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Research Article

# Forgiveness, Religiousness, and Life Satisfaction: An Empirical Study on Turkish and Jordanian University Students

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## Abstract

Forgiveness has been examined in the science of psychology and its sub-departments like psychology of religion with the focus on the interrelations between personality, attachment, health, religiosity, and so on. In this article, forgiveness has been investigated in the context of its relation with religiosity and life satisfaction. The main aim of the study is to delineate the role of religiosity on forgiveness and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the relationship between forgiveness and demographics (gender and age) and the effect of cultural differences on forgiveness have also been investigated in this study. A further goal of this paper will be to describe the effect of forgiveness on life satisfaction. In order to discern the above-mentioned goals, the Interpersonal Forgiveness Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale were applied to a sample of 295 students from Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, and Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey. According to the findings, female students had higher means in "vengeance," a sub-department of forgiveness, than male students. Female students were more likely to be satisfied with life than male students.

## Keywords

Religiosity • Life satisfaction • Interpersonal forgiveness • Comparative study

## Affetme, Dindarlık ve Hayat Memnuniyeti İlişkisi: Türk ve Ürdünlü Üniversite Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma

## Öz

Affetme; sağlık, kişilik, bağlanma ve dindarlıkla ilişkilendirilerek başta din psikolojisi olmak üzere psikolojinin farklı alt dallarında incelenmiştir. Bu makalede affetme, dindarlık ve hayat memnuniyetiyle (yaşam doyumunu) ilişkisi bağlamında araştırılmaktadır. Araştırmanın temel amacı dindarlığın hem affetme hem de hayat memnuniyeti üzerindeki rolünün belirlenmesi, aynı zamanda affetmenin hayat memnuniyeti üzerindeki rolünün tespitidir. Ayrıca araştırmada cinsiyet ve yaşın affetme eğilimindeki rolü ele alınmış, Ürdün ve Türkiye'den iki farklı örneklem seçilerek kültürel bir karşılaştırma da hedeflenmiştir. Araştırma örneklemleri İstanbul ve Irbid'de okuyan üniversite öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmaya katılanların 223'i (%75,6) kadın, 72'si (%24,4) erkektir. Katılımcıların yaşları, 17 ile 50 arasında değişmektedir. Yaş ortalaması ise 22'dir. Örnekleme, Affetme Eğilimi Ölçeği ve Hayat Memnuniyeti Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, affetme eğiliminin ölçme alt boyutunda cinsiyetin anlamlı bir farklılık oluşturduğu anlaşılmıştır.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Dindarlık • Hayat memnuniyeti • Kişilerarası affetme • Karşılaştırmalı araştırma

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Forgiveness was a topic that had received much attention in the fields of religion and philosophy in the past. Many role models for forgiveness exist in holy books of different religions (Ayten, 2014; Sambur, 2001). Philosophers and theologians evaluated forgiveness from religious and philosophical points of view. Theologians highlighted the importance of forgiveness in religion for both the relationship between God and the individual and between people themselves. Furthermore, theologians not only focused on this importance but also referred to forgiveness as the fuel that maintains these relations (Al-A'sfahani, 2002). Various philosophers have considered forgiveness as a virtue (Comte-Sponville, 2012). For instance, Muslim philosophers also confirmed theologians' notions as well as adding detailed descriptions of forgiveness. Al-Tûsî (2007, p. 96) classified forgiveness as virtue under generosity (karam) and defined it as "abandoning the punishment of a transgression even though one has the ability to do this." Moreover, Al-A'sfahani (2009, p. 257) interrelated forgiveness ('afv) with the virtue of clemency (hilm) and defined it as "not punishing a transgressor for their transgression;" forgiveness is accepted as an aspect of the virtue of clemency. Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, and Miller (2007), conceptualized forgiveness as having both cognitive and emotional components. Psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004, p. 30) has classified forgiveness within the value of temperance. Social scientists began studying forgiveness from the psychological perspective in the 1960s. After the development of positive psychology, it was accepted as one of the most important virtues and studied in relation to different variables such as religiousness, health, personality, and more (Ayten, 2009; Egan & Todorov, 2009; Elliott, 2011; Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic; 2011; Lewis, 2005; Rye & Pargament; 2002; Toussaint & Friedman, 2009; Toussaint, Owen, & Cheadle, 2012; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007; Webb, Chickering, Colburn, & Heisler, 2005).

This paper intends to examine the relationship between religiosity, forgiveness, and life satisfaction. At the same time, it aims to investigate the links between gender, country, and the three variables mentioned above. In this article, the following hypotheses have been constructed to address the aims of the research:

*(H<sub>1</sub>) There are positive relationships between gender, forgiveness, religiosity, and life satisfaction.*

*(H<sub>1a</sub>) Women score higher than men in interpersonal forgiveness, religiosity, and life satisfaction.*

*(H<sub>2</sub>) There is no relationship between different countries as far as forgiveness, religiosity, or life satisfaction.*

*(H<sub>3</sub>) There is a positive relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction.*

*(H<sub>4</sub>) There is a positive relationship between religiosity and forgiveness.*

*(H<sub>5</sub>) There is a positive relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction.*

## Method

The survey method and questionnaire technique were used in this research. The “Islamic Religiosity Measure-Short Form” and “Interpersonal Forgiveness Scale” were performed on the subjects. Analyses of factor, reliability, t-test, and regression were used for data analysis.

### Participants

Of the university students studying in Istanbul, Turkey, and Irbid, Jordan, 295 participants were recruited. The non-random snowball sampling technique was used to collect data.

Of the sample, 59% ( $N = 174$ ) were Turkish and 41% ( $N = 121$ ) were Jordanian. For gender, 75.6% ( $N = 223$ ) were females and 24.4% ( $N = 72$ ) were males. The average age of the study participants was 22 years ( $SD = 4.3$ ), and their ages ranged from 17 to 50 years old.

### Measures

**Background information.** Participants responded to several demographic questions that provided data on age, gender, country, marital status, and faculty type.

**Religiosity.** In order to measure the level of subjective religiosity of students, one question was utilized: “How do you evaluate your level of religiosity?” The question measured participants’ religiosity on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 to 7. A “1” indicated a low level of religiosity, and a “7” indicated a high level.

**Forgiveness.** Students’ inclined level of forgiveness was measured by the Interpersonal Forgiveness Scale. Reliability and validity analyses were conducted by Ayten (2009). The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin parameter and Bartlett test showed the suitability of data for factor analysis [ $KMO = .88$ ,  $x^2 = 1894.523$ ,  $p = .000$ ]. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the scale were acceptable (Interpersonal Forgiveness total  $\alpha = .87$ ; avoidance  $\alpha = .83$ ; hopefulness  $\alpha = .74$ , and vengeance  $\alpha = .71$ ). The findings from the factor and reliability analyses showed that the measure was acceptable and useable for assessing people’s propensity towards forgiveness (see Ayten, 2009). In this study, the question of “I investigate the reason behind their deed” was removed from the scale because of its low factor loading. The scale was translated into Arabic by the researchers to measure the level of forgiveness of the Jordanian students. A new reliability analysis was conducted for this study. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the measure were acceptable (Interpersonal Forgiveness total  $\alpha = .839$ ; avoidance  $\alpha = .754$ ; hopefulness  $\alpha = .766$ , and vengeance  $\alpha = .694$ ).

**Life satisfaction.** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to measure the participants’ level of life satisfaction.

The scale was translated into Turkish by Ayten (2012). The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin parameter and Bartlett test were found to be acceptable in terms of suitability of data for factor analysis [ $KMO = .81$ ,  $\chi^2 = 323,367$ ,  $p = .000$ ]. The Arabic version of the scale was used for the Jordanian students. The scale was translated into Arabic by Abdel-Khalek (2008). Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .83$  and the correlation coefficients showing the relations among items in the scale ranged between  $r = .34$  and  $r = .73$ .

## Procedure

Data from the present study was collected between May and June of 2015 from students studying in Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, and Marmara and Istanbul Universities in Istanbul, Turkey. The sample was recruited using the non-random snowball sampling technique. Questionnaires were distributed to participants in the classrooms. The researcher informed the participants about the objectives of the study and what their participation would entail. If needed, the researcher also answered participants' questions regarding the study and the questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes based on voluntary participation.

## Results

### Religiosity, Forgiveness, Life Satisfaction, and Gender

In the present research, the independent sample t-test was carried out in order to examine whether or not religiosity, forgiveness, and life satisfaction were related to gender. The results of t-test analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Forgiveness, Religiosity, Life Satisfaction according to Gender*

Dependent Variables	Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Forgiveness	Male ( <i>N</i> = 72)	3.63	.53	1.790	.090
	Female ( <i>N</i> = 223)	3.75	.55		
Life Satisfaction	Male ( <i>N</i> = 72)	4.34	4.3	-2.721	.008
	Female ( <i>N</i> = 223)	4.78	4.7		
Religiosity	Male ( <i>N</i> = 72)	4.31	1.26	.430	.668
	Female ( <i>N</i> = 223)	4.24	1.19		

Females ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) scored higher on the forgiveness scale than males ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .53$ ). However, the difference between the two groups in terms of gender did not reach a level of statistical significance ( $t_{(123,054)} = -1.790$ ,  $p = .090$ ).

Females ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 4.7$ ) recorded higher life-satisfaction scores than males ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ). The difference between the two groups for life satisfaction was statistically significant ( $t_{(110,728)} = -2.721$ ;  $p = .008$ ).

In subjective religiosity no gender differences were found between males and females ( $t_{(114.806)} = .430$ ;  $p = .668$ ).

### Religiosity, Forgiveness, Life Satisfaction, and Country

The independent sample  $t$ -test was carried out in order to assess the differences between Jordanian and Turkish students in subjective religiosity, life satisfaction, and forgiveness. The results of  $t$ -test analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Forgiveness, Religiosity, Life Satisfaction according to Country*

Dependent Variables	Samples	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Forgiveness	Turkish ( <i>N</i> = 174)	3.79	.52	2.637	.009
	Jordanian ( <i>N</i> = 121)	3.63	.56		
Religiosity	Turkish ( <i>N</i> = 174)	4.95	.94	16.299	.000
	Jordanian ( <i>N</i> = 121)	3.26	.77		
Life Satisfaction	Turkish ( <i>N</i> = 174)	4.71	1.04	.507	.613
	Jordanian ( <i>N</i> = 121)	3.64	1.29		

Turkish students recorded higher forgiveness scores ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) than their Jordanian counterparts ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .56$ ). Moreover, the difference between the two groups was statistically significant ( $t_{(246.615)} = 2.637$ ,  $p = .009$ ).

The significant statistical difference between the two groups was indicated within subjective religiosity ( $t_{(280.470)} = 16.299$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The Turkish students ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) recorded higher subjective religiosity than the Jordanian students ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .77$ ).

As for life satisfaction, no significant difference was found between the two groups ( $t_{(221.390)} = .507$ ,  $p = .613$ ).

### The Relationship between Religiosity and Forgiveness

Regression analysis (enter method) was used to assess whether religiosity has an effect on interpersonal forgiveness. The results of regression analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Linear Regression to Predict Forgiveness with Religiosity*

DV: Forgiveness	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$R^2$ ( <i>p</i> )	$\Delta R^2$ ( <i>p</i> )
	.265	.000	.070 (.000)	.067 (.000)

According to regression analysis, religiosity was a significant predictor of interpersonal forgiveness. Religiosity accounted for 6% of the variance in forgiveness ( $\Delta R^2 = .067$ ,  $F = 22.179$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In regards to the beta coefficients, a positive correlation was found between religiosity and forgiveness ( $\beta = .265$ ,  $t = 4.790$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The results indicated that *interpersonal forgiveness* increased as *religiosity*



increased. These findings support the research hypothesis that there is positive relationship between forgiveness and religiosity ( $H4$ ).

### Religiosity and Life Satisfaction

In order to assess the role of religiosity in life satisfaction, regression analysis was used. The results of regression analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Linear Regression of Religiosity as a Predictor of Life Satisfaction*

DV: Life Satisfaction	$\beta$	$p$	$R^2 (p)$	$\Delta R^2 (p)$
	.200	.001	.040 (.000)	.037 (.000)

According to the analysis, religiosity was a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Religiosity accounted only for 3% of the variance in forgiveness ( $\Delta R^2 = .037$ ,  $F = 12.230$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In regards to the beta coefficients, a positive correlation was found between religiosity and life satisfaction ( $\beta = .200$ ,  $t = 3.497$ ,  $p = .001$ ). The results indicated that *life satisfaction* increased as *religiosity* increased. These findings support the research hypothesis that there is positive relationship between life satisfaction and religiosity ( $H3$ ).

### Forgiveness and Life Satisfaction

Simple linear regression analysis was used to measure the effect of forgiveness on life satisfaction. The results of regression analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Linear Regression of Forgiveness as a Predictor of Life Satisfaction*

DV: Life Satisfaction	$\beta$	$p$	$R^2 (p)$	$\Delta R^2 (p)$
	.121	.038	.015(.000)	.011(.000)

According to regression analysis, which was conducted to find the role of forgiveness in life satisfaction, forgiveness was found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Forgiveness only accounted for 1% of the variance in life satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .011$ ,  $F = 4.344$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In regard to the beta coefficients, a positive correlation was found between forgiveness and life satisfaction ( $\beta = .121$ ,  $t = 2.084$ ,  $p = .038$ ). The results indicated that *life satisfaction* increased as *forgiveness* increased. These findings support the research hypothesis that there is positive relationship between life satisfaction and forgiveness ( $H5$ ).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to examine the relationship between religiosity, forgiveness, and life satisfaction within the sample of university students. Moreover,

the aim was to discern the role of religion and country in students' religiosity, forgiveness, and life satisfaction. The questions of "What is the role of religiosity in forgiveness?" and "How do forgiveness and religiosity promote life satisfaction?" were answered through a comparison study which was carried out on Muslim samples from Turkey and Jordan.

The findings showed no statistically significant relationship to exist between gender and religiosity. This finding did not support the hypothesis regarding the relationship between gender and religiosity (*H1*). This finding was also not consistent with other studies which had been conducted on different samples. On the contrary, various studies have shown a statistically significant relationship to exist between gender and religiosity. Most studies on forgiveness have indicated that females score higher in religiosity than males (Ayten, 2010; el-Mehârib, 2003; Hucâr & Abdulkerim, 2006; Yapıcı, 2007; Walter & Davie, 1998).

The findings from this study indicated that males recorded higher scores in the forgiveness sub-dimension of *vengeance* than females. This showed that female students were more likely to forgive than males. This finding also shows consistency with some other studies. For instance, Miller, Worthington, and McDaniel (2008) examined 70 studies investigating the link between gender and forgiveness and found that females had a higher inclination towards forgiveness than males.

According to the current findings, females scored higher in life satisfaction than males. This finding is consistent with some studies (e.g., Ayten, 2012; Patel, Ramgoon, & Paruk, 2009), while inconsistent with other studies (Abdel-Khalek & al-Nayal, 2015; Ayten & Gashi, 2012; Idemudia & Mahri, 2011; Hamîse, 2013).

This study hypothesized that no difference exists between Turkish and Jordanian students in terms of inclination towards forgiveness, life satisfaction, or subjective religiosity due to their similar cultural and religious backgrounds (*H2*). However, Turkish students had higher scores in forgiveness than their Jordanian counterparts. Many previous comparison studies have shown that cultural differences play a role in forgiveness and life satisfaction (Ayten & Gashi, 2012; Bagnulo, Munoz-Sastre, & Mullet, 2009; Devsîrf, 201; Munoz-Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, & Mullet, 2003). Although Krause (2012), has documented both significant and non significant differences on forgiveness levels with respect to ethnic identity; and Paz, Neto, and Mullet (2008) study has shown no significant differentiation with respect to ethnicity.

Depending on the current findings or the findings from other studies, one could conclude that (a) intensity and forms of forgiveness might change according to race and culture, or (b) differences between collectivist and individualistic societies are not always valid as far as life satisfaction and forgiveness.

Many previous studies have shown a positive relationship to exist between religiosity and forgiveness (Ayten, 2009; Escher, 2013; Lutjen, Silton, & Flannelly, 2012; Uysal, 2015). Similarly, the findings of the current study have demonstrated a statistically significant relationship to exist between religiosity and interpersonal forgiveness.

Religiosity and forgiveness was hypothesized to have positive effects on life satisfaction (H3 and H5). Supporting these hypotheses, the findings showed that religiosity and forgiveness relate positively to life satisfaction. These findings were consistent with many other findings obtained from previous studies (Ayten, 2014; Ayten & Gashi, 2012; Egan & Todorov, 2009; Ismail & Desmukh, 2012; Macaskill, 2012; Suhail & Chaudry, 2004; Toussaint & Friedman, 2009; Webb, Dula, & Brewer, 2012).

The current study was the first unique comparison study on the relationship between religiosity, forgiveness, and life satisfaction using two Muslim samples from Turkey and Jordan. Hence, it had a number of limitations. The first limitation was in regard to the way the sample was constituted. It did not represent all age groups and was limited to university students. It might be beneficial in the future to extend the sample to wider groups. The second limitation was in regard to measurement. In order to assess participants' religiosity, a one-item questionnaire was used. It might be quite useful to measure religious inclinations of samples with an Islamic Religiosity Scale consisting of various questions and dimensions.

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