

PREDICTORS AND MEDIATING ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOUS STRUGGLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Summary. The two studies portray the predictors and functions of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness in interpersonal relationships. Study 1 includes the analysis of relationships between personality traits, parental attitudes, religious struggle, tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness. Study 2 embraces the analysis of the mediatory function of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness in the relationship of religious struggle with mental health. The research showed that the predictors of attitudes toward forgiveness are as follows: high religious guilt, low negative affect toward God and low negative interactions with believers. The predictors of tendency to forgive are as follows: low neuroticism, low protective attitudes of parents and low negative affect toward God. Only tendency to forgive is a significant mediator in the relationship of religious struggle with satisfaction with life, stress, and mental health.

Key words: tendency to forgive, attitudes toward forgiveness, predictors of forgiveness, mental health, religious struggle

Introduction

Forgiveness has a long history in the field of philosophy and theology, in particular the Christian one. In psychology, it was Rokeach (1973) who noticed the significance of forgiveness in the culture of Western Europe and described it in his values classification. An increased interest in forgiveness can be traced back to the 80's of the 20th century, with its source in the experience of psychology practitioners. They recognized forgiveness as a tool to treat patients who were hurt by others, in particular victims to sexual abuse, incest, and domestic violence (Zarzycka, 2016). Although psychologists made some progress in their effort to define and measure forgiveness, still many discrepancies in the understanding of this construct

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are present. For example, Enright (Freedman, Enright, 1996, p. 983) noted that there are two forgiveness dimensions: negative (deliberate discarding resentment toward abuser) and positive (nurturing undeserved traits: generosity and compassion toward the wrongdoer). In turn, McCullough et al. (1998) accentuated the changeability of motivational states: forgiveness is a complex of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral phenomena, in which the negative affect, desire of revenge and avoidance tendencies toward the wrongdoer are diminished. In psychological research, two forgiveness dimensions are included: tendency (disposition) to forgive and the state of forgiveness. The first one focuses on the generalized tendency or tendency to forgive the wrongs and the extent to which an individual is ready to forgive repeated offenses in various relationships and situations. The second one means a temporary state of a person which is a reaction to a particular harm or offense experienced in an interpersonal relationship (Brown, 2003; Tripathi, Mullet, 2010). The results of the existing research are inconsistent in terms of interdependencies of the state of forgiveness and the tendency to forgive. Although Brown and Phillips (2005) suggested that dispositional forgiveness is a predictor of state forgiveness, other researchers (e.g. Eaton, Ward Struthers, Santelli, 2006) did not confirm these correlations. The attitude toward forgiveness – i.e. the extent to which a person perceives forgiveness as a virtue, desired trait, regardless of whether and to what extent they are ready to forgive or practice forgiveness – is also the subject of psychologists' interest.

In this research, forgiveness was examined in two aspects: dispositional – as a tendency to forgive wrongdoings in various interpersonal relationships and as an attitude – the way of perceiving forgiveness. This paper shows the results of two studies. In Study 1, I established predictors of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness. In Study 2, I analyzed the mediating effect of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness in the relationship between religious struggle and mental health.

Predictors of forgiveness

Existing research shows that age, personality traits, religiosity, some aspects related to situation or social context may make it easier or more difficult to forgive harms. The probability of forgiving is significantly higher in those in late adulthood than in adolescents (Mullet, Girard, 2000; McCullough, Witvliet, 2002). These differences were particularly striking in the measures of dispositional forgiveness (Mullet et al., 1998; Lawler-Row, Piferi, 2006). Age-related trends in tendency to forgive were justified by changes in understanding the notion of forgiveness, conditioned by cognitive and moral development (Kohlberg, 1976; Enright, Coyle, 1998). In the pre-conventional stage of thinking prevail egocentrism, focus on avoiding pain, and seeking pleasure, whereas forgiveness is perceived as a way of gaining profit, e.g. the need for revenge or compensation. As for the conventional stage, awareness of standards and social expectations is higher, forgiveness is perceived as an institutional requirement (e.g. imposed by religious institution or the con-

dition of social harmony). At the last stage, corresponding with the orientation of universal principles of conscience by Kohlberg (1976), perception of forgiveness is marked by authentic interest in the welfare of other people and in promoting interpersonal harmony (Enright and The Human Development Study Group, 1991).

Forgiveness demonstrates relationships with the personality traits, but patterns of these dependencies are inconsistent. A series of studies confirmed a positive relationship between forgiveness and agreeableness and a negative one between forgiveness and neuroticism (e.g. Brose et al., 2005; Wang, 2008; Hafnidar, 2013). Other authors indicated positive correlations between forgiveness and extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Maltby et al., 2008; Al-Sabeelah, Alraggad, Abu Ameerh, 2014; Abid et al., 2015). Rangganadhan and Todorov (2010) showed that personality traits are significant predictors of decision about forgiving.

Forgiveness is an important element of many religious traditions. As for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the relationship between God and an individual may be described as the relationship of the one who forgives with the one who is forgiven (McCullough, Worthington, 1999). Each of these religions encompasses encouragement to forgive hurts mutually. Christianity probably accentuates forgiveness to the greatest extent, indicating the need to “turn the other cheek”, and encourages unconditional forgiveness, even if there is no repentance or atonement on the wrongdoer’s side (Peterson, Seligman, 2004).

Religious affiliation, attending Church, and frequency of prayer were tested as predictors of forgiveness. Macaskill (2007) compared three samples: Anglican and Catholic clergy, Christian laymen, and individuals without religious affiliation in Great Britain. Christians were the group which valued forgiveness higher than individuals without religious affiliation, but no significant inter-group differences in the measures of forgiveness for self and others were observed. Fox and Thomas (2008) had similar results in the samples of Jews, Muslims, and individuals declaring no affiliation with any religious tradition. Religious people showed more positive attitudes toward forgiveness than non-religious people, but these groups did not differ in terms of behavioral indicators of forgiveness. Tsang, McCullough, and Hoyt (2005), based on the results of students, observed that there is no relationship between the acceptance of traditional religious values and the state of forgiveness, but there is a very low, negative correlation between religious affiliation and measures of revenge. Witvliet, Hinze, and Worthington (2008) demonstrated a low, positive correlation between religious commitment and the state of forgiveness in Christian students. However, the state of forgiveness was measured in reference to the imagined, not real injustice. Cohen et al. (2006) observed a similar dependence – religiosity correlated positively with forgiveness in the situation of imagined injustice. To recap, religiosity demonstrated stronger relationships with attitudes toward forgiveness and perceiving self as a one who forgives than with tendency to forgive. So “religious people think they should forgive. However, in case of

personal harm, religious affiliation plays a minor role in the determination of who forgives and who doesn't" (McCullough, Worthington, 1999, p. 115).

Some situational variables are also predictors of forgiveness. People experience more difficulties to forgive harms, which they treat as significant, done with intent, and with negative results. Likelihood to forgive increases with the extent to which the wrongdoer repents and asks for forgiveness. Tendency to forgive depends on the nature of interpersonal relation in which the harm took place – people tend to be more inclined to forgive when they had a close relationship with the wrongdoer (Freedman, Zarifkar, 2016).

The aim of Study 1 was to analyze predictors of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness in the Polish sample of adults. The formulated research problem assumes checking whether (and how) personality traits, parental attitudes, and religious struggle determine tendency to forgive and attitudes toward forgiveness. The research included assuming the role of each independent variable in explaining tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness, after other variables have been taken into account. We formulated two hypotheses. As the results published by other authors (e.g. McCullough, Worthington, 1999) demonstrated that religiosity is correlated with attitudes toward forgiveness but is not correlated with the tendency to forgive harms, the first hypothesis assumes that personality traits and parental attitudes determine dispositional forgiveness, not attitudes toward forgiveness. The second hypothesis assumed expecting that religious struggle weakens positive attitudes toward forgiveness, but do not correlate with dispositional forgiveness. The analyses included also age – as the most basic individual variable.

Forgiveness as a mediator of the relationship between religious struggle and health

A considerable portion of research on functional aspects of forgiveness was limited to analyzing relationships between forgiveness and mental and physical health indicators. The tendency to forgive others correlated negatively with depression, anger, and anxiety (Lawler-Row, Piferi, 2006; Ghobari Bonab, Keyvanzadeh, Vahdat Torbati, 2008) and positively with satisfaction with life (Thompson et al., 2005). Dispositional forgiveness correlated negatively with paranoid ideation, interpersonal hypersensitivity, and psychoticism. Weak relationships between state forgiveness and satisfaction with life were revealed in cross-sectional research, but they were not confirmed in longitudinal research, carried out within the time span of eight weeks (Lawler-Row, 2010). Methodological limitation of the research mentioned above consists in methods applied – they assumed forgiveness measured by means of either negative or positive affect experienced by the victim toward the wrongdoer, and mental health measured by means of self-descriptive measures of affect (e.g. depression or anxiety). Interdependencies observed may be the result of semantic similarity, i.e. not real relationship between these variables (McCullough, Witvliet, 2002).

Lawler-Row (2010) hypothesized that forgiveness may be a mediator in the relationship of religiosity and health. In order to confirm this hypothesis, she carried out three studies. Study 1, carried out on the sample of 605 individuals in the late adulthood, revealed that the sense of receiving forgiveness from God was a mediator of dependences between frequency of private prayer, attending religious services, and faith in God's providence with satisfaction with aging (full mediation). In the case of forgiving oneself and forgiving others, mediations were partial. In Study 2, carried out on a sample of 253 individuals in late adulthood, she showed that dispositional forgiveness fully mediated the relationships of prayer and internal religiosity with the intensity of illness symptoms and satisfaction with aging. In Study 3, carried out on a sample of 80 individuals in middle adulthood, she confirmed that state forgiveness was a mediator in the relationship between existential well-being with symptoms of illness and effects of medical treatment. Dispositional forgiveness mediated the relationships of religious well-being and internal religiosity with insomnia and depression. To sum up, in each of the three studies forgiveness turned out to be either a partial or total mediator in the relationships of religiosity and health indicators.

Because the pro-health function of religiosity is realized by forgiveness (Lawler-Row, 2010) one may assume that it will participate also in the processes of determining the state of mental health by religious struggle. Numerous studies confirmed that religious struggle weakens mental health (Wilt et al., 2016; Zarzycka, 2017). The research problem formulated in my research (Study 2) assumes checking whether the effect of religious struggle on mental health is carried out by weakening tendency to forgive and weakening positive attitudes toward forgiveness. I formulated third hypothesis, which assumed that tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness are mediators in the relationships of religious struggle with indicators of mental health: disorders in mental functions, stress and satisfaction with life.

Study 1. Predictors of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness

Study 1 aimed to analyze predictors of tendency to forgive and attitudes toward forgiveness. I tested age, personality trait, parental attitudes, and religious struggle in the set of predictors.

Method

Participants. Study 1 included 100 adults (52 women and 48 men) aged between 18 and 74 years. The mean age was 30.51 ($SD = 11.91$). Students in the fourth year of the undergraduate Psychology program at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin collected data through a web survey as a part of the course *Psychology of religion*, which I taught in the 2016–2017 academic year. Table 1 presents additional demographic characteristics of the participants (Study 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Study 1		Study 2	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Sex				
Women	52	52	49	49
Men	48	48	51	51
Education				
Elementary	3	3		
Vocational	7	7		
Secondary	58	58		
Higher	32	32		
Civil status				
Single	55	55		
Married	34	34		
Divorced	1	1		
Widow / er	2	2		
No answer	8	8		
Religious affiliation				
Roman Catholic	83	83	94	94
Eastern Orthodox	1	1	4	4
Protestant	1	1	1	1
Agnostic	6	6		
No affiliation	9	9	1	1
Place of residence				
Village	26	26	25	25
City or town below 200,000	21	21	21	21
City above 200,000	45	45	53	53
No answer	8	8	1	1

Measures. The following measures were included:

NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI). The NEO FFI is a self-report instrument to measure the five personality domains according to the Five Factor Model: Neuroticism (N), which involves negative emotions and psychological distress in response to stressors; Extraversion (E), which involves sociability, positive emotionality, and general activity; Openness to experience (O), which involves high curiosity

and low conservativeness; Agreeableness (A), which involves altruistic, sympathetic, and cooperative tendencies; and Conscientiousness (C), which involves one's level of self-control in planning and organization. The NEO-FFI has 60 items that participants respond to using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale (McCrae, Costa, 1989). The Polish adaptation of the NEO-FFI has a satisfactory reliability (from .68 do .82) (Zawadzki et al., 1998).

The Parental Attitudes Scale by M. Plopa (PAS). The PAS (2008) consists of two versions used for retrospective assessment of one's mother's and father's parental attitudes. Each version consists of 50 items, to which the respondent replies through choosing an answer on a five-degree scale, from 1 (*he/she was definitely like that*) to 5 (*he/she definitely was not like that*). The PAS consists of five dimensions: Acceptance-Rejection, Demanding, Autonomy, Inconsistency, Protecting. In this research, I conducted the principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal varimax rotation in order to reduce the number of PAS subscales. Based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) I separated three components (Table 2). Component 1 (cold-warm mother) described parental attitude of a mother on the continuum from cold (Demanding and Inconsistency) to warm (Autonomy and Acceptance). Component 2 (warm-cold father) described father's attitude on the continuum from warm (Autonomy and Acceptance) to cold (Demanding and Inconsistency). Component 3 described protective parental attitudes (Protective mother and Protective father). The three components explained 76% of the total variance.

Table 2. Factor Loadings from Principal Factor Analysis: Communalities, Eigenvalues, and Percentages of Variance for subscales of the Parental Attitudes Scale ($N = 100$)

PAS	Factor loadings			Communality
	1	2	3	
Autonomy Mother	.88			.80
Demanding Mother	-.88			.84
Acceptance Mother	.83			.84
Inconsistency Mother	-.80			.77
Demanding Father		.89		.86
Autonomy Father		-.83		.79
Inconsistency Father		.83		.73
Acceptance Father		-.76		.81
Protective Father			.77	.59
Protective Mother			.76	.58
Eigenvalue	4.01	1.97	1.62	
% of variance	40.11	19.69	16.21	

Religious Comfort and Strain Scale (RCSS). Religious struggle was assessed using the RCSS (Exline, Yali, Sanderson, 2000; cf. Zarzycka, 2014). It is a set of 24 items designed to assess the degree to which participants are experiencing feelings of comfort and struggle associated with religion (Exline, Yali, Sanderson, 2000; Exline, 2013). I used three subscales to measure religious struggle: Fear-Guilt involves preoccupation with one's own sin, guilt, feeling unforgiven by God; Negative emotions toward God involve negative feelings toward God, perceiving God as unfair, untrustworthy, cruel, and abandoning people; and Negative social interactions surrounding religion involve negative emotions and relationships with fellow congregants (Zarzycka, 2014). My instruction for study participants was to describe their experiences from the last two months. The response options were from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*).

Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF). The TTF is a simple, four-item scale designed to assess the extent to which individuals typically experience or engage in forgiveness when they have been wronged by others. The author of the TTF is Brown (2003). The Polish translation was compiled by Zarzycka, Krawczyńska, and Rybarski as a part of the course Psychology of religion, which I taught in 2016–2017 academic year. The TTF items describe various behaviors in the situation of harm (np. *I tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings; I have a tendency to harbor grudges*), and respondents were asked to assess the extent to which each of these behaviors describes their reactions to the harms experienced so far (Brown, Philips, 2005). The response options were from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The TTF reliability amounted to $\alpha = .60$ in the present research.

Attitudes toward Forgiveness Scale (ATF). The ATF scale is a 6-item measure of an individual's beliefs regarding forgiveness, as in whether they perceive it as a positive or negative (e.g. *I believe that forgiveness is a moral virtue; It is admirable to be a forgiving person*). The author of the ATF is Brown (2003). The Polish translation was compiled by Zarzycka, Krawczyńska, and Rybarski as a part of the course Psychology of religion, which I taught in 2016–2017 academic year. The response options were from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The ATF reliability amounted to $\alpha = .78$ in the present research.

Results

I calculated correlations between personality traits, parental attitudes, religious struggle with tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness by means of the correlation and regression analysis. Table 3 shows a correlation matrix between the variables. The tendency to forgive correlated negatively with neuroticism and cold parental attitude of one's father, and positively with conscientiousness. Attitudes toward forgiveness correlated positively with agreeableness and warm parental attitude of one's mother. Negative emotions toward God and strains in relationships with believers correlated negatively both with attitudes and tendency to forgive. I observed an interesting relationship in the subscale of Fear-guilt: it correlated negatively with tendency to forgive and positively with attitudes toward forgiveness.

Table 3. Intercorrelations for Scores on TTF, ATF, Six Measures of Parental Attitudes Scales, Five Measures of NEO-FFI, and Three Other Measures of RCSSS (N = 100)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 TTF	—													
2 ATF	.17	—												
3 CM	.18	.28**	—											
4 ChO	-.23*	-.07	.01	—										
5 NP	-.17	.11	.01	.01	—									
6 N	-.55***	.07	-.06	.27**	.14	—								
7 E	.11	.02	-.02	-.14	.27**	-.29**	—							
8 O	-.09	.08	.01	.01	-.09	.09	.02	—						
9 A	.12	.27*	.34***	-.14	.06	-.06	.16	-.33***	—					
10 C	.28**	.04	.13	-.19	-.04	-.41***	.31**	-.05	.27**	—				
11 FG	-.26*	.21*	-.03	.16	-.12	.23*	-.09	-.05	-.08	-.21*	—			
12 NEG	-.26*	-.33***	-.10	.18	-.25*	.12	-.05	-.01	-.24*	-.05	.40***	—		
13 NISR	-.26*	-.31**	-.30**	.12	-.22*	.18	-.05	.23*	-.45***	-.17	.37***	.41***	—	
14 ZR	-.33***	-.17	-.19	.20	-.25*	.23*	-.09	.08	-.33***	-.19	.77***	.78***	.78***	—

Note. TTF – Tendency to forgive, ATF – Attitudes toward forgiveness, CM – Warm mother, ChO – Cold father, NP – Protective parents, N – Neuroticism, E – Extraversion, O – Openness to experience, A – Agreeableness, C – Conscientiousness, FG – Fear-Guilt, NEG – Negative emotions toward God, NISR – Negative social interactions surrounding religion, RS – Religious struggle.
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Next, I carried out two regression analyses. In both models, independent variables were: age, personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness), parental attitudes (cold-warm mother, warm-cold father, protective parents), and religious struggle (fear-guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions surrounding religion). A dependent variable in the first analysis was tendency to forgive. The resulting regression model was significant ($F(12; 86) = 4.18; p < .001$). Neuroticism, protective parents, and negative emotions toward God explained 31% ($R^2 = .31$) of the total variance of the results in tendency to forgive. So, one may assume that high emotional instability, overprotective parental attitudes and negative affect toward God weaken tendency to forgive.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Summary for Age, Personality Traits, Parental Attitudes, and Religious struggle Predicting Tendency to Forgive ($N = 100$)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	.01	.01	.09	.90	.371
N	-.05	.01	-.42	-3.82	< .001
E	.01	.02	.03	.30	.768
O	-.01	.02	-.06	-.64	.524
A	-.02	.02	-.11	-.94	.349
C	.01	.02	.04	.39	.697
Warm mother	.14	.10	.14	1.38	.173
Cold father	-.04	.10	-.04	-.43	.665
Protective attitude	-.25	.11	-.23	-2.16	.034
FG	-.02	.05	-.04	-.38	.708
NEG	-.13	.06	-.23	-2.07	.042
NISR	-.03	.06	-.06	-.55	.585

Note. N – Neuroticism, E – Extraversion, O – Openness, A – Agreeableness, C – Conscientiousness; FG – Fear-Guilt, NEG – Negative emotions toward God, NISR – Negative social interactions surrounding religion.

A dependent variable in the second analysis were attitudes toward forgiveness. The regression model was significant ($F(12; 86) = 4.44; p < .001$). Fear-guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions surrounding religion explained 32% ($R^2 = .32$) of the total variance of the results in attitudes toward forgiveness (Table 5). Therefore, negative affect toward God and strains in relations with believers weaken positive assessment of forgiveness. Fear-guilt was a predictor of positive attitudes toward forgiveness.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Summary for Age, Personality Traits, Parental Attitudes, and Religious struggle Predicting Attitudes toward Forgiveness ($N=100$)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	.01	.01	.01	.13	.897
N	.01	.01	.08	.70	.485
E	.01	.02	.01	.08	.936
O	.03	.02	.17	1,70	.094
A	.01	.02	.05	.41	.679
C	.01	.01	.08	.75	.458
Warm mother	.15	.09	.16	1.59	.116
Cold father	-.03	.09	-.03	-.36	.724
Protective attitude	-.01	.10	-.01	-.03	.975
FG	.22	.05	.50	4.87	< .001
NEG	-.20	.05	-.40	-3.70	< .001
NISR	-.13	.05	-.29	-2.51	.014

Note. N – Neuroticism, E – Extraversion, O – Openness, A – Agreeableness, C – Conscientiousness; FG – Fear-Guilt, NEG – Negative emotions toward God, NISR – Negative social interactions surrounding religion.

Study 2. Tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness as mediators in the relationship between religious struggle and mental health

Forgiveness is a significant predictor of mental health, well-being, and quality of life (Toussaint, Webb, 2005; Lawler-Row, 2010). Although positive relationships of forgiveness with mental health indicators are confirmed by numerous studies, still little is known about the mechanisms of these relationships. Lawler-Row (2010) confirmed that forgiveness plays mediating role in the relationship of religiosity and health. Study 2 was aimed to determine whether attitudes and tendency to forgive in interpersonal relationships is a mediator in the relationship of religious struggle and mental health indicators.

Method

Participants. Study 2 included 100 adults (49 women and 51 men) aged between 19 and 59 years ($M = 29,97$; $SD = 10,83$). Students in the fourth year of the undergraduate Psychology program at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin collected data through a web survey as a part of the course *Psychology of religion*, which I taught in the 2016–2017 academic year. Table 1 presents additional demographic characteristics of the sample (Study 2).

Measures. The following measures were included:

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28). The GHQ-28 is a 28-item measure of emotional distress in medical settings. It was developed by Goldberg (1978) as a screening tool to detect those likely to have or to be at risk of developing psychiatric disorders. The GHQ-28 consists of four subscales: Somatic Symptoms, Anxiety/Insomnia, Social Dysfunction, and Depression (Goldberg, Williams, 2001). The response options were from 0 (*Not at all*) to 3 (*Much more than usual*). Makowska and Merecz (2001) are the authors of the Polish adaptation of GHQ-28.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). The PSS is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a 10-item measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month (Cohen, Kamarck, Mermelstein, 1983). The response options were from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). Juczyński and Ogińska-Bulik (2009) are the authors of the Polish adaptation of the PSS-10.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). I used the SWLS by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) to measure satisfaction with life. The SWLS is a short 5-item test designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Respondents indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In this sample the internal consistency coefficients for SWLS was $\alpha = .87$.

Religious Comfort and Strain Scale (RCSS). Religious struggle was assessed using the RCSS (Exline, Yali, Sanderson, 2000; cf. Zarzycka, 2014). I applied three subscales to measure religious struggle: Fear-Guilt, Negative emotions toward God, and Negative social interactions surrounding religion (Zarzycka, 2014). I instructed study participants to describe their experiences from the last two months. The response options were from 0 (*not at all*) to 10 (*extremely*).

Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF). I applied the TTF for the measurement of tendency to forgive. The TTF reliability amounted to $\alpha = .70$ in the present research.

Attitudes toward Forgiveness Scale (ATF). The ATF served to measure attitudes toward forgiveness. The ATF reliability amounted to $\alpha = .80$ in the present research.

Results

I applied the correlation and mediation analyses to calculate relationships of tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness with religious struggle and mental health. Table 6 shows the matrix of correlations. Tendency to forgive correlated negatively with somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunctions, depression, stress, and three domains of religious struggle: fear-guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions surrounding religion. Tendency to forgive correlated positively with satisfaction with life. Attitudes toward forgiveness correlated negatively with conflicts in relationships with believers.

Table 6. Intercorrelations for Scores on TTF, ATF, Measures of RCSS, Measures of GHQ-28, SWLS, and PSS-10 ($N = 100$)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 TTF	—												
2 ATF	.07	—											
3 FG	-.28**	.15	—										
4 NEG	-.24*	-.14	.32**	—									
5 NISR	-.20*	-.23*	.10	.30**	—								
6 RS	-.34**	-.13	.60***	.73***	.76***	—							
7 SS	-.40***	.01	.10	.30**	.26**	.32**	—						
8 A/I	-.36***	.17	.23*	.39***	.18	.37***	.56***	—					
9 SD	-.22*	-.08	.13	.49***	.13	.34**	.29**	.30**	—				
10 DEP	-.42***	-.05	.23*	.58***	.25*	.49***	.54***	.57***	.53***	—			
11 GH	-.46***	.04	.23*	.56***	.27**	.49***	.78***	.83***	.61***	.86***	—		
12 SWL	.41***	.03	-.24*	-.51***	-.24*	-.46***	-.46***	-.39***	-.52***	-.70***	-.65***	—	
13 Stress	-.51***	.11	.34**	.40***	.18	.41***	.55***	.78***	.43***	.64***	.80***	-.53***	—

Note. TTF – Tendency to forgive, ATF – Attitudes toward forgiveness, FG – Fear-Guilt, NEG – Negative emotions toward God, NISR – Negative social interactions surrounding religion, RS – Religious struggle, SS – Somatic symptoms, A/I – Anxiety/Insomnia, SD – Social disorders, DEP – Depression, GH – General health, SWL – Satisfaction with life.

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

Next, I carried out three mediation analyses. In each analysis, I introduced religious struggle as independent variable (X), as mediators: attitudes toward forgiveness (M_1) and tendency to forgive (M_2). Religious struggle was introduced as a general variable, created by averaging results in three subscales: Fear-guilt, Negative emotions toward God, and Negative social interactions surrounding religion. I introduced following variables one by one as dependent ones (Y): satisfaction with life, stress, and mental health disorders as a general result in the GHQ-28.

The first mediation analysis showed that tendency to forgive is a significant mediator of the relationship between religious struggle and satisfaction with life. Indirect effect was negative ($IE = -.39$ $CI[-.812; -.127]$). Direct effect of religious struggle on satisfaction with life was also significant ($DE = -1.45$; $CI[-2.190; -.710]$). Therefore, it was partial mediation. Unstandardized coefficients of paths for this model are presented in Table 7 and Figure 1. The relationship of struggle with tendency to forgive is negative, whereas the relationship between tendency to forgive and satisfaction with life – positive. This means that the lower intensity of religious struggle, the stronger inclination to forgive, and, as a result, higher satisfaction with life.

The second analysis revealed that tendency to forgive is a mediator in the relationship of religious struggle with stress – the indirect effect was positive ($IE = .07$ $CI[.028; .121]$). The direct effect of struggle on stress was also significant ($DE = .14$; $CI[.055; .221]$). Therefore, it was partial mediation. Table 8 shows unstandardized coefficients of paths for the model and Figure 2 – its graphic presentation. As this data shows, the relationship between struggle and tendency to forgive is negative, similarly to the relationship between stress and tendency to forgive. This result means that the stronger religious struggle, the weaker tendency to forgive and, as a result, the greater stress.

The last analysis of mediation revealed that tendency to forgive is a significant mediator in the relationship between religious struggle and mental health – indirect effect was positive ($IE = .03$ $CI[.012; .066]$). The direct effect of struggle on mental disorders is also significant ($DE = .115$; $CI[.063; .166]$). This mediation was also partial. Unstandardized coefficients of paths for this model are shown in Table 9, whereas its graphic presentation – in Figure 3. The relationship between religious struggle and tendency to forgive is negative, similarly to the relationship between tendency to forgive and the indicator of mental health. This means that the stronger religious struggle, the weaker tendency to forgive and, as a result, stronger disorders in mental functions.

Table 7. Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the ATF and TTF as Mediators of the Effect of Religious Struggle on Satisfaction with Life

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M_1 (ATF)			M_2 (TTF)			Y (SATISFACTION)		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
X (R/S struggle)	-.11	.07	.158	-.29	.08	.001	-1.45	.37	< .001
M_1 (ATF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.21	.48	.653
M_2 (TTF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.32	.42	.003
Constant	4.37	.20	< .001	3.40	.23	< .001	23.22	2.68	< .001
	$R^2 = .02$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .28$		
	$F(1; 96) = 2.02; p = .158$			$F(1; 96) = 12.33; p = .001$			$F(3; 94) = 12.318; p < .001$		

Table 8. Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the ATF and TTF as Mediators of the Effect of Religious Struggle on Stress

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M_1 (ATF)			M_2 (TTF)			Y (Stress)		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
X (R/S struggle)	-.09	.07	.06	-.29	.08	.001	.14	.40	.001
M_1 (ATF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.11	.05	.038
M_2 (TTF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.23	.05	< .001
Constant	4.31	.20	< .001	3.41	.23	< .001	1.57	.30	< .001
	$R^2 = .01$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .35$		
	$F(1; 97) = 1.38; p = .243$			$F(1; 97) = 12.38; p = .001$			$F(3; 95) = 17.29; p < .001$		

Table 9. Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the ATF and TTF as Mediators of the Effect of Religious Struggle on Mental Health Disorders

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M_1 (ATF)			M_2 (TTF)			Y (DISORDERS)		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
X (R/S struggle)	-.10	.07	.184	-.29	.08	.001	.11	.03	< .001
M_1 (ATF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.04	.03	.183
M_2 (TTF)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.12	.03	< .001
Constant	4.36	.20	< .001	3.40	.23	< .001	.67	.19	.001
	$R^2 = .02$			$R^2 = .11$			$R^2 = .35$		
	$F(1; 98) = 1.79; p = .184$			$F(1; 98) = 12.36; p = .001$			$F(3; 96) = 17.22; p < .001$		

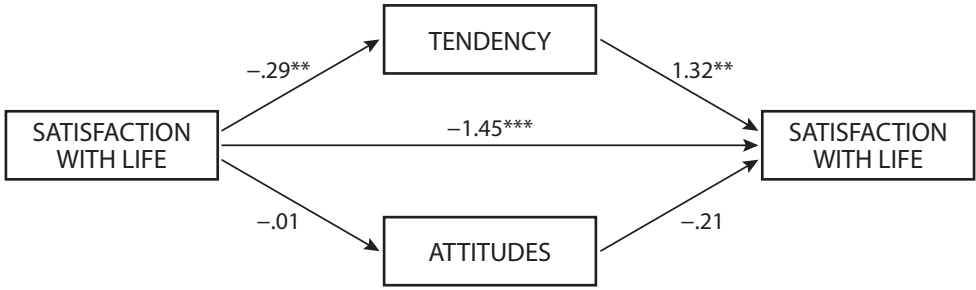


Figure 1. Results of mediation analyses testing ATF and TTF as mediators of the effect of religious struggle on satisfaction with life

Numbers represent the unstandardized regression coefficients for a model with religious struggle as the independent variable, ATF and TTF as the mediator variables, and satisfaction with life as the criterion.

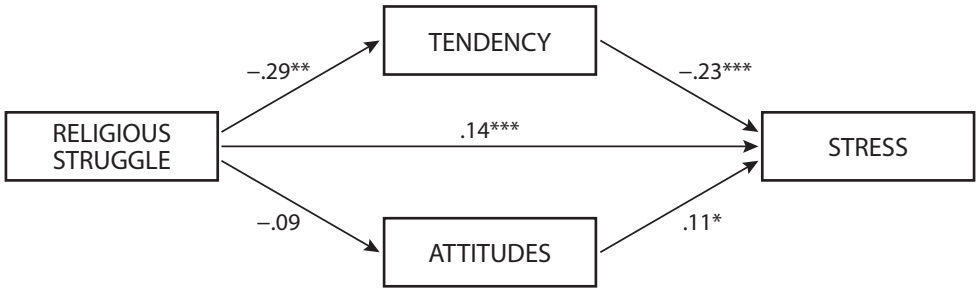


Figure 2. Results of mediation analyses testing ATF and TTF as mediators of the effect of religious struggle on stress

Numbers represent the unstandardized regression coefficients for a model with religious struggle as the independent variable, ATF and TTF as the mediator variables, and stress as the criterion.

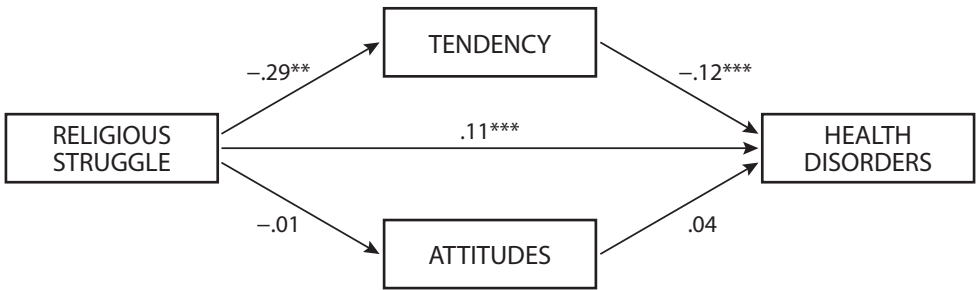


Figure 3. Results of mediation analyses testing ATF and TTF as mediators of the effect of religious struggle on mental health disorders

Numbers represent the unstandardized regression coefficients for a model with religious struggle as the independent variable, ATF and TTF as the mediator variables, and mental health disorders as the criterion.

General discussion

The aim of the research was to establish predictors of forgiveness (Study 1) and to analyze the mediating function of forgiveness in the relationship between religious struggle and mental health indicators (Study 2).

Predictors or tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness

The research confirmed that tendency to forgive correlates with warm parental attitude of one's father, low neuroticism, high conscientiousness, and low religious struggle: fear-guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions surrounding religion. Taking age, personality traits, parental attitudes, and religious struggle into account, significant predictors of tendency to forgive are neuroticism, protective parents, and negative affect toward God – the higher intensity of these variables, the lower tendency to forgive. These results may be deemed partial confirmation of the first hypothesis. However, the relationship between tendency to forgive and negative affect toward God is in contrast to what was expected.

The correlates of attitudes toward forgiveness are as follows: warm attitude of one's mother, agreeableness, low negative affect toward God, low strain in relations with believers, and high religious guilt. However, taking simultaneous account of age, personality traits, parental attitudes, and religious struggle, only religious struggle was a significant predictor of attitudes toward forgiveness. Religious guilt and fear of not being forgiven by God strengthen, and negative affect toward God and negative interactions with believers weaken positive attitudes toward forgiveness. This result may be deemed as a partial confirmation of the second hypothesis. However, the positive relationship between attitudes toward forgiveness and religious sense of guilt is in contrast to what was expected.

The results of my research only partially correspond to the results of studies which show that religiosity is correlated with positive attitudes toward forgiveness, but is not correlated with behavioral indicators, i.e. with tendency to forgive harms in individual cases of being hurt (Fox, Thomas, 2008). In fact, negative emotions toward God and strains in relations with believers reduce positive attitudes toward forgiveness. However, high negative affect toward God also reduces tendency to forgive. Forgiveness is a central element of religious doctrine, Christianity in particular. The more difficulties participants experience in their relationships with God and believers, the more difficult it is for them to accept and value the religious teaching positively. Apart from that, the present research indicates that religious sense of guilt is an important part of positive attitudes toward forgiveness. Favorable attitudes toward forgiveness is shaped based on the experienced sense of guilt toward God, increasing awareness of the need to be forgiven by God and fear that God may not forgive the participants their personal faults.

Dispositional forgiveness – the personality with inclination to forgive harms – depends on low neuroticism and lack of protective attitudes of parents. Negative relationship between neuroticism and disposition to forgive confirms that individuals who are stable emotionally, are more inclined to forgive. This result is in line with ample empirical research on American samples (McCullough, Worthington, 1999). In the present research, I have not confirmed the relationship of disposition to forgive and agreeableness. Moreover, protective parental attitudes do not make it easier to forgive. These results seem interesting and may shed a new light on some aspects of forgiveness, in particular the decision-making aspect. Fitzgibbons (1986) differentiates intellectual forgiveness, which is about deciding to forgive emotionally, i.e. feeling that the act of forgiveness happened. Low neuroticism and lack of protective parental attitudes may be factors which determine the decision-making measure of forgiveness. Moreover, the results observed also indicate that strains and conflicts in relationship with God may reduce tendency to forgive.

Forgiveness as a mediator in the relationship between religious struggle and mental health

In Study 2, I verified whether tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness are mediators in the relationships of religious struggle with mental health disorders, satisfaction with life, and stress. The analysis of mediation was preceded by the correlation analysis between religious struggle, tendency and attitudes toward forgiveness, and indicators of mental health. Fear-guilt, negative emotions toward God, and negative social interactions surrounding religion correlated negatively with tendency to forgive. I also observed negative correlations between indicators of mental health disorders – somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social disorders, depression, and stress – and tendency to forgive. Attitudes toward forgiveness correlated positively with satisfaction with life.

The mediation analysis confirmed that tendency to forgive was a significant mediator in the relationships between religious struggle and mental health indicators. Religious struggle reduced tendency to forgive, and the lower tendency to forgive, the stronger mental dysfunctions and stress, and lower satisfaction with life. These results partially confirmed the third hypothesis.

The result obtained may be commented in the context of knowledge about the function of religious struggle in the area of mental health (Zarzycka, 2017). Ample research confirmed that religious strain weakens somatic and mental health (e.g. Ellison, Lee, 2010; Ellison et al., 2013; Wilt et al., 2016). The researchers observed positive relationships of religious struggle with anxiety and negative affect (Ano, Vasconcelles, 2005), depression and suicidal tendencies (Exline, Yali, Sanderson, 2000), paranoid thoughts, obsessiveness, and compulsivity (McConnell et al., 2006). Although the issue of negative determination of health by religious struggle is obvious, we still know little about the mechanisms which rule these processes (Exline,

2013). Scarce existing research in this subject has confirmed that the relationship of struggle with psychological distress is moderated by civil status – stronger dependencies were observed in unmarried people than in those married (Ellison, Lee, 2010). Age was also a significant moderator of the relationship between struggle and mental health, this relationship is getting lower as people get older (Krause et al., 1999; Ellison, Lee, 2010). Other studies have shown that shame, neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness are mediators of the relationships of the sense of being alienated from God, conflicts in relationships with believers with positive emotions (Murray, Ciarrocchi, 2007). My research extends existing knowledge and indicates that the effect of religious struggle on mental health happens by reducing tendency to forgive.

Another conclusion from this paper is that the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship of religiousness with mental health seems to be complex. The aspects which may make it more difficult to forgive require particular attention (Lutjen, Siltan, Flannelly, 2012). Some researchers already follow the path of differentiating the function of particular religiosity aspects in determining forgiveness. For example, Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008) observed that positive religious coping with stress correlates positively with forgiveness, whereas negative religious coping with stress correlates negatively with forgiveness. In turn, Gordon et al. (2008) proved that internal religious motivation correlated with the tendency to forgive more strongly than external motivation.

This study was limited in several respects. First, it included only two types of forgiveness – dispositional and attitudes toward forgiveness. Therefore, we cannot apply these results for other constructs which describe forgiveness. Second, both samples were quite small, in particular the representatives of religious affiliations other than Christianity. This makes it impossible to carry out analyses in groups with various religious affiliations. Although this limitation did not impair the ability to verify hypotheses, the results obtained cannot be applied for other samples, e.g. of Jews or Muslims.

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UWARUNKOWANIA I MEDIACYJNA FUNKCJA PRZEBACZENIA W ZWIĄZKU ZMAGAŃ RELIGIJNYCH ZE ZDROWIEM PSYCHICZNYM

Streszczenie. W dwóch badaniach przedstawiono predyktory i funkcje tendencji i postawy wobec przebaczenia w relacjach interpersonalnych. Badanie 1 zawiera analizę zależności między cechami osobowości, postawami rodzicielskimi i zmaganiem religijnym a tendencją i postawą wobec przebaczenia. Badanie 2 zawiera analizę mediacyjnej funkcji tendencji i postawy wobec przebaczenia w związku zmagania religijnych ze wskaźnikami zdrowia psychicznego. Wykazano, że predyktorami postawy wobec przebaczenia są: wysokie religijne poczucie winy i przekonanie o potrzebie uzyskania przebaczenia od Boga, niski negatywny afekt względem Boga i niskie negatywne interakcje z ludźmi wierzącymi. Predyktorami tendencji do przebaczenia są: niska neurotyczność, niskie postawy ochraniające rodziców oraz niski negatywny afekt względem Boga. Tylko tendencja do przebaczenia jest istotnym mediatorem w związku zmagania religijnych z satysfakcją z życia, odczuwanym stresem i stanem zdrowia psychicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: gotowość do przebaczenia, postawa wobec przebaczenia, predyktory przebaczenia, zdrowie psychiczne, zmagania religijne

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