FORGIVENESS FOR ADOLESCENTS IN ORPHANAGES

Nur Laili Rohmah[1], Siti Khorriyatul Khotimahl[2], Lufiana Harnany Utami[3]

[123]Fakultas Psikologi dan Kesehatan, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya

Rohmahnurlaili7@gmail.com

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Abstract: This research aims to explore the process of forgiveness among adolescents live in orphanages. This research uses a qualitative case study design method to understand the experience of forgiveness among adolescents living in orphanages through their perspective in depth. The data collection method used was in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences regarding the forgiveness they experienced in facing various challenges in life in an orphanage environment. The result illustrates the complexity of the forgiveness process which involves not only pain management, but also emotional transformation that allows individuals to release anger and trauma, moving towards inner peace and psychological healing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Every individual experiences stages of growth and development, one of which is adolescence. The term adolescence *refers* to the process of becoming an adult. This period is considered crucial because it is a transitional period connecting childhood and adulthood. Generally, adolescence begins between the ages of 10 and 13 and ends between the ages of 18 and 22. Optimal adolescent development occurs when parents provide guidance. The role of parents in providing guidance and direction significantly influences adolescents' ability to position themselves within society as responsible, prosperous individuals, and prepared to become the nation's future leaders. However, many adolescents still lack a harmonious relationship with their parents.

Teenagers are often forced to live in orphanages due to various circumstances, such as the death of a parent, family financial constraints,

separation from their parents, or unresolved family disputes. There are more than 163 million orphans worldwide, with approximately 30 million of them in India. According to various estimates, only about 0.3% of children in India are orphaned due to parental death, while the majority are orphaned due to neglect. In Indonesia alone, data shows that there are approximately 106,406 children living in orphanages. Generally, children in orphanages still have parents, with 60% having both parents and 30% coming from single-parent families.

An orphanage can be understood as a social institution that functions to accommodate and care for abandoned children, by providing services and attention that would normally be received from parents or family (Rienneke and Setianingrum 2018). As a social institution, orphanages play a role in meeting the physical, mental, and social needs of foster children, as well as providing a space for them

to develop their personalities according to expectations, so they can grow naturally and be ready to become the next generation to fulfill the nation's ideals. Based on the results of research conducted by *Save the Children* and the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, it was found that the services and childcare patterns in various orphanages in Indonesia are not optimal. Generally, attention is directed more towards meeting daily material needs, while other important aspects such as children's mental and psychological health are not prioritized (Rahayuningtyas, Sujatmi, and Qodariah 2022).

The concept of positive psychology is very interesting to discuss, especially as it relates to mental health. Positive psychology emphasizes the positive strengths inherent in humans (Nihayah, Ade Putri, and Hidayat 2021). Furthermore, within positive psychology, there is the concept of forgiveness, which is very interesting to study, especially for mental health, related to feelings of anger, hatred, disappointment, and revenge. This is because these negative emotions have so many negative impacts on a person's mental health. McCullough (2000) (Rienneke and Setianingrum 2018) defines *forgiveness* as a change in a series of behaviors by reducing the motivation to seek revenge, distancing oneself or avoiding the perpetrator of violence, and increasing the motivation or desire to reconcile with the perpetrator. According to McCullough (2000), forgiveness has three aspects: (a) Avoidance Motivation, a decreased motivation to avoid personal and psychological contact with the perpetrator, and (b) Revenge Motivation, a decreased motivation to seek revenge. (c) Beneviolence Motivation, characterized by doing good to the perpetrator (Hwang 2021).

Forgiveness encourages individuals to have hope, an improved quality of life, and a willingness to empathize with others. *Forgiveness,* in this case, includes self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of God (Russell 2020). Forgiving others has two parts. First, the willingness to abandon one's right to hold grudges, negative judgments, and negative behaviors toward the person who acted unjustly. Second, forgiveness involves the voluntary cultivation of the qualities of compassion, generosity, and undeserved love toward the offended person (Enright, 2001) (Brady, Saldanha, and Barclay 2023). *Forgiveness* can also be defined as a decrease in negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the offender and, over time, a gradual increase in more positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the offender.

2 METHOD

Design

This study uses a case study design to understand the *forgiveness experiences* of adolescents living in orphanages through their perspectives in depth. The data collection method used was in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences of forgiveness as they faced various challenges in the orphanage environment. This study focuses on forgiveness through three dimensions: (a) Avoidance Motivation, a decreased motivation to avoid personal and psychological contact with the perpetrator; (b) Revenge Motivation, a decreased motivation to seek revenge; and (c) Beneviolence Motivation, characterized by doing good to the perpetrator (Hwang 2021). The phenomenological approach allows researchers to explore the subjective

meaning of participants' experiences, resulting in a richer and deeper understanding. The results of this process are expected to illustrate the various factors that influence the ability of adolescents living in orphanages to practice forgiveness in their lives.

Participants

This study involved two teenagers from an orphanage as participants. The location was chosen because the researcher knew the owner of the orphanage, facilitating data collection. Participants were selected using *purposive sampling* to provide firsthand experience relevant to the phenomenon being studied. Teenagers participated because of their crucial role in the forgiveness process, *despite* facing challenges. Details of participant characteristics can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Respondent Identity	P1 (AA)	P2 (DN)
Age	20	17
Employment Status	Student (semester 3)	Student (3rd grade of high school)
Long time in the orphanage	10 years	12 years old

Procedure

The participant recruitment process began with accessing data on adolescents at the orphanage. This data served to select participants who met the research criteria. Afterward, the researcher prepared a research permit letter as a formal requirement to ensure the research could proceed legally and in a structured manner. This permit letter was an important initial step to ensure the research ran

smoothly without any administrative issues. Furthermore, the researcher also prepared an informed consent document explaining the purpose, procedures, and participants' rights during the research process. This document was then delivered directly to the participants when the researcher met with them, as well as to facilitate an agreement on interview times that would be convenient for the participants, ensuring they did not disrupt their daily activities.

Interviews were conducted according to an agreed-upon schedule, lasting approximately 30–45 minutes for each participant. Throughout the interviews, the researcher recorded and took notes to ensure complete documentation of all information. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim to ensure the authenticity of the data, reflecting the participants' words. The researcher then conducted a coding process to identify key themes emerging from the data. This analysis used a thematic approach to identify patterns and deeper meanings in the forgiveness experiences expressed by the participants.

3 RESULT

Based on the findings in Table 2, each subject provided a diverse perspective on how they experienced *forgiveness* in the forgiveness process to date. Data obtained through in-depth interviews indicated that the forgiveness process varies and yields varying results.

Avoidance motivation dimension

In Avoidance Motivation, there is a decreased motivation to avoid personal and psychological

contact with the perpetrator. The tendency to avoid contact, both personal and psychological, with someone who has committed a hurtful or detrimental act. In the context of forgiveness, avoidance motivation refers to a decreased urge or desire to distance themselves from the perpetrator, both physically and emotionally. Participant 1 revealed that the forgiveness process is not easy because it begins with a feeling of fear, excessive anxiety, and constant reminders of trauma due to the painful experience.

> *" At that time I was being harassed by someone close to me, I was immediately scared and trembling" (AA, W1 151024,95-99)*
>
> *"Yes, I'm really scared because of what happened to me before with my boyfriend. I'm afraid it will happen again. Even though I've tried to make peace with myself and the past, why does it happen again, causing the trauma to resurface and haunt me, even though it's someone close to me?" (AA, W1 151024, 101-114)*

Meanwhile, Participant 2 explained that the forgiveness process begins with avoiding the perpetrator's behavior as a response to protect oneself from further pain. However, the trauma and feelings of disappointment linger, becoming reminders that are difficult to ignore. To heal, the participant chose to distance herself from the perpetrator's behavior, creating space to process the emotional wounds and slowly rebuild stability.

> *"Yes, even if that person appears tomorrow I will still avoid him" (DV,W1 151024,65-68)*

> *"I'm disappointed and I'm too lazy to have any contact with them" (DV,W1 151024,91-93)*

Revenge motivation dimension

Revenge Motivation, which is a decrease in the motivation to seek revenge. Revenge motivation is the urge or desire to seek revenge against someone who has hurt or harmed them. In the context of forgiveness, revenge motivation refers to the intensity of anger or resentment felt by victims, which often drives them to take retaliatory action as a way to restore justice or express anger. Participant 1 explained that a spiritual approach was the primary method in her forgiveness process. Although the constant worry often hindered the process, faith and prayer provided the strength to overcome the pain and gradually release negative emotions toward the perpetrator.

> *"For this matter I just surrender to Allah and let Allah give the answer" (AA,W1 151024,157-160)*
>
> *"Maybe if I take revenge I will be considered a liar because the person who did it was someone close to me" (AA,W1 151024,166-171)*

Meanwhile, Participant 2 revealed that the forgiveness process was difficult due to constant emotional dysregulation, which often triggered aggressive actions in response to the emotional pain experienced. Furthermore, feelings of perceived injustice exacerbated the situation, making it difficult to let go of anger and move toward forgiveness.

> *"Yes, I want them to feel what I feel" (DV,W1 151024,100-102)*

"do the same thing they did to me" (DV,W1 151024,106-108)

Benevolence motivation dimensions

Beneviolence Motivation, can be characterized by doing good to the perpetrator. Benevolence Motivation is the urge or motivation to do good to someone, even if that person has hurt or harmed them. In the context of forgiveness, benevolence motivation involves the intention to show kindness, empathy, and compassion to the perpetrator, even though they may not deserve it in the victim's view. Participant 1 explained that his emotional maturity helped him in the forgiveness process, where he was able to manage his feelings and reactions towards the perpetrator. In addition, his strong sense of empathy and gratitude for himself motivated him to view the situation more wisely, so he could do good to the perpetrator and release the existing emotional burden.

"Yes, because I am someone who has been helped and must repay the favor with kindness" (AA,W1 151024,187-190)

"The reason that drives me to be kind is that I have to be kind to other people and forgive them, but the thing that stops me is the fear of it happening again" (AA,W1 151024,196-204)

Meanwhile, Participant 2 revealed that the apathy she felt often hindered the forgiveness process, making her feel indifferent or disconnected from the emotions associated with the situation. In addition, the presence of trust issues regarding the perpetrator's behavior worsened her ability to trust again, even though she felt compelled to continue with forgiveness motivation, a desire to forgive

despite the difficulty, in order to achieve emotional peace and reduce the psychological burden that arises from the pain and mistrust.

"It depends, because I'm already hurt by how they treated me" (DV,W1 151024,128-131)

"Their treatment of me was so cruel and made me feel hurt to this day" (DV,W1 151024,137-141)

Table 2 Table of findings

Forgivness	Participant 1	Participant 2
1 Avoidance motivation	1. The fear that enveloped 2. Excessive anxiety 3. Trauma that is always remembered	1. Avoidance of behavior 2. Trauma and feelings of disappointment 3. Putting distance on behavior
2 Revenge motivation	1. Spiritual approach 2. The worries that always surround him	1. Dysregulation that is always on my mind 2. Aggressive actions 3. Perceived injustice
3 Benevolence motivation	1. Emotional maturity 2. Value empathy and a strong sense of gratitude towards himself	1. Feelings of apathy 2. Trust issues regarding behavior 3. Forgiveness motivation

4 DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the forgiveness process, which begins with avoidance and the urge to seek revenge, ultimately evolving into the urge to do good to the perpetrator. Understanding these dimensions is expected to provide insight into how forgiveness helps individuals overcome emotional wounds, reduce stress, achieve psychological well-being, and accelerate recovery and personal growth.

In the context of forgiveness, McCullough et al.'s positive psychology theory provides a deep understanding of how the dimensions of Avoidance Motivation, Revenge Motivation, and Benevolence Motivation interrelate in the emotional healing process. Avoidance Motivation reflects the initial urge to avoid the perpetrator as a form of protection against deeper pain. McCullough (Ma and Jiang 2020) explains that while avoidance can be emotionally protective, a healthy forgiveness process requires individuals to confront and respond to the wound in a more positive manner. Revenge Motivation, which manifests as a drive for revenge, can hinder recovery (Benard et al. 2022). True forgiveness is achieved when individuals choose to let go of anger and resentment, providing emotional freedom from negative feelings that disrupt their well-being. Benevolence Motivation emphasizes the urge to be kind to the perpetrator despite their harm, which helps improve psychological well-being by reducing stress and repairing relationships. McCullough suggests that forgiveness involving benevolence can accelerate emotional recovery and increase inner peace (Brady, Saldanha, and Barclay 2023). Thus, forgiveness is not only about letting go of the perpetrator, but also about releasing oneself from the emotional burden that hinders personal growth and the individual's psychological well-being.

Avoidance motivation emerged as an initial response from participants who felt fear, anxiety, and trauma after experiencing emotional harm (Donovan and Priester 2020). Participant 1 described avoidance as a protective mechanism against deeper pain. This avoidance manifested itself in the form of excessive anxiety and trauma that was difficult to forget, especially when the perpetrator was someone close to the victim. This aligns with McCullough's theory (Körner et al. 2022), which states that avoidance is often the first step in the forgiveness process to avoid further harm, although if left unchecked, it can hinder emotional recovery. Participant 2 also expressed avoidance, but more so in the avoidance of the perpetrator's behavior, rather than directly the individual. This participant avoided contact or relationships with the perpetrator as a form of self-protection from deeper disappointment, even though the trauma remained.

Revenge motivation was evident in the experiences of participants who felt compelled to seek revenge due to perceived injustice (Krok and Zarzycka 2021). Participant 1 revealed that despite the deep pain and disappointment, he chose to surrender his revenge to a higher power, namely by surrendering to God, in an effort to let go of the desire for revenge. This demonstrates a transition from the urge for revenge to a more spiritual forgiveness and surrendering the outcome to a higher power. In contrast, Participant 2 was more open about his desire for revenge, even expressing the intention to do the same thing as the perpetrator did to him, reflecting that the forgiveness process was still hampered by

anger and a sense of injustice that had not been fully released (Mróz, Kaleta, and Skrzypińska 2021).

On the other hand, Benevolence Motivation was more evident in Participant 1, who expressed gratitude and emotional maturity as the driving force behind her kindness toward the perpetrator (Kaleta and Mróz 2022). This participant linked kindness to the principle of reciprocity, which allows for the release of negative feelings and allows for forgiveness. From this perspective, benevolence serves as a mechanism for healing and self-recovery. Meanwhile, Participant 2 demonstrated trust issues and apathy that hindered her ability to be kind to the perpetrator. Despite the urge to forgive for inner peace, feelings of disappointment and deep emotional wounds hindered her ability to realize benevolence motivation.

5 CONCLUSIONS

McCullough's theory of forgiveness in positive psychology offers deep insight into how the dimensions of Avoidance Motivation, Revenge Motivation, and Benevolence Motivation interrelate in the forgiveness process. While avoidance and revenge can be natural initial responses to emotional wounds, true forgiveness in positive psychology involves managing negative emotions and the urge to retaliate, with the goal of achieving benevolence motivation—the urge to do good despite the deep wound. Forgiveness, in this case, is not only about letting go of the perpetrator, but also about releasing oneself from emotional burdens that can hinder an individual's personal development and psychological well-being.

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