# The Influence of Forgiveness and Gratitude on Subjective Wellbeing and Health

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# Abstract

Positive Psychology emerged in the 1990s and new paradigm comes into existence for understanding human behaviour from human weaknesses to human strengths. Forgiveness and gratitude are constructs of Positive Psychology. Peterson and Seligman (2004) have classified forgiveness and gratitude as human virtues and strengths. There is something common in forgiveness and gratitude. Forgiveness is a positive psychological response to interpersonal harm and gratitude is a positive psychological response to interpersonal benefits (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In positive psychology, gratitude as an emotion is not only being grateful, but also having greater appreciation for someone or something. Forgiveness happens when one offers mercy to the one who has wronged us instead of holding on to anger. Forgiveness and gratitude are personality qualities that can significantly improve physical and psychological well-being. Individuals, who learn to forgive, reported improvement in stress tolerance, sleeping habits and overall well-being. Gratitude also increases [happiness](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/happiness), empathy feeling and decreases aggression and [depression](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/depression). Forgiveness and gratitude both are very essential to strengthen human relationship that is core behind to subjective well-being. In another words forgiveness and gratitude are positive characteristics of human that are connected to subjective well-being. The present paper is an attempt to incorporate the constructs of forgiveness and gratitude in connection to subjective well-being that have implications for health enhancements. **Key Words: Forgiveness, Gratitude, Subjective Well-Being, Health**

**Introduction:**

Positive Psychology has been developing quickly throughout the most recent two decades. Numerous clinician and specialists are doing their examination in the territory of positive psychology since it centers around human qualities in contrast with human shortcomings. Forgiveness and gratitude are significant ideas of Positive Psychology. They reinforce human relationship. Forgiveness is uprooting of antagonistic propensities, for example, retribution and outrage towards individuals and circumstances (Reed and Enright 2006). It implies forgiveness has the ability to change negative disposition into positive frames of mind. As indicated by Maltby, Macaskil and Day (2001), forgiveness is healthy exertion to manage negative results that are brought about by abuse of others and wrong conduct of oneself. It is difficult to excuse to any individual who has wronged you; yet when you hold feelings of spite with the person in question it lessens your psychological wellness. In any case, we can become familiar with the propensity for forgiveness. Gratitude is additionally significant part of healthy life. All in all terms, gratitude implies be grateful for whatever you have. As per customary depiction of Froh, Miller and Snyder (2007), gratitude is "feeling thankful for a decent or kind conduct from anybody." Wood et al., (2010) revealed that gratitude is influenced by characteristic and heavenly factors. As per this, one ought to be thankful towards to God and nature what they have Forgiveness and gratitude both are fundamental to reinforce a human relationship which is the center behind subjective well-being. At the end of the day, forgiveness and gratitude are positive character qualities that can impact subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is conceptualized as a nature of individual life in setting to the nearness of positive and negative effect and fulfilment with life. One goal of this part is to fuse the develops of forgiveness and gratitude regarding subjective well-being. At the point when the individual encounters subjective well-being, at that point it additionally be said that the individual will encounter great health. This topic is investigated further in this part.

**Forgiveness:**

Forgiveness includes an adjustment in demeanor and feelings towards an individual who harms you (guilty party). It is intentional choice to pardon. It diminishes the inspiration of reprisal and outrage, hatred from a wrongdoer in spite of their negative activities. For this it is required to giving up the negative feelings towards the guilty party. Looking for and intending to render retribution is one of the central human intentions. It is truly requiring mental fortitude and solidarity to excuse somebody. Jampolsky (1979, 1999) has characterized forgiveness utilizing seven criteria, where a change happens in the person's 1. Vision and observation, 2. Frame of mind and Beliefs, 3. Decision, Decision or Intention, 4. Attention to duality to familiarity with unity, 5. Influence or feeling, 6. 'Self' duty to 'self' strengthening; and 7. Recognizable proof of center characteristics of that person.

In another words, forgiveness encourages us to see the things in more extensive point of view, giving up the complaints and hard feelings, outrage, negative feelings and retribution emotions. Forgiveness is an incredible motion towards guilty party and uniquely oneself. Holding negative feelings to anybody annihilates and decreases physical just as emotional well-being particularly subjective well-being. Forgiveness has been characterized practically that is forgiveness of self, and forgiveness of other. Self-forgiveness is a passionate and mental procedure of supplanting self-related negative intellectual assessments and feelings, for example, misery, disgrace and blame, disgrace with positive comprehensions and feelings and practices (Hall and Fincham2008; Wohl et al. 2008).

Worthington et al. (1999) characterized forgiveness of different as the way toward obtaining positive change in possess sentiments, thinking feeling and conduct towards to violator. Thompson et al. (2005) said that forgiveness of others obliges the sentiment of negative feelings, for example, outrage and permits more prominent experience of positive feeling like bliss (Krause and Ellison 2003). It is likewise revealed that self-forgiveness is more troublesome than forgiveness of others and progressively destructive and harming to possess health (Macaskill, 2012).

**Gratitude:**

Gratitude is attractive human trademark that can improve the life for person. Disdain regularly appears to easily fall into place however gratitude isn't programmed reaction towards to circumstances of life. It is inclination or disposition created because of standard practice to be appreciative or grateful whatever you have. It gives you positive encounters and inward harmony. Emmons (2008) has conceptualized gratitude as something past being only a feeling – it can likewise be either a frame of mind, or an ethical excellence or even a propensity. He has additionally conceptualized it as a character characteristic just as an adapting reaction. Along these lines, plainly gratitude has both the good just as enthusiastic viewpoint. As far as good perspective, gratitude is human prudence. As indicated by Synder and Lopez (2002) excellencies have been characterized as human needs to thrive. The enthusiastic part of gratitude includes a sentiment of passionate obligation towards to someone else. Emmons and McCullough (2003) have investigated various approaches to upgrade the feeling of gratitude in individuals. They utilized a mediation strategy to improve gratitude; in this intercession they look at the individuals who recorded either negative or unbiased occasion in their journals, and the individuals who kept up gratitude diaries (recorded appreciative occasions). It was discovered that who kept gratitude diary announced more noteworthy readiness, eagerness and assurance and they gain ground towards significant objectives relating to their scholarly presentation, health and relational relationship. In another investigation of Emmons and McCullough (2003) indicated that the individuals who were in gratitude condition were progressively vigorous, increasingly hopeful, progressively associated with others and bound to rest adequately. Froh et al. (2009a) told an example of young people and youngsters to compose a letter of gratitude to somebody for whom they were grateful and afterward give that letter face to face. In this investigation they found the individuals who were low in positive influence had the option to make more prominent degree of thankfulness and expanded positive effect after mediation. Thus, by these practices and intercessions we can develop gratitude in individual and improve their subjective well-being.

**Subjective well-being:**

The term subjective well-being (SWB) is normally utilized for "bliss", "personal satisfaction" or "life-fulfillment". The significant part of SWB is balance among positive and negative effect. What's more, psychological assessment about existence is likewise significant part of subjective well-being. Diener's (1984) tripartite model of subjective well-being characterizes how people experience the nature of their lives, which includes both intellectual assessments and enthusiastic reactions. Diener portrays that subjective well-being made by three fundamental segments such is reality fulfillment (LS), positive effect (PA) and negative effect (NA). Because of this explanation it is named the Tripartite model. Further Diener (1984) said that subjective well-being has primary two parts. As per him the principal part is life fulfillment which relies on subjective assessment of by and large life fulfillment and second segment is full of feeling encounters that are identified with human's positive and negative passionate reactions in regards to their life. Intellectual and full of feeling well-being are two essential segments of SWB (Headey and Waring, 1992). Psychological well-being reflects by and large fulfillment with life and full of feeling well-being alludes to how individuals feel in a specific minute. Subjective well-being can be comprehended as to some degree indistinguishable from joy (Diener 2000; Diener et al. 2003).

As per Diener (2000) "subjective well-being can be characterized as nature of a person's existence as to both the nearness and relative recurrence of positive and pessimistic feelings after some time and one's general fulfillment with life." If we see the survey of writing in regards to the above develops of positive psychology, we can say forgiveness and gratitude are positively connected with subjective well-being.

**Subjective well-being**

The term subjective well-being (SWB) is commonly used for “happiness”, “quality of life” or “life-satisfaction”. The important component of SWB is balance between positive and negative effect. In addition, cognitive evaluation about life is also important aspect of subjective well-being. Diener’s (1984) tripartite model of subjective well-being defines how humans experience the quality of their lives, which involves both cognitive evaluations and emotional responses. Diener describes that subjective well-being made by three main components that is life satisfaction (LS), positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). Due to this reason it is named the Tripartite model. Further Diener (1984) said that subjective well-being has main two components. According to him the first component is life satisfaction which depends upon cognitive evaluation of overall life satisfaction and second component is affective experiences that are related to human’s positive and negative emotional responses regarding their life. Cognitive and affective well-being are two primary components of SWB (Headey & Waring, 1992). Cognitive well-being reflects overall satisfaction with life and affective well-being refers to how people feel in a particular moment. Subjective well-being can be understood as somewhat identical to happiness (Diener 2000; Diener et al. 2003).

According to Diener (2000) “subjective well-being can be defined as quality of an individual’s life with regard to both the presence and relative frequency of positive and negative emotions over time and one’s overall satisfaction with life.” If we see the review of literature regarding the above constructs of positive psychology, we can say forgiveness and gratitude are positively associated with subjective well-being.

**Positive association of Forgiveness and Gratitude on Subjective Well-being**

There is generous research demonstrating the positive relationship of the given three develops. People falling high on forgiveness report higher life fulfillment and wellbeing, better personal satisfaction, also score high on in general positive effect, particularly bliss, gratitude, trust and confidence. On the other high people low on forgiveness report higher indications of gloom and psychosomatic issue, just as report a bigger recurrence of adverse feelings, for example, dissatisfaction, outrage, tension and blame. In fact, there is a significant relationship among's forgiveness and gratitude noted by Froh et al. (2008). Both forgiveness and gratitude have been accounted for to have a solid positive relationship with wellbeing (Toussaint and Friedman, 2009). While it might appear that forgiveness and gratitude are very comparable builds, Peterson and Seligman (2004) have noticed that there is a distinction in what makes forgiveness as against gratitude. Bono and McCullough (2006) consented to this recommendation, and further suggested that the significant connection between the develops of forgiveness and gratitude is the human relationship where people experience both advantage and damage Writing audit recommends that forgiveness successful to diminish the negative impacts, for example, disdain (Berry and Worthington, 2001). Reed and Enright (2006) revealed that forgiveness replaces the adverse demeanors, similar to outrage and vengeance towards individuals or circumstances, with positive mentalities, for example, tolerance and sympathies. Maltby et al., (2001) said that forgiveness is a healthy exertion to manage contrary outcomes because of wrong conduct of oneself and abuse by others. This exertion beats adverse sentiments and expands joy or well-being of individual. In the event that an individual surrenders contrary sentiments, for example, vengeance, disappointment, aggravation and outrage, and transforms antagonistic emotions into positive emotions and excuses the individual, it fundamentally adds to joy or SWB of individual.

Bono and McCullough (2006) have recommended that gratitude is a positive passionate reaction to a relational advantage. Gratitude enables people to be appreciative for positive occasions and things throughout everyday life. Gratitude enables them to feel more noteworthy level of SWB (Emmons and McCullough 2003; Park et al. 2004). Different analysts found that gratitude has been positively connected to life fulfillment (Lambert et al. 2009; Wood et al. 2009), and positive effect (Froh et al. 2009a, b). Walker and Pitts (1998) portrayed that Gratitude is a positive express that is related with positive feelings, for example, pride, expectation, satisfaction and happiness. McCullough et al., (2001) proposed that gratitude manufactures social, otherworldly and mental assets which are powerful in expanding SWB. Specialists have been accounted for that gratitude assume critical job in change with life, satisfaction and increments physical and mental well-being and furthermore human relationship (McCullough and Witvliet, 2002).

**Positive association of Forgiveness and Gratitude on Individual’s Health and Wellbeing**

The impact of positive emotions on the individual’s mental and physical health has been studied in depth by Fredrickson (2004) and Conway et al., (2013), the expert on positive psychology at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA. Her research has noted that when individuals experience positive emotions, it broadens their ‘thought-action repertoire’, which helps the individual to expand their field of consciousness and be open to more ideas and solutions. This leads to building up of resources and the individual is on the positive gain spiral of mental wellness, which is the well-known ‘Broaden and Build’ theory.

Further research indicates that people who experience a greater amount of positive emotions as compared to negative emotions are emotionally well and develop the resource of resilience. Such people also have improved physical health, including lower blood pressure, reduced weight, reduced risk for heart disease and longer life expectancy.

As stated earlier, forgiveness and gratitude are important constructs of positive psychology which influence subjective well-being. It can also be said that these two constructs have an association with physical and mental health. Surprisingly there is less research on this connection. Lawler et al. (2005) found that higher trait forgiveness had a negative association with lower resting levels of blood pressure and faster post-stress recovery. This relationship was either partially or fully mediated by social skills, spirituality, as well as reduction in either negative affect or stress. They concluded that state as well as trait forgiveness have a positive association with better mental and physical health.

There are various models which propose to explain the relationship between forgiveness and health. Thorensen et al. (2000) proposed six potential pathways which link forgiveness to health: (1) reduction in chronic blaming, anger and hostility; (2) decrease in chronic hyperarousal and/or allostatic load; (3) optimistic thinking; (4) self-efficacy to take health-related actions; (5) social support; and (6) transcendent consciousness. Supporting evidence for this model was noted by Lawler et al. (2005).

A similar theory was proposed by Worthington, Berry and Parrot (2001) which has been expanded by Touissant and Webb (2005). Worthington et al. (2001) proposed that the association between forgiveness and health involves both direct as well as indirect relationships. According to the authors, forgiveness and unforgiveness are two separate constructs and forgiveness cannot occur unless unforgiveness occurs. The crux of the theory is the following four propositions: 1. The state of unforgiveness causes stress in the individual; 2. Coping mechanisms apart from forgiveness can reduce the state of unforgiveness; 3. The experience of forgiveness can reduce the stress experienced due to unforgiveness; and 4. The construct of forgiveness is conceptualised as a coping strategy related to health. There is a large body of research displaying direct evidences supporting the above propositions (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). They have also proposed various direct mechanisms where forgiveness might lead to better mental and physical health, while unforgiveness might lead to poorer health. The direct mechanisms include the evidences that unforgiveness might increase hostility and affects the immune system in various ways – through the release of anti-bodies, at the cellular as well as neuro-endocrine level. Forgiveness might also be affected by various Central Nervous System processes – the motivation systems identified by Gray (1994), vagal tonality, and the function of the hypothalamus and amygdala. Apart from these direct mechanisms, there might be many other indirect mechanisms through which forgiveness can influence physical health. These indirect mechanisms include greater social support, less stressful marriages, implying good relationship skills. Forgiveness may also be related to certain personality traits which in turn are related to health, such as committed religion, higher trait empathy, lower rumination, lower levels of neuroticism and higher levels of agreeableness (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). These aspects lead to the following of ‘healthy behaviours’ by the individual aimed at improving and maintaining good health. This theory, as stated earlier, was expanded by Toussaint and Webb (2005) where they added Personal Control and Rumination as two more mechanisms apart from social support, interpersonal relations and health behaviour having an influence on the association between forgiveness and health. In addition, they have emphasised on the developmental process of forgiveness. This aspect was propounded by Enright, Freedman and Rique (1998) who proposed four broad phases consisting of 20 steps to achieve forgiveness. The first phase is that of Uncovering – where the individual is aware of problem, and may experience emotional pain, offense and anger. The second phase is Decision – the realisation of the need for an alternative resolution to the problem. The third stage is that of Work – which includes the various coping processes including reframing, empathy and acceptance of pain, and arriving at some resolution. The final stage is of Deepening – finding meaning and universality. Of course, the progression of the individual may not be necessarily linear. It has been noted that the relationship between mental health and forgiveness varies depending on the phase that one has reached in the developmental process of forgiveness. Mental health is hypothesised to be poorer in the first two phases and is likely to improve as one works through the further phases. Therefore, Toussaint and Webb (2005) propose that the developmental stage may act as a moderator in the relationship between forgiveness and mental health and subjective well-being.

In the recent past, there has been a growing body of research which shows that gratitude has positive effect on the social, emotional, psychological and physical health of individuals. Various researches have shown that trait gratitude is linked with better physical health (Hill, Allemand & Roberts, 2013; O'Connell, O'Shea, & Gallagher, 2016). Trait gratitude has been defined as a “part of a wider life orientation towards noticing an appreciating the positive in the world” (Wood, et al., 2010, p891). Wood et al. (2010) noted that there is a significant relationship of gratitude with subjective wellbeing and health. This is mediated by a variety of mechanisms such as having an interpretive schema where grateful individuals perceive life through an ‘altruistic’ lens, through positive coping strategies, through the habitual experience of positive emotions, through the broadening and building of resources such as resilience, social support, etc.

These hypothesised relations have found empirical support in various research. Hill et al. (2003) noted that the relationship between trait gratitude and physical health was mediated by psychological health, healthy activities and a willingness to seek help for health concerns; but this result varied with age and was stronger in older adults than younger adults. O'Connell et al (2016) added that this relationship was mediated by the level of loneliness. Lavelock et al. (2016) have added a religious or spiritual aspect to this relationship. In their comprehensive review they noted that there is a body of research to support the relationship of gratitude with physical and psychological health outcomes. The researchers proposed a comprehensive model of gratitude and physical health. Gratitude is having a reciprocal relationship with personal factors, events that prompt gratitude as well as explicit interventions along with the interpretive schemas, positive coping skills, positive affect and broaden-and-build effect. The outcomes of gratitude, namely better mental health outcomes, physical health behaviours and better relationships are mediated by age and gender, and finally lead to better physical health outcomes.

**Conclusion:**

To sum up, it can be said that forgiveness and gratitude are important constructs of positive psychology which influences subjective well-being. SWB is also very significant factor for human life. SWB reflects cognitive evaluation of human life. Nowadays lots of psychological problems are emerging due to cognitive misinterpretation of life. So, if we incorporate, forgiveness and gratitude in a psychotherapeutic intervention, it will speed up recovery and also increase emotional as well as subjective well-being. This improvement in turn will lead to better physical well-being or physical health.

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