ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Can Emotional Intelligence and Forgiveness bring a Difference? Comparison between Clinically Diagnosed Individuals and Normal Population

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of the current study was to determine whether the absence of positive qualities such as emotional intelligence and forgiveness contribute to the occurrence of psychopathology.
Method: To achieve this objective, a group of 150 participants (n=100 psychologically healthy; n=50 psychologically disturbed) was chosen using a purposive convenience sampling technique. The participants varied in terms of age (18-50 years), gender, education, and socioeconomic status. The researchers administered the Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT,2009) and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (2005) to the sample.
Findings/Results: The findings indicated a significant predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness, highlighting their positive influence.
Conclusion: Moreover, a noteworthy distinction was observed between psychologically disturbed individuals and the general public regarding both emotional intelligence and forgiveness.
Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Forgiveness, Psychopathology

INTRODUCTION

Psychopathology, a term encompassing various mental disorders and maladaptive behavioral patterns, continues to pose significant challenges to individuals and societies worldwide[1] . In recent years, the world has witnessed a significant rise in psychological issues and psychopathology, marking a concerning global trend. This surge in mental health challenges has been extensively documented by numerous studies and reports[1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in four people worldwide will be affected by a mental or neurological disorder at some point in their lives [2]. In Pakistan, the rise in psychological issues and psychopathology has become a pressing concern[3]. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reported that about 34% of the country's population suffers from psychological problems, emphasizing the need for further investigation[4]. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, including societal pressures, economic instability, political unrest, and the impact of natural disasters[5]. Research studies have highlighted the prevalence of conditions like anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse disorders in Pakistan[6]. While past research has focused on factors such as poor parental relationships and genetics, there is a growing interest in the role of positive internal factors, such as forgiveness and emotional intelligence, in the development and persistence of psychopathology[7, 8]. This research aims to explore the relationship between the absence of positive qualities and the manifestation of psychopathology in order to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms[9]. The variables are described here:

Emotional intelligence: Goleman's (1995) concept of emotional intelligence emphasizes the importance of positive attributes such as self-confidence, political awareness, achievement motives, and conscientiousness, which aid individuals in problem-solving. Emotional intelligence comprises four mental abilities: perceiving emotions, using emotions to enhance thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in facilitating adaptive coping strategies, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological well-being[10, 11]. Conversely, deficiencies in emotional intelligence have been linked to the development and maintenance of various psychopathological conditions[7]. Researches investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychopathology has yield compelling evidences. For instance, a study by Schutte et al. (2007) found that low emotional intelligence was significantly correlated with symptoms of anxiety and depression. Individuals lack emotional intelligence tend to struggle with identify and regulate their emotions, leading to difficulty in manage stress and adapt to

challenging life circumstance[7]. Hertel, Schutz and Lammers (2009) found significant difference in emotional intelligence of diagnosed case of borderline personality disorder, substance abuse, depression with normal individuals[12]. Sasanpour, Khodabakhshi, and Norryan (2012) studied emotional intelligence, happiness and psychological health in student population. The results showed positive relationship among emotional intelligence, mental health and happiness[13]. Likewise, Butt (2014) found religious orientation and emotional intelligence significantly affected psychological distress. Emotional intelligence account for more variation in psychological well-being than religious orientation, whereas religious orientation also have significant association with emotional intelligence[14]. Likewise, Vaishnavi, & Manini, (2022) studied managers in banking sector and sought the relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness with psycho-immunity. Results indicated that individuals with higher emotional intelligence and forgiveness had more psycho-immunity that lead to mental health[15].

Forgiveness: Forgiveness, a complex psychological process involving the intentional relinquishment of negative feelings and resentment towards a transgressor, has garnered considerable attention in recent years due to its potential impact on mental health outcomes. Enright (1991) described forgiveness as "withholding one's right to show aggression, contempt, or negativity in light of some wrongdoing" (p. 45). The process of forgiveness is voluntary and intentional, resulting in a change in attitude and feelings such as an increased capacity to wish well for the guilty person. It enables individuals to support, excuse, forget, pardon, and reconcile[16]. Enright's (2001) Forgiveness model proposes four stages: (i) uncovering the pain, (ii) making the decision to forgive, (iii) gaining insight into the wrongdoing, and (iv) discovering purpose and meaning in the process of forgiveness[17].

Extensive research suggests that forgiveness plays a crucial role in promoting psychological well-being, resilience, and interpersonal functioning. Conversely, the absence of forgiveness has been associated with the occurrence and maintenance of psychopathology[8]. Studies have linked unforgiving attitudes and behaviors to a range of psychopathological conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[18]. For instance, a meta-analysis by Wade et al. (2014) demonstrated a significant negative relationship between forgiveness and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Failure to forgive oneself or others can lead to rumination, increased stress, and prolonged negative affect, ultimately contributing to the onset or exacerbation of psychopathology[8]. Similarly, Webb & Phillips (2018) this longitudinal analysis focused on the impact of forgiveness on mental health following widowhood. The results showed that

forgiveness was associated with better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression and anxiety, suggesting that forgiveness may have a positive influence on psychopathology in the context of bereavement[18]. Another, Zhang & Zheng (2018) this study examined the effect of self-forgiveness on depression and the mediating roles of rumination, psychological inflexibility, and mindfulness. The results revealed that self-forgiveness was associated with lower levels of depression, and this relationship was mediated by reduced rumination and increased mindfulness, highlighting the potential impact of self-forgiveness on psychopathology[19].

Previous studies have also sought a relationship between forgiveness and emotional intelligence. For example, Eriksen, Kress, & Forsyth, (2015) This study explored the dual process model of forgiveness and spirituality, examining the role of emotional intelligence. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence was positively associated with forgiveness and spirituality, suggesting that emotional intelligence may contribute to the development of both forgiving attitudes and spiritual beliefs[20]. Barcaccia, Pallini, Baiocco, Salvati, & Schneider, (2017) this study examined the role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between forgiveness and psychological adjustment in adolescence. The results showed that emotional intelligence mediated the relationship between forgiveness and psychological adjustment, suggesting that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in promoting positive adjustment through forgiveness[21].

To understand the mechanisms underlying the relationship between the absence of positive qualities and psychopathology, a cognitive-behavioral perspective provides a useful theoretical framework. Cognitive-behavioral theories emphasize the interplay between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, positing that maladaptive cognitive processes and dysfunctional behavioral patterns contribute to psychopathological symptoms[22]. From this perspective, deficits in emotional intelligence and forgiveness can be viewed as cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities, respectively. Individuals lacking emotional intelligence may engage in distorted thinking patterns, experience difficulty regulating negative emotions, and display maladaptive coping strategies, all of which can contribute to the development of psychopathological symptoms. Similarly, unforgiving attitudes and behaviors perpetuate negative cognitive biases, maintain a focus on past transgressions, and hinder adaptive coping, thus increasing the risk of psychopathology.

Rationale of the study: The current era emphasizes the understanding of psychological problems arising from the absence of positive factors in an individual's personality, rather than solely attributing them to environmental constraints. The present research aims to explore the relationship between the lack of forgiveness and the emergence of psychological problems. Additionally, it seeks to investigate whether emotional intelligence can serve as a protective factor against the onset of such issues. Numerous studies have examined the impact of forgiveness on psychological well-being and mental health outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis by Toussaint and Webb (2017) demonstrated that forgiveness was associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress[23]. Moreover, a longitudinal study conducted by Witvliet, Ludwig, and Vander Laan (2001) found that individuals who were able to grant forgiveness experienced reduced negative emotions and physiological arousal, indicating potential benefits for mental health. Furthermore, research has highlighted the significance of emotional intelligence in promoting adaptive coping strategies and psychological well-being[24]. A study by Ciarrochi, Deane, and Anderson (2002) revealed that emotional intelligence buffered the negative impact of stress on mental health outcomes[25]. Similarly, Bar-On (2006) found that individuals with

higher emotional intelligence were less likely to develop psychopathological symptoms[26]. By exploring the interplay between forgiveness, emotional intelligence, and psychological problems, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of how these factors influence mental well-being. The findings may provide valuable insights for interventions and strategies aimed at fostering forgiveness and enhancing emotional intelligence as means of preventing and addressing psychological issues.

Objectives of the Study

• To find the effect of emotional intelligence on forgiveness.

• To find differences in emotional intelligence and forgiveness between clinically diagnosed individuals and individuals with no psychological issue.

Hypotheses

• Emotional Intelligence will have a positive impact on forgiveness.

• Individuals suffering from psychological disorders will score low on Emotional Intelligence scale as compared to general population.

• Clinically diagnosed individuals will score low on Heartland Forgiveness scale as compared to individuals with no psychological issue.

METHOD

Method: Design: A mix of correlational and causal comparative research design was used in the study.

Population: The targeted population composed of psychologically disturbed individuals as well as their normal counter parts. As the exact number of the targeted population was not known a sample of 150 individuals was taken, which is considered sufficient to apply inferential statistics as the data gets normally distributed.

Sample: The Sample consisted of 150 respondents including 50 clinically diagnosed individuals with psychological problems, and 100 individuals with no history of any psychological disorder. The sample varied in age between 18-50 years.

Instruments

1. **The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test:** Schutte, Malouff and Bhullar (2009) devised Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) to measure emotional intelligence via 33 items 5-point scale. The scale bears 0.90 reliability index and the authors' claim that the construct validity of the scale provides an accurate assessment of grownups and young people[27].

2. **Heartland Forgiveness Scale:** Thompson, Snyder, and Hoffman (2005) developed a self-report 18 item Heartland Forgiveness Scale based on 7-point scoring. It encompasses an overall propensity to pardon. HFS yields four scores i.e., along with total HFS, subscales include Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations[28].

Procedure: Different government and private hospitals and clinics were contacted to get permission to collect the data from psychologically disturbed individuals. Individuals with no psychological disorders were conveniently drawn from general population including educational institutes with the permission of the concerned Heads of the departments. Initially consent was taken after which rapport was built with the participants. Subjects were then briefed about the nature and purpose of the study. Two scales were administered i.e., Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), and Heartland forgiveness scale (HFS). During the data collection phase subjects were instructed to honestly complete the scales and were assured that the data will be kept confidential and used only for research purpose. At the end, respondents were thanked for their cooperation.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the Emotional Intelligence scale, and Heartland Forgiveness scale

Scale	No of items	M	SD	S	K	Range		Alpha coefficient reliability
						Actual	Potential	

Emotional intelligence scale	33	117	23.75	-0.39	-1.27	64-152	33-165	0.90
Heartland Forgiveness scale	18	73	19.79	-0.48	-0.89	27-109	18-126	0.84

Note: M=mean; SD=standard Deviation; S=Skewness; K=Kurtosis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the scales with normal skewness and kurtosis range, suggesting the data is normally distributed and parametric tests used for analysis. Coefficient alpha Emotional Intelligence Scale and Heartland Forgiveness Scale are above .70 which shows high reliability.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients of Emotional Intelligence on Forgiveness among psychologically disturbed individuals and normal individuals (N=150)

Variables	B	β	SE
Constant	-5.39***		4.88
Emotional intelligence	.670***	.804	.041
R^2		.647	

***P<.000

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and t-value showing differences between psychologically disturbed individuals and normal individuals on Emotional Intelligence Scale

	Normal (n=100)		Patients (n=50)				95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD	t(148)	p	LL	UL	
Emotional Intelligence	132	13.39	88.96	9.52	20.29	.000	38.87	47.26	3.70

Table 3 indicates the t value (20.29) being significant at .001 level with large effct size (3.70) which confirms that psychologically disturbed individuals scored significantly lower on emotional intelligence as compared to the normal group.

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and t-value showing differences between normal and psychologically disturbed individuals on Hartland Forgiveness Scale

	Normal (n=100)		Patients (n=50)				95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD	t(148)	p	LL	UL	
Forgiveness Scale	85	10.91	50	11.55	17.97	.000	30.84	38.47	3.11

Table 4 indicates significant t value (17.97) at .001 level confirming psychologically disturbed individuals scoring significantly lower on forgiveness as compared to their normal counterparts.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the role of emotional intelligence and forgiveness in the onset of psychopathology. The findings from Table 1 provide important information about the distribution and reliability of the measurement scales used in the study. The normal skewness and kurtosis range suggest that the data is normally distributed, which supports the use of parametric tests for analysis. Furthermore, the high reliability coefficients (above .70) for the Emotional Intelligence Scale and Heartland Forgiveness Scale indicate that these measures demonstrate strong internal consistency.

The findings supported the first hypothesis, demonstrating a significant positive impact of emotional intelligence on forgiveness. The high R-squared value of .64 indicated that emotional intelligence accounted for 64% of the variance in forgiveness (Table- 2). This positive relationship aligns with previous research by De Corte, Buysse, Verhofstadt, & Roets, (2017) This study examined the mediating role of anger in the relationship between forgivingness (a facet of forgiveness) and victimization, while also considering emotional intelligence. The results revealed that emotional intelligence moderated the indirect effect of forgivingness on victimization through anger. Individuals high in emotional intelligence showed a weakened relationship between forgivingness and anger, suggesting that emotional intelligence may help regulate anger and decrease the likelihood of victimization[29]. Likewise, Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, Billings, Heinze, Neufeld, Shorey, Roberts, Roberts, & Ohbuchi, (2018) demonstrated a positive association between dispositional forgiveness and emotional intelligence. The authors suggested that emotional intelligence enables individuals to understand, regulate, and express emotions in ways that promote forgiveness, both towards oneself and others[30]. Lavy, Littman-Ovadia, & Bareli, (2019) investigated the relationship

Table 2 presents the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) on forgiveness in both psychologically disturbed individuals and normal individuals. The analysis revealed a significant relationship, as indicated by the R2 value of 0.647, which indicates that EI accounts for 64.7% of the variance in forgiveness. This relationship was statistically significant (F = 271.081, p < .000). The results demonstrate that emotional intelligence has a positive predictive effect on forgiveness in both psychologically disturbed individuals and normal individuals (β = .804, p < .000).

between emotional intelligence, forgiveness, and workplace revenge. The findings indicated that emotional intelligence was positively associated with forgiveness, suggesting that individuals with higher emotional intelligence may be more likely to forgive others and refrain from seeking revenge in the workplace[5]. Another study conducted by Zhao, Liu, & Wang, (2019) on the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and forgiveness. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence partially mediated the association between certain personality traits (e.g., agreeableness, conscientiousness) and forgiveness. The authors suggested that emotional intelligence facilitates the understanding and management of emotions, allowing individuals to process and forgive transgressions more effectively[31]. Similarly, Vaishnavi and Manini (2022) found positive correlation between emotional intelligence and forgiveness in young adults[15].

The relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness can be understood within the framework proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). According to their model, emotional intelligence encompasses various abilities that facilitate forgiveness. For instance, accurate perception of emotions enables individuals to recognize how their own emotions may hinder the forgiveness process. Moreover, effectively utilizing emotions in problem-solving situations can contribute to forgiveness. Emotional understanding allows individuals to comprehend complex emotional dynamics, making forgiveness easier. Additionally, the effective management of emotions helps regulate both personal and others' emotions, even in the face of negativity[32]. Similarly, Goleman's (1998) model of emotional intelligence, which emphasizes self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation, also supports the relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness. Each component of emotional intelligence described in this model can contribute to an individual's inclination to practice forgiveness. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks such as the Social Cognitive Theory[33] and the Trait-Emotion Model[34] offer additional insights into the observed relationships between emotional intelligence and forgiveness. These frameworks propose that emotional intelligence

encompasses a wide range of cognitive and affective processes, including the perception and understanding of emotions, regulation of emotional experiences, and the application of emotional knowledge to adaptively respond to social situations. By fostering greater emotional awareness, emotional intelligence may facilitate empathic understanding, perspective-taking, and a willingness to forgive.

The second hypothesis posited that individuals with psychological disorders would score lower on the Emotional Intelligence scale compared to those without psychological disorders. The significant t-value of 17.97 confirmed a significant difference between the two groups, with normal individuals scoring higher on emotional intelligence (M = 85) compared to diagnosed individuals (M = 50) (see table -3). This finding is consistent with previous research by Hertel, Schutz, and Lammers (2009), who found that individuals diagnosed with major depressive disorder, substance abuse disorder, borderline personality disorder, and normal individuals differed significantly in emotional intelligence scores[11]. Similar findings were also reported by Nathalie, Maria, and Ana (2014) in patients with anxiety disorders. Lower emotional intelligence scores in individuals with psychological disorders may stem from difficulties in emotional comprehension and regulation[35]. Emotional intelligence, as discussed earlier, develops self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills[36]. The absence of these characteristics in individuals with psychological disorders may increase their vulnerability to developing psychopathological symptoms. Empathy allows individuals to shift their focus from themselves to others, avoiding excessive self-centeredness. Self-awareness and regulation help prevent negative thinking patterns, while motivation enables the utilization of positive energy. Thus, the lack of emotional intelligence is often apparent in individuals with psychological problems.

The observed difference in emotional intelligence between individuals with psychological disorders and those without can be derived from various theoretical frameworks. For instance, According to Trait-Emotion Model, emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively. Individuals with psychological disorders may experience difficulties in these aspects, leading to lower emotional intelligence scores[34]. Similarly, Emotion Regulation Theory by the Gross, (1998) suggested that individuals with psychological disorders often struggle with regulating their emotions. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to manage and regulate emotions adaptively, which may be compromised in individuals with psychological disorders[37].

The third hypothesis suggested a significant difference in forgiveness scores between clinically diagnosed individuals and the general population. The significant t-value of 20.29 supported this hypothesis, with normal individuals scoring higher on forgiveness (M = 132) compared to diagnosed individuals (M = 89.96) (Table-4).This finding aligns with previous research by Frewen, & Lanius, (2015) who reported that less forgiving individuals experienced higher levels of neuroticism, anxiety, and depression[38]. Loren, Grant, Gabriel, and George (2016) also found that lower levels of forgiveness and higher levels of lifetime stress severity predicted worse mental and physical health. The practice of forgiveness was found to lower stress levels, suggesting that cultivating forgiveness habits may mitigate stress-related disorders[39].

Brion, & Levenson, (2019) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examined the relationship between forgiveness, psychopathology, and health. The findings indicated that forgiveness was significantly associated with lower levels of psychopathological symptoms, suggesting a potential protective role of forgiveness in mental health outcomes[40].

The observed difference in forgiveness scores between diagnosed individuals and the general population can be supported by theoretical perspectives such as the Trauma and Forgiveness Theory and the Trauma Recovery Model[41, 42]. According to these perspectives, traumatic experiences can significantly affect an individual's capacity to forgive. Such events can generate emotional distress, impair the processing of emotions, and disrupt interpersonal relationships, thereby hindering the forgiveness process[41, 42]. Additionally, Brenner (2020) presents five reasons why forgiveness can be beneficial for individuals. Firstly, forgiveness allows individuals to acknowledge their own fallibility and engage in self-forgiveness. Secondly, it enables individuals to shift away from a victim mentality and focus on their personal strengths. Thirdly, forgiveness liberates individuals from negative energy, which can be redirected towards positive activities. Fourthly, by calming negative emotions, forgiveness reduces anxiety, anger, and depression. Lastly, the improvement in mental health resulting from forgiveness can facilitate an individual's spiritual journey[43].Therefore, drawing from theoretical frameworks such as the Trauma and Forgiveness Theory[41] and the Trauma Recovery Model[42], as well as considering the positive effects of forgiveness described by Brenner (2020), it becomes apparent that the observed difference in forgiveness scores between diagnosed individuals and the general population may be influenced by the impact of trauma on emotional processing, interpersonal dynamics, and overall psychological well-being[44]. In conclusion, the present study shows that individuals with psychological disorders have lower emotional intelligence and forgiveness scores. Emotional intelligence is important for fostering forgiveness and improving mental health. Future research should investigate these relationships in diverse populations

Limitations and Suggestions: The above study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the use of self-report measures for emotional intelligence and forgiveness introduces the possibility of biases and inaccuracies in participants' responses, which can impact the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causality or determine the directionality of the relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness. To address this, future research should consider employing longitudinal or experimental designs to better understand the temporal and causal aspects of this relationship. Moreover, the study's focus on a specific population, namely psychologically disturbed individuals and normal individuals, and may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations with different psychological profiles. To enhance the external validity, future studies should aim to include a more diverse sample that represents a broader range of individuals. Furthermore, it is important to note that the study was conducted exclusively in the city of Peshawar, Pakistan, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cities within the country. To enhance the applicability of the results, future research should consider including participants from multiple cities across the country.

Lastly, the study did not account for potential confounding variables or alternative explanations that could influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and forgiveness. Factors such as personality traits, social support, or cultural influences should be considered in future studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved. Additionally, it is recommended that future research should expand its scope to include individuals with physical illnesses and disabilities to obtain a more holistic understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence, forgiveness, and various health conditions.

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