

# Influence of religious orientation and personality trait towards forgiving attitude among students

Netty Hartati <sup>a</sup>, Mahmud Jalal <sup>b</sup>, Yufi Adriani <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Psychology Department, State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Communication and Da'wa Department, State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>c</sup> School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Australia.

<sup>c</sup> Corresponding authour: yufi@deakin.edu.au

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**Abstract:** Forgiving attitude is not self-rejecting attitude as a defense against affection and self-assessment. Forgiving is an attitude of degrading the motivation of revenge or a willingness to make peace with the wrongdoer. Willing to forgive is the path to happiness and peace of mind. In facing and forgiving other people, what makes us feel uncomfortable is influenced by religiousness and the personality of the relevant person. This research aims at testing the religious oriented influence and personality trait towards the forgiving attitude of the students of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. The sample of the research includes 555 students of UIN Jakarta. The technique used sampling is non-probability sampling. The result of the research shows that there is a significant influence in both religious oriented variable and personality trait towards the forgiving attitude. The influences between the exogeneous latent variable and endogeneous latent variable are the intrinsic religious oriented variable, extrinsic religious oriented and neuroticism personality which are statistically significant. Meanwhile, the extraversion personality variable, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are not statistically significant towards the forgiving attitude.

**Keywords:** Forgiving Attitude, Religious Orientation, Personality Trait

## Introduction

**F**orgiving is an attitude of degrading the motivation of revenge or a willingness to make peace with the wrongdoer. Willing to forgive is the path to happiness and peace of mind. The Holy Koran which becomes the guideline in living among Muslims describes that forgiving other people's guilt is very important to know and do by human beings. Forgiving attitude is very important for people's lives. There are many elaborations showing that forgiving will bring in to health benefit for those who do it. Furthermore, a recent research suggests that the influence of forgiving also gives a good benefit for the transgressors.

Forgiving, according to McCullough *et al.*, (1997) is a set of motivation changing in which an organism continuously degrades his or her motivation of revenge within a relationship. Thus, the more degrading the motivation to avoid the wrongdoer, the more increasing the motivation of doing something good and the willingness to make peace to the transgressors, despite the fact that their mistakes are dangerous ones. Forgiving other people has a potential to become one of the key issues in this century in various disciplines, not only in gaining an understanding regarding forgiving, but also in finding many ideas to stimulate minds and a research for the well-being of mankind. Forgetting while forgiving is a very hard thing to do. Imagine that this task is like moving a mount or a hill, if the pain is too deep and too hard to forget. It is easier said than done, but not all people can do it sincerely. However, as religious people, we are demanded to forgive, let alone if the wrongdoer has apologized. Several studies found factors influencing forgiving attitude include one's religious orientation and personality trait. The religious oriented variable and personality trait are the variables functioning as "mechanism" which provide meanings for life and determinant of individual's characteristics.

Religious orientation is individual's view towards the role of religion in his or her life which influences the pattern of his or her relationship with his or her religion (Wullf, 1991). In this case, religiousness is not the focal point, but the motivation of doing something related to the belief and religious practice regarding forgiveness. Smelser, as quoted by Sreekumar (2008) suggests that religion is used as life guidance for its followers and has a great impact in

their lives in society. It is due to the fact that religion gives a set of rules or norms to guide its followers. Personality trait is a disposition of behavior in certain ways, as reflected in one's behaviors in various situations. Allport (in Hall & Lindzey, 1993) believes that personality trait unites and integrates one's behavior which causes someone to do a similar approach (both purpose and plan) towards different situations. In this research, personality trait is measured based on Big Five Personality Trait theory.

Based on the explanation about the predicted variables influencing forgiving attitude, the research focused is to see whether there any significant influence of religious oriented variable and personality trait towards the forgiving attitude among students of State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia.

### **Forgiving Attitude**

Forgiving attitude is a change of motivation when an individual changes destructive response against transgressor into constructive one (McCullough *et al.* in Hall, 2006). Forgiving attitude is a choice of internal mind of the victim (deliberately or not) to let go of revenge, and if it feels safe and wise, then the reconciliation with the transgressor may happen. Worthington (2005) states that forgiving attitude is not the same as conflict resolution. Someone might overcome conflict without forgiving or maybe forgive the transgressor without overcoming the conflict. Forgiving attitude is also defined as a set of prosocial motivation changing inside the victim in which the willingness to revenge and avoid is lessen, or the attitude towards the transgressor becomes better (Tangney, *et al* (2005)). Therefore, it can be said that if someone forgives, he or she will get a more positive emotions such as empathy, sympathy, and love.

Forgiving attitude is a willingness to put down the mistake(s) in the past which causes pain, anger, and hatred, which wards the willingness to hurt other people or themselves. The same argument is also stated by McCullough *et al.*, (1997) who states that forgiving attitude is a set of motivation to change someone not to revenge but to alleviate hatred against the transgressor and to increase the trigger to conciliation of relationship with the transgressor.

McCullough, *et al.*, (2004) defines forgiveness itself as an attitude to cope with negative things and judgement against the transgressor without denying the pain itself, but with pity and love. Forgiving attitude can lessen rivalry and negative stress felt by anyone. McCullough *et al.* then emphasizes that the respond of forgiving reflects the change of basic motivation which is against the natural tendency of an individual to revenge. Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that forgiving is a choice which is very personal to let go of unforgiving other people's mistakes.

In addition, Enright & Coyle (1998) argues that forgiving needs to be differentiated from pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting, and denying. Generally, people agree that forgiving attitude needs to be differentiated from the concepts related to reconciliation. It is due to the fact that reconciliation, which involves restoring trust in interpersonal relationship through the behavior of being able to be trusted, is not a requirement of forgiving. For example, someone can forgive others because they can no longer continue the relationship with someone whom they cannot meet anymore, for example someone who is in jail or dead or with those whom they do not want to have connection with (Worthington & Drinkard, 2000).

A philosopher namely J. North's Enright (in Enright & Coyle, 1998) states that forgiving actually happens when the target of an interpersonal transgression can see that the transgression with love and admit that he or she deliberately let go of his or her rights to harm the transgressor. Berry & Worthington, (2001) states that when someone forgives others who harm him or her, then positive emotion based on love such as empathy and sympathy will alter the negative emotion. McCullough *et al* (1998); McCullough & Hoyt, (2002) state that people who forgive will experience motivation changing and typically the transgressor will come to apologize for what he or she has done. It is considered that motivation changing will increase the possibility to accept the transgression when someone forgives.

Accepting others is not the same as forgiving. Accepting others happen when that person is considered as a good person. Meanwhile, forgiving others happen when that person does bad things. Forgiving is the willingness to let go of past painful mistakes by no longer looking for the source of anger and hatred, while at the same time warding the willingness to harm others or self. Therefore, forgiving is an attempt to throw away all the willingness to revenge and the personal pain towards the transgressors or people who hurt us and followed by the willingness to restore the relationship.

Based on the explanation above, the definition of forgiving in this research is an attitude when an individual alter destructive response against transgressor into a constructive response with the attempt of throwing away all the

willingness to revenge and personal pain towards the transgressor of those who hurt us and followed by the willingness to restore the relationship.

Some literatures state that forgiving others is the same as interpersonal forgiveness. In this limitation, forgiving involves prosocial change in interpersonal motivation, that someone will experience: (a) Avoidance Motivation (motivation degradation to avoid psychological or personal contact with the transgressor); (b) Revenge Motivation (motivation degradation to revenge or witness the destruction that is expected to happen to the transgressor); and (c) Benevolence Motivation (motivation increase to do good deed to the transgressor) (McCullough, 2000; McCullough *et al.*, 1999 in Thompson & Synder., 2005). In this research, forgiving attitude is seen from the three motivations of forgiveness stated by McCullough; avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation.

### **Religious Orientation**

Religious orientation is individual view towards religious role in his or her life which influences someone's relation pattern with his or her religion (Wullf, 1997). In this case, it is not religiousness which is viewed, but the motivation of behaving which relates to the belief and religious practice. Smelser, as quoted by Sreekumar (2008) states that religion is used as life guidance for its followers and has a big impact in their social lives. It is due to the fact that religion gives a set of rules and norms to guide its followers.

There are two religious orientation; intrinsic orientation and extrinsic orientation. (Allport & Ross in Lopez & Synder, 2002). Intrinsic orientation means someone makes religion as a main purpose or a strong motivation in fully practicing religion, applying and following the religious values in themselves. Meanwhile, extrinsic orientation means an individual makes religion as the tool to reach goals, safety, status, and justification of what he or she wants. Ellison (1991) finds that most benefit of religion is within the cognitive aspect by giving a support to framework of thinking to understand life experiences while at the same time influencing the emotional well being by erasing negative events or increasing positive activities.

A number of researches has shown that people with high level of religious participation, religious significance, or religious commitment tends to be more forgiving compared to those who are less religious. Religiousness such as religious commitment and religious intrinsic motivation contributes to around 4% of variants in the tendency of the society to forgive many transgression done by multiple relationships (for instance friend, parents, or romantic partner). Religious teaching generally promotes forgiving attitude. McCullough & Worthington (1999) states that it needs to be considered that religion can influence how someone forgives because it is a main base for moral consideration which affects interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Psychological research consistently shows that the intervention of being religious positively relates to disposition of forgiving others - a characteristic that refers to forgiving attitude. Bono (2002); Mauger, *et al.*, (1996), also reports on the same findings.

In this research, the definition of religious orientation which is used is an individual view towards role of religion in his or her life which influences the relation pattern of someone with their religion. It includes two religious orientations; intrinsic orientation and extrinsic orientation by referring to the theory stated by Allport & Ross (in Lopez & Synder, 2002).

### **Personality Trait**

Trait theory is a personality theory based on several assumptions, i.e.: trait is a consistent pattern from mind, feeling, or action which differentiates someone from the others, while trait is relatively stable from time to time, consistent from situation to situation and becomes a basic tendency which stays for as long as we live. However, the behavior characteristics can change due to adaptive process, the existence of power difference and the combination of existing trait(s). Big Five Personality Trait is an approach used in psychology to see someone's personality through a trait which is composed from five personality domains. These domains have been formed by using analytical factors. The five personality traits are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experiences.

Allport (in Hall and Lindzey, 1993) believes that trait unifies and integrates one's behavior which causes someone to do the similar approach (both for purpose and plan) towards different situations. Nevertheless, two people who have the same trait do not always show the same actions. They can express their trait with different ways. This difference makes each individual unique. Therefore, Allport believes that individual can only be understood partially. In the case of using tests by group nowm, the words used by someone to depict themselves and other people become important clues regarding personality structure.

Based on what has been described above, therefore, the definition of personality trait in this research is the pattern of characteristics which relatively stay or possess unique characteristics which gives consistency and individuality in someone's behavior by using the theory of Big Five Personality Trait by McCrae & Costa (1999).

Religious orientation is predicted as forgiving attitude predictor variable which is assumed as religious teaching used in behaving. It leads individuals to live the life in accordance with the applicable norms. Smelser (in Sreekumar, 2008) states that religion is used as life guidance for its followers and has a great impact in their social lives. It is due to the fact that religion gives a set of rules or norms to guide its followers. It explains that religiousness influences attitude. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that religious orientation affects the forgiving attitude. Personality trait variable from several undertaken studies shows that heritability of personality plays important role in attitude, including forgiving attitude. Personal reaction towards life situation decides more rather than the event itself, because personality influences someone's reaction. The five traits in Big Five Personality; openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, are assumed to be the strongest and most consistent predictors of individual resources.

## **Methods**

The respondents of this research are the students of State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta who are still active students in 2015 in all faculties; Faculty of Tarbiyah Science and Pedagogy, Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Faculty of Sharia and Law, Faculty of Culture and Humanity, Faculty of Da'wa and Communication, Faculty of Islamic Dirasat, Faculty of Psychology, Faculty of Science and Technology, Faculty of Economy and Business, Faculty of Medical and Health Science, and Faculty of Social and Political Science. The sampling technique is non-probability. In this research, the researcher used 600 samples.

## **Result**

In the first step, the researcher looked at R-square scale to find out the percentage (%) of the DV variant explained by IV.

Table 1. Summary of regression test of independent variables towards dependent variables

Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R-square	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
1	.318 <sup>a</sup>	.101	.090	.67974	.101	8.804	7	547	.000	

Source: SPSS output data

In the table of regression test, it is shown that the R-square score = 0.101, which means the variant proportion from forgiveness explained by all IV (intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) in this research is 10.1%, while the rest of 89.9% is influenced by other variables outside the variables in this research.

In the second step, the analysis of effect from all IV towards DV was done. The result of F test can be seen in the following Table 2:

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Table 2. The significance of regression test of independent variables (IV) towards dependent variables (DV)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.476	7	4.068	8.804	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	252.743	547	.462		
	Total	281.219	554			

Source: SPSS output data

Overall in Table 2, it is shown that the sig value = 0.000 ( $P < 0.05$ ), therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant influence of all IV towards DV (forgiveness) is rejected. It means that there are significant influences at the same time from variable sof intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness towards forgiveness.

The last step is to see the coefficient of regression of each IV in order to measure whether the resulting coefficient of regression is significant, by seeing trhe value of significant column in each variable. If the sig value  $< 0.05$ , then the coefficient of regression is significantly influencing the forgiveness and vice versa. The table of coefficient of regression is shown in the following Table 3.

Table 3: Coefficient of regression of independent variable (IV) towards dependent variable (DV)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Costant)	.006	.029		.211	.833
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	.166	.053	.137	3.124	.002
Extrinsic Religious Orientation	.098	.035	.118	2.829	.005
Extraversion	.012	.035	.015	.340	.734
Neuroticism	.240	.039	.257	6.223	.000
Openness to experience	.038	.045	.037	.851	.395
Agreeableness	-.124	.066	.088	-1.898	.058
Conscientiousness	.049	.048	.045	1.013	.312

Therefore, based on the coefficient value of regression in Table 3, it can be explained regarding the regression equation on forgiveness as follows:

$$\text{Forgiveness} = .006 + 0.166 * \text{intrinsic religious orientation} + 0.098 * \text{extrinsic religious orientation} + 0.012 * \text{extraversion} + 0.240 * \text{neuroticism} + 0.038 * \text{openness to experiences} - 0.124 * \text{agreeableness} + 0.049 * \text{conscientiousness} + e$$

On the regression equation above, it can be seen that whichever IV can give significant influence towards DV. Seeing the comparison of influence significance of IV towards DV can be done by two ways; by seeing the value in the significance column and also by seeing the value in the standard coefficient (beta) column. From the data from Table 3 above, it can be known that IVs which have significant influence are the variable of intrinsic religious orientation, extrinsic religious orientation and neuroticism personality. Meanwhile, the variables which do not have influence towards forgiveness are extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personalities.

It can be concluded from the data in the table that from 8 minor hypothesis in this research, there are only three minor hypothesis which have significant influence towards forgiveness. The rest do not have significant influence towards forgiveness. The explanation about coefficient value of regression obtained from each IV is as follows:

#### 1. Intrinsic Religious Orientation Variable

The coefficient value obtained in intrinsic religious orientation variable is 0.166 and sig = 0.002 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no influence in intrinsic religious orientation variable towards forgiving attitude is rejected. It means that statistically, there is a positive significant influence of intrinsic religious orientation towards one's forgiving attitude.

#### 2. Extrinsic Religious Orientation Variable

The coefficient value obtained in extrinsic religious orientation variable is 0.098 and sig = 0.005 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no influence in extrinsic religious orientation variable towards forgiving attitude is rejected. It means that statistically, there is a positive significant influence of extrinsic religious orientation towards one's forgiving attitude.

#### 3. Neuroticism Personality Variable

The coefficient value obtained in neuroticism variable is 0.240 and sig = 0.000 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no influence in neuroticism personality variable towards forgiving attitude is rejected. It means that statistically, there is a positive significant influence of neuroticism personality towards one's forgiving attitude. Another variable which has no significant influence is extraversion personality. The coefficient value obtained in extraversion variable is 0.012 and sig = 0.734 ( $P < 0.05$ ), it means that extraversion variable has no significant influence towards one's forgiving attitude. Variables of openness to experiences ( $B=0.038$ ,  $\text{sig}=0.395$ ), agreeableness ( $B=-0.124$ ,  $\text{sig}=0.058$ ), and conscientiousness ( $B=0.049$ ,  $\text{sig}=0.312$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no influence of extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality variables towards one's forgiving attitude is accepted. It means that statistically, there is no positive significant influence of extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality towards one's forgiving attitude.

#### Test of Proportion of Contribution of Each IV towards DV

The proportion of forgiveness variants can be seen in the following Table 4:

From the data in Table 4, it can be explained that from 7 IV, there are three variables which give great and significant contributions. The explanation about the proportion of forgiveness variant of each variable based on Table 4 is as follows:

1. Neuroticism orientation variable gives the biggest contribution of 0.064 or 6.4% towards forgiveness variants and has the F value of 39.151 and df = 1 and 550. The number of contribution is significant.
2. The dimension of extrinsic religious orientation gives the contribution of 0.021 or 2.1% towards forgiveness variants and has the F value of 11.918 and df = 1 and 552. The number of contribution is significant.
3. The variable of intrinsic religious orientation gives the contribution of 0.009 or 0.9% towards the forgiveness variants and has the F value of 4.802 and df = 1 and 553. The number of contribution is significant.

Table 4: Proportion of forgiveness variants caused by each IV

Model	R	R-square	Change Statistics				Sig.	F
			R-square	F change	df1	df2		
			Change					
Intrinsic Religious	.093 <sup>a</sup>	.009	.009	4.802	1	553	.029	
Orientation	.172 <sup>b</sup>	.030	.021	11.918	1	552	.001	
Extrinsic Religious	.172 <sup>c</sup>	.030	.000	.061	1	551	.806	
Orientation	.307 <sup>d</sup>	.094	.064	39.151	1	550	.000	
Extraversion	.308 <sup>e</sup>	.095	.001	.353	1	549	.553	
Neuroticism								
Openness to experience	.316 <sup>f</sup>	.100	.005	2.949	1	548	.087	
Agreeableness	.318 <sup>g</sup>	.101	.002	1.025	1	547	.312	
Conscientiousness								

Source: SPSS output data

4. The numbers of contribution from the other four variables; extraversion, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness personality variables are not significant towards the variant score of forgiveness.

## Discussion

Besides the explained presentation of result above, there is an additional result related to the test of difference of each forgiveness dimension, either from subject's origin of faculty or gender. Forgiveness consists of three dimensions; forgiveness avoidance, revenge, and benevolence. The analysis of test of difference of each forgiveness dimension is done based on the origin of faculty (religious vs. general) which shows that there is no difference in each forgiveness dimension based on the origin of faculty. Nevertheless, if it is seen based on gender, from the three forgiveness dimension, there are two dimensions that have significant difference; forgiveness avoidance and forgiveness revenge. In the variable of forgiveness avoidance, women have a higher forgiveness avoidance value (mean=50.60, SD=6.87) than men (mean=49.15, SD=7.35). Meanwhile, in the third dimension, forgiveness benevolence, there is no significant difference between men and women.

If it is seen from the origin of faculty (religious vs. general), the significant difference from the studied variable is only in extrinsic religious orientation ( $t=2.013$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.045$ ). Other variables (forgiveness, intrinsic religious orientation, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experiences, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) do not have significant difference based on the origin of faculty. For intrinsic religious orientation variable, there is a significant difference between men and women, in which women (mean=50.64, SD=5.54) have higher value of intrinsic religious orientation than that of men (mean=48.85, SD=6.32). On the other hand, for the extrinsic religious

orientation, men have higher value (mean=51.95, SD=9.24) than women (mean=49.04, SD=8.02). It works similarly on extraversion and agreeableness variables. There are significant differences in extraversion and agreeableness variables based on subject's gender. Women have higher levels of extraversion (mean=50.61, SD=8.75) and agreeableness (mean=50.61, SD=4.75) than that of men.

As explained before that the respondents/ subjects of this research are the students of State Islamic University who are all Muslim, it is clear that their daily behavior refers to religious norms. Therefore, the significant influence of forgiving attitude for both individuals with intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation is in line with the findings in McCullough & Worthington's (1999) research; Rye *et al.*, (2000) states that religion can influence how an individual forgives because religion is the ultimate base for moral consideration, very influential towards the interpersonal and intergroup relationship. Besides, the findings in Roberts' (1995) research states that it consistently shows that the religious involvement positively relates to the disposition to forgive other people. The disposition refers to the forgiving attitude.

The findings in this research contribute positively mainly towards the forgiving attitude of the author. The author realizes that there are many weaknesses related to the respondents of the research across the faculty which is still low in number. Based on the result of the research and the explained discussion, the author suggests that in order to enrich the findings regarding forgiving attitude, it is suggested to involve the subjects from outside of religious college. Furthermore, it is recommended to be able to study other independent variables such as social-cognitive variable, offensive characteristics, quality of interpersonal relationship and emotional intelligence. Due to the fact that religious orientation in behavior is highly significant and influential, it is suggested that the students always follow the guidance of religious norms and values in life. Educational institutions, government, and parents are suggested to develop forgiving attitude within the society, particularly for adolescents.

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