Exploring the Association among Social Cognition, Forgiveness and Dispositional Mindfulness of Young Adults

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Abstract

Background: Social cognition is key to both forgiveness and mindfulness. Forgiveness requires perspective-taking, seeing the situation from the offender's viewpoint. Mindfulness, through awareness of our own biases, helps us detach from negative emotions and cultivate compassion, both crucial for letting go of resentment.

Purpose: The aim of the present study was to explore the nature of the association between social cognition and forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness, while also investigating the gender difference and difference among students who stay at home and away from home in terms of social cognition, forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness.

Methods: A descriptive survey research design was used with convenient sampling. A total of 120 young adults were selected in this study. Five psychological tools were used for the current study. Descriptive statistics for all the variables and for all groups, spearman rank correlation to identify the association among variables, the Mann-Whitney U test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to compare groups.

Results and Conclusion: The result indicates a positive association among empathy and forgiveness, attribution style for positive events and forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness, whereas a negative association between difficulty in emotional regulations and dispositional mindfulness has also been noticed, and attribution style for negative events and forgiveness is negatively associated. Gender differences in forgiveness, perceived distress, emotional regulation, and global-specific attribution styles for positive events have been found, and differences in perceived distress and global-specific attribution styles for negative events have also been seen among students staying at home and hostels.

Keywords: Forgiveness; Dispositional Mindfulness; Empathy; Emotional Regulation; Attribution Style; Young Adults

Abbreviations

HFS: Heartland Forgiveness Scale; MAAS: Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; IRI: Interpersonal Reactivity Index; DERS: Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; ASQ: Attributional Style Questionnaire; SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences; FS: Forgiveness of Self; FO: Forgiveness of Others; FSN: Forgiveness of Situations; DM: Dispositional Mindfulness; PT: Perspective Taking; FS1: Fantasy; EC: Empathetic Concern; PD: Perceived Distress; ER: Emotional Regulation; PIE: Internal-External Attribution Style for Positive Events; PSUS: Stable Unstable Attribution Style for

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Positive Events; PGS: Global-Specific Attribution.

Introduction

Social cognition refers to the different psychological processes that influence how people process, interpret, and respond to social signals. It's about processing and interpreting the social information in order to respond and make decisions. The term 'empathy' was coined over one hundred years ago by Titchener, an adaptation of the German word Einfühlung and is used to describe a wide range of experiences. Emotion researchers generally define empathy as the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. According to Daniel Goleman "Empathy is the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. It is the ability to understand others' perspectives and to use that understanding to guide our actions."

Emotion regulation is the process of monitoring, evaluating, and modulating emotions to achieve goals [1]. It is a functional aspect of our emotions, providing information about our environment and motivating behaviors to adapt to situational demands [2].

However, difficulties in emotion regulation can interfere with adaptation and lead to negative outcomes. According to various studies, emotional regulation issues are linked to specific hallmark mechanisms in mental disorders. These include eating disorders, schizophrenic outbreaks [3], personality disorders [4,5], anxiety and depression [6], additions [7], eating behavior issues and more [8-10].

Attribution, a concept within psychology, focuses on individuals' interpretations of the causes behind their everyday experiences, discerning whether these causes are external or internal in nature. This framework investigates the mental processes that go into giving explanations for occurrences and how they affect perception and action. The theory of attribution refers to the models used to describe this process.

External attribution, also known as situational attribution, involves interpreting someone's behavior as influenced by their environment. For instance, if a car tire punctures, attributing it to a road pothole helps make sense of the event without discomfort from the possibility of one's own driving causing it.

Internal attribution, also known as dispositional attribution, involves attributing the cause of behavior to internal characteristics such as personality, likability, or motivation rather than external factors. This concept intersects with the locus of control, where individuals perceive themselves as personally responsible for all occurrences in their lives.

Forgiveness is a process through which negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors towards a transgressor are replaced with positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors [11]. According to McCullough & Worthington [12], "Forgiveness is a set of psychological changes through which the victim becomes less and less motivated to get revenge. He feels more and more motivated to make peace. Forgiveness is a complex affective, cognitive, and behavioral phenomenon."

There are few types of forgiveness, such as self-forgiveness, which involves letting go of negative emotions tied to past wrongs, such as guilt, regret, or shame, without plagiarizing existing content. Interpersonal forgiveness is a profound and often challenging process that involves letting go of feelings of resentment, anger, or the desire for revenge towards someone who has wronged you. Situational forgiveness refers to the act of forgiving someone for a specific incident or offense. It's a response to a particular situation rather than a general disposition.

Previous research studies examined the relationship among forgiveness and empathy, indicating the association between empathy and forgiveness varied based on gender; specifically, empathy played a more significant role in forgiveness for men [13,14]. Another study done by Barbara et al. found that female students reported experiencing greater emotional empathy compared to their male counterparts; empathy also played a significant role in predicting forgiveness towards others.

A study by Dwi Ayu Aprilia H. Fuad Nashori aims to determine the relationship between emotion regulation and empathy with forgiveness in victims of bullying. The results showed there is a simultaneous influence of emotion regulation and empathy on forgiveness, and there is a relationship between emotion regulation and empathy with forgiveness in victims of bullying. Investigating antecedents of forgiveness, empirical studies and theoretical models propose that attributions influence forgiveness [15].

Mindfulness is the cognitive ability to maintain meta-attention to one's thoughts in the present moment. It is typically gained through meditation. The idea of mindfulness was first a component of a larger philosophical and spiritual framework that was connected to Buddhism. Research into the effectiveness of mindfulness in education shows that it improves learning and grades [16,17], Emotional intelligence [18], self-efficacy [18] creativity [19], empathy [20], learning and grades [16,17], well-being [21] and emotion regulation and cognitive control [22]. However, mindfulness decreased anxiety [20].

Mindfulness is characterized as both a state and a trait. State mindfulness occurring in meditation and trait mindfulness being a person's predisposition to be mindful daily. Dispositional mindfulness is a crucial personality trait referring to the ability to pay attention to present-moment experiences with an open, non-judgmental attitude. [23]. Research indicates that trait mindfulness is a significant factor in differential intervention effects, particularly in measures of psychological health and cognitive function. Research shows that trait mindfulness can influence the cognitive outcomes of meditation-based interventions. Positive correlations have been found between trait mindfulness and task performance in different cognitive control tasks [24]. However, different facets of trait mindfulness are uniquely related to specific aspects of cognitive function. For example, individuals with high levels of observing have better visual working-memory performance, while those high in non-reactivity show greater cognitive control flexibility [25].

Daniel, et al. investigated the relationship between mindfulness and social cognition and found that mindfulness is associated with enhanced social cognition. The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire factors of observing and describing significantly mediated the relationship between mindfulness practice and empathy are revealed in a study done by Raquel, et al. Dispositional mindfulness facets were positively associated with perspective-taking and empathy and negatively associated with personal distress, as also revealed in a study done by Stefano, et al.

A study done by Karen, et al. examines the interplay between attachment security, emotion regulation, and dispositional mindfulness in 192 participants without prior mindfulness training. The result confirms the relationship between emotional regulation, attachment security, and dispositional mindfulness. The role of emotional regulation as a potential mechanism underlying the stress-reducing capacity of dispositional mindfulness across different age groups was also found by Ruchika, et al.

A study conducted by Jonathan Gene Kimmes investigates the relationship between attachment, trait mindfulness, and attributions among 542 young adults in romantic relationships. Path analysis revealed direct effects, with membership in the High Mindfulness and Non-judgmentally Aware classes associated with more benign attributions compared to the Low Mindfulness class. Additionally, indirect effects were observed, such as attachment anxiety being inversely linked with membership in the non-judgmentally aware class, which in turn related to benign attributions. Similarly, avoidant attachment decreased the probability of High Mindfulness class membership, subsequently reducing benign attributions.

The period of 18 to 25 years, known as emerging adulthood, is characterized by a balance between newfound independence and lingering reliance on parental support. They demonstrate advanced cognitive abilities, including critical thinking and abstract reasoning, which influence their decision-making processes. Socially, students form diverse peer networks and romantic relationships, where conflict resolution and forgiveness play significant roles in maintaining social bonds and emotional well-being.

Social cognition is a mental tool used to understand and navigate our social world. It involves empathy, emotional regulation, and attribution style, these concepts of social cognition help build strong and healthy relationships in social settings. Social cognition is key to both forgiveness and mindfulness. Forgiveness requires perspective-taking, seeing the situation from the offender's viewpoint. Mindfulness, through awareness of our own biases, helps us detach from negative emotions and cultivate compassion, both crucial for letting go of resentment.

Therefore, the objectives of the study were to examine
- The nature of the association between social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, and attribution style) and forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness
- Whether or not social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, attribution style), forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness vary among both genders
- Whether or not students stay at home and students stay at hostel/PG will differ significantly in terms of social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, attribution style), forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness.

Research Hypothesis

Hypotheses 1: There will be a significant association between social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, and attribution style) and forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness.
Hypotheses 2: There will be a significant effect of gender on social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, attribution style), forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness.
Hypotheses 3: Students staying at home and students staying at hostel/PG will differ significantly in terms of social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation, attribution style), forgiveness, and dispositional mindfulness.

Methods

Sample

In the present study, a total of 120 (40 male and 80 female) young students whose age range varies from 18 to 24 years are students and recited in the region of Purulia and Bankura

district of West Bengal, India. The convenient sampling method was used with some exclusion criteria, like any other occupation than students, the presence of any physical or psychological illness, belonging to any urban residency, or coming from a high SES group.

Tools used

1. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is a self-report measure of dispositional forgiveness. The HFS is an 18-item measure that is composed of three, six-item sub scales for the measurement of forgiveness of self, others, and situations. Cronbach coefficient: 0.92. Additionally.
2. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) [23] consists of 15 items, including a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never). The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, and test-retest reliability of MAAS were respectively 0.76 and 0.69.
3. Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) is composed of four different aspects of empathy, i.e., perspective-taking, empathetic concern, personal distress, and fantasy. It consists of 28 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Does not describe me well" to "Describes me very well." The IRI typically shows good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from around 70 to 80.
4. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale—16-iitem version (DERS-16) is a self-report measure that assesses individuals' typical levels of difficulties in emotion regulation. DERS-16 demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =.92) [6].
5. The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) typically includes statements or scenarios that measure attribution tendencies along key dimensions such as internal/external, stable/unstable, and global/specific. The internal reliability of the ASQ-S was good ($\alpha > 0.7$). The test-retest correlations were significant but failed to reach the 0.7 set. The congruent validity of the ASQ-S was established relative to the comparisons.

Procedure

After conducting a thorough literature review on forgiveness, dispositional mindfulness, and social cognition, we have identified specific study objectives and formulated key research goals. In order to assess these objectives, we chose to focus on young adults in the Purulia and Bankura districts. A total of 120 students were selected using convenience sampling methods, and we utilized five standardized psychological tools to gather relevant data. Following data collection, the data were tabulated and further analyzed using SPSS to test the formulated hypotheses. The results of this analysis were then used as the basis for further discussion and drawing of conclusions.

Analysis of Data

Name of the software: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), also known as IBM SPSS Statistics.
1. Descriptive Statistics (Mean & SD)
2. Test of normality (Shapiro-Wilk Test)
3. Spearman rank correlation
4. Inferential Statistics (Mann-Whitney U Test & Kruskal-Wallis Test)

Results

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	W	p
FS	120	26.3833	4.85622	14	37	0.978	0.046
FO	120	26.1583	5.46186	13	42	0.988	0.372
FSN	120	26.2083	5.34349	17	48	0.92	0
DM	120	3.869	0.8547	2.3	6	0.95	0
PT	120	16.9667	3.77727	9	27	0.959	0.001
FS1	120	16.8083	4.43874	8	28	0.975	0.024
EC	120	17.325	4.49493	2	28	0.975	0.023
PD	120	15.4	3.89225	2	24	0.976	0.029
ER	120	2.7225	0.76174	1	6	0.961	0.001
PIE	120	5.1633	1.23376	1.2	7	0.951	0
PSUS	120	5.0683	1.08077	1.8	7	0.978	0.044
PGS	120	5.0767	1.10543	2.2	7	0.973	0.017
NIE	120	4.05	1.09014	1	6.7	0.985	0.195

NSUS	120	4.0858	0.87113	2	6.5	0.984	0.16
NGS	120	4.2158	1.04455	1.2	6.5	0.982	0.117

Note, FS =Forgiveness of Self, FO = Forgiveness of others, FSN = Forgiveness of situations
DM= Dispositional Mindfulness, PT = Perspective Taking, FS1= Fantasy, EC= Empathetic concern, PD= Perceived Distress, ER= Emotional Regulation, PIE= Internal-external attribution style for positive events, PSUS= Stable-unstable attribution style for positive events, PGS= Global-specific attribution style for positive events. NIE = Internal-external attribution style for negative events, NSUS= Stable-unstable attribution style for negative events, NGS= Global-specific attribution style for negative events.
N= Sample size for sample data W= Shapiro-Wilk test Statistic, p= Significance level
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Shapiro-Wilk Test for normality for variables.

As the Shapiro-wilk test result indicates that in the present study the data is not normally distributed, therefore, in order to test the hypotheses, non-parametric statistics have been computed for rest of the analysis.

Hypotheses 1: There will be a significant association between social cognition (empathy, emotional regulation and attribution style) and forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness

Variables	FS	FO	FSN	DM
PT	.229*	0.095	0.112	-0.044
FS1	.250**	.286**	-0.06	-0.013
EC	.232*	.318**	-0.013	0.63
PD	0.055	-0.51	0.035	-0.001
ER	-0.107	0.062	-.187*	-.300**
PIE	-0.088	-0.031	.225*	.209**
PSUS	0.141	0.084	0.001	.230*
PGS	0.018	-0.052	-0.065	0.132
NIE	-.245**	-0.076	0.068	0.046
NSUS	0.036	-0.11	-0.108	-0.053
NGS	-0.117	-.224*	-.232*	-0.094

Table 2: Correlations among variables.

Therefore, H1 is partially accepted.
Hypotheses 2: There will be a significant effect of gender on social cognition (Empathy, Emotional Regulation, Attribution Style), Forgiveness and Dispositional Mindfulness.

Variable	U	z	p
FST	2063	2.579	0.01
DM	1829	1.277	0.202
PT	1683.5	0.467	0.547
FS	1630.5	0.17	0.865
EC	1378	-1.24	0.215
PD	1151.5	-2.507	0.012
ER	992.5	-3.388	0.001
PIE	1622.5	0.125	0.9
PSUS	2012	2.297	0.022

PGS	1236	-2.206	0.027
NIE	1387	-1.188	0.235
NSUS	1459.5	-0.784	0.433
NGS	1279.5	-1.788	0.074

Note, U= Mann-Whitney U statistic; z= standardized test statistic; p=significance level.
Table 3: Results of Mann-Whitney U test comparing Groups.

Therefore, H2 is partially accepted.

Hypotheses 3: Students stays at home and students stays at hostel/PG will differ significantly in terms of social cognition (Empathy, Emotional Regulation, Attributional Style), Forgiveness and Dispositional Mindfulness.

Variable	H	df	p
FST	0.541	1	0.462
DM	2.21	1	0.137
PT	0.167	1	0.683
FS	1.68	1	0.194
EC	0.728	1	0.394
PD	5.29	1	0.021
ER	0.234	1	0.629
PIE	0.242	1	0.622
PSUS	0.034	1	0.854
PGS	1.08	1	0.297
NIE	0.011	1	0.916
NSUS	4.76	1	0.029
NGS	0.154	1	0.695

Note, H= Kruskal-Wallis H statistic; df =degrees of freedom; p=significance level.
Table 4: Results of Kruskal-Wallis Test Comparing Groups.
Therefore, H3 is partially accepted.

Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the association between social cognition on forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness. Results were in the anticipated direction and supported the hypothesis that there is a significant association between social cognition and forgiveness and dispositional mindfulness.

The present study showed that components of empathy, i.e., perspective taking, fantasy, and emotional concern, are positively associated with forgiveness to self, whereas fantasy and emotional concern are significantly positively associated with forgiveness to others, which implies that participants reported a higher level of empathy (perspective taking, emotional concern, fantasy) and a higher level of forgiveness. This is consistent with the finding Liu Y, et al. [25] that perspective taking has a positive correlation with forgiveness to self and emotional concern has a positive correlation with forgiveness to others. A higher level of empathy was associated with an easier ability to forgive others for both men and women [26]. The results therefore suggested that empathy can play a key role in forgiveness and build a path toward reconciliation among young youth. By understanding others and forgiving ourselves and others, people can create stronger connections, improve their mental well-being, and navigate life's challenges with greater resilience.

This study also signified difficulties in emotion regulation are negatively associated with forgiveness in situations. Our finding aligns with previous studies, which indicated that difficulty in emotion regulation and self-regulatory strength depletion was negatively associated with the tendency to forgive. As self-regulatory strength and emotion regulation were significant predictors of forgiveness [27].

The present study finding pointed out that emotional regulation difficulties can create a significant hurdle in the path towards forgiveness. This is because of stronger negative emotions, impulsive reactions, and rumination. This study also signifies that the difficulty in emotion regulation is negatively associated with dispositional mindfulness.

The present study finding also supported the previous study MacDonald HZ, et al. [19] that indicated a higher level of dispositional mindfulness was associated with fewer difficulties with emotion regulation. There is a close relationship between emotional regulation and dispositional mindfulness; [29] adolescents with a balanced time profile have fewer emotional regulation difficulties and a higher level of dispositional mindfulness [29].

This study also signified that attributional style for negative events is negatively associated with forgiveness (forgiveness to self, forgiveness to others). The present study supports a previous finding Caler ME, et al. [23] that suggested that individuals with a more negative attributional style, particularly those who blame others excessively (external attributions), tend to forgive less readily; on the contrary,

individuals in the positive attribution condition displayed more ease of forgiveness than the negative attribution condition.

This present study also signifies that attributional style for positive events is positively associated with dispositional mindfulness. According to a study Daniel Campos, et al. the non-reactivity facet of mindfulness was the significant predictor of attributional style (intentional bias). The higher dispositional mindfulness demonstrated a lower hostile attributional style. The present study suggests that mindfulness equips people to be more aware of their attributions and make conscious choices about how they view positive events. This can lead to a more positive and empowered mindset.

The present study reveals that forgiveness in situations is higher in men than in women. That means the cultural norms and values play a significant role in shaping forgiveness behaviors, and these norms can differ significantly between genders within different cultures. The context of the situation such as the severity of the transgression, the relationship between the parties involved, and the perceived sincerity of the apology can greatly influence forgiveness, and these factors can interact differently with gender. The study done by Stephen M Kmiec examines the relationships among sex, empathy, and forgiveness, and another study by Loren Toussaint & Jon R Webb focuses on gender differences in empathy and forgiveness. In both studies, it is clarified that empathy played a more significant role in forgiveness for men, but this association was not observed in women.

The gender difference in perceived distress (the emotional and mental discomfort felt due to stress or adverse events) has also been found out in this study, which indicates that females tend to report higher levels of perceived distress compared to males. Females are generally more likely to express their emotions and seek help for distress, which can lead to higher reported levels. Women often juggle multiple roles, such as work, caregiving, and household responsibilities, which can increase stress. Females are often socialized to be more attuned to their emotions and the emotions of others, which can heighten their perception of distress. From the study conducted by Gupta K, et al. [13] discovered a notable gender difference in empathy among college students, with girls exhibiting higher empathy than boys.

The present study also signified that students staying at home and students staying at hostel/PG differ significantly in terms of perceived distress and stable-unstable attributional style for negative events. Students staying at home score slightly higher than the students staying at a hostel or mess, specifically in the NSUS (stable-unstable attributional style

for negative events) domain. This suggests that home-based students may possess more stable attributional styles when faced with negative academic events and often enjoy a more structured and supportive environment, which can contribute to better academic outcomes and better coping mechanisms. Hostel/Mess Students: Might face more distractions and less personal support, potentially impacting their academic performance. The present study proved the result of other studies. For example, the study done by Richard Haugen and Lund T, et al. [28] found that hostel and non-hostel students exhibit different global-specific attributional styles, with notable differences in their attribution styles for negative events.

And regarding the perceived distress (i.e., the stress or discomfort that an individual feels and recognizes in a situation), our study indicates that students living in hostels or messes tend to report lower levels of perceived distress compared to those living at home. This suggests that hostel/mess environments may provide better coping mechanisms or social support systems that help mitigate perceived distress. Hostel environment provides a sense of community and shared experience, which can be crucial for emotional well-being. Living with peers who are facing similar challenges can create a supportive network that alleviates stress. Whereas home-based students may face higher stress due to family expectations and isolation. Hostel/mess life encourages independence and the development of personal coping strategies. The need to manage one's own affairs and navigate a shared living environment can foster resilience. Home life may not provide the same level of independence, potentially leading to less developed coping mechanisms when dealing with academic and personal stressors [29-34].

In the study done by Sathya Mohan, et al. found that students living at home reported higher levels of perceived stress compared to those living in hostels. And study conducted by Priyanka Singh, et al. the study revealed the same: home-staying students had higher perceived stress levels due to environmental factors at home, contrasting with hostel students who reported stress related to academic pressure but had better social support networks.

Conclusion

It is found that young adults who are overly concerned with other feelings, have oversensitivity towards others, and have the ability to take someone else's perspective will influence their forgiveness of others as well as self-forgiveness. An individual's interpretation of the causes of positive events, either attributing them to internal factors (such as personal traits or abilities) or external factors (such as situational influences or luck), will influence forgiveness of situations and also influence dispositional mindfulness (DM) of a

person; empathy is positively associated with forgiveness to self and others, whereas difficulties in emotional regulation are negatively associated with forgiveness of situations and dispositional mindfulness (DM).

This current study signified that gender has a significant effect on forgiveness, perceived distress, emotional regulation, a stable-unstable attribution style for positive events, and a global-specific attribution style for positive events. And the students staying at home and students staying at hostel/PG differ significantly in terms of perceived distress and stable-unstable attribution style for negative events.

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