

The Influence of Forgiveness on Subjective Well-Being in Late Adolescents from Broken Home Families

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Abstract

Family harmony is an ideal condition desired by all children. However, not every child has the opportunity to experience a harmonious family environment. One of the main factors that contributes to negative emotional states and lower quality of life in children—particularly adolescents—is parental divorce. Negative emotions can interfere with the development and maintenance of a child's subjective well-being. For adolescents affected by parental divorce, the ability to forgive may help mitigate the adverse effects of a broken home.

This study aims to examine the effect of forgiveness on subjective well-being among late adolescents from broken home families. The research employed a quantitative approach. The participants were late adolescents aged 18 to 21 years whose parents were divorced. Subjective well-being was measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Forgiveness was assessed using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18).

A snowball sampling technique was employed, resulting in a total sample of 126 respondents. Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression, with the aid of Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 22 for Windows.

The results showed no significant effect of forgiveness on the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being, specifically life satisfaction. However, forgiveness was found to have a highly significant effect on the affective dimensions of subjective well-being, namely positive affect and negative affect. Therefore, it can be concluded that forgiveness does have a significant influence on subjective well-being among late adolescents with divorced parents.

Keywords: Forgiveness, Subjective Well Being, Broken Home, Late Adolescence

1. Introduction

Family harmony refers to a condition in which family members are united, fulfilling their respective rights and responsibilities, while fostering mutual affection, understanding, open communication, and effective cooperation among all members (Fatmawati, 2022). However, not all individuals are fortunate enough to experience such familial harmony. When conflicts within the family are not adequately resolved and recur over time, they may lead to a breakdown in the household structure. This condition, commonly referred to as a *broken home*, often has detrimental effects on children. A *broken home* may result from parental divorce or an incomplete family structure, in which one or both parents fail to effectively fulfill their roles and responsibilities as caregivers (Olivia, Yanti, & Yunindyawati, 2017).

The prevalence of *broken home* families in Indonesia has shown a significant upward trend in recent years. According to data from Indonesia's statistical reports, the number of divorce cases reached 516,334 in 2022—an increase of 15.31% compared to 447,743 cases recorded in 2021. The 2022 figure represents the highest number of divorce cases in the past six years (Annur, 2023). Adolescents who experience parental divorce are at a higher risk of developing symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, as well as a decline in overall happiness and life satisfaction (Mistiani, 2018).

Children often perceive the emergence of a *broken home* as a distressing and unfavorable life event. The various post-divorce issues experienced by parents can lead to life changes that are difficult for children—especially adolescents—to accept (Ningrum, 2013). Adolescents burdened with negative emotions may experience significant changes in their psychological state, and those from broken homes are anticipated to exhibit lower levels of well-being in adulthood. This can be observed through signs such as low self-confidence, difficulties in forming social relationships, and poor academic or occupational performance. When negative affect outweighs positive affect in adolescents, it contributes to a decline in their overall *subjective well-being* (Dewi & Utami, 2008).

Subjective well-being is a construct composed predominantly of frequent positive emotions such as joy, happiness, hope, interest, trust, and love, and infrequent negative emotions such as sadness, guilt, hatred, and anger. It also encompasses satisfaction across various life domains, including work, education, and personal life (Diener, 2000). Individuals with high levels of subjective well-being tend to hold more positive thoughts about themselves, perceive the world as conducive to their happiness, and demonstrate greater resilience in response to adverse events (Larsen & Prizmic, 2008).

Maltby, Day, and Barber (2005) emphasized the significance of forgiveness as a human strength, highlighting a potential relationship between forgiveness and happiness. Previous studies have suggested that forgiveness reflects a positive cognitive framework, and therefore, it is expected to play a crucial role in enhancing subjective well-being. Forgiveness is defined as the willingness to relinquish negative experiences arising from interpersonal relationships, and instead, foster and cultivate a more positive connection with the individual who caused the harm (Nashori, 2011).

Forgiveness is not a simple, singular act, but rather a dynamic process involving emotional, affective, and cognitive mechanisms. When someone who has been wronged—despite having the right to feel anger or to punish the offender—chooses instead to let go of resentment out of compassion and kindness, the act of forgiving contributes to personal growth and moral development (Rizzo, 2022). Forgiveness encompasses a transformation of negative feelings toward the transgressor into more positive ones, as well as the release of losses and the decision to move forward (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington Jr., 2014).

Research conducted by Khizar, Nawaz, Haroon, and Mubarak (2021) demonstrated that forgiveness has a strong and positive impact on subjective happiness. Their findings indicate that forgiving others fosters a more positive mindset, which in turn enhances an individual's overall happiness, particularly in comparison to those with lower levels of forgiveness. Similarly, a study by Zuroida and Agustin (2022) found a highly significant positive correlation between forgiving behavior and subjective well-being, suggesting that the more an individual is able to forgive, the greater their subjective well-being—particularly among divorced women. Forgiveness may thus serve as a key determinant of emotional well-being and happiness, enabling individuals to move forward with their lives.

Drawing upon previous research, it is evident that forgiving behavior can positively influence an individual's well-being and overall life satisfaction. The present study aims to examine the effect of forgiveness on subjective well-being among late adolescents from *broken home* families, who are often predicted to experience lower quality of life in adulthood.

2. Methodology

This study involved 126 late adolescents who met the following criteria: aged between 18 to 21 years and originating from broken home families, specifically individuals whose parents are divorced. The sampling technique used was snowball sampling, which is a method that begins with a limited number of initial respondents and gradually expands by recruiting new participants through referrals. This technique was chosen due to the initial difficulty in accessing a sufficient number of qualified participants (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data were collected using an online structured questionnaire designed with a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The collected data were analyzed using simple linear regression.

The subjective well-being scale was adapted based on the dimensions proposed by Diener (2009), which include cognitive and affective dimensions. To measure this variable, two established instruments were used:

1. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985), which consists of 5 items. All items demonstrated good discriminatory power, with item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.660 to 0.799.
2. Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988), which was used to assess affective aspects.

For the forgiveness variable, the researcher used the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) developed by McCullough, Root, & Cohen (2006), based on the model proposed by McCullough (2000), which includes three key aspects: avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation. The item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.303 to 0.700, and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for this scale was 0.902, indicating high internal consistency and that the scale was considered reliable ($\alpha > 0.7$).

3. Result and Discussion

The hypothesis proposed in this study stated that forgiveness influences subjective well-being in late adolescents from broken home families. Based on the results of a simple linear regression analysis between the forgiveness scale and life satisfaction, a significance value of 0.344 ($p > 0.05$) was obtained. This indicates that forgiveness does not have a significant influence on life satisfaction.

However, the regression analysis between forgiveness and positive affect yielded a significance value of 0.008 ($p \leq 0.05$), suggesting that forgiveness significantly influences positive affect. Similarly, the regression analysis between forgiveness and negative affect resulted in a significance value of 0.006 ($p \leq 0.05$), indicating a significant influence on negative affect as well.

The R^2 value between forgiveness and positive affect was 0.056, meaning forgiveness accounts for 5.6% of the variance in positive affect, while the remaining 94.4% is influenced by other factors. For negative affect, the R^2 value was 0.059, indicating that forgiveness contributes 5.9% to the variance in negative affect, with the remaining 94.1% influenced by other external factors. These findings suggest that forgiveness affects the affective dimensions of subjective well-being, namely positive and negative affect, but does not significantly

affect the cognitive dimension (life satisfaction).

These results are consistent with Diener (2006), who stated that one of the factors influencing subjective well-being is personality, which includes internal traits such as forgiveness. Forgiveness helps individuals release emotional burdens caused by interpersonal conflicts. For children of divorced parents, emotional pain caused by the separation can gradually be reduced through forgiveness, potentially increasing their overall happiness and well-being (Dewi, 2006). Adolescents who have forgiven their parents and come to terms with their family situation may find a greater sense of peace and satisfaction in life.

These findings align with research conducted by Karimah (2021), which showed that forgiveness positively influences subjective well-being, although its effective contribution was only 2.8%, with the rest influenced by other factors. Dewi and Nasywa (2019) further identified internal factors such as gratitude, personality, self-esteem, and spirituality, and external factors like social support, as contributors to subjective well-being.

Interestingly, this study revealed that forgiveness does not affect life satisfaction. This aligns with the findings of Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, and Mullet (2003), who argued that the low correlation between forgiveness and life satisfaction may be due to the different scopes of the instruments used. The TRIM-18 scale measures forgiveness in response to specific interpersonal transgressions, while the Satisfaction with Life Scale captures global life satisfaction without reference to any specific events.

In this study, it is likely that participants had already forgiven their parents and reconciled with their circumstances. However, forgiving one's parents may not significantly enhance overall life satisfaction, possibly due to a lingering sense of family incompleteness or emotional void. Despite the absence of avoidance or revenge motivations, and continued positive relationships with parents, adolescents may still experience emotional impacts of divorce, such as loneliness or loss of parental roles, which affect life satisfaction. This supports Diener (2009), who noted that individuals feel satisfied when their lives align with personal expectations.

The results also support findings by Allemand, Hill, Ghaemmahami, and Martin (2012) and Datu (2013), which emphasized the role of forgiveness in reducing negative emotional states, thereby improving subjective well-being. In this study, forgiveness showed a greater influence on negative affect than on positive affect, highlighting its regulatory role in mitigating adverse emotional responses.

Descriptive analysis showed that life satisfaction among late adolescents with divorced parents was at a moderate to high level, suggesting that their lives were generally manageable despite the challenges. Parental divorce typically causes emotional and psychological issues, potentially affecting satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Eddington and Shunman (2008), who stated that family plays a central role in child development and happiness. Likewise, Astuti (2015) asserted that individuals experience greater life satisfaction when they enjoy positive family interactions.

The level of forgiveness among participants was also moderate to high, with an empirical mean score of 60.75. This suggests that adolescents affected by parental divorce were generally capable of forgiving their parents. Despite experiencing the negative consequences of their family situation, participants did not express desires for revenge or avoidance. Instead, they maintained respectful relationships and sought reconciliation. This finding is supported by Yáñez Yaben (2015), who emphasized that forgiveness can help restore damaged relationships, especially within families. Moreover, research by Rahmania, Hizbullah, Anisa, and Wahyuningsih (2021) showed that adolescents who are able to forgive can still find meaning in life despite their parents' divorce.

An analysis of living arrangements revealed that most participants lived with their mothers, followed by fathers, aunts, siblings, or alone. There were variations in life satisfaction based on living arrangements. Participants living with siblings, grandparents, or alternating between homes reported higher levels of life satisfaction, with the highest mean score observed in those living with siblings. This supports Narindrani (2021) and Sugianto & Kristiyani (2021), who found that positive sibling relationships are associated with higher life satisfaction.

Further analysis based on the perceived impact of parental divorce revealed that adolescents who experienced social or economic impacts reported higher life satisfaction than those who experienced emotional, academic, personal, or relational impacts. This suggests that emotional and relational disruptions have a more profound effect on adolescent well-being. This is consistent with Kelly and Emery (2003), who found that parental divorce can lead to a variety of emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study aimed to examine the influence of forgiveness on subjective well-being among late adolescents from broken home families. The analysis showed that forgiveness did not have a significant effect on life satisfaction, but had a significant influence on the affective dimensions of subjective well-being, namely positive and negative affect. Forgiveness contributed 5.6% to positive affect and 5.9% to negative affect, with the remaining variance explained by other factors beyond forgiveness. Although the effect size is relatively small, these findings indicate that the ability to forgive can help reduce negative emotions and enhance positive emotions in individuals.

The majority of respondents in this study demonstrated moderate-to-high levels of forgiveness and

subjective well-being, suggesting an adaptive capacity to cope with the challenges of living in a non-intact family environment. Additionally, differences in life satisfaction were observed based on with whom the respondents lived and the perceived impact of parental divorce. Respondents who lived with siblings—especially older siblings—reported higher life satisfaction, while those who experienced social and economic impacts of parental divorce also tended to report higher satisfaction. These findings reinforce the importance of social relationships and emotional support in shaping subjective well-being among adolescents from broken homes.

Based on these results, it is recommended that psychological interventions, such as counseling or therapy, be provided to help adolescents develop forgiveness, particularly to reduce negative affect and enhance positive affect. Furthermore, it is important for parents, educators, and mental health professionals to pay attention to other factors that influence subjective well-being, such as social support, spirituality, self-esteem, and the quality of relationships with family members, especially siblings.

Future researchers are encouraged to use multivariate analytical approaches, such as multiple regression or mediation-moderation models, to further explore the complex factors influencing subjective well-being. Psychological well-being programs for adolescents from broken homes should be holistically designed, incorporating both affective and cognitive aspects, and based on the internal strengths of individuals as well as their supportive social environments.

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