Moderating Role of Social Connectedness on Forgiveness and Subjective Happiness Among Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the moderating role of social connectedness on forgiveness and subjective happiness among adults. The population selected for this study was the public universities located in the Multan district and the sample size was consisted of 300 adults ranging the age of 18-40 years were chosen by using simple random technique. The correlational research design was used to conduct this study. The revised version of Social Connectedness Scale of the Lee and Robbins (1995) developed by Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001) with 20 items, Heartland Forgiveness Scale which was proposed by the Thompson and Synder (2003) with 18 items, and the Subjective Happiness Scale measured by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) with 4 items were used as assessing tools for this study. Further, SPSS has used to compute and analyze the data, and bivariate correlation, linear regression analysis, normality test, standard deviation and was used to analyze the data used in current study. Moreover, the results of the current study indicated a positive effect of forgiveness on subjective happiness among adults. However, there was a significant positive correlation between forgiveness and social connectedness as well as between subjective happiness and social connectedness among adults. The results also revealed a moderating effect of social connectedness on forgiveness and subjective happiness and there was no any variation in terms of gender for variables such as subjective happiness and social connectedness indicated in the results. However, the results proved females to be more forgiving than males as the p-value found was smaller than 0.001***. Thus, current study has beneficial implications in terms of a better life and in positive psychology.

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1.   Introduction

Positive psychology is related to positivity, positive emotions and feelings, positive traits and characteristics that assist in creating productive social relationships and developing social institutes for individuals (Lopez & Snyder, 2009). Positive psychologists have worked for individuals to strive for a betterment of life, as it is positive psychology that help people think positively about everything, even to the traumatic events. It is positive approach of a person

that make him get up again after a failure or a rejection in life. Indeed, an individual cannot spend a happy life if he has a negative mind-set or negative approach towards life (Seligman, 2012). Human beings feel contentment in their lives if they experience happiness and satisfaction in life and also to the extent they rate their happiness (Rojas & Veenhoven, 2013). However, Caprara et al. (2016) stated that the positive psychology deals with everything that is linked to positivity in life.

Human beings are born with the innate needs to be socially connected and loved by others, it is in their instincts to make social bonds that are mutually beneficial and stay close to people as it is necessary for their survival (Seppala, Rossomando, & Doty, 2013). They instinctively want to feel loved, connected, trust and attached to people Social connection is an attribute of the self that help individuals indulged into interpersonal relationships and interact with society and make them able to create social bonds or relationships productively (May, 2013). Social connection is significant in psychology because if this attribute is missing, it will lead to social isolation and can cause psychological problems for people (Holt-Lunstad, Robles, & Sbarra, 2017; Inagaki, Hazlett, & Andreescu, 2020).

According to Lee and Robbins (1998), social connectedness is a cognitive concept of being in social relationships that provide individual to function properly in long lasting relationships (Savci & Aysan, 2019). Baldwin (1992) defined social connectedness as a "cognitive structure representing regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness" (Cohen & Semple, 2010). Social connectedness is necessary for social wellbeing as it enhances the effective functioning in social community and interpersonal relationships in society (Sedikides et al., 2016). Being connected with other people is considered as an instinctive need for human beings because it is a source of psychological and physical health (Chien et al., 2021; Seppala et al., 2013).

Enright (2001) stated that forgiveness is considered a virtue as it makes a person learn and practice compassion, kindness, love, generosity and mercy for others, even for those who have hurt him in one way or another. When a person who has suffered a loss and a harm and has got every right to be angry or punish the offender, instead of punishing, let him go out of mercy and compassion, that feeling of forgiveness helps him to be a better person (Del Rizzo, 2020). According to Enright (2001), forgiveness is not limited to a simple definition rather it is a process which involves the whole mechanism of feelings, emotions and cognitions involved in it. Forgiveness involves various aspects of human feelings, as negative feelings for the person who has done any harm to the other are converted into positive feelings, letting go all the loss and forgive him (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington Jr, 2014).

Happiness is an emotion that plays a major part in psychological and subjective wellbeing. It is a state of mind that leads towards a better and improved mental health. As a happy person, there are more chances to have positivistic approach towards different areas of life (Alkozei, Smith, & Killgore, 2018; Hao, Shah, Nawazb, Barkat, & Souhail, 2020). Happiness is not limited to emotions only but it also helps to improve thinking patterns of a person and perceptions of life (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013). According to the researchers, happiness has many aspects and concepts which are based upon one's satisfaction with life, satisfaction with one's own self and a positive mind-set towards positive emotions rather than negative ones. By considering all these aspects, positive psychology researchers have assessed psychological wellbeing of an individual (Auyeung & Mo, 2019; Bolier et al., 2013; Haktanir, Lenz, Can, & Watson, 2016; Hendriks, Schotanus-Dijkstra, Hassankhan, De Jong, & Bohlmeijer, 2020; Jianjun et al., 2021; Tejada-Gallardo, Blasco-Belled, Torrelles-Nadal, & Alsinet, 2020; Yurayat & Seechaliao, 2021). Happiness is considered as an important component of subjective wellbeing (SWB) (DiMaria, Peroni, & Sarracino, 2020; Helliwell, 2020). In psychology, subjective wellbeing is considered as an individual's belief whether his/her life is fulfilling and useful or not (Bian, Zhang, Yang, Guo, & Lei, 2015).

S. A. Satici, Uysal, and Deniz (2016) conducted a study on the link between social connectedness and loneliness with the mediating role of subjective happiness. About 325 university students studying in the Turkey universities was the respondents for this study. The loneliness scale, social connectedness scale and subjective happiness scale were used to collect the data through questionnaires. SEM techniques was used to analyze the results of their study revealed that there is a direct and positive relationship between the social connectedness and subjective happiness while the subjective happiness has a direct and negative relationship with the loneliness. Furthermore, subjective happiness as a mediator has linked between the loneliness and social connectedness.

A study conducted by Alam, Rafique, and Anjum (2016) aimed to understand that the "narcissistic tendencies, forgiveness and empathy are the predictors of social connectedness among the universities students of Lahore". The sample of this study was consisted on 280 students studying in the different universities located in Lahore. The results of the study showed that narcissism is a significant negative predictor of social connectedness and forgiveness of others and empathy has positively predicted the social connectedness. Further, social connectedness and empathy had not moderated by the narcissism and also between the social connectedness and forgiveness. The findings of the study revealed that universities administrators and guiders can assist the students for building the social capital with the help of forgiveness and empathy and they can also help the students for learning the management strategies of narcissistic tendencies to increase the social interaction.

The study of B. Satici (2020) have explored the relationship between coping humor and subjective happiness with the mediating role of forgiveness and belongingness. The study used a sample of undergraduates to test a mediation-based model of cross-sectional association of coping humor with subjective happiness mediated by the forgiveness and belongingness. The sample of this study was consisted of 306 legitimate participants ranging in age group of 18 to 26 who completed questionnaire by assessing the belongingness, coping humor, forgiveness, and subjective happiness and the bootstrapping method was used for the mediation analysis. The results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the belongingness, coping humor, forgiveness, and subjective happiness. Moreover, the results of the mediation analysis indicated that coping humor had a linked with higher level of belonginess which was associated with the forgiveness and the more subjective happiness. However, coping behavior had indirect relationship with more subjective happiness with the forgiveness and belongingness.

The study conducted by Yelpaze, Deniz, and Satici (2021) have examined the mediating role of psychological vulnerability on the relationship between social connectedness and well-being among the students of universities located in Turkey. The study was quantitative in nature and 261 students were surveyed for the data collection through questionnaire. this research has used the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique and bootstrapping for analyzing the results which showed that social connectedness has a direct effect on well-being, partially mediated by psychological vulnerability. The results further showed that there is indirect and yet significant effect of moderating role of psychological vulnerability on the relationship between social connectedness and well-being.

The aim of my study was to find out how forgiveness affects subjective happiness among adults. Though different researchers have conducted studies by using various variables in positive psychology regarding positive emotions, satisfaction in relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Ouweneel, Le Blanc, & Schaufeli, 2013; Sanchez & Vazquez, 2014) and life satisfaction (Ruvalcaba-Romero, Fernández-Berrocal, Salazar-Estrada, & Gallegos-Guajardo, 2017; Tong, Zhu, & Lo, 2019). Furthermore, Maltby, Day, and Barber (2005) suggested that forgiveness is an emerging variable in field of positive psychology because it strengthens the positive emotions making life happier and enhancing humans' capabilities to build stronger social connections in society (Booker & Dunsmore, 2016).

This study is conducted in the context of Pakistan to see how forgiveness has effect on subjective happiness, however, differences regarding gender are also considered in this study. Although there are also evidences available regarding the research conducted on the forgiveness and subjective happiness in different cultural context but in the Pakistani context, there are very few studies conducted to analyze the effects of forgiveness on subjective happiness. Moreover, it has proposed that forgiveness is basic tool for developing one of the essential positive emotions such as happiness (Chaudhary & Chaudhary, 2014). As happiness is a positive emotion which leads towards the betterment of life (Sanchez & Vazquez, 2014). Forgiveness is considered to be a significant factor in positive psychology that helps in living a happy, blissful life (Singh & Sharma, 2018).

2.   Research Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature and the data for conducting this study was collected by using the questionnaire consisting on the items of each variable that were being used in this study. SPSS has used to compute and analyze the data, and bivariate correlation, linear regression analysis, normality test, standard deviation and was used to analyze the data used in current study.

2.1.   Population and Sample

The sample was collected from the adult population of age ranging from 18-40 years from two universities located in the Multan district (one public; Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan and the other private; Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan). The sample of the study was consisted of 300 adults who were educated participants and it was equally distributed among males and females. Simple random sampling technique was used for gathering the data from respondents.

2.2.   Research Instruments
2.2.1. Social Connectedness Scale (SCS)

This scale was firstly developed by the Lee and Robbins (1995) and further revised by Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001). It is consisted on total 20 items and it is 6-point Likert scale which represents 1=Strongly Disagree and 6=Strongly Agree. The reliability of this scale is 0.91. the reverse scoring of this scale is 3,6,7,9,11,13,15,17,18,20.

2.2.2. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

This scale was proposed by the Thompson and Synder (2003) which consisted on total 18 items and it has three sub-dimensions; forgiveness of others, forgiveness of self, and forgiveness of situations. This scale is 7-points Likert scale which represents "1=Almost Always False of Me" and the "7=Almost True of Me".

2.2.3. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

This scale consisted on total 4 items and it was developed by the Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999), to measures the subjective happiness. It is 7-point Likert scale which indicates that the Item 1 evaluates the degree in which the "individual thinks they are happy" (1=Not a Very Happy Person to 7=A Very Happy Person). Item 2 evaluates "how happy a person feels compared to others" (from 1=Less Happy to 7=Happier). Items 3 and 4 measure the degree in which the "Individual is usually very happy or not very happy" (1= Not at all to 7= A Great Deal).

2.3.   Research Procedure

The data was collected by giving questionnaires to respondents of the relevant population and the data was taken with formal consent of the subjects by briefly telling them about the purpose of this study. The confidentiality of given data given was assured and the questionnaires were distributed to 150 males and 150 females according to age criteria mentioned in the research. After getting all questionnaires filled, statistical analysis was applied.

3.   Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates the regression analysis of forgiveness on subjective happiness. As the p value is smaller than 0.001 proving that forgiveness has a positive effect on subjective happiness among adults.

Table 1
Regression Analysis showing effect of Forgiveness on Subjective Happiness among Adults

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P
(Constant)	5.587	1.22		4.550	.000***
Forgiveness	.144	.016	.467	0.109	.000***

Note: R = .467, Adjusted R square = .215, F = 82.96, df = 1, P < 0.001***

Table 2
Bivariate Correlation between Subjective Happiness, Forgiveness and Social Connectedness among Adults

	Subjective Happiness	Forgiveness	Social Connectedness
Subjective Happiness	1	.467**	.533*
Forgiveness	.467**	1	.536**
Social Connectedness	.533**	.536**	1

Note: P < 0.001**

Table 2 shows the bivariate correlation between subjective happiness, forgiveness and social connectedness among adults. As the p value is proved lower than 0.001 showing a significant positive correlation among variables.

Table 3
Normality Test of Subjective Happiness, Forgiveness and Social Connectedness among Adults

Scales	Normality Test	Statistic	Std. Error	Calculated Value	P
Subjective Happiness	Skewness	.156	.141	1.1	-.007**
	Kurtosis	-.208	.281	-0.4	
Forgiveness	Skewness	-.166	.141	-1.8	0.12**
	Kurtosis	.968	.281	3.4	
Social Connectedness	Skewness	-.205	.141	-1.4	.032**
	Kurtosis	-.306	.281	-1.0	

Note: P < 0.000***, P = < 0.001**, p> (n.s.) C.V < 1.96, -1.96

Normality test of subjective happiness, forgiveness and social connectedness is applied in above mentioned Table 3. It has indicated that subjective happiness, forgiveness and social connectedness have significant values of 0.001** and calculative values lies between the range of 1.96 to -1.96.

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations and t-values of Gender on the Subjective Happiness, Forgiveness and Social Connectedness among Adults

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	P	Cohens'd
Subjective Happiness	Male	150	16.53	3.465	-.509	.611	0.058757
	Female	150	16.75	4.004			
Forgiveness	Male	150	74.08	11.004	-3.826	-3.826	0.441479
	Female	150	79.31	12.633			
Social Connectedness	Male	150	76.11	12.016	1.209	1.209	0.140117
	Female	150	74.33	13.356			

Note: df = 298, P < 0.000***, P > (n.s.)

Table 4 shoes that there is no variation in terms of gender among the variables i.e., subjective happiness and social connectedness. As findings have shown the results that are not significant. While forgiveness has shown a significant value in terms of gender as the outcomes have shown that females are more forgiving as compared to males. As the p value found is smaller than 0.001***.

Figure 1: *Graphical representation of subjective happiness, forgiveness and social connectedness on the basis of gender among adults (N=300)*
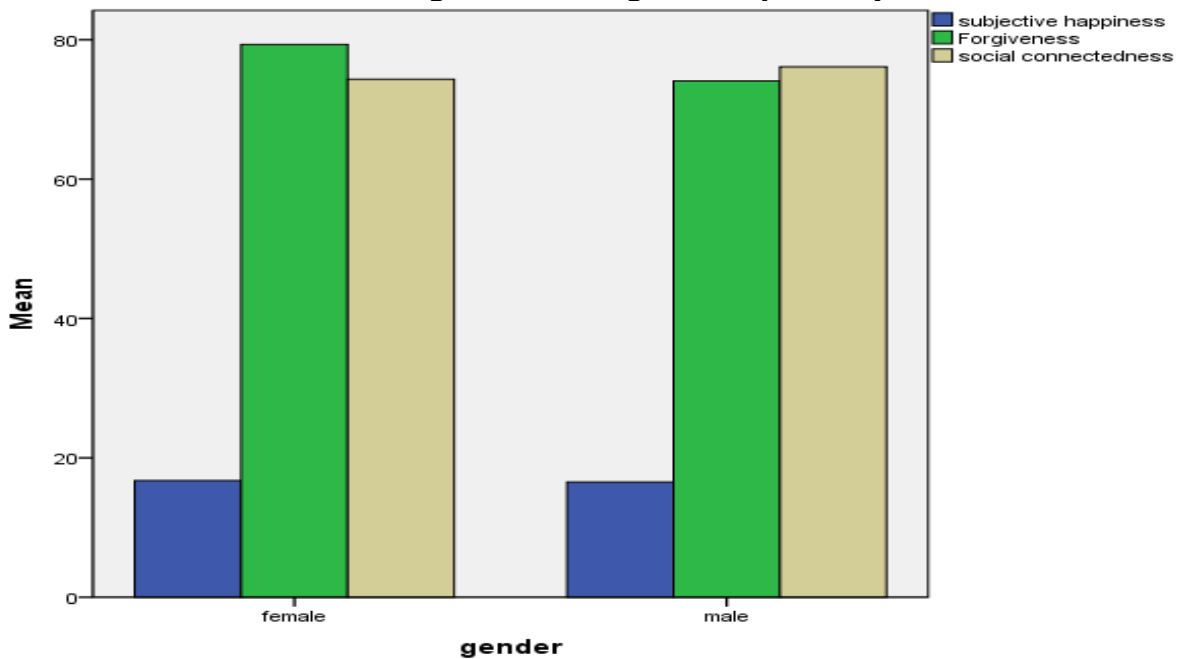
The aim of current research was to analyze the variables in perspectives of positive psychology as positive psychology is leading our lives in a more productive direction through every field of life. Therefore, purpose of this study is to introduce various aspects that can be used in positive psychology and assist in living a fruitful and healthy life with a positive mind set. According to the first hypothesis that forgiveness has a positive effect on subjective happiness, results have proved that forgiveness has a strong and positive impact on subjective happiness. It has also been evidenced in past studies that there is a positive relationship between both variables, forgiveness and subjective happiness such as (Batik, Bingöl, Kodaz, & Hosoglu, 2017; Eldeleklioğlu, 2015). However, previous studies have supported this hypothesis in such a manner that forgiving others is a source of increase in positive thinking patterns in an individual's life that ultimately makes him happier than those who are less forgiving. Additionally, an individual who has significant interpersonal relationships and he practices forgiveness in his life, it will bring satisfaction as an outcome, that will make him contented. This is the reason both variables have showed positive correlation between them (B. Satici, 2020).

The results have also examined the second hypothesis as a positive relationship between forgiveness and social connectedness was found (Alam et al., 2016). As it is seen that people who are socially connected to other individuals tend to let go others' mistakes and accept them anyway, which helps them to be more successful in their relationships and increase their emotional satisfaction and keep them happier as close relationships become a source of letting go of negative feelings. The findings of this study revealed that forgiveness is not only the foundation of a happy life but it is also a root of satisfaction in relationships.

The results of third hypothesis proposed that there would be a positive correlation between subjective happiness and social connectedness and have proved that there is a significant association between variables. Previous researches have also evidenced a positive relationship between subjective happiness and social connectedness (Diener & Ryan, 2009; S. A. Satici et al., 2016). As close social or interpersonal relationships in a society with a strong sense of social connectedness also fulfil needs of affiliation that ultimately become a source of satisfaction and a person feels happy and contended. Moreover, past findings have concluded that less socially connected people are more prone and vulnerable as chances of being isolated, anxious and depressed are increased in them (Golden et al., 2009). Consequently, a stronger link is present between subjective happiness and social connectedness.

After examining the relationship among variables and analyzing the effect of social connectedness on subjective happiness and forgiveness, it was found that social connectedness has a significant positive effect on subjective happiness as well as on forgiveness in adults' population. Previous findings have shown that social connectedness and forgiveness are positively linked (Alam et al., 2016), as it was concluded that people with higher sense of social connection do not keep bad feelings for their relationships and forgive for maintaining healthy and strong relationships. Previous researchers who have mentioned that social connectedness and forgiveness are interrelated as forgiveness serve as a basic solution for people after a dispute to maintain and continue any relationship in their lives (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008).

As the fourth hypothesis was proposed that females would have higher level of forgiveness as compared to males. By examining and analyzing the results, it was proved that forgiveness has shown a significant variation regarding gender as current findings have shown that females tend to forgive more quickly and tend to forgive others as compared to males. This finding is also supported by the outcomes of a study that had been made in past that males are more revengeful whereas females practice compassion in their relationships that is why they forgive after a conflict, as findings have also shown that after a dispute, male members go for revenge in a relationship and females go for ways to solve the complications and work for repairing a close relationship.

Fifth hypothesis was proposed that females would be more socially connected as compared to males which was not supported when results were analyzed and examined and no variation in social connectedness was found regarding gender. Social connectedness is an interpersonal experience and there is no variation in results of males and females when compared on social connectedness because men and women both have different and a variety of experiences when they move in a society and on that they develop sense of connection to society and other people.

The analysis examined the sixth hypothesis that females would be happier than males but results have shown contradicting outcomes to proposed hypothesis as it was found that there is no significant difference in terms of gender. Previously a study has also supported that there is no variation or difference on the level of subjective happiness may it be females or males and it has been seen that these results are also consistent with the current hypothesis as well (Rasmussen & Laumann, 2014). Additionally, another research has also given evidence that subjective happiness is indifferent to gender. As subjective happiness is an emotion and it can

be related to personal characteristics and other variables like personality traits on which it might show different outcomes but in current research no gender variation has been found on subjective happiness.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the mediating role of social connectedness on forgiveness and subjective happiness. The results gathered from this study have shown that forgiveness have a positive relationship and positive effects on person's inner feelings that are related to his/her happiness. So, people with more forgiving nature would be able to spend a happy life. Moreover, the outcomes of this study have also shown that social connectedness has a really significant importance in one's life as it helps people to be more socially involved which keep them away from getting isolated. As the data was taken from adult population, so the results are also from general population which are really helpful to adopt these important ways that are valuable in positive psychology. The results have further shown that females practice forgiveness more as compared to males, the reason might be their compassionate and sympathetic nature as females are considered to be more protective towards maintaining their relationships which help them to forgive. Furthermore, results in current study have shown no variation regarding gender on basis of subjective happiness as well as social connectedness as both variables work equally for males and females.

4.1. Implications

This research is conducted on the role of social connectedness on forgiveness and subjective happiness. According to the results of the study which are discussed above, the university campuses should be arranged in a way in which students are able to socialize and interact with each other and thereby, a sense of forgiveness can be created among the students. In this regard, students counseling centers in universities can play a significant role in making these activities to be systematical and effective for the students which will in turn contribute to subjective happiness.

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