Pathways to Healing: Forgiveness and Spiritual Growth for Domestic Violence Survivors in Islam

Nadiatus Salama

Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia
E-mail: nadia@walisongo.ac.id

Abstract: Forgiveness plays a crucial role in the psychological recovery of domestic violence (DV) survivors, and within the framework of Islamic teachings, it is seen as a means of attaining inner peace and spiritual healing. This study explores the role of forgiveness in the psychological and spiritual healing of domestic violence (DV) survivors within an Islamic framework. Employing a qualitative case study approach through in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, and observations with a single female DV survivor in Solo, Indonesia, to gain insights into the complex, non-linear journey of forgiveness. This study investigates the forgiveness process that aligns with Islamic principles of mercy (rahmah), patience (sabr), and divine justice. The findings reveal that the process of forgiveness is complex, non-linear, and influenced by various dynamics, including feedback and feed-forward loops, with survivors revisiting earlier stages. This process is often unpredictable, with survivors revisiting previous stages they thought were overcome, accompanied by changes in attitude. Victims' motivation to forgive is frequently influenced by a desire to accept the situation sincerely, often aligned with religious teachings. Additionally, releasing negative emotions is a significant driving force in the forgiveness process. Social support from family, community, and religious institutions is crucial in encouraging victims to engage in forgiveness, providing the necessary encouragement and understanding to navigate this challenging journey. The study underscores the importance of integrating religious guidance with psychological support, highlighting the significant psychological benefits of forgiveness for DV survivors, including improved emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Forgiveness, psychotherapy, spiritual healing, domestic violence

A.   Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a complex social problem with widespread effects, especially on the psychological and emotional well-being of victims. Survivors often suffer from profound trauma that affects their quality of life. In this context, forgiveness can serve as a pathway to emotional recovery. Forgiveness not only helps victims release negative emotions but also holds the potential to improve interpersonal relationships and enhance psychological well-being.

Forgiveness is a universally recognized approach in the recovery process for domestic violence (DV) survivors, but it carries different meanings and methods across cultures. In Western therapies, forgiveness is often seen as a cognitive strategy to release negative emotions, such as anger and resentment, which helps in reducing symptoms of trauma.[1]

Recent studies on forgiveness in domestic violence contexts highlight forgiveness as a complex process supporting both psychological and spiritual recovery worldwide. Research, such as Johnson and Sassen's[2] U.S.-based study and Ahmed et al.'s[3] work in Canada shows that forgiveness interventions can reduce PTSD and enhance resilience among DV survivors, especially when culturally sensitive approaches are used. Globally, studies like Mbatha and Khumalo's[4] research in South Africa underscores the empowering role of spirituality in forgiveness, which enables survivors to manage trauma while achieving a sense of inner peace and justice. In many religious and cultural frameworks, forgiveness extends beyond psychology to include spiritual and moral dimensions that enhance inner peace.[5]

DV in Indonesia has been a persistent issue, with significant increases in reported cases in recent years. In 2021, the National Commission on Violence Against Women reported 338,496 cases of violence against women, marking a nearly 50% rise compared to the previous year.[6] A significant portion of these cases involve DV, which includes physical, psychological, sexual, and economic

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[1] Everett L. Worthington Jr., *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving* (New York: Crown, 2001), 78–84.

[2] Karen Johnson and Leslie Sassen, "Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Intervention for Domestic Violence Survivors: A U.S.-Based Study," *Journal of Trauma and Recovery* 15, no. 2 (2022): 45–60.

[3] Lina Ahmed, Robert White, and Emily Gordon, "Resilience through Forgiveness: A Study of Domestic Violence Survivors in Canada," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2023): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260523112487.

[4] Zandile Mbatha and Thabo Khumalo, "Faith and Forgiveness: The Role of Spirituality in Healing Domestic Violence Trauma among South African Women," *South African Journal of Psychology* 51, no. 4 (2021): 487–502.

[5] Charlotte van Oyen Witvliet, "Forgiveness and Health: Review and Reflections on a Matter of Faith, Feelings, and Physiology," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 29, no. 3 (2001): 213–220.

[6] UCA News. "Violence Against Women Continues to Rise in Indonesia." UCA News, March 7, 2023. https://www.ucanews.com.

abuse, often committed by family members or acquaintances. West Java, East Java, and Central Java recorded the highest reported cases.

In 2023, approximately 15,688 cases of domestic abuse against women were recorded by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, reflecting a 4% increase from 2022. DV accounted for 66% of all violence against women reported that year.[7] However, many incidents remain unreported due to stigma and cultural norms, making the reported figures the "tip of the iceberg." The rise in domestic abuse has also contributed to Indonesia's growing divorce rate. In 2023, over 5,700 divorces were linked to domestic abuse, marking an 8% increase from previous years.[8] Despite existing laws, experts argue that more resources and education are needed to address the issue effectively, including better police training and longer premarital counseling sessions to prevent abuse and promote healthier relationships. Efforts to combat DV continue, but the issue remains a significant challenge in Indonesia's pursuit of gender equality and the protection of women's rights.

Forgiveness is a unique, non-linear journey for each person. The more severe the emotional pain, the longer it may take. It begins with letting go of hatred and resentment, paving the way for personal peace and healthier relationships.

Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer identify two main dimensions of forgiveness: intrapersonal (internal mindset shift) and interpersonal (outward expression, not always communicated).[9] For DV survivors, forgiveness supports well-being and helps perpetrators move past their role in the violence. DV causes psychological and emotional damage, leading to PTSD, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Campbell, Sullivan, and Davidson report around 50% of DV survivors suffer from PTSD.[10] Over time, victims may also experience low self-esteem and

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[7] Asia News Network. "Divorce on the Rise in Indonesia amid Rampant Domestic Abuse." Asia News Network, July 31, 2024. https://asianews.network.

[8] Loasana, Nina A. "Divorce on the Rise in Indonesia amid Rampant Domestic Abuse." The Jakarta Post, July 15, 2024. https://www.thejakartapost.com.

[9] Baumeister, R., Exline, J. & Sommer, K. (1998). The victim role, grudge theory, and two dimensions of forgiveness. In Everette L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.) *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives*. (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998): 79-104.

[10] Jacquelyn C. Campbell, Claire M. Sullivan, and William S. Davidson, "Women Who Use Domestic Violence Shelters: Changes in Depression Over Time," Psychology of Women Quarterly 26, no. 1 (2002): 80-88.

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social isolation. Furthermore, forgiveness is crucial for recovery, helping survivors let go of resentment and focus on healing and growth. Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, and Miller find forgiveness enhances psychological well-being by reducing depression and anxiety.[11]

Research shows that forgiving people lead happier and healthier lives than those who hold onto hatred, anger, and revenge. The benefits of forgiveness include reducing anxiety, symptoms of depression, deep regret, and guilt, improving overall mental health, enhancing life satisfaction, lowering levels of depression and anxiety by forgiving oneself, others, and even God, and reducing PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Forgiveness also improves physical health,[12] such as lowering the risk of heart attacks and reducing cortisol levels. It can also help alleviate headaches, tension, insomnia, and fear, decreasing dependency on nicotine, drug abuse or dependence, and reducing phobias and bulimia nervosa, [13] and can even boost self-esteem and hope for the future.[14]

Generally, those who forgive tend to adapt more easily, are more sociable, less selfish, and better understand the wrongdoer's perspective than those who are unwilling or unable to forgive. In other words, forgiveness offers more benefits to the forgiver than the one being forgiven. Forgiving brings grace into one's life and encourages individuals to regain a sense of normalcy. However, forgiveness is not solely driven by personal motivation—it often requires support

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[11] Everett L. Worthington Jr., Charlotte Van Oyen Witvliet, Pietro Pietrini, and Andrea J. Miller, "Forgiveness, Health, and Well-Being: A Review of Evidence for Emotional Versus Decisional Forgiveness, Dispositional Forgivingness, and Reduced Unforgiveness," Journal of Behavioral Medicine 30, no. 3 (2007): 291-302.

[12] See Everette L. Worthington, Jr., Suzanne E. Mazzeo, & Canter, D. E. Forgiveness-promoting approach: Helping clients reach forgiveness through using a longer model that teaches, 2005, Dalam L. Sperry, & E. P. Shafranske (Eds.), *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy* (pp. 235–257). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Dan Witvliet, C. V. Forgiveness and health: Review and reflections on a matter of faith, feelings, and physiology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 29*, 2001, 212–224. Also, see Ryan, R., & Deci, E. On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52* (2001): 141–166.

[13] Kendler, K. S., X.-Q. Liu, C. O. Gardner, M. E. McCullough, D. Larson, and C. A. Prescott. "Dimensions of Religiosity and Their Relationship to Lifetime Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders." American Journal of Psychiatry 160 (2003): 496–503.

[14] Robert D. Enright and Catherine T. Coyle, "Researching the Process Model of Forgiveness within Psychological Interventions," in Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Perspectives, ed. E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1998), 139–161.

and reinforcement from family,[15] friends, mediators,[16] spiritual guidance,[17] and broader societal and cultural contexts.[18]

Forgiveness can also contribute to improved interpersonal relationships. In some cases, survivors may choose to forgive the perpetrator to mend relationships, particularly when factors such as children are involved. However, it is crucial to note that forgiveness does not equate to condoning violence. Instead, forgiveness can be a step toward healing and establishing healthy boundaries within the relationship.

McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal argue that forgiveness is a set of motivations that transform a person, reducing their desire for revenge and diminishing their intent to hate the offender while increasing the willingness to reconcile the relationship with the wrongdoer.[19] Forgiveness is carried out deliberately and voluntarily, driven by a conscious decision to forgive.[20] It can reduce the intention to seek revenge and transform negative emotions into positive attitudes.[21] In each instance, forgiveness occurs because the victim seeks better emotional well-being and happiness. Similarly, DiBlasio describes forgiveness as a decision and a strong will to release feelings of resentment and malice toward the offender.[22]

There might be cases where forgiveness harms individuals. If a person assumes that forgiveness is called for and that person forgives, then as a

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[15] F. A. DiBlasio and J. H. Proctor, "Therapists and the Clinical Use of Forgiveness." *American Journal of Family Therapy* 21 (1993): 175–184.

[16] Robert D. Enright, S. Freedman, and J. Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness," in Exploring Forgiveness, ed. R. D. Enright and J. North (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 46–62.

[17] J. J. Exline, A. M. Yali, and M. Lobel. Op. Cit.

[18] S. J. Sandage, P. C. Hill, and H. C. Vang, "Toward a Multicultural Positive Psychology: Indigenous Forgiveness and Hmong Culture." Counseling Psychologist 31 (2003): 564–592.

[19] Michael E. McCullough, Everett L. Worthington, and Chris K. Rachal. "Interpersonal Forgiving in Close Relationships." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 73, no. 2 (1997): 321–336.

[20] Robert D. Enright, M. J. Santos, and R. Al Mabuk. "The Adolescent as Forgiver." *Journal of Adolescent* 12, no. 1 (1989): 99–110.

[21] Debra Kaminer, Dan J. Stein, Irene Mbanga, and Nompumelelo Zungu-Dirwayi. "Forgiveness: Toward an Integration of Theoretical Models." *Psychiatry* 63, no. 4 (2000): 344–357.

[22] F. A. DiBlasio, "The Use of Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention within Intergenerational Family Therapy," Journal of Family Therapy 20 (1998): 77–94.

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consequence, places himself or herself in danger, some argue that forgiveness has thus had an iatrogenic effect. Others argue that this is a misunderstanding of forgiveness.

Although realistic reasoning about the offender and oneself as victim are important parts of forgiveness, solely cognitive forgiveness may be what Enright et al. called pseudo-forgiveness or what McCullough and Worthington referred to as role-expected, expedient, detached, or limited forgiveness. In contrast, the "true" forgiver's cognitive, affective, and motivational changes toward the wrongdoer are essential. Furthermore, reconciliation, pardoning, excusing, and altruism should be seen as consequences of, not part of, forgiveness. Forgiveness is different from those processes. Similarly, revenge and restitution seeking can be consequences of, but not part of, unforgiveness.[23]

Several factors influence the process of forgiveness, which can either facilitate or hinder an individual's ability to forgive. One significant factor is the response of the offender,[24] nature of the offense, quality of the interpersonal relationship, personality traits,[25] religious values, and time elapsed since the hurtful event. Lastly, the victim's emotional and cognitive processing—their ability to work through feelings and thoughts related to the offense—is critical in determining whether they can forgive.

Forgiveness is understood as a multidimensional process, highlighting forgiveness's complexity and non-linear nature and emphasizing the emotional, mental, and behavioral changes that occur throughout the process. These stages are not rigid or linear but involve flexible processes that can include feedback and feed-forward loops, leading to attitude changes. As such, individuals may progress through these stages sequentially, skip, or revisit previous stages.[26]

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[23] M. E. McCullough and E. L. Worthington, Jr., "Models of Interpersonal Forgiveness and Their Applications to Counseling: Review and Critique," *Counseling and Values* 39 (1994): 2–14.

[24] J. J. Exline, A. M. Yali, and M. Lobel, *Op. Cit.*

[25] R. Baumeister, J. Exline, and K. Sommer, "The Victim Role, Grudge Theory, and Two Dimensions of Forgiveness," in Everette L. Worthington, Jr., Ed., *Op. Cit.*

[26] R. D. Enright and Catherine T. Coyle, "Researching the Process Model of Forgiveness within Psychological Interventions," in E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 52

Enright outlines four phases in the process of forgiveness: uncovering, deciding, working, and deepening.[27] In the first uncovering phase, individuals become aware of their wounds and begin to confront these painful experiences. The second phase, the deciding phase, is crucial, as individuals make a cognitive choice to forgive, even if they are not emotionally ready to forgive. In the third phase, the working or processing phase, individuals commit to refraining from causing further harm or pain, even toward the offender. Finally, in the fourth phase, the outcome or deepening phase, individuals find meaning in their suffering, potentially discovering new hope due to their journey toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness offers a pathway to healing that goes beyond psychological recovery. Forgiveness also holds deep spiritual significance, especially within religious frameworks such as Islam. In the Islamic tradition, forgiveness transcends psychological relief and serves as a means of spiritual growth. Within Islamic teachings, forgiveness is viewed as a spiritual act that brings inner peace. Islamic principles, such as patience (*sabr*), mercy (*rahmah*), and trust in divine justice (*tawakkal*), are integral to the forgiveness process, offering a framework for survivors to cope with their emotional trauma. For Muslims, forgiveness is not about excusing the wrongdoer's actions but about releasing oneself from the emotional burden and placing trust in Allah's justice. This perspective adds a layer of spiritual significance to the healing process, making it an emotional and spiritual journey.

This study aims to explore how forgiveness unfolds in DV survivors within the context of Islamic teachings. While previous research has focused largely on the psychological aspects of forgiveness in DV survivors, limited attention has been paid to the religious dimensions, particularly within an Islamic framework. This study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of two Muslim women who have endured DV, analyzing how forgiveness as a spiritual and psychological process aligns with Islamic principles.

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[27] R. D. Enright, Freedman, S., & Rique, J. *Op. Cit.* p. 53.

B. Method

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore and analyze the process of forgiveness in domestic violence (DV) victims within the context of Islamic teachings. This methodology allows for an in-depth examination of participants' personal experiences, emotions, and spiritual reflections, providing rich insights into forgiveness's psychological and religious dimensions.[28] By focusing on individual cases, the research captures the nuanced dynamics of forgiveness as influenced by psychological healing and the Islamic faith,[29] necessitating the selection of participants with relevant experiences.[30]

In qualitative research, particularly case studies, the depth and richness of data gathered from a single participant can provide profound insights into complex phenomena. A single case study allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, enabling researchers to uncover nuanced perspectives that might be lost in broader quantitative research.[31] In such studies, quality often supersedes quantity, as a single, well-chosen case can reveal significant findings transferable to similar contexts.[32] Yin (2018) argues that a single case study can be particularly valuable when representing a unique or revelatory case, offering insights that broader studies might overlook.[33] Furthermore, in studies focusing on sensitive topics like domestic violence, smaller sample size can create a safe space for participants, allowing them to share detailed and personal experiences without feeling overwhelmed or scrutinized. This focus enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.[34] Case study research by Creswell (2013) also supports that single-case studies can be highly valuable, particularly when

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[28] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013).

[29] Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 49-52

[30] Nadiatus Salama and Nobuyuki Chikudate. "Religious influences on the rationalization of corporate bribery in Indonesia: a phenomenological study." *Asian Journal of Business Ethics* 10, 85–102 (2021).

[31] Yin, Case Study Research and Applications, 52

[32] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 264–265

[33] Yin, Case Study Research and Applications, 49–51.

[34] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 127.

examining specific phenomena within cultural or contextual frameworks, as they allow for a concentrated examination of one individual's lived experiences, beliefs, and coping strategies.[35]

The participant in this study is a female victim of DV, identified through local community networks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supporting women affected by domestic abuse. The woman was a practicing Muslim and resided in Solo, Indonesia. Ani was a 33-year-old single mother who recently divorced due to DV involving psychological and economic abuse.[36] The participant was selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required that participants (1) had experienced DV, (2) were involved in the process of forgiving their abusers, and (3) identified themselves as Muslim, allowing the research to focus on the interplay between forgiveness and Islamic teachings. The woman's spiritual beliefs and religious practices were integral to their experiences, providing a unique lens through which forgiveness could be understood.[37]

Data was collected over two months using a combination of semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and observations. Semi-structured interviews provided a flexible framework for understanding the participants' experiences, while in-depth interviews allowed for more detailed exploration of specific aspects of their forgiveness journey, such as their emotional dynamics, religious influences, and social support. The interviews were conducted in a private, comfortable environment, lasting 60 to 90 minutes.[38] Direct observations were also made during interactions with family members and community settings. The

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[35] John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 100.

[36] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015).

[37] Lawrence A. Palinkas, Sarah M. Horwitz, Carla A. Green, Jennifer P. Wisdom, Naihua Duan, and Kimberly Hoagwood, "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (2015): 533-44.

[38] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009).

informant was made aware of the study's purpose and nature.39 The study adhered to ethical standards by ensuring confidentiality by using a pseudonym for the participant, securing data on encrypted devices, and omitting identifying details in reports. Informed consent was obtained, and the participant's well-being was prioritized by providing a safe interview setting, flexibility in participation, and access to support resources as needed.

C. Result

This section provides an analysis of the process of forgiveness in domestic violence (DV) victims using Enright's model, which is combined with insights from Islamic teachings. The case of Ani, a victim of DV, is examined in detail. Ani's experience offers a comprehensive understanding of how forgiveness unfolds in both psychological and spiritual dimensions, particularly in the context of Islamic values. Ani, a 33-year-old single mother with a bachelor's degree, is actively involved in a non-governmental organization (NGO) and is starting a home-based garment business. The DV case she experienced involved her husband's dominance over her, economic abuse, and infidelity.

1. Uncovering Phase: Awareness of Pain and Injustice

Ani, a single mother, endured a range of negative emotions due to DV, feeling especially anger and hatred for living an unjust life. Vulnerable to gossip, these emotions resurfaced, highlighting her deep pain. She said:

"At first, the pain felt overwhelming. The anger and betrayal were like a storm inside me that I couldn't control. I kept asking, 'Why did this happen to me?' But slowly realized that I had to face the hurt to heal. I couldn't hide from it forever. I had to acknowledge the pain to find my way forward, and I began to understand that this was a test, a path I had to walk through with patience."

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39 Nadiatus Salama and Nobuyuki Chikudate. "Unpacking the Lived Experiences of Corporate Bribery: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Common Sense in the Indonesian Business World." *Social Responsibility Journal* 19, no. 3 (2023): 446-459.

Ani had to navigate life as a single mother, facing societal stigma and trying to forget her troubles unless necessary. Over time, sharing her story became a source of emotional relief and inner healing. She said: "*Initially, I felt ashamed of my divorce, but as I started sharing my story, it became a source of emotional relief and inner healing, helping me reclaim peace and strength*."

In this phase, Ani became acutely aware of the emotional and psychological pain caused by her husband's abuse, leading to a profound spiritual crisis. Her journey, seen as a test of patience (*sabr*) in Islam, helped her view life's trials as opportunities for spiritual growth. Recognizing her pain was essential for forgiveness, as holding on to anger and hatred kept her emotionally trapped. Understanding her suffering as a test of faith helped her endure and seek Allah's guidance.

The quotes from Ani offer valuable insights into her forgiveness journey, which largely aligns with Enright's four-phase forgiveness model but also reflects unique aspects tied to her personal and cultural context. For instance, Ani's initial awareness of her pain and anger mirrors Enright's Uncovering Phase, where individuals recognize and confront their emotional responses to wrongdoing.

2. Decision Phase: The Choice to Forgive

Ani began to consider the benefits of forgiveness for herself and those around her. This decision was grounded in spiritual considerations and support from her social environment. She tried various strategies to address her feelings of victimization and injustice, although she struggled to evaluate them. Forgiveness, she reflected, might offer insights and relief for her well-being, her child, and a better future. She said:

> "Forgiveness wasn't easy, but I had to decide what mattered more—holding on to anger or finding peace. It wasn't for him. It was for me, for my child, and our future. By trusting in Allah and letting go, I could break free from the past and create a life filled with hope instead of hurt."

Ani sought answers through spiritual means, reflecting deeply to find broader meaning and emotional support. Forgiveness, though challenging, was influenced by her Islamic beliefs, seen as an act of worship and submission to

Allah's will. It was not about excusing the perpetrator but freeing oneself from anger and resentment for the sake of Allah. She said:

> "I realized that forgiving him wasn't about excusing what he did but about freeing myself from the weight of anger and pain. It was a choice I had to make for my peace, to let go and trust that Allah's justice is greater than my need for revenge."

In this phase, Ani's decision to forgive was driven by her desire to achieve inner peace and reconnect with her faith. She understood that forgiveness was not a sign of weakness but a reflection of spiritual strength. The concept of tawakkal (placing trust in Allah) became central to her decision. By trusting that Allah would bring justice and that her role was to focus on her healing, Ani was able to let go of the desire for revenge. Her reflections on the personal benefits of forgiveness resonate with Enright's Decision Phase, as she makes a conscious choice to forgive to achieve inner peace rather than excuse her abuser. However, Ani's process diverges from Enright's model in her emphasis on Islamic values, such as patience (sabr) and divine justice (tawakkul), which frame forgiveness as an act of faith. This spiritual motivation extends beyond Enright's framework, suggesting an additional layer of resilience through religious coping.

3. Work Phase: Reframing and Spiritual Growth

Through reframing, Ani tried to understand her husband's perspective, considering his background and factors that may have influenced his behavior. Empathizing with him, she offered forgiveness as a moral gift to heal her emotional wounds. Ani maintained a good relationship with her husband's family and cared for their only daughter. Ani said:

> "As I tried to understand why he did what he did, it wasn't about making excuses for his behavior. I started to see that compassion doesn't mean forgetting, but it does mean healing. By reframing my thoughts, I found space in my heart to move forward without the weight of bitterness. It was a difficult journey, but each step brought me closer to peace."

In the work phase, Ani engaged in cognitive and emotional reframing, aligning with the Islamic principle of *rahmah* (compassion) and finding peace within herself. She said:

> "Understanding his actions didn't mean justifying the hurt he caused. It was about finding peace within myself, letting go of the anger, and realizing that forgiveness was more for my healing than for him. In that process, I found strength and compassion I didn't know I had."

Ani's empathy for her husband reflected her spiritual connection, marked by increased prayer (*salah*), supplication (*du'a*), and recitation of the Qur'an, which provided emotional relief. Forgiving him did not mean forgetting the abuse but was for her spiritual and emotional well-being. Islamically, forgiveness benefits the forgiver more, freeing the soul from hatred.

4. Deepening Phase: Finding Meaning and Reconciliation

Ani realized that all humans are fallible and need forgiveness. This new perspective helped her build life goals and improve relationships. Recognizing that everyone makes mistakes, she saw the need for forgiveness for herself and others. This realization aligned with the 17th stage of Enright's model of forgiveness, where one recognizes the need for forgiveness for one's past mistakes. She said:

> "Forgiveness brought me a new perspective. It helped me see that no one is perfect and that holding onto resentment only keeps me stuck. Through this process, I found a deeper meaning in my struggles. I began to set new goals, focus on my daughter, and build a better life for us. It wasn't just about forgiving him but about forgiving myself, learning, and growing. I now see the wisdom in my pain and trust that Allah has a plan for me beyond the suffering."

Ani discovered new meaning in the injustice and victimization she experienced, leading to greater self-appreciation and a desire to rise above her circumstances. She began to establish new life goals and directed herself toward achieving them. Feeling needed by those around her, Ani aimed to bring happiness to them, especially her only daughter and her siblings. Forgiveness

enhanced her interpersonal skills, making her more open and expanding her life experiences. She strengthened herself:

> "Forgiving him helped me see that everyone, including myself, is flawed and needs forgiveness. It wasn't just about healing from the past—it was about finding wisdom in my pain and building a future filled with peace for me and my daughter. Through forgiveness, I discovered a new strength and purpose."

In the deepening phase, Ani began to find meaning in her suffering. This is where the Islamic concept of *hikmah* (wisdom) becomes significant. In Islam, believers are encouraged to seek the wisdom behind their trials and tribulations, trusting Allah has a greater plan. She attained spiritual and emotional resilience through forgiveness and trusting Allah's justice and mercy. This allowed her to move forward, focusing on her well-being and her child rather than remaining trapped in the past.

One of the priorities and targetted objects of Islamic law is *mu'amalah*. Muamalah is an activity that regulates the process of the relationship between humans and the universe. As perfect beings who can interact with their natural surroundings, humans have become obliged to regulate the pattern of their relationships with the surrounding environment. Interacting in various forms and various communities, of course, all have advantages and disadvantages. Because of these strengths and weaknesses, inevitably, we must work together in living in the world. This is done as a form of 'defense' to exist on this earth. Muamalah must have a certain target to improve the quality of life, which is filled with ukhuwah, rights, and obligations.[40]

D. Discussion

The findings reveal that forgiveness for DV survivors is a dynamic and non-linear process influenced by internal emotional shifts and external support systems. Ani's journey illustrates that Islamic teachings offer a powerful framework for understanding forgiveness, viewing it not as weakness but as

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[40] Amin Syukur, *Pengantar Studi Islam* (Semarang: Pustaka Nuun, 2010), 124.

spiritual and emotional liberation. By embracing principles such as mercy, patience, and trust in divine justice, survivors can find peace despite their trauma.

Ani endured psychological and economic abuse, including control and manipulation, leaving her feeling powerless. Her husband avoided low-paying, physically demanding jobs, forcing Ani to work to meet daily needs. When he eventually found work, he neglected his family and engaged in infidelity. Ani's forgiveness process is characterized by feedback and feed-forward loops with fluctuating attitudes. Feedback loops occur when she regresses to earlier stages after feeling progress. For example, a triggering event may reignite feelings of anger or hurt, illustrating that healing is not linear. Feed-forward loops involve moving to new stages without fully resolving earlier ones, potentially leading to future challenges when unresolved emotions resurface. Forgiveness is unpredictable and influenced by social support, daily experiences, or spiritual understanding. Ani's attitude may change significantly throughout this journey; she may feel she has been forgiven at one moment and revert to resentment later. These shifts highlight that forgiveness is a dynamic process requiring time and emotional adjustment.

Ani's motivation to forgive stemmed from reflecting on the benefits of forgiveness, her responsibility toward her child and siblings, and support from close ones and colleagues, which are deeply rooted in her religious beliefs. Over time, Ani has succeeded in forgiving, and she now appears stronger, more stable, comfortable, and independent. She feels more confident and optimistic about her future and demonstrates a higher level of hope compared to before. This aligns with the study by Wei-Fen Lin and colleagues, which found that women suffering from PTSD due to DV can benefit from forgiveness, as it serves as an effective therapy that reduces anger, depression, anxiety, and even neurotic tendencies.[41]

Ani's psychological progress is also consistent with the findings of Richard L. Gorsuch and Judy Y. Hao, which show that religious individuals are more inclined to forgive and less likely to harbor hatred toward those who have wronged

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[41] Wei-Fen Lin, David Mack, Robert D. Enright, Dean Krahn, and Thomas W. Baskin, "Effects of Forgiveness Therapy on Anger, Mood, and Vulnerability to Substance Use among Inpatient Substance Dependent Clients," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 72 (2004): 114-121.

them.[42] Ani believes that her faith played a crucial role in helping her recover from her trauma. Similar findings by Peter Strelan, Collin Acton, and Kent Patrick suggest that because Ani did not feel disappointment in God, she did not exhibit signs of depression or stress.[43] Instead, she showed spiritual maturity and inner peace and maintained a good relationship with her husband's family.

Ani, who forgave her husband, demonstrates a pleasant personality, open-mindedness, emotional stability, and a consistent reliance on her faith. Despite her ex-husband not acknowledging his mistakes, promising to change, or apologizing to Ani as the victim of DV, the closeness of their past relationship influenced her decision to forgive, along with the support of her child, family, and friends.

Ani does not view herself as superior to her ex-husband just because she is the victim. She recognizes that she, too, needs forgiveness, acknowledging that she had wronged him at times as well, which contributed to her willingness to forgive. From a religious perspective, Ani entrusts her fate to God, which makes it easier for her to forgive others.

Emotionally and cognitively, Ani demonstrates empathy and acceptance, key factors in prosocial qualities such as the desire to help and forgive others. However, victims of DV like Ani cannot fully resolve all emotional pain. Ani still experiences emotional ups and downs due to the trauma she endured. While forgiveness therapy has reduced her sadness, it has not completely healed or resolved the despair she feels from her husband's betrayal and infidelity. Therefore, counselors and service providers working with Muslim DV survivors are encouraged to integrate Islamic principles such as rahmah, sabr, and tawakkul into therapy, framing forgiveness as an act of spiritual empowerment rather than condoning abuse while also involving supportive family or community members where appropriate to reinforce healing.

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[42] Richard L. Gorsuch and Judy Y. Hao, "Forgiveness: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Its Relationship to Religious Variables," Review of Religious Research 34 (1993): 333-47, https://doi.org/10.2307/3511971.

[43] Peter Strelan, Collin Acton, and Kent Patrick, "Disappointment with God and Well-Being: The Mediating Influence of Relationship Quality and Dispositional Forgiveness," Counseling and Values 53, no. 3 (2009): 202-215.

C.   Conclusion

Forgiveness in the context of DV is a complex and dynamic process that often does not follow a linear path. It is characterized by feedback and feed-forward loops where victims may revisit or skip certain stages of forgiveness, reflecting changes in their attitudes over time. The motivation for forgiveness is often tied to a desire to find inner peace, influenced by religious beliefs, and supported by social networks. The process of forgiveness can greatly benefit the psychological and emotional well-being of DV victims, helping them rebuild their lives with a sense of inner peace and improved relationships.

This study highlights how forgiveness serves as both a psychological and spiritual healing process for Muslim survivors of domestic violence, with findings indicating that Islamic values such as rahmah (mercy), sabr (patience), and tawakkul (trust in divine justice) uniquely support survivors' journeys toward inner peace. The integration of psychological and spiritual support proves essential for a holistic recovery, as it empowers survivors to find emotional relief and renewed purpose through faith-based resilience.

In the context of DV, forgiveness is a complex but spiritually rewarding process, with Islamic teachings emphasizing patience, faith, and trust in Allah's divine justice. Victims forgive to release emotional burdens and seek Allah's mercy, enabling spiritual and emotional healing. This process is essential for their spiritual growth and aligns with Islamic principles of mercy, patience, and justice, providing peace and hope. Forgiveness in Islam is not merely an act of leniency towards the perpetrator but is essential for the victim's spiritual growth and healing. By aligning the process of forgiveness with Islamic principles of mercy, patience, and justice, DV victims can find peace in knowing that their suffering is not in vain and that Allah's justice will prevail.

This study is limited by its small sample size, as it focuses on a single participant, cultural specificity, and reliance on self-reported experiences. Additionally, the dynamic and non-linear nature of forgiveness and the short study time frame suggest that further longitudinal research is needed to capture the evolving nature of forgiveness across diverse contexts. Further research is necessary to integrate Islamic teachings on forgiveness into therapeutic interventions for DV victims. By combining psychological support with spiritual guidance, victims can achieve holistic healing and improve their quality of life,

both in this world and the hereafter. Exploring forgiveness in recovery programs is crucial for understanding its long-term impact on DV victims. Future research could also broaden these insights by exploring forgiveness experiences among a larger, more diverse group of participants, or by conducting cross-religious comparisons to understand how different spiritual frameworks influence the forgiveness process in DV recovery.

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