

The Role of Forgiveness on Psychological Well-Being in Adolescents: A Review

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Abstract: *Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept to which individuals carry out their psychological functions positively. One of the factors that influence psychological well-being is forgiveness. Teenagers who have the ability to forgive things that hurt their feeling can have a prosperous psychological impact. The purpose of this article is to find out how forgiveness affects adolescent psychological well-being. The method used in this article is a literature review by using research journals published between 2013 and 2018 as the criteria of the article. Journal articles are collected from various websites, including ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, google scholar, and academia.edu. Based on the literature, the results indicated that forgiveness could be a factor of psychological well-being among adolescents. Forgiveness is able to have some positive effect on happiness, spiritual well-being, and subjective well-being among adolescents, including youth of bullying victims. Lastly, it can be concluded that adolescents with a high degree of forgiveness will be psychologically prosperous.*

Keywords: forgiveness, psychological well-being, adolescents

Introduction

Humans are complete living things that have several aspects inside their souls including physical, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects. Every human being has the right to be psychologically prosperous because psychological aspects might affect the physical condition of an individual. If the psychological and physical functions go well, this person will be an optimal human being. Psychologically prosperous individuals will bring up positive attitudes towards themselves. Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept of the extent to which an individual performs his psychological functions positively (Hardjo & Novita, 2015).

Psychological well-being fosters positive emotions in adolescents so that they would feel satisfaction and happiness in their life. Besides, it could reduce depression and negative behavior in adolescents (Akhtar, 2009). Basson (2008) stated that psychological well-being in adolescents is very important as a protective factor to reduce negative effects on adolescents, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and juvenile delinquency such as drinking alcohol, smoking, and drug abuse.

In addition, adolescents with psychological well-being could experience a more positive life in intrapersonal and interpersonal relations as well as in their school life (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2010). A person would feel free from the burden in his life if he feels happy. According to Indrawati's research, adolescents who are involved in brawls and play truant during class time are caused by a lack of psychological well-being in the academic field (Fitri, Intan, & Luawo, 2017).

In a previous study, it was shown that several factors influence adolescents' psychological well-being, including self-control, social support, age, and gender.

The results showed that self-control and social support could predict psychological well-being among adolescents. Older adolescents show lower psychological well-being compared to younger adolescents, while gender could not predict psychological well-being in adolescents (Ronen, Hamama, Rosenbaum, & Mishely-Yarlap, 2016). Other research conducted on adolescents who experienced sexual violence showed that true social support affects psychological well-being. The higher social support is, the higher the psychological well-being will be (Hardjo & Novita, 2015).

Another factor affecting psychological well-being is forgiveness. In a study, Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1991) revealed that forgiveness could improve psychological well-being. However, forgiveness is difficult for teenagers to do, as we know, in their ages, adolescents tend to be selfish. The most important part of one aspect of adolescent development is social cognition, termed by David Elkind as egocentrism, which is the tendency of adolescents to see things, both the world and themselves, according to their perspectives (Desmita, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising if adolescents consider themselves as the most righteous and the most superior among their peers. When they face a problem, sometimes adolescents use their egos and make it difficult to tolerate the problems they face. Egocentrism possessed by adolescents makes them being reluctant to apologize the others, yet on the other hand, forgiving is one of the factors which can cause an individual to be psychologically prosperous. Forgiveness could make an adolescent feels something positive and causes psychological well-being.

Adolescents who experience bullying by their peers would feel lonely, isolated, and it will lead to feelings of anger and violent behavior (Anderson, 2006). Anger

in adolescents could lead to aggression, depression, drug abuse, and even suicide (Navis, 2012). Because of that, forgiveness could be an effective way to reduce anger that will adversely affect the adolescent. Worthington argued that forgiveness could control negative behaviors in individuals, for instance, anger, revenge, hatred, resentment, and dislike to people who have done wrong to him (Damayanti & Sandjaja, 2012). Forgiveness is a way to release negative emotions that arise due to hurtful treatment to someone carried out by others (Lestari & Agung, 2016).

Another advantage of forgiveness is experiencing positive mental health. Pareek, Mathur, and Mangnani (2016) stated that forgiveness has been proven to have positive benefits both psychologically and physically. Another study revealed that forgiveness could be a coping strategy for adolescents who experience bullying by their peers. To clarify the discussion on the influence of forgiveness on psychological well-being, a literature review was conducted. Thus, this study aims to discuss the influence of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of adolescents.

Psychological Well-being

Well-being is an important part of a positive quality of life (Sagiv, Roccas, & Hazan, 2004). Psychological well-being is a condition of an individual who has positive attitudes towards him or herself and others, has the ability to make decisions and regulate his own behavior, is able to regulate his external environment, has a purpose in life, and has the ability of personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Diener and Suh (1997) mentioned the basic components of psychological well-being including life satisfaction and affect. Affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions, while life satisfaction refers to cognitive satisfaction in life.

Ryff and Singer (2008) mentioned that there are six dimensions of psychological well-being in individuals, for instance, self-acceptance, positive relation with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Aspects of positive development in adolescents are able to obtain well-being (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005).

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is defined as the process of accepting mistakes made by wrongdoers by trying to heal emotional wounds and establish a new relationship in the future (Williamson & Gonzales, 2007). Flanagan, Vanden Hoek, Ranter, and Reich (2012) said that forgiveness is an effective coping strategy for adolescents. Due to forgiveness, adolescents would have the ability to maintain positive internal conditions and positive interpersonal relationships so that they can establish interactions with their peers.

According to McCullough, forgiveness is defined as an individual condition to succumb, fix the relation, and rebuild it with people who have hurt them and make a better environment as it was before the conflict (Setyawati & Rahmandani, 2017). Based on that

definition, it can be concluded that forgiveness is an individual condition to be more receptive to what has happened in his or her life, refrain from anger and make him or her feel better as well as leave the burden that might interfere and improve relationships with the bully in the future.

Review Procedure

The literature used in this study were several papers taken from various journals. The keywords used in searching for the journals were “forgiveness” and “psychological well-being in adolescents.” During the process, 12 papers were found; they discussed the effect of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of adolescents. The papers were collected by searching via the internet from several websites, including ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, google scholar and academia.edu. The required papers used as literature in this paper were the papers discussing the effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being in adolescents. The journals contained the papers must be published between 2013 -2018.

Results and Discussion

The sample of this literature study was adolescents since this study specialized in discussions on adolescents and it related to forgiveness and psychological well-being in adolescents.

From the 12 research results reviewed, there were several characteristics of subjects in the review. There are 1 journal using the subject of teenagers living in orphanages, 6 journals using the subject of high school or higher education students, 1 journal using the subject of students in Islamic boarding schools, 2 journals using the subject of adolescents as victims of bullying, and 2 journals using adolescent subjects without specific characteristics — subjects used between the ages of 12-22 years.

Adolescents who live in orphanages, in this case, ranged from age 15 to 21 years old who categorized themselves as adolescents. Adolescents could develop optimally due to affection from their parents as parents could guide and deliver them to the wider community. Later, adolescents would become a successful person in the future, but nowadays, many adolescents could not enjoy their lives properly with their parents (Rienneke & Setianingrum, 2018).

Another characteristic is a student. Adolescence is a period in which individuals are in education, starting from junior high school, senior high school until higher education. Adolescence is an interesting phase to investigate (Dwityaputri & Sakti, 2015), as, in that phase, adolescents have not found a clear stage. They are no longer children but also they cannot be stated as adults. In other words, adolescence is a phase between children and adults. Furthermore, adolescents have not been able to control their functions both physically and psychologically well (Utami, 2015).

The positive development of adolescents will yield a good character. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, positive characteristics of adolescents come from positive relationships and positive groups (Mary & Patra, 2015). This study was supported by students in Islamic Boarding School as subjects who always followed the rules and activities in boarding schools such as doing routine congregational prayer and communal Quran reading and discussions. Besides, they were also expected to be able to absorb and practice Islamic knowledge well (Nashriyati & Arjanggi, 2016).

However, there is often a bullying behavior in adolescence that has negative effects on adolescents. According to Vanden Hoek, being a victim of bullying brings a negative impact on children's social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development (Barcaccia et al., 2018).

Forgiveness and Psychological Well-being in Adolescents

Forgiveness affects some other variables related to psychological well-being such as happiness and spiritual well-being. Adolescents having high forgiveness tend to have high happiness as well. In achieving happiness, an individual could feel the pleasure that grows out of gratitude and forgiveness. Conversely, if a person could not foster gratitude and forgiveness, then he could not feel happy (Rienneke & Setianingrum, 2018).

There is a positive correlation between forgiveness and happiness in adolescents. Gradually, older adolescents are easier to forgive than younger ones. Adolescents who are more forgiving would be calmer because forgiveness could lower blood pressure, heart rate and tendency to feel stressed (Rana, Hariharan, Nandinee, & Vincent, 2014).

Individuals who feel happy, psychologically they would be able to feel prosperous. The meaning of happiness, according to Seligman, is a concept that refers to positive emotions that create positive activities and eliminate the components of negative feelings. Happiness aspects here include positive emotions in the past, present, and future. Emotions from the past could be in the form of pride, satisfaction, and calm. Emotions at present include pleasure and gratification, while those in the future could be in the form of optimism, hope, trust, faith, and self-confidence. Through these aspects, a person could achieve psychological well-being (Rienneke & Setianingrum, 2018).

One study showed a significant correlation between forgiveness and happiness (Rienneke & Setianingrum, 2018; Rana et al., 2014; Batik et al., 2017). In this case, forgiveness determines happiness in adolescents. Through this finding, it is expected that adolescents are able to build forgiveness behavior which would be a source of happiness in their lives (Rana et al., 2014).

Forgiveness has important roles in achieving psychological health as it is an important healing mechanism in helping someone overcome the guilty feeling, injustice, sadness, and feeling of loss. Forgiveness can be comprehended as a personality disposition as well as a social unit characteristic of psychological condition from a person who receives unpleasant treatment. Specifically, forgiveness is defined as a series of motivations to alleviate revenge as well as motivation to create good behaviors and recreate a good atmosphere (Pareek et al., 2016).

Bullying behavior often afflicts adolescents, especially those in school periods. Adolescents who were the victims of bullying often have high levels of disability, such as easily being depressed, easily experiencing anxiety, and unable to manage anger. Forgiveness and friendship can be moderate agents for psychological effects that are useful to weaken the negative effects for bullying victims (Barcaccia et al., 2018). In this case, forgiveness can be applied in schools as therapies that can help bullying victims to revive.

Bullying is more common in high school students who are still in their adolescence. There are some negative effects of bullying behavior such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, poor social adjustment, behavior to absent from school, even the desire of committing suicide. However, after conducting research on the correlation between forgiveness and psychological well-being of bullying victims, a positive result has been obtained. The higher the level of forgiveness correlates positively with a higher level of psychological well-being (Juwita & Kustanti, 2018).

Forgiveness also built spiritual well-being for individuals (Nashriyati & Arjanggi, 2016). According to Fisher, the meaning of spiritual is a belief that can provide value and meaning in an individual's life, help individuals in loving God, help individuals to make peace with themselves and neighbors, and build a harmonious life. The result of this study indicates a significant correlation between forgiveness and gratitude with spiritual well-being (Nashriyati & Arjanggi, 2016). Besides, forgiveness is also proven to reduce depression in adolescents (Barcaccia et al., 2019). Forgiveness could directly provide a protective factor against depression in adolescents by helping them to control and manage emotions, thereby increasing emotional health and improving psychological well-being.

Apparently, not all research yielded a significant correlation between forgiveness and psychological well-being of adolescents. In other studies, it was found that forgiveness does not play a role in subjective welfare in adolescents (Utami et al., 2018). This result was different from other studies mentioning that forgiveness has an important role to improve psychological well-being in adolescents. The results of other studies revealed that forgiveness does not have any implication on reducing depression in adolescents as victims of bullying (Barcaccia, Schneider, Pallini, &

Baiocco, 2017). In this case, it was assumed that when adolescents forgive bullies, it means that they have justified the behavior of the bullies themselves.

Although forgiveness has been considered as a process to overcome emotional wounds, not all adolescents are able to do that (Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). Gerlsma and Lugtmeyer (2018) proved that reactions in giving forgiveness could also depend on the type of violation. Victims in criminal offenses (for example physical violence and theft) are less forgiving than victims of noncriminal violations (bullying). In addition, forgiveness in each adolescent has a different level and intuition, for instance, adolescents towards parents, close friends, friends with different sex, and strangers.

Conclusion

Forgiveness influences adolescent psychological well-being. By forgiving others, individuals could reduce depression and find happiness that will improve their psychological well-being. In addition, an adolescent could feel spiritually prosperous. Adolescence is a period between children and adults. If in this period, the adolescent applies forgiveness to the person who has hurt him without instilling a sense of revenge, he will feel psychologically prosperous. It can also be applied to bullied adolescents who are psychologically depressed, withdraw themselves from their surroundings, even have suicidal thoughts. When they are able to forgive, they will be able to revive so they will feel more psychologically prosperous. However, there are several results of other studies revealing that forgiveness could not improve psychological well-being and could not reduce depression in adolescents.

Recommendation

Adolescents are expected to be forgiving individuals since it would help them to release all the burdens inside themselves. Specifically in adolescents who experience bullying, it is necessary to practice forgiving therapy to revive and have a good life without inner stress.

Other researchers are suggested to develop and find other factors that make adolescents feel psychologically prosperous. Due to different results of previous research on the influence of forgiveness on psychological well-being in adolescents, further research is suggested to look at the variables that can moderate the effect of forgiveness on the psychological well-being of adolescents.

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