Personality Patterns and Forgiveness Among University Students in Ardabil, Iran

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Abstract

Background: Forgiveness is associated with many psychological and personality factors such as severe and clinical personality patterns.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to determine the role of severe and clinical personality patterns in prediction of forgiveness in a sample of university students.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted on 375 students (175 female, 200 male) from university of Mohaghegh Ardabili in 2012-2013. The subjects were asked to fill out Millon clinical multiaxial inventory-III and interpersonal forgiveness inventory. The data were analyzed by SPSS version 22 using Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression analysis at 95% significance level.

Results: The results showed that schizoid ($r = -0.28$), avoidant ($r = -0.38$), depressive ($r = -0.38$), dependent ($r = -0.37$), negativistic ($r = -0.44$), masochistic ($r = -0.52$), schizotypal ($r = -0.43$), borderline ($r = -0.41$), and paranoid ($r = -0.55$) personality patterns were negatively associated with forgiveness. The results of stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that paranoid and borderline personality patterns among severe personality patterns, and masochistic, antisocial, narcissistic, and negativistic personality patterns among clinical personality patterns were significant predictors of forgiveness ($P < 0.001$).

Conclusions: The findings of the present study identified individuals' ability and capacity in relation to forgiveness; accordingly, it gave a realistic vision for experts and consultants in resolving interpersonal conflicts and therefore, developed the existing knowledge in the area of forgiveness.

Keywords: Clinical, Forgiveness, Iran, Severe Personality Patterns, Students

1. Background

Clinical psychologists and therapists nowadays have begun implicitly to study the concept of forgiveness (1). One of the most important reasons for popularity of forgiveness in psychology is its sociability that could move to the field of positively oriented psychology (2). Forgiveness is a positively adaptive process with the release of feelings, cognitions, and hatred towards the offender. In this way, compassion, generosity, and good are fostered for that person (3). A review of research shows that the tendency to forgive others is related positively to psychological well-being (4), while it is negatively related to the lack of social support and weak coping skills (5). Researchers pay special attention to recognizing the basic personality dimensions associated with forgiveness to identify basic personality mechanisms involved in it (6). They have been concerned with identifying the basic personality dimensions associated with forgiveness in order to better predict forgiveness and understand the behind personality-based mechanisms (7). There is a positive relationship between forgiveness and all personality activities relating to the agreeableness dimension of the five-factor model (8). There is also a negative relationship between forgiveness and all neuroticism dimension of the five-factor model of personality (8). However, there are contradictory findings about the relationship between the 3 dimensions of personality and forgiveness (9).

In addition to the five-factor model of personality, the relationship between forgiveness and Hexaco personality model (10) and Cloninger personality model (11) has also been discussed. In the present study in order to complete the line of studies on the relationship between forgive-

ness and personality, the possible relationships between forgiveness and severe (schizotypal, borderline, and paranoid) and clinical personality patterns (schizoid, avoidant, depressive, dependent, histrionic, narcissistic, antisocial, sadistic, negativistic, compulsive, and masochistic) are considered. Some of these personality patterns have been studied in relation to forgiveness. People who have a higher score on borderline personality symptomatology are less capable in subscales of forgiveness (12). The result of the studies shows that there is a positive relationship between paranoid personality style and enduring resentment and a negative relationship between paranoid personality and willingness to forgive (13). The research also showed there is no significant relationship between forgiveness and schizotypal personality (14). In another study, narcissism had a positive relationship with self-forgiveness and a negative one with forgiveness of others while no significant relationship was found with positional forgiveness (15).

2. Objectives

The present study was conducted to evaluate the relationship between severe and clinical patterns of personality and forgiveness in a sample of Iranian students.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Sample

This cross-sectional research was done on 375 students of Mohaghegh Ardabili University, in the north-west of Iran, based on Kerjcie, Morgan, and Cohen's tables in the academic year of 2012 - 2013. Statistical sample was selected using proportional stratified sampling method in which, gender (female and male) and major (humanities, basic sciences, agriculture, and engineering) were considered as examined population groups, after achieving students' statistics from the education division of the university according to gender and major. Considering their gender and major, 128 students (54% female, 46% male) in humanities, 82 (61% female, 39% male) in basic sciences, 82 (41% female, 59% male) in agriculture, and 83 (34% female, 66% male) in engineering were selected randomly. The researcher first introduced himself and thanked the students for their participation; then details on how to fill out the questionnaires were given to the students and they were asked to answer the questionnaires accurately and honestly. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. A consent form was obtained from all the study participants.

3.1.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for the students were age of 18 to 37, being an undergraduate student, not having mental disorders, and not having drug abuse. Exclusion criteria included not having tendency to fill out the questionnaires of the present research.

3.2. Study Tools

Socio-demographic variables consisted of age, gender, major, marital status, father's job status, and mother's job status.

Sever and clinical personality patterns were assessed using Millon clinical multiaxial inventory. This questionnaire was developed by Millon (16) based on a bio-psycho-social theory. It contains 175 yes-no questions and measures 3 severe personality patterns (paranoid, schizotypal, and borderline), 11 clinical personality patterns (schizoid, avoidant, depressive, dependent, histrionic, narcissistic, antisocial, sadistic, negativistic, compulsion, and masochistic), and 10 clinical syndromes (anxiety, somatization disorder, bipolar, dysthymia, dependency to alcohol, dependency to drugs, posttraumatic stress disorder, thought disorder, major depression, and delusional disorders). Millon (16) noted a validity of 0.87 for the test. In Iran, its validity has been reported to be acceptable (i.e., reliability of various scales reported in range from 88% to 97%) (17). The reliability of this measure assessed by Cronbach's alpha in this study was 98%.

Forgiveness was measured by interpersonal forgiveness inventory. This scale has 25 items made by Ehteshamzadeh, Ahadi, Enayati, and Heydari (18). It has a total score for interpersonal forgiveness while three scores are obtained for the subscales. For items 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 25, scoring was made as completely disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and completely agree (4). The rest of the items are scored reversely. The first subscale, restructure of relationship and control of revenge, includes 12 items, the second subscale, pain control, includes 6 items, and the third subscale, realistic understanding, includes 7 items. Concurrent validity coefficients of interpersonal forgiveness scale with family forgiveness scale and Ahvaz aggression scale were 0.85, 0.71, and 0.56, respectively. The reliability coefficients of this scale and its subscales using test-retest were 0.71, 0.70, 0.68, and 0.58, respectively. The reliability coefficients using Cronbach's alpha were 0.86, 0.84, and 0.68 (19). The reliability of this measure in this study was 89% based on Cronbach's alpha.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to present demographic characteristics. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to find the relationship of

severe and clinical personality patterns with forgiveness, and multiple regression analysis was employed to find prediction of forgiveness by personality patterns. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 22 software.

4. Results

According to the results of demographic characteristics, the mean age of the respondents was 22.54 years ranged from 18 to 37 years. The frequency of women (F = 210) was more than that of men (F = 165) and single subjects (F = 248) were more frequent than married subjects (F = 127). More details on the demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Value	No. (%)
Age	
18 - 22	155 (41.33)
23 - 27	100 (26.66)
28 - 32	094 (25.08)
33 - 37	026 (6.93)
Gender	
Male	165 (44)
Female	210 (56)
Major	
Humanities	128 (34.13)
Basic science	082 (21.86)
Agriculture	082 (21.86)
Engineering	083 (22.15)
Marital status	
Single	248 (66.13)
Married	127 (33.87)
Fathers' job status	
Employee	111 (29.6)
Self-employed	264 (70.4)
Mothers' job status	
Housewife	258 (68.8)
Employee	117 (31.2)

As seen in Table 2, control of revenge had a negative correlation with schizoid, depressive, dependent, sadistic, negativistic, masochistic, schizotypal, borderline, avoidant, and paranoid personality patterns ($P < 0.05$). Pain control had a negative correlation with schizoid,

avoidant, depressive, dependent, negativistic, masochistic, schizotypal, borderline, and paranoid personality patterns ($P < 0.01$) and a positive correlation with histrionic, narcissistic ($P < 0.01$), and OCD ($P < 0.05$) personality patterns.

There was only a significant negative correlation between realistic understanding of forgiveness and schizotypal personality pattern ($P < 0.01$). Finally, there was a negative correlation between total forgiveness and schizoid, avoidant, depressive, dependent, negativistic, masochistic, schizotypal, borderline, paranoid ($P < 0.01$), and sadistic personality patterns ($P < 0.05$) and a positive correlation between total forgiveness and histrionic personality pattern (Table 2).

In multiple regression analysis, it was shown that among severe and clinical personality patterns, paranoid and borderline patterns could enter the equation in two steps to explain forgiveness. Among clinical personality patterns, masochistic, antisocial, narcissistic, and negativistic personality patterns could enter the equation in four steps to explain forgiveness. The patterns entered the equation could significantly predict forgiveness ($P < 0.001$) (Table 3).

5. Discussion

The present research investigated the relationship between severe and clinical personality patterns and forgiveness. To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate this relationship. As expected, according to our results, among severe personality patterns, paranoid and borderline patterns were the strongest predictors of forgiveness while schizotypal pattern could not predict any relationship between the variable of interest. These results are in line with those of previous studies (12-14).

The negative relationship between paranoid personality patterns and forgiveness can be explained through the cognitive conceptualization of this personality style. The basic paranoid assumption relies on deceptive malevolence and in the case of opportunity, on the intention of other people to violate one's rights (20). These qualities lead to the fact that individuals with high paranoid pattern consider interpersonal transgression deliberately and consciously. They probably experience a feeling of revenge and not only do they have difficulty in forgiving others, but also react angrily and take retaliatory action (21). The paranoid tendencies can also be characterized as a combination of two dimensions of neuroticism and lack of agreeableness (13). Paranoid personality is positively related to neuroticism (22) and negatively related to agreeableness

Table 2. Correlation Between Personality Patterns and Forgiveness

Variables	Control of Revenge	Pain Control	Realistic Understanding	Total
Schizoid	-0.21[a]	-0.37[a]	-0.01	-0.28[a]
Avoidant	-0.17[b]	-0.58[a]	-0.10	-0.38[a]
Depressive	-0.22[a]	-0.53[a]	-0.09	-0.38[a]
Dependent	-0.27[a]	-0.52[a]	0.00	-0.37[a]
Histrionic	0.08	0.33[a]	-0.03	0.17[b]
Narcissistic	-0.01	0.20[a]	0.01	0.07
Antisocial	-0.06	-0.05	-0.05	-0.04
Sadistic	-0.22[a]	-0.09	0.03	-0.15[b]
Negativistic	-0.35[a]	-0.44[a]	-0.12	-0.44[a]
Compulsion	0.00	0.14[b]	0.04	0.03
Masochistic	-0.38[a]	-0.62[a]	-0.11	-0.52[a]
Schizotypal	-0.23[a]	-0.50[a]	-0.21[a]	-0.43[a]
Borderline	-0.31[a]	-0.44[a]	-0.12	-0.41[a]
Paranoid	-0.56[a]	-0.49[a]	-0.05	-0.55[a]

[a] $P < 0.01$.
[b] $P < 0.05$.

Table 3. Regression Model of Severe and Clinical Personality Patterns and Forgiveness[a,b]

Predicted Variables	b	SEB	Beta	t
Constant	77.86	1.244	-	62.613***
Paranoid	-1.018	0.165	-0.440	-6.161***
Borderline	-3.015	0.215	0.142	0.429**
Masochistic	-1.087	0.266	-0.411	-4.091***
Antisocial	-0.858	0.174	0.341	4.942***
Narcissism	-0.725	0.148	-0.342	-4.905***
Negativism	-0.831	0.200	-0.461	-4.162***

[a] Step 1, $R^2 = 0.313$ (F = 85.00); Step 2, $R^2 = 0.345$ (F = 48.88). * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.
[b] Step 1, $R^2 = 0.315$ (F = 81.37); Step 2, $R^2 = 0.337$ (F = 44.72); Step 3, $R^2 = 0.380$ (F = 35.68); Step 4, $R^2 = 0.436$ (F = 33.58). * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

(23). Therefore, lack of forgiveness and paranoid personality pattern can be reflections of high neuroticism and low agreeableness (13).

In addition, a negative link was found between borderline personality pattern and forgiveness. The most important characteristics of borderline personality disorder are the persistent problems in emotion regulation, impulse control, and instability of interpersonal relationships and self-image (24). These people have difficulty in forgiving and loving themselves and expressing hatred, hostility, fear, and anger (24); therefore, the increased tendency to reconciliation is recommended in patients with borderline personality disorder as a way to finding meaning for traumatic childhood experiences and creating sympathetic insight and forgiving oneself and others (25). Dichotomous thinking is one of the problematic factors in

interpersonal relationship in these patients (21); hence, it is likely that individuals with high scores in borderline personality pattern, when facing violations of others, shift them from the good side to the bad side of their thinking and feel hatred toward them and consequently tend to show less forgiveness.

Another finding of the present study was that masochistic, antisocial, narcissistic, and negativistic clinical personality patterns were the strongest predictors of forgiveness. These results are in line with those of previous research (15, 26).

People, who have high scores of masochistic personality pattern, allow or even encourage others to abuse them in interpersonal relationships. Their attention is drawn towards the worst aspects of themselves and they think that they deserve humiliation. They remember and ruminate

the past misfortunes actively and frequently (27).

Lying, deception, irresponsibility, and lack of respect are fundamental determinants of antisocial personality disorder; however, in the present research, there was a positive relationship between high scores of antisocial personality pattern and forgiveness, which seems unreasonable due to the characteristics of these people (21). Therefore, these people appear with features such as humor, superficial appeal, warmth, generous behavior, planning, and/or contrivance at the beginning of relationship to take advantage of this opportunity to reach their goals and abuse others. These individuals would like to express forgiveness to the violator, as a case of "absurd forgiveness" as named by Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer (28). This type of forgiveness can be costly for the victim because the violator has been apparently forgiven, but the negative emotions remain intact; therefore, the victim forgives to conform to the social norms and escape from social pressure. Individuals with high scores of antisocial personality pattern are less bound by social norms; forgiveness for these individuals could be for personal purposes, including showing the justified face and deceiving people to exploit and benefit from them.

The other finding of the present research was that narcissism was negatively correlated with forgiveness. An extreme sense of self-importance, too much tendency to be praised, and inability to sympathize with others are three main signs of narcissistic personality disorder (21). Due to such qualities in people with high scores of narcissistic personality pattern, low rates of forgiveness are expected. Moreover, since such people are recognized as arrogant and proud by those around them, in the event of violation, it is less likely that the violator apologizes and thus the probability of failure to forgive rises up (29).

As another result of the present research, we found that negativism was negatively correlated with forgiveness. Negative people are moody and irritable, sometimes stubborn, and in a while, they feel guilty and regret. They feel that no one understands them, and they usually fluctuate between passive dependency and stubborn opposition and this behavior irritates those around them. These people feel that they are treated unfairly, they complain constantly and they are always grumpy and complaining (30). Therefore, it is no surprise if they have difficulties in their interpersonal relationships and have little tendency to forgive others.

Finally, we should mention the limitation of our study. The use of a convenience sample of mostly female university students from an Iranian context and the use of self-report tools were the limitations of the present study. Future research should use multiple methods of measurement and examine greater diversity among individuals such as clinical population and people with personality disorders by considering various positional and dispositional forgiveness.

5.1. Conclusions

The present study emphasized the relationship between severe and clinical personality patterns and forgiveness. According to these results, consultants can obtain realistic insight into forgiveness and its complicated correlations with personality patterns.

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