

Beyond forgiveness and suicidal behaviour in adolescence: the moderating role of gender



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Suicide is a public health problem worldwide and the second leading cause of death between 15 and 29-year-olds. The role of depressive symptoms and the intense negative emotions has been emphasized as one of the crucial risk factor.

Empirical evidences have suggested that one protective factor that could play an important role in developing emotional competencies is FORGIVENESS.

Forgiveness is a strength that involves the reduction of negative emotions and the introduction of more positive feelings, cognitions and behavior towards the perpetrator, event, and yourself without necessarily restitution, retribution and reconciliation (Toussaint, Worthington & Williams, 2015; Webb Toussaint & Conway-Williams, 2012).

Research has found beneficial effects of forgiveness in mental health and subjective well-being. Also, previous studies have reported gender differences in forgiveness, with women typically being more forgiving than men (Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008). Despite the scientific progress in the area of forgiveness, research in adolescents are still scarce and even less gender differences in the context of suicidal behavior.

The present research was design to gaining more insight into the links between forgiveness, depression and suicide in a sample of adolescents, examining the moderator's role of gender in this relationship.

Method

Participants

The total sample consisted of **572 Spanish adolescents** (50.9% men) from three public secondary schools. They were between 13 and 17 years ($M = 15.49$, $SD = 1.09$).

Measures

-Forgiveness was measured with the 10-item Forgiveness subscale from the Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths (**VIA-IS**; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It was used the Spanish translation of the trait forgiveness subscale that can be found in the Authentic Happiness website.

-Depression was assessed using the 10-item Children's Depression Inventory Short Version (**CDI-S**; Kovacs, 1992; Spanish version of Del Barrio & Carrasco, 2004).

-Suicidal thoughts and behaviors were assessed with the Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (**SBQ-R**; Osman et al., 2001), translated from English into Spanish using the method of back-translation.

-Big Five factors of personality were measured with the Spanish version of the **BFI-44** inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998).

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Table 1. Gender differences, reliabilities and correlation matrix between study variables.

Variable	Gender differences			Correlations				
	Total Sample M (SD) N=	Male M (SD) N=	Female M (SD) N=	T	d	1	2	3
1. SBQ	4.84 (3.25) N= 572	4.75 (3.42) N= 291	4.95 (3.07) N= 281	-.74	-	(.86)	-.319***	.154**
2. Forgiveness	3.33 (.64) N= 570	3.28 (.65) N= 289	3.39 (.63) N= 281	-2.06*	-.17	-.021	(.77)	-.167**
3. Depression	1.62 (.38) N= 572	1.60 (.38) N= 291	1.64 (.38) N= 281	-1.55	-	.244***	-.218***	(.78)

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Regression results for the moderating effect of depression and forgiveness on suicidal thoughts.

Step	Variable	Total Sample			Male sample			Female sample		
		B	R ²	ΔR ²	B	R ²	ΔR ²	B	R ²	ΔR ²
Step 1	Age	.07	.04	.05***	.06	.06	.08**	.09	.05	.05*
	Extraversion	.10			.09			.06		
	Agreeableness	-.04			.05			-.06		
	Conscientiousness	.09			.04			.15*		
	Neuroticism	.02			.03			-.03		
	Openness	-.02			.05			-.11		
Step 2	Depression	.13**	.05	.02**	.02	.06	.01	.23**	.09	.04**
	Forgiveness	-.15**	.07	.01**	-.34***	.14	.05***	.03	.09	.00
Step 4	Depression x Forgiveness	-.04	.07	.00	-.20**	.17	.03**	.04	.09	.00

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

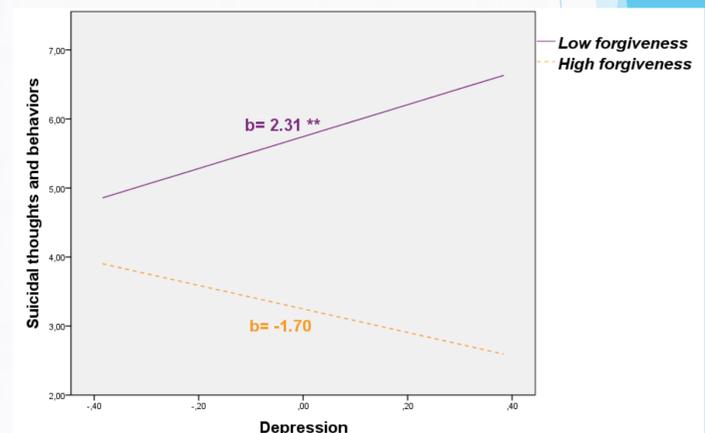


Figure 1. Relationship of depression and forgiveness for predicting suicidal thoughts and behaviors scores in males.

Discussion

This research indicate that **forgiveness predicts lower suicidal thoughts and behaviors in male adolescents with high scores on depression.**

Specifically, when scores on depression were high, **males at the low forgiveness showed high levels of risk suicide, whereas at higher scores on forgiveness males reported lower levels of suicidal behavior and thoughts.** This finding was consistent with previous research showing that men and women differ in baseline levels of forgiveness, with women typically being a bit more forgiving than men (Miller et al., 2008; Rey & Extremera, 2016).

These results suggest that treatments and interventions that facilitate forgiveness in adolescent's males with high scores in depression may help to reduce the likelihood of suicide attempts. In contrast, it is possible that forgiveness in adolescent's females may depend on a number of simultaneous factors, such as gender-specific coping mechanisms (i.e., rumination) that should be examined in future research.

This research provides some empirical support for the idea that **developing personal qualities differently by gender from positive psychology might be useful to reduce level of suicidal ideation among adolescents with high scores in depression related to peer transgressions.**