



The mediating effect of forgiveness on the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being in adults with history of childhood bullying

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Abstract: The long-term effects of childhood bullying on psychological well-being in adulthood have recently gained attention in research. This study examines the complex dynamics of the phenomenon by investigating the role of forgiveness as a mediator in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among individuals who experienced bullying during their childhood. A purposive sample of 202 participants aged 19-40, who were bullied between the ages of 6-18, were recruited. The measurements used in the study included the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale ($\alpha = .77$) to measure psychological well-being; the Heartland Forgiveness Scale ($\alpha = .82$) to measure forgiveness; the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale ($\alpha = .94$) to measure the spirituality of the participants; and the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire ($\alpha = .71$) as a screening tool to confirm participants' experiences of bullying. Through mediation regression analysis with 5000 bootstrap samples using Macro PROCESS by Hayes, forgiveness emerged as a significant full mediator ($\beta = .318, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI}: .212, .438$). The study provides evidence that forgiveness enhances psychological well-being, suggesting that implementing a forgiveness program could reduce the long-term effect of childhood bullying.

Keywords: childhood bullying; forgiveness; psychological well-being; spirituality; young adult

Abstrak: Saat ini, efek perundungan di masa kecil terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis individu dewasa mendapat perhatian lebih dalam penelitian. Penelitian ini mengkaji fenomena tersebut dengan mengeksplorasi peran pengampunan sebagai mediator dalam hubungan antara spiritualitas dan kesejahteraan psikologis pada individu yang mengalami perundungan di masa kecil. Melalui teknik *purposive sampling* penelitian ini merekrut 202 peserta berusia 19-40 tahun, yang mengalami perundungan di masa kecil di antara usia 6-18 tahun. Pengukuran dalam penelitian terdiri dari *Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale* ($\alpha = 0,77$), *Heartland Forgiveness Scale* ($\alpha = 0,82$), *Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale* ($\alpha = 0,94$), dan *Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire* ($\alpha = 0,71$) untuk menseleksi partisipan yang memiliki pengalaman perundungan. Berdasarkan hasil analisis regresi mediasi dan *Macro PROCESS Hayes* dengan bootstrap 5000 sampel ditemukan bahwa pengampunan berperan sebagai mediator penuh ($\beta = 0,318, p < 0,05, 95\% \text{ CI}: 0,212, 0,438$). Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengampunan dapat meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis. Oleh karena itu, penerapan program pengampunan dapat dilakukan untuk meredakan dampak jangka panjang dari perundungan di masa kecil.

Kata Kunci: bully terhadap anak-anak; pemaafan; kesejahteraan psikologis; spiritualitas; dewasa muda

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Introduction

The prevalence of bullying is increasing around the world. Findings from the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that 41.1% of students reported experiencing incidents of bullying. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) received 37,381 complaints of child abuse between 2011 and 2019, while a report by Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (2020) revealed that the incidence of bullying cases had risen to 2,473, with a constant upward trend. Therefore, Indonesia ranks among the top five out of 78 nations in terms of the highest number of schoolchildren being victims of bullying. However, beyond these alarming statistics, our research distinctly centers on the profound impact of bullying on psychological well-being. The statistics serve as a backdrop, emphasizing the urgency of comprehending the enduring consequences, particularly for adult survivors.

Bullying has a detrimental effect on its victims. It disrupts students' concentration, leading to lower academic achievement and increased adolescent suicide risk (Alavi et al., 2017). Moreover, its impact can extend into adulthood, leaving lasting effects on individuals. Research suggests that individuals who were victims of bullying during childhood and adolescence are more likely to develop mental health disorders in adulthood than those without such a history (deLara, 2019; J. Lee, 2021; Sweeting et al., 2020).

Based on the findings of previous studies, bullying experiences have an impact in adulthood. Copeland et al. (2013) found that bully-victims were more likely to engage in bullying behavior themselves later in life. Bullying during childhood is also associated with an increased likelihood of developing antisocial personality disorder as an adult, together with the experience of suicidal ideation, depression, and increased anxiety.

Takizawa (2014) found that bullying contributes to poor social relations, economic hardship, and poor quality of life at the age of 50. Likewise, Gattario et al. (2020) investigated the link between childhood bullying and the onset of body image problems and unhealthy eating habits in adulthood using a 14-year longitudinal study. They revealed that children who experienced frequent bullying reported greater dissatisfaction with their bodies. These negative perceptions persisted into adolescence and young adulthood.

Moreover, childhood bullying has both short- and long-term effects on adult psychological well-being. The long-term impact of childhood bullying includes increased rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, PTSD, and eating disorders. Moreover, it has been revealed that bullying as a child may have long-term effects not only on the mental and physical health of a person, but also on their ability to form and maintain relationships as an adult (deLara, 2019; Gattario et al., 2020; Rigby, 2007). According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is achieved when individuals reach their full potential by embracing their past and present self, including their strengths and weaknesses (self-acceptance); demonstrating independence (autonomy); fostering positive relationships; effectively managing their environment (environmental mastery); having a sense of purpose in life; and continuously developing their personality over time (personal growth). Low levels of psychological well-being are common among individuals who have been victims of bullying, as its effects can trigger negative emotional symptoms such as unhappiness, depression, and sadness.

According to Rigby (2007), children classified as victims of bullying are more likely to have poor physical and mental health. Physically, individuals with low psychological well-being display poor endurance, while psychologically, the negative emotions experienced as a result of bullying can

lower a person's self-esteem and resistance to future anxiety or depression. Higher levels of depression and anxiety are often seen in victims of bullying. Its serious psychological consequences can manifest in recurrent suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Cast & Burke, 2002; Henriksen et al., 2017).

One factor identified as helping individuals recover from the effects of bullying is spirituality (Soimah et al., 2019). Pargament (2001) defined spirituality as an awareness or belief in a higher power or energy that motivates individuals to seek meaning and purpose in life. Although the interpretations of spirituality and religiosity often overlap, they are distinct concepts (Villani et al., 2019). Religiosity is generally characterized by five components: system, belief, organization, worship, and practice, while spirituality is commonly defined by five words: life, principle, animator, transcendent, and relationship - the last three of which refer to being, God, and quality. This study will approach the topic of spirituality as a broader and more universal phenomenon than religiosity, which is limited to formal systems of tradition and belief.

Developing strong spirituality can enhance one's mental health (Basileyo, 2019; Boylan et al., 2022; Ivtzan et al., 2013; Koenig, 2009). Individuals with strong communication skills and a spiritual foundation are better equipped to address and resolve various issues, including those related to bullying (Soimah et al., 2019). This is because a high level of spirituality fosters optimism and resilience, enabling individuals to persist in their efforts even when faced with challenges.

Despite having high levels of spirituality, individuals may still struggle in their quest for meaning and strong moral commitments, hampered by negative thoughts and spiritual conflicts related to different aspects of spirituality,

such as belief, experience, and practice. Gilbertson et al. (2022) explained that these struggles have been found to have negative effects on psychological well-being, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and pessimism. Likewise, individuals who experience high spirituality may still struggle to forgive when faced with personal, real-life hurt, which may ultimately lead to unforgiveness and negatively impact psychological well-being (Karner-Huțuleac, 2020; Zarzycka, 2019). This underscores the complex nature of the relationship between spirituality and forgiveness, in which high spirituality may manifest differently in individuals, influencing forgiveness positively or negatively based on various factors, including personal experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, research (Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2021) shows that forgiveness plays an important role in promoting the psychological well-being of individuals who are bullied. Thompson et al. (2005) define forgiveness as the effort to change negative feelings that result from one's own adverse circumstances or those of others from negative to neutral or positive. It aims to minimize harmful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that result from interpersonal wounds (Halling, 1994). Forgiveness differs from tolerating, forgetting, justifying, or reassuring after facing injustice or feeling hurt and disappointed (Enright, 2001). Forgiving oneself and others for negative events can provide a sense of relief and a fresh start in life (Macaskill, 2005). Juwita and Kustanti (2020) found a positive correlation between forgiveness and psychological well-being among bullied high school students. Another study (Wolke et al., 2013) found that victims of bullying have been consistently demonstrated to be at higher risk of internalizing problems, in particular in relation to diagnoses of anxiety disorder and depression in young and middle adulthood (18-50 years of age). Victims of bullying who practice forgiveness

do not necessarily justify the bullying they have experienced.

The process of forgiveness allows the offender to take responsibility for their offense, while the victim objectively navigates their forgiveness process. Forgiveness does not involve condoning, excusing, or absolving the offender, nor does it involve denying or ignoring the offending behavior. Additional research suggests that higher levels of forgiveness in adolescents are associated with less bullying and victimizing behavior (Quintana-Orts et al., 2021). Furthermore, previous research based on systematic review studies indicates that forgiveness can reduce depression, anxiety, and stress and increase psychological well-being among victims of bullying (Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2021; Wade et al., 2014).

Based on research by Juwita and Kustanti (2020) and Quintana-Orts et al. (2021), the focus is often on the effects of bullying on individual adolescents. However, its effects can be long-term and can continue into adulthood. This study is unique in focusing on the adult experience of bullying, an area less researched than that related to adolescents (Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2021; Shaver et al., 2022). Previous studies also focus solely on the association between forgiveness and psychological well-being (Cornish et al., 2022; Ekawardhani et al., 2019) or spirituality and psychological well-being (Basileyo, 2019; Gireyhan, 2022). Therefore, the relationship between forgiveness, spirituality, and psychological well-being needs further exploration. Research has shown forgiveness to be a coping strategy for dealing with the impact of bullying, allowing individuals to replace negative emotions with positive ones and reduce anger and aggressive states (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Watson et al., 2017). In addition, forgiveness has been identified as a mediator in the relationship between spirituality and both quality of sleep and

depression, highlighting its role in improving mental health outcomes (Lawler-Row, 2010).

Research demonstrates a positive relationship between spirituality, forgiveness, and psychological well-being, particularly among individuals who have experienced trauma (David et al., 2022). Additionally, previous studies indicate that forgiveness plays a mediating role in the correlation between spirituality and posttraumatic growth among victims of conflict, ultimately promoting resilience and positive psychological outcomes (Hafnidar et al., 2013).

In this study, forgiveness is considered to be a mediator because it is predicted to be an important process that occurs over time and affects the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being. Unlike moderators, whose role is usually to alter the strength or direction of a link, a mediator clarifies the mechanism by which spirituality has an impact on psychological well-being.

Drawing inspiration from Martin Seligman's positive psychology, which emphasizes the cultivation of strengths and virtues, forgiveness is viewed as a transformative process contributing to psychological growth, individual fulfilment, satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being (Hojjat & Ayotte, 2013).

Furthermore, Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development suggests that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, with forgiveness being integral to higher stages that focus on principled reasoning and ethical decision-making (Kohlberg, 1976). Therefore, when considering forgiveness as a mediator between spirituality and psychological well-being, Kohlberg's theory implies that individuals with a higher capacity for forgiveness, rooted in moral development, are likely to experience enhanced psychological well-being. The ability to forgive is seen as part of a broader moral and ethical

framework that contributes positively to an individual's overall psychological health and well-being. Overall, the integration of positive psychology, as emphasized by Seligman, and the insights from Kohlberg's theory of moral development, enrich our proposition that forgiveness plays a vital role as a mediator between spirituality and psychological well-being.

Previous studies have only tested one of the three dimensions of forgiveness, self-forgiveness in relation to subjective well-being, to the detriment of forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations. As a result, their findings cannot be used to represent forgiveness as a whole (Ekawardhani et al., 2019). In summary, our primary objective is to contribute a more profound understanding of the mediating role of forgiveness in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among adults with a history of childhood bullying. The process by which forgiveness serves as a mediator between spirituality and psychological well-being in adults who experienced childhood bullying involves employing forgiveness as an emotion-focused coping strategy, which in turn enhances resilience and fosters positive psychological outcomes. This intricate process is closely connected to spirituality and has the potential to mitigate the deleterious psychological effects of being a victim of bullying.

Methods

Participants

A total of 202 participants with a history of bullying were recruited using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were that they were male or female, aged 19-40, and who had experienced bullying between the ages of 6 and 18. This age range was set to align with the developmental period during school years, as a significant majority of bullying incidents occur within this timeframe. As an initial step in participant

recruitment, posters were disseminated online through social media. Subsequently, individuals who met the research criteria were invited to complete the questionnaire, either online or offline. The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ-R) (2006) was used to screen participants who had experienced bullying. After screening, we eliminated eight participants who did not meet the criteria. Consequently, only 194 participants were analysed, consisting of 164 females and 30 males (see Table 1). The age at which participants first experienced bullying ranged from 6-10 years (49%), 11-15 years (44.8%), and 16-18 years (6.2%). The duration of their experience of bullying ranged from less than one year to more than 10 years. The majority of the participants were from Jakarta and reported being bullied in the school environment.

Instruments

Bullying. Use of the OBVQ-R ensured that the participants had experiences relevant to the study objectives, thus facilitating exploration of the impact of bullying on psychological well-being and spirituality. The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ-R) developed by Gonçalves et al. (2016) served as a screening tool to confirm participants' experiences of bullying. The questionnaire highlights three key characteristics of bullying incidents, namely 1) the intention of the aggressor to harm another individual, 2) consistent aggressive behavior, and 3) an imbalance of power between the victim and the aggressor (Gonçalves et al., 2016; Olweus, 2006; Salmivalli & Peets, 2018).

The scale is composed of 22 items with sample statements such as "I was called by negative nicknames and taunted in hurtful ways"; "I was hit, kicked, pushed, and confined in a room"; and "I was left out, rejected, and ignored by my friends". The OBVQ has adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha at .71. The bullying scale responses were combined to create

Table 1*Characteristics of the Research Samples*

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	30	15.5
Female	164	84.5
Current Age		
19-24	148	76.3
25-29	31	16
30-35	11	5.7
36-40	4	2.1
First Bullying Experience (Age)		
6-10	95	49
11-15	87	44.8
16-18	12	6.2

an overall score. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale from 0 (no bullying) to 4 (several times in a month). To categorize bullying perpetrators and victims, we used the "two or three times a month" cutoff recommended by Solberg and Olweus (2003) for the targeted statements.

Psychological Well-Being. The Ryff and Singer Psychological Well-Being Scale (1996) objectively measures psychological well-being. The scale includes six subscales: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. It comprises 18 self-report items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale includes sample questions such as "Overall, do you feel you have control or responsibility for the situations you encounter?" and "For me, is life a constant process of personal growth and change?" Reliability testing indicated that the scale is valid and reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77. High levels of psychological well-being may be associated with values in the top 25 percent of the distribution, while low levels may be associated with values in the bottom 25 percent.

Forgiveness. The study employed the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) created by Thompson et al. (2005), which comprises 18 items, to assess forgiveness. In our study, we utilized an adapted version of the Forgiveness Scale (HFS) in Indonesian, developed by Chandra (2019). The HFS comprises three subscales: forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations. Participants rate the HFS on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unsuitable) to 5 (very suitable). Some self-report statements provide examples of items from the subscales, such as "learning from my mistakes helps me overcome them" (self-forgiveness); "over time, I came to comprehend others' mistakes" (other-forgiveness); and "I eventually found inner peace with the adverse situations in my life" (situation-forgiveness). The validity and reliability of the scale was shown by a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Total HFS scores can range from 18 to 126; they indicate the extent to which a person is willing to forgive themselves, others, and uncontrollable situations. Higher scores indicate higher levels of forgiveness, while lower scores indicate lower levels. Scores of between 18 and 54 indicate

difficulties in forgiving self, others, and uncontrollable situations. Scores between 55 and 89 indicate an equal likelihood of forgiving or not forgiving self, others, and uncontrollable situations, while ones between 90 and 126 indicate ease in forgiving self, others, and uncontrollable situations.

Spirituality. Spirituality was assessed using the Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) developed by Underwood as part of the Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 1999). The DSES comprises 16 self-report items aimed at assessing experiences with God in daily life. Constructs include awe, gratitude, compassion, and a sense of a loving relationship with the Sacred (God). An example item is: "I am moved by the beauty of God's creation." The DSES demonstrates high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .94. Each item is assessed on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always), and the total score ranges between 16 and 84. An average score is preferred for analysis (Underwood, 2011).

Procedures

The research protocol followed the ethical standards set by Universitas Tarumanagara, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and well-being. The first stage of the research preparation was to search for phenomena related to psychological well-being among adolescent victims of bullying. Theories and concepts from various reliable sources were prepared to support the research. Furthermore, the research participants were selected using online questionnaires. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants in advance. Those who met the research criteria and were willing to participate completed informed consent and either online and offline questionnaires. Throughout, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained to safeguard participant privacy. The data collected

underwent thorough analysis adhering to ethical guidelines on participant treatment, data storage, and the dissemination of findings.

Analysis

Initially, the distribution of the data was assessed using a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which provided insights into the normality of the dataset. Subsequently, Pearson's correlation test was utilized to investigate the relationships between variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interconnections within the dataset.

The main analysis of the study employed a regression model with a mediating variable using mediation analysis. The macro-PROCESS by Hayes in SPSS 25 was utilized, generating population estimates through a bootstrap sample of 5000 to examine both direct and indirect effects. Finally, an independent samples t-test was used to assess the variation in variables based on participant characteristics.

Results

The distribution of the data was tested using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; a significance value of .200 was achieved, which is greater than .050. Therefore, the data distribution for all the variables (spiritual, forgiving, and psychological) is assumed to be normal, which allows parametric statistics to be used to test the relationships between them.

Pearson correlational tests revealed significant relationships between the study variables ($r > .35$; $p < .01$). Forgiveness and psychological well-being were found to have the strongest relationship. This suggests that individuals who have a higher level of forgiveness will also have a higher level of psychological well-being ($r = .623$; $p < .01$). A significant relationship was also found between forgiveness and spirituality ($r = .482$; $p < .01$), while the lowest

was found between spirituality and psychological well-being ($r = .364$; $p < 0.1$), see Table 2.

Mediation tests conducted using SPSS PROCESS 4.2 by Hayes with 5000 bootstrap samples indicate that the direct effect of spirituality on psychological well-being (c') is not significant ($\beta = .094$, $p > .05$, 95% CI: $-.049, .237$). Considering forgiveness as a mediator, the indirect effect showed a significant relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being ($\beta = .318$, $p < .05$, 95% CI: $.212, .438$). This finding suggests that spirituality does not significantly affect the psychological well-being of non-forgiving adult victims of childhood bullying (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

The study participants can be classified into three groups based on the hypothetical mean of each variable: low, medium and high categories. For the spirituality variable, the research indicates

that 2.6% of the participants were in the low category, 21.1% in the medium category, and 76.3% in the high category. Regarding the forgiveness variable, it was shown that 10.8% of the participants had a low level of forgiveness, 77.8% had a medium level, and the remaining 11.3% had a high level. In terms of psychological well-being, 1.5% of the participants had low psychological well-being, 69.1% had a moderate level, and the remaining 29.4% had a high level. It can thus be concluded that the participants had a moderate level of forgiveness, a high level of spirituality, and a moderate level of psychological well-being (see Table 4).

For each variable, paired sample t-testing was conducted to determine the differences in participant characteristics in relation to gender, education, age, and duration of bullying (see Table 5).

Table 2
Relationship between the Research Variables

No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Spirituality	4.10	.735	1		
2	Forgiveness	3	.582	.482**	1	
3	Psychological Well-being	4.59	.740	.364**	.623**	1

Note: N = 194. SD = standard deviation. ** $p < .01$

Table 3
Results of the Mediation Test

Pathway	95% CI					p
	Coeff	SE	LLCI	ULCI		
SP – F	a	.429	.563	.318	.540	.00
F – PWB	b	.741	.818	.580	.902	.00
SP – PWB	c	.412	.762	.262	.562	.00
Direct	c'	.094	.729	-.049	.237	.198
Indirect	ab	.318	.056	.212	.438	.00

Note: * $p < 0.05$. SP= Spirituality, F= Forgiveness, PWB = Psychological Well-being

Figure 1
Hypothesis Test Results

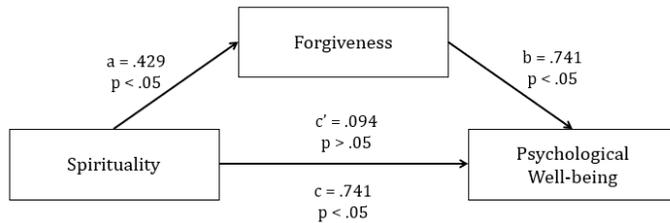


Table 4
Categorization of the Participants based on Variable

Variable	Range score	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Spirituality	< 37.4	Low	5	2.6
	37.4 to 58.6	Medium	41	21.1
	>58.6	High	148	76.3
Forgiveness	< 42	Low	21	10.8
	42 to 66	Medium	151	77.8
	> 66	High	22	11.3
Psychological Well-being	< 54	Low	3	1.5
	54 to 90	Medium	134	69.1
	> 90	High	57	29.4

Table 5
Additional Analysis: Participant Characteristics based on Gender, Education, Age, and Bullying Duration

Characteristic	Disparities		
	Spirituality	Forgiveness	Psychological Well-being
Age	No significant (p = .95)	Significant (p = .04)	No significant (p = .20)
Gender	No significant (p = .35)	No significant (p = .50)	No significant (p = .55)
Educational Level	No significant (p = .07)	No significant (p = .06)	Significant (p = .02)
Bullying Duration	No significant (p = .09)	Significant (p = .00)	Significant (p = .00)

Note: *p<.05

The results suggest that there were no significant differences in the levels of forgiveness, spirituality, or psychological well-being between the genders, as indicated by the p -values $> .05$ for all of the gender-specific variables. Nevertheless, men with bachelor's degrees had slightly higher average psychological well-being scores. When testing for age differences, those aged 30-40 showed higher levels of forgiveness compared to those aged 19 - 29. Compared to participants who had been bullied for less than a year, those who had been bullied for more than a year had lower levels of forgiveness and psychological well-being.

Discussion

This study has aimed to examine the role of forgiveness as a mediator in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being in adult victims of childhood bullying. The research obtained several results.

First, forgiveness is associated with the psychological well-being of adult victims of childhood bullying ($r = .623$; $p < .01$). This indicates that an individual's ability to forgive is positively associated with their level of psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with several previous studies that have investigated the effectiveness of forgiveness and concluded that forgiveness not only provides relief and a fresh start in life, but also lowers levels of depression, anxiety, and stress while increasing psychological well-being (Cornish et al., 2022; Ekawardhani et al., 2019; Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Wade et al., 2014). Individuals who are capable of forgiveness are not able to change the events that caused them harm, but forgiveness has been shown to enable people to adjust their perspectives, emotions, mental associations, and understanding of the meaning of unpleasant events.

Second, the correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between spirituality and

forgiveness ($r = .482$; $p < .01$). This finding aligns with Hall and Finchman's (2008) work, demonstrating a positive connection between forgiveness and the belief in being forgiven by a higher power. However, it is essential to note that the correlation test showed that the relationship between the spirituality variable and psychological well-being had the lowest significance value compared to the other variables ($r = .364$; $p < .01$). This nuanced result shows that while spirituality and forgiveness are positively correlated, a high level of spirituality does not guarantee effective forgiveness, and this intricate nature can impact psychological well-being. Previous research, such as the study by Witvliet et al. (2001), indicates that individuals with high spirituality scores may face challenges in achieving effective forgiveness. The expectation to promptly forgive, especially under pressure, or solely based on religious obligations, might diminish the effectiveness of promoting psychological well-being.

In essence, the presence of high spirituality alone may not necessarily translate into high psychological well-being, particularly if forgiveness is not effectively achieved. The immediate expectation to forgive and reconcile, especially without addressing the complexities of forgiveness, can lead to uncomfortable, stressful, or guilty feelings, ultimately impacting an individual's psychological well-being (Cox et al., 2012; Karner-Huțuleac, 2020; Zarzycka, 2019).

Third, our findings indicate that forgiveness plays a critical role as a full mediator in the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being among adults who experienced childhood bullying. Following the mediation model proposed by Baron and Kenney (1986), the results of our analysis substantiate the assumption that forgiveness acts as a crucial mediating variable in shaping the relationship between spirituality and the psychological well-

being of adult victims of childhood bullying. Previous research has found that although spirituality may influence an individual's psychological well-being (Basileyo, 2019; Boylan et al., 2022; Gireyhan, 2022), it is not a fail-safe solution to issues such as searching for a life purpose; feeling a great responsibility for morality; or negative thoughts or conflicts that may arise due to certain aspects of spirituality, ultimately negatively impacting psychological well-being (Karner-Huțuleac, 2020; Zarzycka, 2019).

Gilbertson et al. (2022) found a negative correlation between spiritual struggles and psychological well-being, as well as an increased risk of anxiety, depression, and a negative outlook on life. Other studies (Karner-Huțuleac, 2020; Zarzycka, 2019) discovered that individuals who perceive themselves as having high levels of spirituality may still encounter challenges in forgiving when confronted with personal pain, resulting in unforgiveness or the inability to forgive, ultimately having a negative impact on their psychological well-being. Despite high levels of spirituality, unforgiveness still occurs, and this can be attributed to the higher likelihood of forgiveness among individuals in late adulthood compared to adolescents, who have not yet fully developed their cognitive and moral understanding of forgiveness and well-being.

Research has shown that victims of bullying often experience feelings of unforgiveness and a strong desire for revenge (Akhtar et al., 2017; Lee, 2013), and they often develop a tendency to become bullies or cyberbullies themselves in adulthood (J. Lee, 2021). These outcomes align with previous research emphasizing the detrimental effects of unforgiveness on mental and physical health, such as rumination, anger, resentment, and hatred (Karner-Huțuleac, 2020). Consistent with studies highlighting the essential role of forgiveness in achieving psychological

well-being (Gilbertson et al., 2022; Worthington & Sandage, 2016), our findings reveal a pivotal discovery. Specifically, it is demonstrated that forgiveness operates as a full mediator, signifying that spirituality alone may not significantly impact the psychological well-being of adult victims without the intermediary role of forgiveness.

While our findings present forgiveness as a crucial mediator, we acknowledge the inherent complexity in the relationships between spirituality, forgiveness, and psychological well-being. The initial framing of forgiveness as a mediator in this study may benefit from a more nuanced exploration, considering potential moderating factors or confounding variables. Recognizing these intricacies opens avenues for future research endeavors to delve deeper into the interplay between these psychological factors within this specific population.

Fourth, further analysis of participant characteristics based on gender, education, age, and bullying duration revealed no significant educational disparities in the levels of forgiveness, spirituality, or psychological well-being between the genders. However, men with bachelor's degrees exhibited marginally higher mean psychological well-being scores. Bowman's (2010) research suggests that higher educational levels are linked to both increased neighbourhood awareness and improved psychological well-being.

A comparison of the age groups found that individuals between 30 and 40 exhibited greater levels of forgiveness compared to those aged 19-29. This phenomenon is supported by previous research (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Kohlberg, 1976; Malone & Dadswell, 2018; Zarzycka, 2019; Zimmer et al., 2016) demonstrating that as individuals mature, their cognitive and moral development expands, leading to a better comprehension of forgiveness and its favorable impact on mental health.

Subjects who were bullied for more than a year reported lower levels of both forgiveness and psychological well-being compared to those who were bullied for less than a year. According to research conducted by Singh et al. (2023), persistent bullying for a prolonged period can cause depression, extreme sadness, heightened emotional stress, decreased psychological well-being, and low self-esteem. Alavi et al. (2017) identified that such factors increase the probability of suicidal thoughts and depression. Long-term repetitions of transgressions or hurtful behavior have been found to limit one's ability for forgiveness in several studies (Singh et al., 2023). Problematic forgiveness has a negative impact on mental health due to a decrease in negative emotions such as hatred and the desire for revenge (Ebrahimi et al., 2015; Ermer & Proulx, 2016; Karner-Huțuleac, 2020; Witvliet et al., 2001). Conversely, individuals who have difficulty forgiving others are prone to depression (Ingersoll-Dayton & Krause, 2005).

Overall, this study stands out for its unique focus on adult bullying victims, a topic that has received minimal attention compared to research on adolescents (Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2021; Shaver et al., 2022). The study provides new insights into the importance of forgiveness, even for individuals with high levels of spirituality. The findings suggest that high spirituality may not lead to sufficient psychological well-being for adult victims of childhood bullying without forgiveness skills. In addition, the study extends the research by examining all the dimensions of forgiving, whereas previous studies have only focused on self-forgiving and subjective happiness (Ekawardhani et al., 2019).

While this study contributes valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, which offer opportunities for refinement in future

research. First, the study did not delve into the specific factors contributing to the promotion of forgiveness. Recognizing this limitation, future research endeavors may benefit from incorporating qualitative methodologies or in-depth interviews to explore and unravel the intricate dynamics that foster forgiveness amongst individuals who have experienced childhood bullying.

Second, the limited number of participants raises concerns about generalizability, emphasizing the importance of larger and more diverse samples in future research for broader applicability. Moreover, the utilization of the 16-item DSES (Fetzer Institute, 1999) for assessing forgiveness, while a valid measure, underlines the importance of employing more comprehensive tools in future investigations. The Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS) is recommended as an alternative, offering a more detailed examination of spirituality. Additionally, this study's reliance on self-reporting may introduce the possibility of social desirability bias. Future research could mitigate this by incorporating observational or interview-based assessments.

Despite these limitations, it is crucial to recognize that research is an evolving process. This study lays a foundation for future inquiries to build upon and address these limitations.

Conclusion

It is concluded that forgiveness serves as an intermediary in the correlation between spirituality and psychological well-being in adults who suffered bullying during childhood. The results indicate that forgiveness plays a pivotal role in enhancing psychological well-being in individuals with bullying victimization experience. The findings could be used to design programs aimed at promoting forgiveness as a

means of enhancing the continued wellbeing of those who experienced childhood bullying. Communities could aid victims through active support and the use of social psychoeducational initiatives to encourage forgiveness.[]

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Author Contribution Statement

Michelle Theodora: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Validation; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Writing, Review & Editing. **Riana Sahrani:** Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Validation; Writing, Review & Editing. **Roswiyani Roswiyani:** Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Funding Acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Validation; Writing, Review & Editing.

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