

“I forgive but do not forget”: A Systematic Review of Factors Influencing Forgiveness in Older Adults

Fajriah Rahmah B Arafah^{*1}, Adriana Soekandar Ginanjar¹

¹*Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia*

Submitted 29 October 2024 Accepted 15 January 2025 Published 25 June 2025

Abstract. Forgiveness in older adults is a complex process influenced by various internal and external factors. Studies on forgiveness in older adults highlight that time, life experiences, and individual characteristics play crucial roles in understanding and practicing forgiveness. This systematic literature review aimed to explain the factors influencing forgiveness in older adults. The review included eight studies that met the specified inclusion criteria: discuss forgiveness, studying older adults, and published within the last ten years 2014 to 2024. The literature review identified several factors affecting forgiveness in older adults: (a) religiosity; (b) aging characteristics; (c) time; (d) the nature of transgressions; and (e) obligation to societal and cultural norms. Further exploration of the process of forgiveness among older adults is recommended for future research.

Keywords: factors; forgiveness; older adults; religiosity

Introduction

It is estimated that by 2030, at least 1 in 6 people worldwide will be older adults (World Health Organization, 2022). The number of individuals aged 65 and over is expected to double, increasing from 9.3% in 2020 to 16% by 2050 (United Nations, 2019). The United Nations reported that the global older adults population reached 703 million in 2019 (United Nations, 2019), and the figure is projected to exceed 1.5 billion by 2050, more than twice the amount.

Indonesia has been classified as a country with an aging population structure since 2021, with statistics showing that 1 in 10 people in Indonesia are elderly. Data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) in March 2023 revealed that over the past decade (2010–2022), the percentage of elderly in the country increased by approximately 4%, reaching 11.75% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023).

Old age represents a stage or period in the life cycle marked by physical and psychological aging (Santrock, 2011). Aging encompasses biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects (Derdaele et al., 2019). In the elderly stage, there are several developmental challenges, including retirement and

*Address for correspondence: fajriah.rahmah@ui.ac.id



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health issues (Berk, 2018). As people age, they experience physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. One of these changes is the stagnation in late adulthood, which then leads to a decline in condition as individuals enter old age (Papalia et al., 2009; Santrock, 2011). Many elderly struggle with challenges, such as depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, social isolation, and sleep disorders (Berk, 2018). However, some individuals in late adulthood are able to maintain emotional wellbeing (Suanet & Huxhold, 2020).

The quality of aging depends on one's ability to adapt to existing challenges, including the vulnerabilities linked to the old age (Estebarsari et al., 2019). Successful aging correlates with various factors, both physical and psychological, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal, e.g., health, life satisfaction, social relationships, self-acceptance, reflection and retrospection, and autonomy (Baltes & Smith, 2004; Estebarsari et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2018). According to the psychosocial development theory, older adults are in a developmental stage where they have an ego integrity, which is a sense of satisfaction with life achievements and acceptance of both positive and negative events that have occurred (Santrock, 2011). When individuals reflect on their lives, it is important to review how the older adults contemplate and understand forgiveness, whether toward themselves, others, or certain situations (Crain, 2015; Thompson et al., 2005).

Retrospection at the final stage of psychosocial development provides the older adults with opportunities to resolve personal and interpersonal transgressions and conflicts (Berk, 2018). According to Worthington et al. (2007), forgiveness is considered a crucial aspect of mental well being, especially among the older adults, and thus plays a role in resolving past conflicts. Snyder and Lopez (2002) described forgiveness as three concepts: forgiveness as a response, as a personality disposition, and as a characteristic of a social unit. This description highlights that forgiveness is a prosocial change in the victim's thoughts, emotions, and behavior toward the offense or conflict that occurred. McCullough et al. (2000) generally defined forgiveness as an intraindividual prosocial change in a specific interpersonal context. Therefore, forgiveness is essentially intrapsychic, involving individual cognitive states and processes that occur within an interpersonal context. Forgiveness provides positive outcomes for both individuals and groups, including improving life satisfaction, well being, and a sense of purpose (Kaleta & Mróz, 2018; Krok & Zarzycka, 2021; Tiwari et al., 2023).

Forgiving others for the harm they have caused can be challenging for individuals. Each person may employ different strategies for forgiveness, e.g., letting go of negative feelings toward the wrongdoer or overcoming anger and pain through reflection or catharsis (Worthington et al., 2000). Forgiveness is also often considered important in improving the quality of both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Billingsley & Losin, 2017; Worthington et al., 2000). Worthington et al. (2007) categorized forgiveness into two types: decisional forgiveness, which involves a change in behavioral intention, and emotional forgiveness, which involves replacing negative emotions with positive ones. Research on forgiveness has expanded into various fields of psychology, including developmental psychology. There is an assumption that individual's ability to forgive changes throughout life, from childhood and adolescence to adulthood and old age (Allemand, 2008; Allemand & Olaru, 2021; Oostenbroek & Vaish, 2019).

Similar research has shown a relationship between forgiveness and age, suggesting that older individuals tend to exhibit more forgiving attitudes than younger people (Kaleta & Mróz, 2018; Toussaint et al., 2001). Due to aging, older adults experience various declines, physically and mentally, making it likelier for them to experience depression symptoms. Research by Derdaele et al. (2019) found that forgiveness is negatively related to depression symptoms in the older adults, and these findings are mediated by the psychosocial developmental tasks of this age group. The developmental task of finding a balance between ego-integrity and despair is an important intrapersonal mechanism, so forgiveness is positively related to life satisfaction and negatively related to depression symptoms (Derdaele et al., 2019; Tian & Wang, 2021). There is also longitudinal research suggesting that greater forgiveness is associated with less stress and better mental health in the older adults (Toussaint et al., 2016).

Previous research conducted by Toussaint et al. (2001) suggested that various forms of forgiveness are related to health in young, adult, and older adults. However, forgiveness of others is only positively related to health in the older adults, specifically mental health. Furthermore, Tian and Wang (2021) explained that self-forgiveness in the older adults is also positively related to life satisfaction. The higher one's forgiveness level is (both toward oneself and others), the more satisfied the older adults are with their life. According to Erikson (1994), at each stage of development, there is a crisis that one will experience if they do not successfully complete the developmental tasks of their age. When older adults age, they not only face crises or conflicts at that age, but also reflect on life experiences in previous age periods. Older adults are at the "ego integrity vs despair" developmental stage, meaning that they may feel despair when they are disappointed with their life experiences, unachieved goals, or unresolved interpersonal problems (Berk, 2018). Therefore, forgiveness can be one of the useful strategies to minimize negative experiences and optimize positive life experiences (Allemand et al., 2013).

This also supports the notion that forgiveness is important for successful aging (Estebansari et al., 2019; Hantman & Cohen, 2010). Therefore, forgiveness that plays a vital role in old age is a multifaceted process. Factors that influence forgiveness in one geographic area may not necessarily influence another region due to different social, economic, or cultural circumstances. Factors contributing to higher levels of forgiveness in older individuals include increased religiosity, decreased rumination tendencies, and a better sense of life purpose (Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2010; Krok & Zarzycka, 2021; Lawler-Row, 2010). Factors that influence forgiveness in the older adults have not been fully reviewed. Thus, the primary objective of this study was to find and explain the factors, both internal and external, that influence forgiveness, especially in the older adults. This will be achieved through the extraction of empirical studies with a systematic review approach.

Method

The study employed a systematic review framework to identify the factors influencing forgiveness in older adults individuals. An electronic database search was conducted using the PRISMA (Preferred

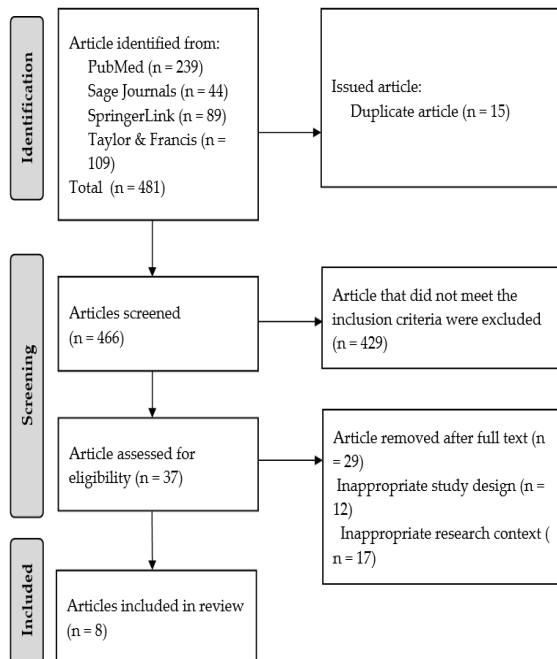
Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method, which encompasses three stages: identification, screening, and acceptance of results. Researchers screened and ensured that all studies in the literature review met the inclusion criteria. The systematic review was conducted through three stages of assessment: conducting a search through several databases using titles and keywords to ensure inclusion criteria, then assessing abstracts, and finally assessing full-text articles. Electronic databases accessed online included Sage Journals, PubMed, SpringerLink, and Taylor & Francis. The search strategy involved using keywords such as “forgiveness” AND (“older adults” OR “late adulthood” OR “older adults”). The research was conducted from April to August 2024.

Selected studies had to meet the determined inclusion criteria: (1) studies conducted on forgiveness in older adults; (2) empirical studies that explicitly described their research methods; (3) studies published within the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2024; and (4) all study designs except literature reviews. A total of 481 articles were obtained from four databases (Figure 1). Subsequently, a selection process was conducted on the abstracts of the articles, and duplicate articles were removed. A total of 429 articles were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, including studies examining forgiveness in younger age populations. The full-text review and assessment consisted of 37 articles. A total of 29 articles were excluded due to exclusion criteria, which were: articles that did not specifically discuss forgiveness in the older adults or late adulthood and articles that did not involve the older adults as the sample. Unpublished works, book chapters/subchapters, psychometric articles, reports, and dissertations were not included in the literature analysis.

Result

The literature search yielded 481 articles. Of these, eight articles were selected for comprehensive review as they met the inclusion criteria for inclusion and addressed factors influencing forgiveness in older adults (Table 1). The selected articles varied in research scopes, methods, and types of study. Four articles employed qualitative research designs, while the other four utilized quantitative research designs, comprising two longitudinal studies and two cross-sectional studies.

This study aimed to identify factors that influence forgiveness in the older adults. Of the eight articles reviewed, quite a few stated that forgiveness in the older adults is a complex process, so that only one aspect that plays a role cannot be identified, but rather a combination of several factors. From the results of the systematic review, several factors influencing forgiveness were found: religiosity and aging characteristics (internal factors) and time, nature of transgression, and obligations to social and cultural norms (external factors).

Figure 1*Article Screening Process Flow***Table 1***Overview of Literature Findings*

Citation	Country	Objective	Participants	Method	Results
Almeida and Cunha (2023)	Portugal	Examining how resentment and forgiveness in older adults develop over time	20 older adults (aged 66–85 years old)	Qualitative(content analysis)	A shift from hate to forgiveness over time. Time affects the experience of forgiveness in the older adults.
Band-Winterstein et al. (2024)	Arab & Israeli	Understanding the role of forgiveness in the reflective process during aging in older adults victims of abuse	Older adults women who were victims of abuse	Qualitative (secondary analysis)	Forgiveness in older adults people who experienced abuse is a complex process. This study explained that one of the things that influences forgiveness is the painful event.

Table 1 (Continued)*Overview of Literature Findings*

Citation	Country	Objective	Participants	Method	Results
Brudek et al. (2024)	Poland	Examining the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between gerotranscendence and wisdom in the older adults.	312 older adults (aged 60–75 years old)	Longitudinal quantitative research	Increased gerotranscendence is positively associated with forgiveness and wisdom in older adults.
Brudek et al. (2023)	Poland	Investigating the mediating role of forgiveness on the relationship between wisdom and wellbeing in older adults.	418 older adults (aged 60–92 years old)	Cross-sectional quantitative research	Forgiveness serves as a mediator in the relationship between wisdom and wellbeing in the older adults. Wiser people are likelier to forgive others or situations, and this condition improves wellbeing.
Ermer et al. (2022)	United States of America	Revealing how older individuals learn forgiveness throughout their life journey	22 older adults (aged 62–89 years old)	Qualitative (thematic analysis)	Older adults people learn forgiveness through religious teachings and the life experiences they have gone through.
Krause (2015)	African-American	Investigating the relationship between humility and self-forgiveness, as well as the relationship between religious involvement and self-forgiveness.	Seniors aged 66 years and over	Longitudinal quantitative research	Increased humility resulting from religious involvement can increase the tendency towards self-forgiveness in the older adults.
Prabhakar et al. (2024)	India	Revealing the nature and dynamics of perceived violations and forgiveness in older adults living in nursing homes and older adults living with families	Older adults people living in nursing homes and living with their families	Qualitative (thematic analysis)	There are several factors that influence forgiveness, including the nature of the offense and the relationship between the victim and the offender.

Table 1 (Continued)*Overview of Literature Findings*

Citation	Country	Objective	Participants	Method	Results
Rydz et al. (2024)	Poland	Testing the mediating role of forgiveness and hope in the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction in the older adults.	237 older adults (aged 60–92 years old)	Cross-sectional quantitative research	Forgiveness mediates the relationship between religiosity centrality and life satisfaction. In older adults, forgiveness is influenced by religiosity.

Religiosity

Several studies have revealed that religious teachings and religiosity play a significant role in helping older adults individuals forgive themselves and others for past mistakes (Ermer et al., 2022; Krause, 2015; Rydz et al., 2024). Older adults learn forgiveness from religious teachings or beliefs ingrained in them from a young age (Ermer et al., 2022; Prabhakar et al., 2024). Ermer et al. (2022) reported that religion influences the thoughts and understanding of forgiveness among older adults. Older individuals use their religious beliefs and experiences to shape their understanding of forgiveness. In addition to religiosity, studies on older adults forgiveness report that forgiveness in older adults is influenced by humility (Krause, 2015; Rydz et al., 2024). Those who frequently attend religious gatherings tend to be humbler, and humble individuals are more inclined to forgive past offenses (Krause, 2015).

Rydz et al. (2024) found a positive relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward forgiveness and a tendency to forgive among older adults individuals. The positive correlation between religiosity, beliefs about forgiveness (forgiving attitudes), and the likelihood of practicing forgiveness in specific situations (tendency to forgive) suggests that religiosity can influence both forgiveness views and actions (Ermer et al., 2022; Prabhakar et al., 2024; Rydz et al., 2024). As described by Ermer et al. (2022), older individuals learn forgiveness through religious teachings, e.g., religious education, reading religious texts, or teachings at places of worship. Religion and religiosity provide a critical framework for understanding existential issues, including forgiveness (Prabhakar et al., 2024). As a core belief system, religion deepens understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and life satisfaction or wellbeing in the older adults (Brudek et al., 2023; Rydz et al., 2024).

Aging Characteristics

Forgiveness in older adults is influenced by aging characteristics, where decreased capacity for forgiveness may stem from certain older adults traits, e.g., egocentrism and inflexibility, which makes them considered as a vulnerable group (Prabhakar et al., 2024). One developmental characteristic in

older adults is the ability to reflect on positive and negative life events (Brudek et al., 2023). When older adults individuals can reflect on painful experiences, self-forgiveness becomes more attainable (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Krause, 2015). Realizing that painful past memories should ultimately be let go fosters life satisfaction through honest and authentic living.

A study by Brudek et al. (2023) found that wisdom is positively related to forgiveness in older adults, whereas wisdom strengthens the tendency toward forgiveness. Additionally, the concept of gerotranscendence is considered a positive predictor of forgiveness in older adults individuals (Brudek et al., 2023). Gerotranscendence enables older adults individuals to develop wisdom as a new personality component. Over time, individuals will abandon their biases and start to view themselves, the world, and life events more clearly. Gerotranscendence fosters a capacity to approach transgressions with humility (Krause, 2015) and compassion for themselves and others, leading to forgiveness and wisdom (Brudek et al., 2023, 2024). Personal characteristics in older adults, e.g., not overthinking conflicts, also influence their ease in forgiving past offenses (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024).

Time

Time plays a role in the forgiveness process among older adults (Almeida & Cunha, 2023; Ermer et al., 2022). Qualitative findings by (Ermer et al., 2022) showed that older adults individuals learn forgiveness over time. These findings emphasize that older adults tend to gain insights into forgiveness as they age, with forgiveness continuously evolving in terms of importance as time passes. Forgiveness is viewed as a dynamic, complex process that evolves continuously (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024).

Perceiving forgiveness as a process supports the notion that, as individuals age, time and life experiences contribute to a deeper understanding of forgiveness (Ermer et al., 2022). Research by Almeida and Cunha (2023) showed that time helps ease perceived offenses (e.g., reducing resentment), ultimately leading to forgiveness. Although some older adults individuals strive to forgive, they may still harbor negative feelings toward the offender (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Prabhakar et al., 2024). This suggests that forgiveness is a multifaceted process involving ongoing challenges and reflection over time (Ermer et al., 2022), highlighting the significant role time plays in its complexity in older adults (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Ermer et al., 2022).

Nature of Transgression

The severity and context of offenses shape how individuals process and forgive transgressions (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Prabhakar et al., 2024). Prabhakar et al. (2024) found that transgressions differ between older adults in nursing homes and those living with family. For older adults individuals in a family setting, transgressions often involve minor everyday issues, e.g., family conflicts or intergenerational disrespect. Such incidents are typically viewed as part of normal family life and are easier to forgive because of their mild nature. Forgiveness becomes simpler in less severe family conditions as these do not cause deep emotional harm.

In contrast, older adults individuals in nursing homes perceive more severe offenses, e.g.,

neglect, betrayal, and abandonment by family members (Prabhakar et al., 2024). Such serious transgressions often involve deep emotional wounds, making forgiveness more challenging. These older adults may feel neglected or mistreated by their children and forced into nursing homes, causing forgiveness to be difficult to achieve. Forgiveness in these cases may be shallow or compelled, described as “pseudo-forgiveness” motivated by helplessness and fear of losing self-esteem.

In other contexts, transgressions involving abuse significantly hinder forgiveness in older adults (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024). Lifelong abuse survivors face severe, traumatic transgressions, e.g., physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, often perpetrated by spouses or family members over extended periods. Such offenses are not only harmful but deeply personal, making forgiveness complex and emotionally charged. The context of offenses, especially in close relationships like family, also plays an essential role. In cases where the offender is a close family member, e.g., a spouse or child, older adults individuals may experience conflicting emotions. Even if forgiveness is extended, it is often partial or ambivalent, as they may outwardly forgive the offender but still harbor ongoing negative emotions, like resentment (Almeida & Cunha, 2023; Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Prabhakar et al., 2024).

Obligation to Social and Cultural Norms

External pressures, such as obligations to social and cultural norms, often drive or even compel forgiveness to maintain family harmony and adhere to cultural expectations. Prabhakar et al. (2024) reported that the strong influence of India’s collectivist culture and family-oriented values affect forgiveness. older adults individuals living with family often feel a social and cultural obligation to forgive, as maintaining family harmony and upholding respect for family members is a priority. These social expectations make forgiveness appear more like an obligation than a personal choice, reflecting how cultural values shape interpersonal dynamics. Likewise, for older adults individuals in nursing homes, social norms persist but manifest differently. Many older adults experience “pseudo-forgiveness,” where they outwardly forgive offenses, especially by family members, to preserve family harmony. older adults individuals may suppress genuine emotions to conform to societal and cultural expectations.

Furthermore, obligations to societal norms play a role in forgiveness among older adults in abusive relationships (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024). Older adults women who have experienced lifelong abuse feel compelled to forgive abusers due to cultural expectations surrounding marriage and family roles. Cultural norms often impose strong pressures on women to uphold their roles as caregivers, even if they have been victims of abuse. Older adults women may continue to care for their partners, not because they forgive the offenders for what had been done to them, but because societal norms dictate that women must fulfill their role as a wife. This sense of obligation often leads to duty-bound forgiveness, where personal pain conflicts with external pressure to forgive and conform to expected gender and family roles. Forgiveness in such cases is shaped not by emotional reconciliation but by cultural and social expectations (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024; Prabhakar et al., 2024).

Discussion

There are several compelling reasons to investigate forgiveness in later life. One such reason is that the capacity for forgiveness tends to undergo changes across the lifespan, mirroring the individual's socioemotional and cognitive processes (Allemand & Steiner, 2011). Forgiveness plays a significant role in old age, and prior research suggests that forgiveness is perceived as more readily achieved by older adults (Allemand, 2008; Ghaemmaghami et al., 2011; Toussaint et al., 2001). The conducted literature review sought to explore the factors influencing forgiveness in older adults. This review identified several factors that may affect forgiveness in the older adults, including religiosity, aging characteristics, time, the nature of transgressions, and obligations to social and cultural norms.

Religiosity and Forgiveness

Both religiosity and religious teachings play a crucial role in determining an individual's capacity to forgive or their difficulty in doing so. Those who actively engage in religious practices and possessing deep-seated beliefs tend to find it easier to forgive themselves, others, and circumstances (Krause & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2001; Matuszewski & Moroń, 2022). These findings align with several studies reporting that religious individuals exhibit a greater propensity for forgiveness, from young adulthood to old age (Allemand, 2008; Krause & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2001; Lutjen et al., 2012; Nashori et al., 2023). A study by Krok and Zarzycka (2021) indicated the mediating and moderating roles of the religious meaning system in the relationship between interpersonal forgiveness and meaning in life. This highlights how an individual's religious system can influence interpersonal forgiveness in older adults, ultimately contributing to a greater sense of meaning in life.

Religiosity stands out as one of the most influential factors in forgiveness among the older adults. For many older adults, religiosity can enhance the capacity for forgiveness, consistent with the emphasis on forgiveness and compassion found in most religions (Hayward & Krause, 2013; Toussaint et al., 2012). For older adults, religious involvement can foster their ability to view past transgressions with humility and compassion, thus facilitating forgiveness (Abreu et al., 2023; Read et al., 2014). Similarly, spirituality can also serve as a coping strategy, helping individuals re-evaluate challenging situations and fostering a forgiving disposition (Abreu et al., 2023).

Psychosocial Development Stage: Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Given the emphasis on ego integrity, wisdom is a characteristic often attributed to older adults (Erikson, 1994). Wise individuals, when faced with life demands and interpersonal incidents, are more inclined to forgive life, themselves, and others (Webster, 2007). This underscores that older adults, with their aging characteristics, are often associated with a forgiving attitude, leading to positive effects both physically and emotionally (López et al., 2021). Research by Goeleven et al. (2010) on age differences in emotional information processing found that older adults exhibited less disruption from negative stimuli than the younger people. One characteristic of aging, gerotranscendence, involves a shift in an individual's beliefs based on personal life experiences (Brudek et al., 2024). Previous research has also

demonstrated that forgiveness is associated with a more positive meaning in life (Krok & Zarzycka, 2021; Thompson et al., 2005), particularly among older adults (Toussaint et al., 2001).

Consistent with the psychosocial developmental theory, the developmental task in the final stage of life (ego integrity vs. despair) is retrospection, indicating that individuals review their lives in previous periods (Erikson, 1994). Older adults may experience despair when recalling negative experiences and regretting them; however, when they are able to progress according to their developmental tasks, past life experiences will be reflected upon positively without regret, leading them to ego integrity (Berk, 2018). Research has found that individuals who narrate stories about overcoming adversity tend to be more satisfied with their lives (McAdams et al., 2001). Older adults frequently engage in retrospective reflection, recounting their life experiences, including any abuse they have experienced (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024). Forgiveness allows individuals to reconstruct and gain a deeper understanding of past conflicts or transgressions, which contributes to emotional wellbeing.

Time and Life Experiences of Older Adults

Furthermore, time plays a role in how older adults forgive, whereby forgiveness can occur through a process of reflecting on past events and how individuals perceive past positive and negative occurrences (Almeida & Cunha, 2023). Based on the psychosocial development theory, older adulthood represents the final developmental stage, implying that individuals have traversed the entire sequence of development in previous periods. This suggests that older adults possess a greater accumulation of life experiences from earlier age periods that can be reflected upon (Erikson, 1994; Santrock, 2011). Forgiveness is considered an important aspect in older adults in resolving past conflicts, which leads to sound mental health (Worthington et al., 2007).

Consistent with the types of forgiveness proposed by Worthington et al. (2007) decisional forgiveness tends to precede emotional forgiveness in older adults. Older adults first decide to forgive behaviorally but do not necessarily achieve emotional resolution (Band-Winterstein et al., 2024), demonstrating the complexity of forgiveness in older adults, which takes time.

The Nature of Transgressions as a Determinant Factor

McCullough et al. (1998) posited several factors determining forgiving attitudes, one of which is the nature of the transgression. The more severe the transgression and its impact on a relationship, the more difficult it is for individuals to forgive (Arafah et al., 2023; McCullough et al., 1998). Furthermore, the extent to which the perpetrator apologizes and acknowledges their wrongdoing is also a significant factor in the forgiveness process. The influence of the severity of the offense aligns with a qualitative study conducted by Arafah et al. (2023), which examined the dynamics of forgiveness within collectivist cultures. One theme that emerged as a factor hindering forgiveness was the degree of severity of the transgression. This suggests that if the transgression is minor and within acceptable limits, individuals will find it easier to forgive.

Based on socioemotional selectivity theory, emotional and motivational changes across the

lifespan result from perceptions of the future (Carstensen et al., 1999). As individuals age, emotional experiences become paramount. For example, older adults tend to prune their social networks by maintaining relationships that provide emotional rewards and closeness, such as relationships with family or close relatives. Beside the nature of the transgression, one determinant factor in forgiveness is the quality of interpersonal relationships (McCullough et al., 1998). Previous research also supports this, stating that the closer the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, the easier forgiveness will be (Arafah et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). Forgiveness is considered a motivational shift to rebuild relationships after interpersonal conflict; therefore, the level of intimacy or closeness is positively correlated with forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998).

Cultural Values in Forgiveness

Cultural values also play a significant role in forgiveness in older adults, as culture shapes individuals' worldviews. Although individualistic and collectivist cultures hold different views on transgressions, individuals from both cultures acknowledge the presence of conflict or transgressions in interpersonal relationships (Hook et al., 2009). Research conducted by Ho and Worthington (2020) elucidated the cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures in defining forgiveness. Cultural differences are evident in the emphasis on cognitive versus emotional dimensions, whereas collectivist cultures prioritize social harmony and values when it comes to forgiveness, while individualistic cultures focus more on emotional release and personal well-being. Based on several studies on forgiveness in Indonesia, which is a collective culture, there is an emphasis on maintaining harmonious values in forgiveness (Arafah et al., 2023; Kurniati et al., 2017).

In this regard, the pressure of collectivist culture also plays a role in forgiveness; social pressure and expectations can explain the understanding of forgiveness (Siassi, 2007). Collective forgiveness is defined as a decision to forgive that is motivated by social harmony and occurs within the context of reconciliation and relationship repair (Hook et al., 2009, 2012). Thus, forgiveness in collectivist cultures is viewed as a forgiveness action done to maintain social harmony, especially if the transgression occurs within close relationships, like family. Previous research also supports this by explaining that higher values and commitment on family influence individuals in forgiving (Hayward & Krause, 2013). In contrast to collectivist cultures, the goal of forgiveness in individualistic cultures is the attainment of subjective wellbeing for those who forgive (Santrock, 2011).

Conclusion

This systematic review concluded that forgiveness in older adults is influenced by religiosity, aging characteristics, time, the nature of the transgression, and obligations to social and cultural norms. Reviewed literature revealed that forgiveness among the older adults is a complex process, influenced by various factors rather than a single aspect. The study emphasized that forgiveness in the older adults is a dynamic and multifaceted process, shaped by the interplay between internal factors (e.g., life experiences, aging characteristic, and religious beliefs) and external factors (e.g., the nature of

transgression and sociocultural values). However, it is important to note that the factors identified in this study may not encompass all factors influencing forgiveness in the older adults. The results of this systematic review highlight the need for a holistic, multidimensional approach to support the forgiveness process in older adults, providing valuable information for academics and practitioners, especially in the field of developmental psychology. Psychosocial and spiritual support must be designed with the understanding that forgiveness is a complex process influenced by life experiences and interpersonal dynamics.

Recommendations

This study had limitations, including the availability and limited search scope of sources. The study highlighted the need for further exploration of the forgiveness process in older adults and the mechanisms underlying the complexity of forgiveness, given the diverse experiences and life reflections of older individuals. Future researchers are encouraged to increase data sources by expanding the journal database searching and explore further how older adults achieve forgiveness by examining the process or stages leading to forgiveness.

Declaration

Acknowledgment

The first author would like to thank all parties involved in this research, including the research supervisor, as well as the editors and reviewers who have provided constructive input for this manuscript.

Funding

The authors did not receive any financial support in research process, manuscript writing and/or publication.

Authors' Contributions

This research was conducted by two contributing authors, from the preparation to the manuscript submission. Conceptualization stage; FRBA and ASG; Methodology: FRBA and ASG; Supervision: ASG; Initial drafting: FRBA; Writing, review, and revision; FRBA and ASG

Conflict of Interest

Authors report no conflict of interest in this research.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, or others) were used in the writing of this manuscript.

Orcid ID

Fajriah Rahmah B Arafah  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6220-6091>

Adriana Soekandar Ginanjar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6806-8456>

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