al., 2008). Research investigations also suggested that counsellors who had at least eight hours of intensive education in applying the Process and REACH treatments were skilful and successful in leading forgiveness treatments (Rainy et al. as cited in Kankpog & Awabil, 2023). The process model of forgiveness is a 20-step model developed by Enright (2001), which examined forgiveness as a progression that evolves through twenty varied parts. The components are not in line but include four key stages, namely, the stage of discovery, choice, work, and deepening. The revealing stage comprises acknowledging the offence's facts and evaluating its harmful effects. On this note, the sufferer gets visions, exploring how their lives have been harmed by the injustice and the ensuing pain. During the decision-making stage, the victim obtains a precise comprehension of the forgiveness and chooses to forgive based on that comprehension. In this case, the victim hopes that by coming to terms with the transgression, the offender will be spared more needless pain. The task at hand, in the working phase, is practising forgiveness. The victim's affectivity toward the wrongdoer changes for the better as a result of gaining mental facts of the offender and starting to observe the transgressor in a different light. The sufferer starts to derive more meaning from the agony throughout the deepening phase, reduces

adverse emotions, and transforms the aim of life. The REACH therapy of forgiveness, on the other hand, was created by Worthington (1989) and built on the Pyramid model. This framework consists of a five-stage treatment procedure comprising; Recall the hurt, which entails the sufferer admitting the harm and making a choice to give up the ill feelings. Empathy is the next step, where the sufferer endeavours to feel how the transgressor feels. The third stage is the altruistic gift of forgiveness. Here, the sufferer gives forgiveness as a kind gift to the offender. The fourth stage is Commitment to forgive and the final step is holding on to positive feelings. This is proved by displaying compassion and love to the wrongdoer.

Individuals' responses to forgiveness in terms of gender and age may vary. This may be based on societal values and norms. For instance, women were found to be more emotionally expressive (Cabras et al., 2022). Men were also seen to have more status of being disposed to rage (Burt, 2014). Also, Suman's (2016) research stated that women exhibit rage the same way as men but experience strain in recognising and acknowledging the emotions as a result of societal restraints. Generally, men usually and securely are inclined to show more rage because of their exposure to violence whereas women are less exposed to aggressive signs (Trnka, 2019).

Regarding forgiveness and gender, Kaleta and Mroz's (2022) study in a Polish sample of 625 respondents indicated a greater tendency to forgive among male respondents than females, but there was no significant difference among genders. An investigation done by Fehr et al. (2010) of 53 research trials involving 8,366 respondents showed no evidence of a significant correlation between gender and forgiveness. There were also no significant differences between gender and forgiveness in another 23 trials involving 3,364 subjects. In addition, McCullough et al. as mentioned in Fehr et al. (2010), in their investigation conducted a succession of t-tests and revealed an insignificant disparity between genders' scores in forgiveness.

Rijavec et al. (2010) conducted a study on sex variations in the relationships among happiness, despair, and forgiveness among six hundred college students at the University of Zagreb and the results indicated that men reported stronger reprisal drive than women. This indicated that women were more forgiving as compared to men. However, this research showed insignificant sex variation between both sexes concerning forgiving.

There were other studies conducted by scholars indicating that there has been a significant variation between forgiveness and gender. A 2008 meta-analysis by Miller, Worthington, and McDaniel of 53 publications covering seventy studies on gender and forgiveness in the US, found women more forbearing as compared to men with an average deviation of 0.281. The finding showed substantial differences exist in sex responses to forgiveness. Abid's (2017) study examining 120 identified depressed patients from Nishtar Hospital that were used to examine the significance of forgiveness in mental health, the results showed that women scored higher than men on both measures of forgiveness and well-being.

In terms of age and forgiveness, Cabras et al. (2022), investigated gender and age differences in forgivingness among Polish and Italian samples and found that older adults were more forgiving than younger adults. Steiner et al.'s (2011) study on age disparities in forgiveness and the role of wrongdoing incidence and amount amongst Swiss adults between the ages twenty to eighty-three, disclosed that old adults were, generally speaking, more keen to pardon people than the young ones. Furthermore, the study discovered a negative correlation between age and the frequency and severity of transgression. In a similar study, Lawler-Row and Piferi, as mentioned in Steiner et al. (2011), demonstrated ageing influence in forgiveness among adults from the ages of fifty to ninety-five years, where the elder adults were described as more forgiving than the middle-aged ones. According to this survey, middle-aged adults were not perceived as being as forgiving as older adults. Furthermore, Doran et al. (2011) in their study, reported that pardoning conduct among elderly people was substantially developed more than the younger respondents. That is, the disposition to pardon was related to low trauma stress for older persons than the younger ones.

Ghaemmagbami et al.'s (2011) study regarding age and sex issues in forgiving among younger, middle-aged, and older adults in Germany found that middle-aged adults showed extreme evasion as compared to the young grown-ups. Similarly, the young ones required a better drive to pursue vengeance than the middle-aged and older ones. The research revealed a substantial relationship

between age and interpersonal clemency, a sense of being pardoned by God as well as an overall affinity to pardon, devoid of intra-forgiveness. The investigation also showed a relationship between age and a destructive approach of clemency such as vengeance, and evasion, and not with an affirmative approach like benevolence.

Escaping behaviour was advanced among adults who were middle-aged than those who were within the other age categories. This research also indicated that clemency was the more obvious focus in the daily living of persons who were in their middle ages and females. A meta-analysis conducted by Fehr et al. (2010), utilising twenty-three investigations with 3,364 respondents saw forgiveness and age substantial, but the significant level was very minute. However, Sadiq and Mehanz (2017) showed a substantial variation among adults and old-age respondents in their investigation. Based on this, the researcher needed to explore the influence of gender and age on forgiveness using a quasi-experimental study since these personal variables have not been explored in Ghana, especially among college-education students. It is anticipated that this study's findings would enable counsellors to determine the extent to which the personal characteristics of their clients influence forgiveness. Therefore, the main goal of the investigation was to investigate the impact of age and gender on forgiveness among second year college of education students from the Upper West Region of Ghana who have experienced psychological wounds using forgiveness counselling.

Study's Objectives
The study's objectives were to:
1. Determine the influence of gender on the forgiveness of respondents subjected to Process and REACH treatments.
2. Explore the influence of age on the forgiveness of respondents subjected to Process and REACH treatments.

Research Hypotheses
The study's research hypotheses were:
1. $H_0 1$: There is no statistically substantial disparity in the forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on sex.

$H_1 1$: There is a statistically significant disparity in the forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on sex.

2. $H_0 2$: There is no statistically significant disparity in forgiveness of respondents in the treatment cohorts based on age.

$H_1 2$: There is a statistically significant disparity in forgiveness of respondents in the treatment cohort based on age (Please, a review has been indicated in the work on pages 5 and 6).

Research Methods
Research Design
This study used a quasi-experimental research design, which is essentially a baseline test, and a post-test control group method. This requires the adjustment of one or more factors; individuals are not assigned at random to groups. Two treatments and one non-treatment cohort were used for the study. Respondents in treatment group cohort one were subjected to the process therapy while those in treatment group two benefited from the REACH therapy.

This research design shown in Figure 1, was adapted from Awabil et al. (2013).

G1   01   x   02

G2   03   x   04

G3   05   c   06

The G1 = Treatment group 1 (Process therapy)

G2 = Treatment group 2 (REACH therapy)

G3 = Control group

01= Pre-test (Process therapy)

X= Treatment

02= Post-test (Process therapy)

03= Pre-test (REACH therapy)

04= Post-test (REACH therapy)

05= Pre-test (Control group)

C= Control (No treatment given)

O6= Post-test (Control group)

Data acquired before the treatment is referred to as the pre-test, while data collected after the experiment is referred to as the post-test.

Population and Sample
The study's participants were all second-year students from Tumu, Nasurat Jahan Ahmadiya, and McCoy Colleges of Education in Ghana's Upper West Region. The total was 1,074 second-year students, comprising 683 men and 391 women. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the study's sample. The inclusion requirements were satisfied by 360 second-year students out of the total population of 1,074 at the three educational institutions of Ghana's Upper West Region, that is participants who scored 210 and below: Tumu College of Education (127), Nasurat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education (146), and McCoy College of Education (87). Sixty respondents were then chosen using a simple random sampling technique especially the lottery method for the study. There were a total of 8 men and 12 women at Tumu College of Education, 11 men and 9 women at Nasurat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, and 7 men and 13 women in total at McCoy College of Education. Some information was used to determine the size of each group. Some researchers have found that a group counselling intervention can have between 15 and 20 participants (Javid & Ahmadi, 2019). Subjects from Tumu and McCoy Colleges of Education comprised the treatment cohorts in this investigation for the Process and REACH therapeutic counselling whereas Nasurat Jahan Ahmadiya College of Education became the non-treatment group.

Instrument for Data Collection
The Forgiveness Inventory is a 60-item objective self-report measure that assesses an individual's capacity for forgiveness toward those who have mistreated them. It has three subscales, each having twenty items that measure behaviour, affect, and cognition. The questionnaire is grounded on a 6-point Likert-type scale. From Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory's overall score is 360. This is obtained by adding all sixty items. This indicates respondents who scored below 210 were eligible for the study.

This indicates the degree of forgiveness increases with a higher score, while the degree of forgiveness decreases with a lower score. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory was adapted and pre-tested. Pre-testing was done to assess the content validity and reliability of the instrument. Test-retest reliability estimates provided information about the instruments' reliability computed using 50 second-year students' pre-test scores from St. John Bosco College of Education in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Reliability in the test-retest for the pre-test, estimates 0.516 for affect, 0.825 for behaviour, and 0.377 for cognition. This means cognition can not be stable over a given period. The dependability of this was determined by applying Cohen's (1988) claim that a reliability coefficient of 0.5-1.0 is considered reliable. About the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was determined which reported a value of 0.940. This was done by calculating the total variance of the scores and the variance of each item. This is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1- *Internal Consistency of Forgiveness Instrument*

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Affect	20	.727
Behaviour	20	.819
Cognition	20	.717
Overall forgiveness	60	.940

Source: Field data, 2019

Pallant (2020) states that the value 0.940 is dependable for application. Two experts in counselling and forgiveness studies were provided with the instrument to examine for content validity. The wording of certain items in the questionnaire was refined by the experts to make the items clear and easy for the respondents to respond to. These suggestions were included in the final questionnaire to make the instrument suitable for use in the research.

Data Collection Procedure
To collect the data, an introductory letter from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and an ethical clearance from the College of Education

Studies-University of Cape Coast were received. To obtain permission to involve the students in the investigation, the College Principals each received an individual copy of the introductory letter and the ethical clearance from the researcher.

Again, permission was requested from the Colleges of Education's Principals to allow the researcher to get in touch with the Heads of the Counselling Unit to identify two (2) counsellors who would receive training to act as investigation aids to support the researcher's implementation of the intervention. The investigation aids, working under the direction of the investigator, provided the instruments to participants at the planned time and place in the designated education institutions in Ghana's Upper West Region. The rules of ethics were followed.

The goal of the study was explained to the respondents, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Additionally, participants were free to ask questions about any issue on the questionnaire that they did not understand. Also, voluntary withdrawal from the study was permitted for participants. Three phases of data collection were conducted: Before intervention, intervention, and after intervention. The before-treatment data were gathered in lecture rooms using the Instrument of Forgiveness. The instrument had sixty items, of which, all the sixty second-year college students responded. Using the intervention manual, two-hour sessions per week for eight weeks were allocated for REACH and the Process treatments throughout the intervention phase. Finally, the same forgiveness inventory was used to gather the post-intervention data from the three groups two weeks following the intervention's conclusion.

Data Processing and Analysis Procedure

Statistical Product and Service Solution version 20 was used for tabulation and analysis after the gathered data were modified and serially coded. The two hypotheses were examined using a Two-Way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA).

Results and Discussion of the Study
Study Hypothesis One

$H_0 1$ There is no statistically substantial disparity in forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on sex.

$H_1 1$: There is a statistically substantial disparity in the forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on sex.

A two-way ANCOVA was conducted to test this hypothesis. The independent variables were the two therapies, the control group and gender. The pre-test forgiveness score served as the covariate. The dependent variable was the post-test forgiveness score. Table 1 comprises a summary of the findings.

Table 2: Two-way ANCOVA Test for Disparity in Forgiveness of Respondents Exposed to the Treatments and Non-treatment Groups based on Sex

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	27449.269	6	4574.878	3.663	.004	.293
Intercept	106004.139	1	106004.139	84.874	.000	.616
Forgiveness	6093.784	1	6093.784	4.879	.032	.084
Group	16651.723	2	8325.862	6.666	.003	.201
Gender	3523.522	1	3523.522	2.821	.099	.051
Group * Gender	2427.686	2	1213.843	.972	.385	.035
Error	66194.914	53	1248.961			
Total	5057045.000	60				
Corrected Total	93644.183	59				

Source: Field survey, 2020

Findings from the two-way ANCOVA indicated no statistically substantial disparity in forgiveness based on sex, $F(1, 53)=2.821$, $p=.099$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$ (Table 2). Concerning this, the null hypothesis which states there is no statistically significant disparity in forgiveness

of respondents in the treatment groups based on sex is retained. The finding showed that both genders did not respond significantly differently to the therapies concerning improving forgiveness among college students, $F(1, 53)=2.821$, $p=.099$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$ (Table 2). In addition, it is noted that the two therapies were equally efficient for both sexes in the college in terms of improving forgiveness. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the interaction effect, of group and gender on forgiveness is not statistically significant F (2, 53)= 0.972=0.035.

Study Hypothesis Two
$H_0$2: There is no statistically substantial disparity in forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on age.

$H_1$2: There is a statistically substantial disparity in forgiveness of respondents in the treatment groups based on age.

Hypothesis two examined whether there was a statistically discernable disparity in the forgiveness of respondents in the investigative groups based on age. A Two-way ANCOVA was done to verify this assumption. The two forgiveness therapies, control group, and age were the independent variables. The baseline forgiveness score was the covariate. The dependent variable was the post-test forgiveness score. Table 2 comprises a summary of the findings.

Table 3: Two-way Analysis of Covariance for Disparity in Post-test Forgiveness Score in the Treatments and Non-experimental Groups based on Age

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	26414.686ᵃ	9	2934.965	2.183	.039	.282
Intercept	93036.034	1	93036.034	69.193	.000	.581
Forgiveness	4493.067	1	4493.067	3.342	.074	.063
Group	1001.359	2	500.680	.372	.691	.015
Age	201.207	2	100.604	.075	.928	.003
Group * Age	4762.525	4	1190.631	.885	.479	.066
Error	67229.497	50	1344.590			
Total	5057045.000	60				
Corrected Total	93644.183	59				

Source: *Field survey, 2020*

The finding from the ANCOVA test, as shown in Table 3, indicated no substantial influence of age on forgiveness, $F (2, 50) =.075$, $p=.928$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which claims that there is no discernible variation in respondents' forgiveness across the treatment groups according to age remains valid. The finding denotes that respondents found within dissimilar age groupings failed to respond substantially differently to the therapies of forgiveness concerning increasing their levels of forgiveness. Table 3 further reveals that the interaction effect of group and age was not statistically significant F (4, 50)=0.885=0.479.

Discussion
The findings of the investigation revealed that the two forgiveness therapies are somehow not influenced by gender in their impact on forgiveness. However, there were some observed gender relationships, but this was not statistically significant. This shows that both sexes of students failed to respond substantially differently to the two intervention therapies. This implies the Process and REACH therapies similarly are potent for all genders in the institutes. This result is buttressed by Kankpog (2020) that sex and age did not hinder the efficacy of forgiveness counselling. The significance of the finding for therapists is that forgiveness therapies can be employed to enhance forgiveness for all classes of individuals regardless of sex, age, belief, and racial origin.

Related researchers carried out investigations to investigate the association between gender and

forgiveness (Kaleta & Mroz, 2022; Abid, 2017; Fehr et al., 2010) and revealed an association between sex and forgiveness, but sex had no statistically substantial influence on forgiveness. It is noted that, the respondents' application of several abilities, facts, and procedures, like empathy, and allowing anger go within the forgiveness groups possibly is credited to the outcomes. This is based on the evidence that both genders were introduced to the two treatments of forgiveness counselling which substantially enhanced their forgiveness levels.

In contrast, according to a meta-analysis by Miller et al. (2008), women are more pardoned than men. The results showed that there is a statistically significant gender variation in how people respond to forgiveness. The likely mediators influencing gender variations encompass disparities in handling forgiveness, disparities in dispositional qualities, and situational signs.

The research also showed that respondents who were found in diverse age classes failed to respond significantly in a different way to the forgiveness therapies concerning forgiveness based on age. The implication is that forgiveness therapies are potent for diverse age classes. The result is consistent with the opinion of Kankpog (2020) who found age, and sex, did not hamper the potency of forgiveness counselling. Conversely, Sadiq and Mehanz (2017), revealed a statistically substantial variation between grown-ups and old age respondents in the research they conducted in terms of forgiveness. Furthermore, Fehr et al.'s (2010) meta-analyses conducted saw age and forgiveness degree of significance minute. Notwithstanding these researches, other researchers showed an influence of age on forgiveness, but the researchers never specified whether the influence had been substantial or otherwise. Notable among them are; Cabras et al. (2022), and Doran et al. (2011) who revealed that pardoning conduct between grown-up people was substantially developed than younger respondents. Also, the disposition to pardon was related to lower stress for grown-up persons as compared to the younger ones. Furthermore, Steiner et al. (2011) revealed that adults who were old were typically much more interested in pardoning as compared to the younger ones.

Gbaemmagbami et al. (2011) indicated that grown-ups who were in the middle age class showed more elusion than younger adults; younger adults had greater ambition to look for vengeance as compared to the middle-aged class and old adults.

The researches stated failed to explicitly indicate whether the influence of age on forgiveness had been statistically significant or otherwise. This current finding showed how active the respondents were involved in the therapies. The finding also indicated the efficiency and the scope of education the facilitators received in applying the two therapies of interventions to promote clemency. The finding is buttressed by Rainey, Readdick, and Thyer as cited in Kankpog and Awabil (2023) that a competent facilitator promoting forgiveness counselling should be given training for eight hours or more. This signifies that counsellors willing to promote forgiveness counselling should be given effective and adequate education in forgiveness counselling to help them gain knowledge and abilities that will efficiently address the needs of all age classes. The finding also indicates that for counsellors, counselling geared towards increasing forgiveness can be effected regardless of age boundary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusions drawn from the investigation are: Firstly, gender has no substantial impact on forgiveness when clients are subjected to Process and REACH therapies. Stated differently, males and females failed to respond substantially diversely to the two therapies of forgiveness. Secondly, age has no substantial impact on forgiveness when clients are subjected to Process and REACH treatments. Also, all age groups did not respond differently to the two therapies. Age is not also a significant determinant of forgiveness, since all age groups did not respond differently to the two therapies. Thus, the two forgiveness treatments can be used irrespective of gender and age. In cognisance of the findings of the investigation, the researcher proposed that counsellors should apply the two treatments to render forgiveness counselling to clients.

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