



## FORGIVENESS AND LONELINESS: A STUDY OF ELDERLY PEOPLE IN KOLKATA



**Manjusha Adak<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D Student, University of Calcutta & Project Linked Person, Psychology Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

**Prof. Anjali Ray<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

### ABSTRACT

*Forgiveness is a process that involves a change in emotion and attitude regarding an offender. It is considered as human strength and an important factor that influence human development. Loneliness is defined as individual's subjective experience of a lack of satisfying human relationships and it is a negative feeling causing distress to an individual. Several research studies have shown that connection between loneliness and forgiveness contributes to comprehension of interpersonal engagement correlating with intrapersonal reflections in old age. The present study was to investigate the relationship between forgiveness and loneliness in elderly people in Kolkata.*

*In this study purposive sampling technique was used on a sample of 100 (50 male and 50 female) respondents aged between 65 to 80 years from old age home and house hold in Kolkata by using 1. Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005) and 2. Revised UCLA loneliness scale (RULS), [Dan Russel Otitia Peplau and Carolyn Cutrona 1980].*

*Data based fact of qualitative and quantitative analysis highlighted that people with regular social interaction demonstrate significantly lower level of loneliness and higher level of forgiveness when compared to those who are less socially adjusted and lonely.*

*Findings have implicated that lower level of loneliness boosting forgiveness in old age.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Forgiveness, Loneliness, Old Age, Health, Relationships, Cardiovascular Diseases, Anxiety, Depression,*

### INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is one of the important topics that have been the center of attention of many researches during the last decade, because it has an effect on the individuals' functions and on their relationships (Volkman, 2009). Forgiveness has physical, mental, social and spiritual benefits as well, and researches have shown the influences of forgiveness on the regulation of blood pressure, reduction of cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, loneliness, depression, and psychosomatic illnesses and generally have shown its influence on the health. Forgiveness is one of the effective factors which have been discussed by the mental health specialists in

the recent years. Researcher said forgiveness reduces the negative emotions such as resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, loneliness etc (Ehteshamzadeh, 2009). Loneliness is a phenomenon that occurs in all stages of life and is a significant problem for many older people. Loneliness in old age is a risk factor that can be linked to various health-related problems, physical and mental problems (Donaldson JM, Watson R, 2008).

Researchers have defined forgiveness in different ways. For example, Enright, Gassin, and Wu (1992) defined *forgiveness* as "the overcoming of negative affect and judgment toward the offender, not



by denying ourselves the right to such affect and judgment, but by endeavoring to view the offender with compassion, benevolence, and love". Day and Maltby (2005) defined dispositional forgiveness is important for social relationships because people who psychologically adjust through interpersonal forgiveness tend not to be lonely since they forge strong social relationships. Paplau and Perlman (1992) studied 12 definitions of loneliness and found that all have three elements in common: First, loneliness is a result of deficiencies in a person's social relations. Second, it is a subjective feeling, not synonymous with isolation. It is possible to feel lonely together with many people or to be alone without feeling lonely. Third, the feeling is negative and unpleasant. Connection between loneliness and forgiveness contributes to comprehension of interpersonal engagements correlated with intrapersonal reflections. Loneliness derived from a lack of quality relationships which may causes severe disruptive social and emotional effects. In the contrary, lack of forgiveness is related with disposition of loneliness.

Forgiveness, a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response to interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict, is important to social harmony. Studies have shown that individuals who feel lonely or rejected are less forgiving of oneself (Jones, Kamat & Raw, 2006). Fisher and Exline (2006) found that an ability to forgive one is associated with lack of remorse and self-condemnation. Considering the significance of forgiveness and loneliness as in the important factor and component in health and other component of quality of life, researcher were interested to unearth these relationship between these two factors and their impact on betterment of elderly people. Positive interpersonal relationship resulted from increased well-being and adjustment which reflected through resolving interpersonal situations and intrapersonal reflection (Lopez, Snyder, & Rasmussen, 2002). In accordance with this, forgiveness is seen as a process in which there is a continual engagement through intrapersonal reflection and developing and maintaining social relationships within the context of interpersonal transgression (Yamhure-Thompson & Snyder, 2002). This type of approach suggests that forgiveness of another person's transgression is related to a person's social relationship and that people who tend to forgive others seek to forge stronger social relationships and would tend not to

be lonely. Forgiveness literature suggested a three-dimensional model of dispositional forgiveness (Yamhure-Thompson & Snyder, 2002) which, aside from forgiveness of others, identifies forgiveness of oneself (forgiveness regarding one's own previous transgression against others) and forgiveness of situations (a tendency to accept and seek closure around a negative life event beyond one's control, such as an earthquake or illness). A study carried out by Hansson *et al.* (1987) revealed that loneliness was related to poor psychological adjustment, dissatisfaction with family and social relationships. As people grow old, the likelihood of experiencing age-related losses increases. Such losses may impede the maintenance or acquisition of desired relationships, resulting in a higher incidence of loneliness. Many people experience loneliness either as a result of living alone, a lack of close family ties, reduced connections with their culture of origin or an inability to actively participate in the local community activities.

Considering the significance of forgiveness and management of loneliness of elderly people the present researcher has interested to find out the relationship between these two variables. Accordingly, present researcher was interested to study the variables on sample of elderly people with following parameters of objectives.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the nature of forgiveness of elderly people living in Kolkata in terms of their sex and living arrangement.
2. To study the nature of loneliness of elderly people living in Kolkata in terms of their sex and living arrangement.
3. To identify the pattern of relationship among sets of variables- the level of forgiveness and loneliness of elderly people living in old age home and house hold in Kolkata.

## METHOD

### Variables

#### Independent Variable

*Forgiveness.* McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) defined *forgiveness* as "the set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner; (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender; and (c) increasingly motivated by

conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender’s hurtful actions”. Forgiveness is an interpersonal hurt or transgression perpetrated by another. When a person forgives his/her thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward the offender become less negative and more positive (McCullough, et al., 2000). It is important for social relationship and forgiveness reduces the negative relations and social relationship. In this study Thompson et al., (2005) concept of forgiveness was used as a measured variable.

**Dependent Variable**

*Loneliness:* Loneliness denotes a “lack of... quantity and quality of social contacts” (Delisle, 1988). It is a state in which one experiences a powerful feeling of emptiness and isolation, a feeling of wanting company or wanting to do something with another person.

**Tools Used**

1. General Information Schedule (containing name, age, sex, socio-economic background etc).
2. The adopted Bengali version of Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2000).
3. The revised UCLA Loneliness scale (Dan Russel, Otita Peplau and Carolyn Cutrona; 1980).

**Description of the tools used**

**Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS):** The adopted Bengali version of Adak and Ray (2009) is based on 18 items covering 6 components of the Thompson et al., (2005) original scale. The item total correlation of the adopted version ranged from 0.43-0.81 and the Spearman-Brown reliability is 0.84.

**The revised UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) loneliness scale (Russell et al., 1980):**

The revised UCLA Loneliness scale includes 10 negatively worded and 10 positively worded items with item total correlation values ranged from 0.39- 0.81. The high reliability value of the scale is 0.91.

**Sample**

In this study, purposive sampling technique was used of 100 (50 male and 50 female) elderly people from old age homes and house hold within the jurisdiction of Kolkata Municipal Corporation were selected to fulfill the needs of the study.

**Sample selection criteria**

**Selection of old age home**

1. It should be a ‘paid’ old age home.
2. There must be at least 25 accommodations.

**Selection of elderly people**

1. Age range of the respondent was 65-80 years.
2. They were home boarders at least one year.
3. There was no diagnosed psychological illness present within the respondents.

**Area**

Five old age homes and the adjacent areas were selected within the jurisdiction of Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

**Data Collection**

Face to face interview by visiting the respondents in their old age homes.

**Statistical treatment**

The statistical treatments (Mean, SD, ‘t’ and r) were applied on respondents of 100 respondents of house hold living (n=50) and old age home living (n=50) elderly people of Kolkata.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table-I: Forgiveness and Loneliness in terms of sex (Male= 50 and Female=50) respondents of Kolkata.**

Variable	Respondents	Mean	SD	t-value
Forgiveness	Male	83.88	9.57	0.899*
	Female	82.05	8.61	
Loneliness	Male	38.35	9.39	2.73**
	Female	45.45	6.88	

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

The results of the above table shows that the Mean score of Male and Female elderly on Forgiveness scale was 83.88 and 82.05 respectively and the SD was 9.57 and 8.61 respectively. The obtained t-value was 0.899 implying that there was a significance difference (at 0.05 level) between Male and Female elderly. The Mean score of male and female Elderly on Loneliness scale was 38.35 and 45.45 respectively and the SD was 9.39 and 6.88 respectively. The obtained t-value was 2.73 implying that there was a significant difference (at 0.01 level) between male and female elderly on Loneliness.

There is no strong evidence for gender differences in forgiveness for scores across a number of forgiveness measures (Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Brown & Phillips, 2005). In reviewing the literature on forgiveness in group interventions, Worthington, Sandage, and Berry (2000) showed that women are no more likely to forgive than men. However, sometimes results are mixed and women have been found to score significantly higher on some measures (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Miller and her coworkers (Miller,

Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008) conducted meta-analysis with 53 articles reporting 70 studies that addressed gender and forgiveness. The mean d was 0.28 indicating that females are more forgiving than males. This may be a result of gender role socialization, since men are typically encourage to suppress most emotions, except for aggressive ones, and women are expected to respond to offenses with understanding, compassion, and empathy (Gault & Sabini, 2000; Kopper & Epperson, 1996).

The review of the previous research indicates that loneliness is a common problem among older people. Studies showed that women those living alone were more likely to be lonely. It is well known that women live longer than men (United Nations Statistics Division, Demographic Yearbook 2009-2010) and as a consequence both widowhood and thus living alone are more common among women. Loss of spouse has been pointed out as a cause of loneliness in several studies (Victor C.R., 2005, Jaobsson U., 2005 and Aartsen M, 2011).

**Table-II: Forgiveness and Loneliness in terms of living condition (Household =50 and Old Age Home=50) respondents of Kolkata.**

Variable	Living condition of the Respondents	Mean	SD	t-value
Forgiveness	Household	81.85	5.80	0.220*
	Old Age Home	85.80	8.60	
Loneliness	Household	36.35	7.65	0.920*
	Old Age Home	38.75	8.82	

\* $p < 0.05$

The result of the Table-II indicated that Mean and SD score (85.80 and 81.85 respectively) of Old Age Home living elderly is relatively better than the Household living (Mean= 81.85, SD= 5.8) elderly people. The obtained t-value was 0.220 indicating significant difference (at 0.05 level) between two living conditions on Forgiveness. In Loneliness scale Mean and SD score (38.75 and 8.82 respectively) of Old Age Home living elderly was higher than Household living (Mean=36.35, SD= 7.65) elderly people. The obtained t-value was 0.920 indicating significant difference between (at 0.05 level) two living condition on Loneliness scale.

Previous research findings indicated that (Enright, 2001), forgiveness occurs when individuals who have been unjustly hurt are able to overcome their resentments and offer compassion to the wrongdoer. Enright's approach focuses on changing feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward those who

have been hurtful. Individuals engaged in the forgiveness process are encouraged to being by making very small changes such as refraining from making negative comments about the hurtful person. This small change in behavior may be accompanied by incremental changes in thoughts and feelings about the hurtful individual. Old Age home boarders emphasized with each others' pain, assisted in helping to reframe thoughts about the hurtful person, suggested new behaviors, and forgiveness.

The research findings revealed that elderly people found to be lonelier when they living in old age home. This result is true for the Indian socio-cultural context where joint family system is prioritized from the ancient period. Unlike Western countries, in India it is consider being one's duty and responsibility to look after their parents.

**Table- III: Relationship between Forgiveness and Loneliness of elderly people (n=100) of Kolkata.**

Name of the variable	r
Forgiveness	0.217
Loneliness	

Data analysis shows that there was a positive correlation between Forgiveness and Loneliness ( $r=0.217$ ). The results confirmed Day and Maltby's findings of forgiveness of self and situations negatively correlate with social loneliness. An inability to forgive self may cause feeling of solitary isolation and withdraw because they may feel an unworthiness to be forgiven. People who consider themselves lonely might feel they do not have enough quality social relationships and as a result, they put the discomfort, desensitize and loose self-respect. Failure to resolve the transgression and effectively cope with an unpleasant life event may contribute to negativism about oneself or the event and thus lead to a withdrawal from social relationships. A person who refrains from forgiving may find themselves feeling they are unworthy to receive forgiveness from others or unable to forgive themselves for transgressions.

**CONCLUSION**

The study findings indicated that lower level of forgiveness was associated with higher level of loneliness. The interpretation based on the correlation that people unable to forgive themselves tend to withdraw from social relations and they tend to feel unworthy to forgive. On the contrary, people who are lonely might feel that they have lower social relationships and assign more importance to their own transgressions because they are unable to forgive themselves. Forgiveness may be considered as an important pre-condition to reduce the loneliness among elderly people.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite the contributions of the present study, there are also several limitations that must be acknowledged.

1. Limitations of the study include self report method. The other methods (objective observation, video tapping etc) may be use to verify the trustworthiness of data.
2. Moreover the data analyzed in this study is gathered in one point of time only. That should be tested in different sequential level.

3. It would be fruitful to explore the extent of forgiveness and loneliness from multiple situation and sources.
4. In some, this study uncovers some important pathways in geriatric forgiveness and level of loneliness that would benefit further research and clinical investigation.

**REFERENCES**

1. Adak, M., & Ray, A. (2009). *Nature of Forgiveness and Quality of Life of Elderly People in West Bengal.*
2. Barber, L., Maltby, J., & Macaskill, A. (2005). *Angry memories and thoughts of revenge: The relationship between forgiveness and anger rumination. Personality and Individual Differences, 39, 253–262.*
3. Brown, R. P., & Phillips, A. (2005). *Letting bygones be bygones: Further evidence for the validity of the Tendency to forgive scale. Personality and Individual Differences, 38, 627– 638.*
4. Day, L., & Maltby, J. (2005). *Forgiveness and social loneliness. Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied, 139(6), 553-555.*
5. Delisle, E.J., *What Does Solitude Mean to the Aged? Canadian Journal on Aging, 7, 358-371(1998)*
6. Donaldson JM, Watson R. *Loneliness in elderly people: an important area for nursing research. J Adv Nurs 1996; 24: 952-958.*
7. Ehteshamzadeh P, 2009. *The investigation of the relationship between extraversion, neuroticism with general health and happiness with respect to mediatory variables of forgiveness and Islamic coping strategies of college students in Islamic Azad and Chamran of Ahvaz universities. PhD dissertation. Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch – Khuzestan.*
8. Enright, R.D., Gassin, E.A., & Wu, C. (1992). *Forgiveness: A developmental view. Journal of Moral Education, 21, 99-114.*
9. Enright, R.D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice: A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.*
10. Fisher, M. L., & Exline, J. J. (2006). *Self-forgiveness versus excusing: The roles of remorse, effort, and acceptance of responsibility. Self and Identity, 5, 127-146.*



11. Hansson R. O, Jones W. H, Carpenter B. N, Remondet J. H. *International Journal of Human Development*. 1986-1987; 27 (1):41-53.
12. Kamat, V., Jones, W., & Row, K. (2006). *Assessing Forgiveness as a Dimension of Personality*. *Individual Differences Research*. 4(5), 322-330.
13. Kopper, B.A., & Epperson, D.L. (1996). *The experience and expression of anger: Relationships with gender, gender-role socialization, and mental health functioning*. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43, 158-165.
14. Lopez, S. J., Snyder, C. R., & Rasmussen, H. N. (2002). *Striking a vital balance: Developing a complementary focus on human weakness and strength through positive psychological assessment*. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 3-20). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
15. McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L. J., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). *Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 321-336.
16. McCullough, M.E. (2000). *Forgiveness as human strength: Theory, measurement, and links to well-being*. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19, 43-55.
17. Miller, A.J., Worthington, E.L.Jr., & McDaniel, M.A. (2008). *Gender and forgiveness: A Meta-analytic review and research agenda*. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27(8), 843-876.
18. Paplau LA, Perlman D (eds.) *Loneliness. A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy*. New York: John Wiley, 1992.
19. Russell, D. W. 1996. *UCLA loneliness scale (version 3) : reliability, validity and factor structure*. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66, 20-40.
20. Sandage, S.J., Worthington, E.L., Jr., Hight, T.L., & Berry, J.W. (2000). *Seeking forgiveness: Theoretical context and initial empirical study*. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 28, 21-35.
21. Thompson L Y, Snyder C R, Hoffman L, Michael S T, Rasmussen H N, Billings L S, Heinze L, Neufeld J E, Shorey H S, Roberts J C, Roberts D E, 2005. *Dispositional forgiveness of self, other, and situations*. *Journal of Personality*. 73: 313-359.
22. United Nations Statistics Division, *Demographic Yearbook 2009-2010*.
23. Victor CR, Scambler SJ, Shah S, Cook DG, Harris T, Rink E, De Wilde S. *Has loneliness amongst older people increased? An investigation into variations between cohorts*. *Ageing Society* 2002; 22: 585-97.
24. Volkmann J R, 2009. *A longitudinal analysis of the forgiveness process in romantic relationships*. PhD dissertation, George Mason University.
25. Wade, N.G. (2002). *Understanding reach: A component analysis of a group intervention to promote forgiveness*. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences & Engineering*, 63, 261.
26. Walker, D.F., & Gorsuch, R.L. (2002). *Forgiveness within the Big Five personality model*. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 32, 1127-1137.
27. Yamhure-Thompson, L., & Snyder, C. R. (2002). *Measuring Forgiveness*. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures* (pp. 301-312). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.