

# ROOTS OF FORGIVENESS AND INNER PEACE: Exploring Gender and Geographical Identity among Muslim University Students

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the correlation between forgiveness and inner peace and examines differences based on gender and place of residence among emerging adult Muslim university students in Indonesia. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 438 randomly selected students (90 males, 348 females) from 17 universities across Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. Inner peace was measured using a 19-item validated scale ( $\alpha = 0.764$ ), while forgiveness was assessed with an adapted TRIM-18 ( $\alpha = 0.723$ ). Data analysis involved Spearman's rho, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Dunn tests. A significant positive correlation was found between forgiveness and inner peace ( $p = 0.326$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Gender differences were evident in several inner peace dimensions—Acceptance of Loss, Inner Balance and Calmness, and total Inner Peace—as well as in forgiveness, particularly in Avoidance Motivation and overall Forgiveness scores. Residence-based differences were also observed. Kruskal-Wallis tests showed significant group differences in Avoidance and Benevolence Motivation. Dunn's post-hoc tests revealed that students from mountainous areas had significantly lower avoidance motivation than those from coastal regions, while highland residents showed higher benevolence motivation than lowland residents. These findings suggest that gender and geographic environment significantly influence students' emotional and spiritual well-being. This study underscores the importance of promoting inner peace and forgiveness in higher education settings and provides valuable insights for educators and counselors to cultivate supportive campus environments that foster students' holistic development.

**Keywords:** emerging adulthood; forgiveness; gender differences; inner peace; place of residence

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji korelasi antara pemaafan dan kedamaian batin, serta mengeksplorasi perbedaan berdasarkan jenis kelamin dan tempat tinggal terhadap kedua konstruksi tersebut pada mahasiswa Muslim dewasa awal di Indonesia. Menggunakan survei potong lintang, data dikumpulkan dari 438 mahasiswa (90 laki-laki, 348 perempuan) yang dipilih secara acak dari 17 universitas di Sumatra, Jawa, Kalimantan, dan Sulawesi. Skala Kedamaian Batin terdiri dari 19 butir valid ( $\alpha = 0,764$ ), sementara pemaafan diukur menggunakan adaptasi TRIM-18 (18 butir,  $\alpha = 0,723$ ). Data dianalisis menggunakan Spearman's rho, U Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis, dan uji Dunn. Terdapat korelasi signifikan antara kedamaian batin dan pemaafan ( $p = 0,326$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ). Perbedaan berdasarkan jenis kelamin muncul dalam kedamaian batin, khususnya pada aspek Penerimaan Kehilangan dan Keseimbangan serta Ketentraman Batin, total Kedamaian Batin, serta pada pemaafan, terutama pada aspek Pengurangan Motivasi Penghindaran, dan total Pemaafan. Perbedaan dalam dimensi pemaafan juga ditemukan berdasarkan tempat tinggal. Uji Kruskal-Wallis menunjukkan perbedaan signifikan dalam kelompok terhadap Pengurangan Motivasi Penghindaran dan Motivasi Kebajikan. Uji Dunn dengan koreksi Holm menunjukkan bahwa individu dari daerah pegunungan menunjukkan motivasi penghindaran yang secara signifikan lebih rendah dibandingkan mereka yang tinggal di daerah pesisir, sementara mereka yang tinggal di dataran tinggi menunjukkan Motivasi Kebajikan yang lebih tinggi dibandingkan mereka yang tinggal di dataran rendah. Dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi, penelitian ini menyoroti peran jenis kelamin dan lingkungan dalam membentuk perkembangan emosional dan spiritual mahasiswa. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pendidik dan konselor dalam membangun budaya kampus yang mendukung kedamaian batin dan pemaafan sebagai bagian dari kesejahteraan holistik mahasiswa.

**Kata kunci:** masa dewasa awal; pemaafan; perbedaan gender; kedamaian batin; tempat tinggal

## Introduction

In recent years, the pursuit of emotional well-being has become a central concern in psychological and educational research, especially in the era of disruption, where the movement for peace education—particularly through cultivating inner peace—faces significant challenges in academic settings. Mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, low life satisfaction, and mood disorders have become increasingly common among young adults, particularly university students.<sup>1</sup> These are exacerbated by nonstop social media exposure, unrealistic ideals, the spread of hedonistic and consumerist values, and a hustle culture that disrupts emotional balance and weakens life harmony.<sup>2</sup>

This crisis is especially concerning during emerging adulthood (ages 18–25), a critical developmental stage often spent in higher education, where students are navigating academic pressures alongside personal, social, and spiritual growth, a phase of identity exploration, instability, and heightened vulnerability. In Indonesia, 10.7% of university students reported moderate anxiety, 6.6% severe, and 0.8% very severe<sup>3</sup>. Other studies show high anxiety about the future, low life satisfaction, and a significant presence of quarter-life and existential crises. Left unaddressed, these pressures hinder the development of inner peace and risk contributing to more profound emotional instability.

This crisis of mental health disrupts emotional balance and prevents the development of *inner peace*, a stable state of mental and spiritual well-being. In this context, forgiveness emerges as a crucial virtue in positive psychology and Islamic ethical teachings as a key mechanism

in fostering emotional healing and resilience. Forgiveness involves releasing negative emotions and motivations—such as resentment, revenge, and avoidance—and replacing them with benevolence and compassion toward those who have caused harm.<sup>4</sup> This process enables individuals to move beyond emotional conflict, promoting greater clarity and reducing internal turmoil. Forgiveness becomes an essential pathway to inner peace by letting go of destructive emotions, helping individuals restore emotional balance, and mitigating the distress that impedes mental well-being.

However, the development of forgiveness and inner peace may be shaped by socio-cultural factors such as gender and geographic environment. Cultural norms, gendered emotional expression, and differences in daily life between mountainous and coastal communities can influence how individuals interpret suffering and practice forgiveness. Among Muslim students in emerging adulthood, these dynamics may intersect with religious meaning-making and spiritual coping, as this developmental stage is marked by identity exploration, value formation, and increased spiritual sensitivity. Understanding how gender and place shape the journey toward forgiveness and inner peace is therefore crucial in addressing these challenges.

While peace research in Indonesia has explored various dimensions of peace, such as behavioral peace, conflict resolution, and social harmony, there remains a significant gap in the empirical study of inner peace and its relationship to forgiveness. Most existing research in peace studies has focused on broader social and behavioral aspects of peace, such as youth aggression prevention.<sup>5</sup> Promoting peaceful thinking in adolescents<sup>6</sup> and fostering a

<sup>1</sup> A.K. Przybylski et al., “Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out,” *Computer in Human Behavior* 29 (2013): 1841–1848.

<sup>2</sup> A Hanun and D Rahmasari, “Manajemen Konflik Pernikahan Pada Perempuan Yang Menikah Di Usia Muda,” *Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi* (2022), <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/character/article/view/47026>.

<sup>3</sup> Clinton J. S. Walean, Cicilia Pali, and Jehosua S. V. Sinolungan, “Gambaran Tingkat Kecemasan Pada Mahasiswa Di Masa Pandemi COVID-19,” *Jurnal Biomedik* 13, no. 2 (2021): 132–143.

<sup>4</sup> R D Enright and R P Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (American Psychological Association, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Wahyu Eka Nanda Saputra and others, “The Development of Peace Counseling Model (PCM): Strategy of School Counselor to Reduce Students Aggressive Behavior,” *JKBK Jurnal Kajian Bimbingan Dan Konseling* 4, no. 4 (2019): 134–142.

<sup>6</sup> Agus Supriyanto and Wahyu Nanda Eka Saputra, “Peace Guidance: Training for School Counsellors at Preventing Tendency to Aggression for Students,” *PROFICIO: Jurnal Abdimas FKIP UTP*

peace culture in educational settings<sup>7</sup>. However, the psychological and spiritual dimensions of peace, particularly inner peace, remain underexplored.

Inner peace is often described as a mental and spiritual state free from negative emotions and characterized by inner stability and serenity.<sup>8</sup> Xi and Lee have been linked to greater emotional regulation, resilience, and subjective well-being.<sup>9</sup> Despite its increasing relevance in psychology and spirituality, the study of inner peace in Indonesian research has largely been neglected, particularly in the context of forgiveness. While peace education initiatives have explored interpersonal peace and peace-building behaviors, these studies do not address how inner peace—especially as a personal and spiritual construct—develops and functions within individuals, particularly in the formative years of emerging adulthood.

At the same time, forgiveness, a process of releasing negative emotions and replacing them with compassion.<sup>10</sup> Enright & McCullough has been identified as a crucial mechanism for emotional healing and promoting inner peace. However, most forgiveness research focuses on its social and relational impacts, with a lack of attention to the psychological mechanisms and predictors of forgiveness at the individual level. While forgiveness has been linked to empathy, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence, little research in Indonesia has explored these factors concerning inner peace, particularly among emerging adults.

Furthermore, socio-cultural factors such as gender and place of residence have been shown to influence how forgiveness is expressed and experienced.<sup>11</sup> Gendered emotional expression and cultural norms around forgiveness and conflict resolution can shape how individuals practice forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> In Indonesia, for example, cultural differences between mountainous and coastal communities may influence forgiveness practices, with differing interpretations of religious teachings, such as Islamic notions of divine mercy and forgiveness. These socio-cultural nuances are often overlooked in existing studies,<sup>13</sup> leaving a gap in understanding how these factors shape forgiveness and inner peace. Although inner peace and forgiveness have been studied as separate constructs, there remains a lack of integrated research exploring how these concepts interact among Muslim university students in Indonesia, particularly concerning demographic factors such as gender and place of residence.

This study is motivated by the need to bridge these research gaps and contribute to a more holistic understanding of psychological well-being in the Indonesian context. By investigating the relationship between forgiveness and inner peace among emerging adult Muslim university students, the study seeks to uncover how forgiving can serve as a foundation for inner peace. Furthermore, by incorporating gender and residential context as moderating variables, the research acknowledges that internal dispositions and external socio-cultural factors shape the path to emotional healing. In doing

2, no. 2 (2021): 35–43.

<sup>7</sup> H Abu-Raiya and K I Pargament, “Religious Coping among Diverse Religions: Commonalities and Divergences,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 7, no. 1 (2015): 24–33.

<sup>8</sup> L R Brody and J A Hall, “Gender, Emotion, and Socialization,” in *Handbook of Gender Research in Psychology*, ed. J C Chrisler and D R McCreary, vol. 1 (Springer, 2010), 429–454.

<sup>9</sup> Juan Xi and Matthew T Lee, “Inner Peace as a Contribution to Human Flourishing: A New Scale Developed from Ancient Wisdom,” in *Measuring Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities*, ed. Matthew T Lee, Laura D Kubzansky, and Tyler J VanderWeele (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 432–481.

<sup>10</sup> Enright and Fitzgibbons, *Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*.

<sup>11</sup> L Toussaint, E L Worthington, and D R Williams, “Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health,” in *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*, ed. E L Worthington, L Toussaint, and D R Williams (Springer, 2015), 3–19.

<sup>12</sup> A Nurlatifah, “Forgiveness among Javanese Ethnic Students: A Mountainous, Highland, Lowland, and Coastal Culture Background Comparison,” *JOMSIGN: Journal of Multicultural Studies in Guidance and Counseling* 4, no. 1 (2020): 45–63.

<sup>13</sup> Martina Ayu Wulandari and Zahrotutsani Mujahidah, “KEBIJAKAN HOMESCHOOLING DAN RELEVANSINYA TERHADAP PENGUATAN PENDIDIKAN AGAMA ISLAM DI INDONESIA PADA ERA DIGITAL,” *TARLIM Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 63–78.

so, it moves beyond a universalist model of well-being toward a context-sensitive psychological framework that reflects the lived realities of Indonesian Muslim youth.

This study explores the interplay between forgiveness and inner peace among emerging adult Muslim university students in Indonesia, with particular attention to gender and geographical differences. The objectives are: (1) to assess the correlation between forgiveness and inner peace; (2) to examine whether levels of forgiveness and inner peace differ based on gender; (3) to examine whether levels of forgiveness and inner peace differ based on place of residence.

Method

Population and the methods of sampling

The target population of this study was comprised of Muslim undergraduate students enrolled in universities across the Indonesian archipelago, specifically those situated on the Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi islands. These islands represent diverse cultural, ecological, and social landscapes, providing a suitable context for examining the influence of environmental background on psychological outcomes. This study involved a total of 438 Muslim university students aged between 20 and 25 years ( $M = 22.06$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), drawn from 17 higher education institutions located across four major islands in Indonesia: Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. The sample comprised 348 female students (79.5%) and 90 male students (20.5%), reflecting the current gender distribution in many Indonesian universities, particularly within the social sciences and humanities.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Specifically, students were categorized according to their primary place of residence based on self-reported, which fell into one of four geographic typologies: mountainous areas, highlands, lowlands, and coastal regions. Inclusion criteria required participants to (1) identify as Muslim, (2) be currently enrolled as undergraduate students, (3) fall within the 20–25 age range, and (4) provide

informed consent. The data were collected via an online survey distributed through institutional networks and student organizations. Table 1 and Figure 1 present the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 1. Participants of This Study

Aspect	Criteria	Number of Participants	Percent
Gender	Male	90	20.5
	Female	348	79.5
Age	20 years old	46	10.5
	21 years old	132	30.1
	22 years old	119	27.2
	23 years old	75	17.1
	24 years old	26	5.9
	25 years old	40	9.1
Place of Residence	Mountainous	45	10.3
	Highlands	113	25.8
	Lowlands	240	54.8
	Coastal	40	9.1
Missing	System	0	
Total		438	100

Instrumentation

Inner peace was assessed using the adaptation of the *Inner Peace Scale*<sup>14</sup>. The original scale consisted of 21 items, but following pilot testing, 19 items were retained based on item validity analysis, with items 14 and 15 excluded due to low factor loading and weak item-total correlations. The final 19-item scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.764$ ). The scale captures three conceptual dimensions: acceptance of loss, inner balance and calmness, and transcending hedonism and materialism. Respondents rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), reflecting the frequency with which they experienced or embodied each aspect of inner peace.

Forgiveness was measured using an adapted version of the *Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory* (TRIM-18) developed by

<sup>14</sup> Xi and Lee, “Inner Peace as a Contribution to Human Flourishing A New Scale Developed from Ancient Wisdom.”



Table 2. Table of Analysis

Objective	Variable(s)	Statistical Test	Assumptions	Effect Size	Post-Hoc
Describe data	Forgiveness, Inner Peace, Gender, and Place of Residence.	Descriptive statistics (Mean, median, Frequency)	–	–	–
Analyze correlation	Forgiveness & Inner Peace	Spearman's Rho	Ordinal/Non-normal	$\rho$ (rho)	–
Compare by Gender	Forgiveness, Inner Peace by Gender	Mann–Whitney U	2 groups, non-normal	$r = Z / \sqrt{N}$	–
Compare by Residence	Forgiveness, Inner Peace by Residence	Kruskal–Wallis H	$\geq 3$ groups, non-normal	$\epsilon^2$ (epsilon squared)	Yes
Identify specific group differences.	Forgiveness, Inner Peace by Residence (if significant)	Bayesian Dunn Test	Pairwise comparisons	Posterior probabilities	Adjusted p-values

McCullough, a widely used instrument consisting of 18 items that assess interpersonal forgiveness across three dimensions: avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation. In this study, the TRIM-18 showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.723$ ). To reflect the level of forgiveness, scores for the avoidance and revenge subscales were reverse-coded, such that higher scores on the total scale represented lower avoidance, lower desire for revenge, and greater benevolence—thus indicating a higher overall level of forgiveness.

Both instruments were translated into Bahasa Indonesia and delivered through an online survey platform (Google Forms), with an estimated completion time of approximately 15 minutes.

### Procedures and, if relevant, the time frame

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The instruments used were adapted from the Inner Peace Scale and the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale (TRIM-18), with adjustments to fit the cultural and contextual characteristics of the target population.<sup>15</sup> Adaptation procedures included translation, back-translation, and expert validation to ensure content relevance and construct validity. After obtaining ethical approval, participants were

recruited using purposive sampling, and data were collected through an online self-report questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained digitally, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. The entire process—from instrument adaptation to data analysis—was conducted over three months, from April 2024 to March 2025.

### Analysis plan

The quantitative data were analyzed using a series of non-parametric statistical procedures suitable for the distributional characteristics of the dataset. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, were used to summarize participant demographics, while means and standard deviations were calculated to describe the central tendency and dispersion of the inner peace and forgiveness variables. Given the non-normally distributed data, Spearman's Rho correlation was applied to examine the relationship between forgiveness and inner peace. Group differences based on gender were tested using the Mann–Whitney U test, while variations across different places of residence were analyzed using the Kruskal–Wallis H test. When significant differences were found in the Kruskal–Wallis analysis, a Dunn test was conducted to identify specific group contrasts, incorporating multiple comparison adjustments. The details of the analysis plan are presented in Table 2.

<sup>15</sup> (Xi & Lee, 2021; Boyle, Saklofske, & Matthews, 2015)

## Scope and/or limitations of the methodology

This study focuses on Muslim university students from four major Indonesian islands—Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and Sulawesi—offering a geographically and culturally diverse sample within the national context. This scope enables the identification of regional patterns in the relationship between forgiveness and inner peace, particularly across distinct socio-cultural environments. However, the findings are limited in generalizability to other groups, such as students from less-represented islands (e.g., Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara), non-Muslim populations, and non-student adults. A cross-sectional, non-experimental design based on self-report questionnaires introduces potential biases, including social desirability and subjectivity in responses. Additionally, while non-parametric tests were chosen to accommodate nominal data and non-normal data distributions, these methods typically have lower statistical power than parametric alternatives. The reliance on quantitative data also constrains the depth of interpretation, as it may not fully capture the complexity of cultural, emotional, and spiritual dimensions associated with forgiveness and inner peace. For more comprehensive insights, future research should consider expanding the sample to a national scale, involving more diverse populations, and incorporating longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to understand causality and context better.

## Results and Discussion

### Concept and Development of Inner Peace

Inner peace, while often understood intuitively, has gained increasing attention in psychology, spirituality, and peace studies. From the perspective of peace studies, it represents a micro-level dimension within the broader framework of holistic peace. It shifts the traditional dichotomy of negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (presence of social justice and institutional harmony) toward an intrastate dimension—peace experienced internally within individuals. Inner peace is a mental and spiritual state free from negative thoughts and

emotions, characterized by inner stability, strength, and serenity regardless of external circumstances.<sup>16</sup> It comprises three key aspects: (1) freedom from distress caused by undesirable life conditions, (2) detachment from excessive longing for ideal conditions, and (3) the ability to maintain calmness and inner balance. It also reflects emotional self-regulation and the dynamic capacity for resilience amid life's challenges.<sup>17</sup>

Inner peace is increasingly viewed as foundational for achieving outer peace. It is associated with harmony, positivity, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a healthy lifestyle. Within the framework of positive psychology, it aligns closely with character strengths such as hope, zest, gratitude, forgiveness, and spirituality. These psychological and moral traits position inner peace as an emotional state and a multidimensional strength that nurtures well-being and ethical behavior.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these developments, the recognition of inner peace in mainstream peace research has progressed slowly. Leading journals like the *Journal of Peace Research* prioritize macro-level analyses of violence, conflict resolution, and structural reform. Inner peace is rarely the primary focus, and when discussed, it typically arises from theological or Eastern philosophical contexts—such as Islamic, Confucian, or Buddhist traditions—that view peace as a state of harmony, simplicity, and spiritual fulfilment.<sup>19</sup>

In Islamic thought, inner peace is rooted in submission to the will of Allah. Islam derives from the root word for peace and surrender, suggesting that true inner peace (*salaam*) emerges from obedience to the Giver of Peace, Allah. Inner peace is inseparable from tawhid (belief in the oneness of

<sup>16</sup> R P Brown and A Phillips, "Letting Bygones Be Bygones: Further Evidence for the Validity of the Tendency to Forgive Scale," *Personality and Individual Differences* 38, no. 3 (2005): 627–638.

<sup>17</sup> J J Gross, "Emotion Regulation: Affective, Cognitive, and Social Consequences," *Psychophysiology* 39, no. 3 (2002): 281–291.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Groff and Dominguez Hills, "Religion and Peace, Inner Outer Dimensions Of," 1995 (2007): 1846–1859.

<sup>19</sup> Zuleyha Keskin, "Inner Peace in the Life of Said Nursi," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* (2019).

God) and manifests through *ridha* (contentment), *sakinah* (serenity), and *timing* (tranquility).<sup>20</sup> Scholars like Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the integration of spiritual and material dimensions, intellect, and heart—cultivated through worship, remembrance, and reflection.<sup>21</sup>

Historically, peace research has focused on negative and positive outer peace.<sup>22</sup> Interest in inner peace grew with explorations of peace in Eastern wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, where inner tranquility lies at the core. This was later complemented by studies rooted in Abrahamic religious perspectives, particularly Islam and Christianity.

As research evolved, inner peace intersected with psychological constructs such as happiness, harmony, spirituality, mindfulness, and serenity—becoming a significant domain within subjective well-being. More recently, it has been examined concerning the 24-character strengths of positive psychology.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside this theoretical development, efforts to measure inner peace also emerged. Initially, studies used broader tools such as subjective well-being scales, the WHO's Spiritual, Religious, and Personal Belief Domain VI, or the Peace of Mind Scale. Eventually, a dedicated Inner Peace Scale (IPS) was developed based on ancient virtue ethics, providing a more direct and culturally grounded measurement of inner peace.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Zuleyha Keskin, "Said Nursi's Tawheed-Centric Worldview and Inner Peace," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 9, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>21</sup> Hassan Shakeel Shah and Adib Susilo, "E-COMMERCE ON THE STUDY OF MASLAHAH MURSALAH (A REVIEW FROM AN ISLAMIC ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE)," *Tasharruf: Journal Economics and Business of Islam* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 17, <https://journal.iain-manado.ac.id/index.php/TJEBI/article/view/1944>.

<sup>22</sup> Jon Barnett, "Peace and Development: Towards a New Synthesis," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 75–89.

<sup>23</sup> Netra P Sharma, "From Inner Peace to World Peace: Buddhist Meditation in Practice," *Journal of International Affairs* 3 (2020): 132–144.

<sup>24</sup> Khairuddin Hasballah and Rahmadani, "Studi Pemikiran Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah Tentang Hakam Dan Relevansinya Dengan Mediasi Di Pengadilan Agama," *Samarah* 3, no. 1 (2019): 53–68.

In Indonesia, research on intrapersonal peace has centered chiefly on *personal peace*, which—while overlapping—differs conceptually from inner peace. Inner peace emphasizes inner balance, transcendence, and acceptance, whereas personal peace focuses on interpersonal qualities such as care, fearlessness, and love. Studies that align more closely with inner peace include those exploring spiritual tranquility or *peace of soul*, particularly its connection to practices like *dhikr*.<sup>25</sup>

## Psychological Mechanisms and Predictors of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not merely a social act but a transformative process that can lead to profound personal serenity and emotional release. The philosophical foundation of forgiveness dates back to ancient Greece through the Aristotelian concept of *sungnômê*, which refers to setting permissible conditions for excusing and forgiving a wrong. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, forgiveness is grounded in divine mercy—God is perceived as forgiving, and humans are encouraged to mirror that divine forgiveness in their interpersonal relationships.<sup>26</sup> In Hinduism and Buddhism, forgiveness is motivated by the law of karma; individuals forgive to release themselves from hatred and vengeance, promoting peace in both present and future lifetimes.

Modern scientific interest in forgiveness emerged in theological writings in the 1970s and expanded into developmental psychology by the 1990s, notably through the work of Robert D. Enright.<sup>27</sup> Enright (1989) conceptualized forgiveness as replacing negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors toward an offender with positive ones—

<sup>25</sup> Nunu Burhanuddin, "Akar Dan Motif Fundamentalisme Islam: Reformulasi Tipologi Fundamentalisme Dan Prospeknya Di Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 1, no. 2 (2016): 199–210.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> M S Rye et al., "The Role of Place and Culture in Forgiveness," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, ed. E L Worthington Jr and others, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2021), 295–308.

compassion, generosity, and love. This intrapersonal shift is foundational to inner peace, as unresolved resentment and anger often disrupt emotional balance and spiritual contentment.

From a motivational perspective, McCullough described forgiveness as a reduction in avoidance and revenge motivations, paired with increased benevolence toward the offender.<sup>28</sup> Baumeister added that forgiveness involves cancelling a “debt” owed by the transgressor, leading to both emotional release and relational restoration. These psychological models align with the goal of inner peace—reducing inner turmoil and fostering a state of calm and wholeness.

Research has identified a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence forgiveness. Intrinsically, forgiveness is positively predicted by self-compassion, gratitude, empathy, agreeableness, emotional intelligence, and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, forgiveness is hindered by rumination and victim cynicism. Extrinsic factors such as apologies, offender’s remorse, communication quality, and power dynamics also affect whether forgiveness occurs.<sup>29</sup> The nature of the relationship between victim and offender often shapes forgiveness. Close, trusting relationships promote forgiveness, while third-party forgiveness—such as forgiveness offered by someone close to the victim rather than the victim—tends to be more difficult. In the context of divine forgiveness, belief in a forgiving God has been shown to influence individuals’ sense of being forgiven and their capacity to forgive others.<sup>30</sup>

Demographic factors also play a significant role in how forgiveness is experienced and expressed. Gender has been frequently examined, with some studies suggesting significant differences while others find no significant differences or highlight

contextual variability.<sup>31</sup> The place of residence—such as mountainous versus coastal regions—may shape socio-cultural norms related to interpersonal relationships, emotional expression, and conflict resolution styles.

In sum, forgiveness is a multidimensional process that intersects personal, relational, spiritual, and cultural domains. Understanding how forgiveness correlates with individual traits and demographic factors—such as gender and place of residence—offers insight into its role in fostering inner peace. As a bridge between emotional healing and spiritual clarity, forgiveness contributes significantly to restoring inner balance, calmness, and resilience following interpersonal hurt.

### **Descriptive and Inferential Statistical Analysis of Inner Peace and Forgiveness by Gender and Place of Residence**

This study involved 438 respondents, with an uneven gender distribution, where 79.5% (n= 348) of respondents were female and only 20.5% (n= 90) were male. This imbalance reflects the higher prevalence of females among the study participants, which may be related to the student population composition within the sampled demographic. Regarding the place of residence variable, there was considerable diversity among respondents. The majority, 54.8% (n= 240), resided in the lowlands. Meanwhile, 25.8% (n= 113) of respondents came from the highlands. Only 10.3% (n= 45) of respondents lived in mountainous areas, which are often more challenging in terms of living conditions, and 9.1% (n= 40) resided in coastal areas.

The three dimensions of inner peace measured — Acceptance of Loss (AL), Inner Balance and Calmness (BC), and Transcending Hedonism and Materialism (TM) — had mean scores of 15.17 (*SD*= 3.21), 26.53 (*SD*= 4.79), and 9.53 (*SD*= 2.15). The total Inner Peace score (tIP) ranged from 17 to 66, with a mean of 43.98 (*SD*= 7.36). Regarding forgiveness

<sup>28</sup> M E McCullough, E L Worthington, and K C Rachal, “Interpersonal Forgiving in Close Relationships,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73, no. 2 (1997): 321–336.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali: The Mystic* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1944).

<sup>30</sup> N Krause and R D Hayward, “Humility, Forgiveness, and the Peace of Mind: Religious and Psychosocial Pathways,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 18, no. 5 (2015): 398–409.

<sup>31</sup> L Toussaint and J R Webb, “Gender Differences in the Relationship between Empathy and Forgiveness,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 145, no. 6 (2005): 673–685.



Table 3. Descriptive statistic

Variables		Gender		Place or Residence			
		Male	Female	Mount.	High.	Low.	Coast.
Acceptance of Loss	M	16.289	14.879	15.200	15.496	15.154	14.300
	SD	3.251	3.140	2.936	2.943	3.331	3.436
Inner Balance and Calmness	M	27.744	26.221	26.844	26.646	26.629	25.300
	SD	4.504	4.812	4.680	4.263	4.908	5.497
Transcending Hedonism and Materialism	M	10.044	9.394	9.556	9.637	9.583	8.850
	SD	2.548	2.015	2.262	1.955	2.228	2.007
total Inner Peace	M	46.567	43.307	44.333	44.504	44.033	41.750
	SD	7.814	7.092	6.866	6.195	7.831	7.818
Revenge Motivation (lessen)	M	19.511	19.287	19.867	19.133	19.308	19.450
	SD	3.748	3.934	3.259	3.988	3.941	4.070
Avoidance Motivation (lessen)	M	22.244	19.273	21.511	18.823	20.646	16.475
	SD	8.409	8.307	7.896	8.140	8.723	6.540
Benevolence Motivation	M	26.167	25.891	26.044	27.000	25.379	26.275
	SD	4.203	4.880	4.805	4.516	4.776	4.761
total forgiveness	M	67.922	64.451	67.422	64.956	65.333	62.200
	SD	10.797	11.285	10.085	9.994	12.202	9.587

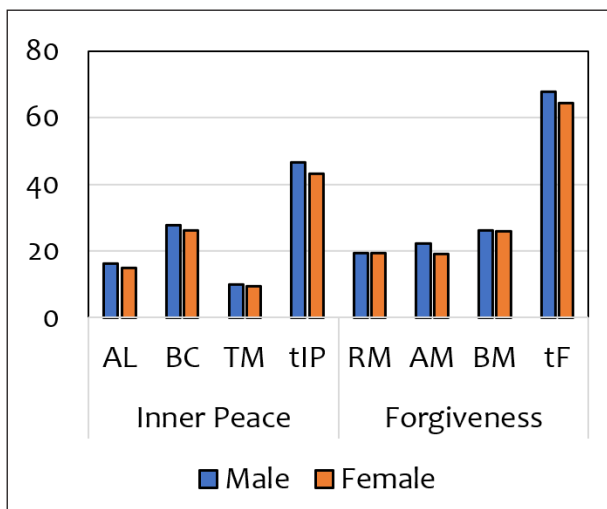


Figure 1. Mean comparison by gender

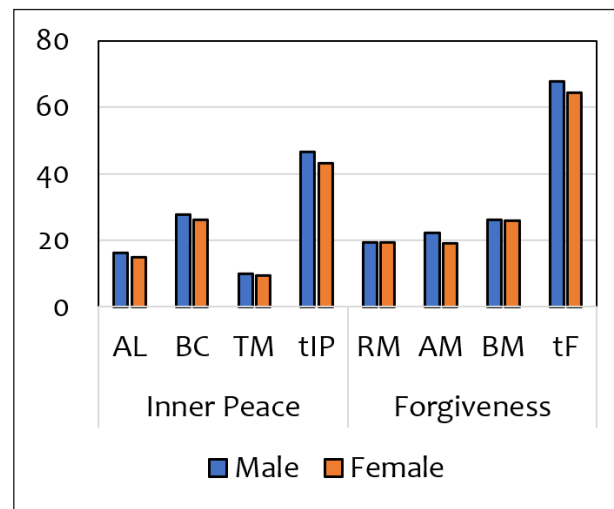


Figure 2. Mean comparison by place of residence

(tF), the total score had a mean of 65.16 ( $SD=11.26$ ), ranging from 28 to 94. Further breakdown of the dimensions —Lessen Revenge Motivation (RM), Lessen Avoidance Motivation (AM), and Benevolence Motivation (BM) — revealed mean scores of 19.33, 19.88, and 25.95. These details are shown in Table 3.

A Spearman's rho correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between inner peace (tIP) and forgiveness (tF),  $\rho(n)=0.326$ ,  $p<.001$ . The association suggests that individuals who report higher levels of forgiveness also tend to experience greater inner peace. The Fisher's z-transformation of the

correlation yielded  $z = 0.338$ , supporting the stability of the association in the sample.

Table 4. Spearman's Rho Correlation Between Inner Peace and Forgiveness

Variable	Spearman's rho	p	Fisher's z
Inner Peace – Forgiveness	0.326	< .001	0.338

The Mann–Whitney U test revealed statistically significant gender differences in several variables, including *Acceptance of Loss* ( $U = 19249.000$ ,  $p < .001$ ), *Inner Balance and Calmness* ( $U = 18463.500$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ), *total Inner Peace* ( $U = 19345.000$ ,  $p < .001$ ), *Avoidance Motivation (lessen)* ( $U = 19129.500$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and *total Forgiveness* ( $U = 18694.500$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). Regarding place of residence, the Kruskal–Wallis test showed that only *lessened Avoidance Motivation* ( $p = 0.010$ ,  $\epsilon^2 = 0.026$ ) and *Benevolence Motivation* ( $p = 0.017$ ,  $\epsilon^2 = 0.023$ ) demonstrated statistically significant differences. The effect size

values ( $\epsilon^2$ ) across variables indicated minor effects, with the most significant contribution from a place of residence in *Avoidance Motivation* and *Benevolence Motivation*, as seen in Table 5.

Dunn's test revealed several significant differences in the levels of *lessened Avoidance Motivation* and *Benevolence Motivation* between groups based on their residence. For *less Avoidance Motivation*, significant differences were found between the Mountains and Coastal groups ( $Z = 2.748$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ,  $p_{\text{Holm}} = 0.036$ ,  $r_{\text{rb}} = 0.356$ ). These results indicate that participants from the Mountains and Coastal areas exhibited distinct differences in avoidance motivation. Regarding *Benevolence Motivation*, significant differences were observed between the Highland and Lowland groups ( $Z = 3.139$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $p_{\text{Holm}} = 0.010$ ,  $r_{\text{rb}} = 0.206$ ). However, no significant differences were found for the other comparisons, such as between the Mountains and Highland groups or the Mountains and Lowland groups.

Table 5. Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H Test Results for Variables by Gender and Place of Residence

Variables	Gender		Place of Residence	
	U	p	Rank $\epsilon^2$	p
Acceptance of Loss	19249.000	< .001	0.010	0.212
Inner Balance and Calmness	18463.500	0.009	0.005	0.542
Transcending Hedonism and Materialism	17638.000	0.062	0.011	0.204
Inner Peace	19345.000	< .001	0.013	0.133
Revenge Motivation (lessen)	16038.500	0.723	0.002	0.868
Avoidance Motivation (lessen)	19129.500	0.001	0.026	0.010
Benevolence Motivation	16329.500	0.531	0.023	0.017
Forgiveness	18694.500	0.005	0.013	0.119

Table 6. Dunn's Test for Avoidance and Benevolence Motivation by Type of Residence

Group Comparison	lessen Avoidance Motivation				Benevolence Motivation			
	Z	p	$P_{\text{Holm}}$	$r_{\text{rb}}$	Z	p	$P_{\text{Holm}}$	$r_{\text{rb}}$
Mount.– Highland	2.201	0.028	0.111	0.233	-1.004	0.315	1.00	0.111
Mount.– Lowland	1.058	0.290	0.510	0.093	1.115	0.265	1.00	0.108
Mount.– Coastal	2.748	0.006	0.036	0.356	-0.015	0.988	1.00	0.002
Highland– Lowland	-1.894	0.058	0.175	0.123	3.139	0.002	0.01	0.206
Highland– Coastal	1.138	0.255	0.510	0.119	0.945	0.345	1.00	0.095
Lowland– Coastal	2.491	0.013	0.064	0.244	-1.079	0.281	1.00	0.104

## The Role of Forgiveness in Cultivating Inner Peace

The moderate positive association between forgiveness and inner peace indicates that individuals with a greater capacity to forgive are more likely to experience psychological tranquility and inner balance. This supports previous findings that identify forgiveness as a vital coping mechanism and emotional resource in enhancing well-being.<sup>32</sup> In letting go of resentment and blame, individuals may disengage from ruminative thoughts and restore cognitive-emotional stability—thereby fostering a more peaceful internal state. This appears closely related to the Acceptance of Loss, which involves emotionally reconciling with adversity or personal injury. Forgiveness often entails acknowledging harm without being consumed, which supports emotional healing and long-term psychological adjustment (Wade et al., 2005). In this context, forgiveness becomes a relational act and an inner resolution that helps individuals find meaning in suffering and embrace a more compassionate outlook.

The dimension of Inner Balance and Calmness further illustrates how forgiveness helps stabilize affective fluctuations. Individuals who forgive are less likely to be overwhelmed by anger, anxiety, or guilt. This is consistent with emotion regulation theory, which posits that forgiveness enables better control over disruptive emotional responses, fostering internal balance.<sup>33</sup> The emotional stability achieved through forgiveness is a foundation for maintaining inner calm across different life situations.

The relationship between Transcending Hedonism and Materialism highlights a spiritual dimension to the forgiveness-inner peace link. Forgiveness often requires surrendering ego, pride, and the desire for retribution—values typically reinforced by materialistic or hedonistic worldviews. By transcending such impulses, individuals align with higher moral or spiritual ideals, such as compassion, humility, and interconnectedness.<sup>34</sup> This orientation

fosters a type of peace that is not dependent on external validation but rooted in deeper existential values.

## Gender Differences in Inner Peace and Forgiveness

First, the Mann–Whitney U test revealed statistically significant gender differences across several dimensions of inner peace, including *Acceptance of Loss*, *Inner Balance and Calmness*, and overall *Inner Peace*, with male participants consistently scoring higher than females. These findings suggest that, within the present sample, males may report a greater ability to cognitively or emotionally accept personal or situational losses, experience more inner calm, and maintain a more stable sense of peace than their female counterparts.

One possible explanation lies in gender socialization patterns. Males are often encouraged to exhibit emotional restraint and resolve, especially in the face of adversity, which may foster acceptance and inner calm perceptions. In contrast, females tend to be more attuned to emotional expression and relational processing, which, while adaptive, may heighten emotional awareness and distress when facing loss or internal conflict. These differences are echoed in prior research emphasizing the role of gender norms in shaping coping mechanisms and emotional regulation.<sup>35</sup>

Coping styles also differ by gender: men are generally more inclined toward problem-focused strategies, which may temporarily enhance the perception of emotional stability,<sup>36</sup> whereas women more frequently engage in emotion-focused or ruminative coping, which is associated with increased emotional turbulence and lower subjective well-being.<sup>37</sup> Cultural and religious expectations may

<sup>32</sup> Toussaint, Worthington, and Williams, “Forgiveness Heal. Sci. Evid. Theor. Relat. Forgiveness to Better Heal.”

<sup>33</sup> Gross, “Emotion Regulation: Affective, Cognitive, and Social Consequences.”

<sup>34</sup> Krause and Hayward, “Humility, Forgiveness, and the Peace of Mind: Religious and Psychosocial Pathways.”

<sup>35</sup> L K Tamres, D Janicki, and V S Helgeson, “Sex Differences in Coping Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review and an Examination of Relative Coping,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6, no. 1 (2002): 2–30.

<sup>36</sup> M P Matud, “Gender Differences in Stress and Coping Styles,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 37, no. 7 (2004): 1401–1415.

<sup>37</sup> S Nolen-Hoeksema, “Emotion Regulation and Psychopathology: The Role of Gender,” *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 8 (2012): 161–187.

reinforce these patterns by valuing emotional composure in men and emotional expressiveness in women, influencing actual experiences and self-reporting tendencies.

Biological factors may also contribute. Hormonal fluctuations, particularly in estrogen and progesterone across the menstrual cycle, have been linked to emotional variability in females, potentially affecting their sense of inner calm.<sup>38</sup> These psychological, social, and biological factors may help explain why male participants in this study reported higher levels of acceptance, calmness, and overall inner peace.

Second, the findings also indicated significant gender differences in both *lessen avoidance motivation*—a core dimension of forgiveness—and *total forgiveness*, with males scoring higher than females. Specifically, male participants appeared to exhibit a lower tendency to avoid offenders following a transgression, suggesting a greater openness to reconciliation. This aligns with previous research indicating that men are more inclined toward direct coping strategies, such as confronting and addressing interpersonal issues rather than withdrawing from the transgressor.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, women tend to internalize emotional pain and maintain relational distance for more extended periods, possibly due to more intense emotional responses to hurt or betrayal.

These gender differences may be shaped by socialization processes that teach men to suppress emotional vulnerability and resume interpersonal functioning more quickly, while women may be culturally encouraged to guard their emotional well-being by keeping distance. Evolutionary psychology perspectives also suggest that avoidance behaviors may have served different adaptive purposes across genders, influencing contemporary patterns of forgiveness. Significantly, less avoidance motivation reflects more than physical proximity—it signals

a psychological shift from defensive withdrawal to emotional openness, foundational to genuine forgiveness.

This study also found that males reported higher levels of *total forgiveness*, suggesting a broader capacity for letting go of grievances. While some prior studies have associated higher forgiveness with women—citing greater empathy and relational orientation—other research supports the present findings, primarily when forgiveness is conceptualized as reducing avoidance and revenge rather than increasing benevolence (Miller et al., 2008). This underscores the importance of viewing forgiveness as a multidimensional construct, encompassing reduced avoidance, diminished desire for revenge, and enhanced goodwill toward the transgressor.

The higher forgiveness scores among males may reflect a more cognitive or pragmatic approach to conflict resolution, wherein emotional distancing or retaliation is perceived as inefficient or unproductive. Alternatively, women may report lower forgiveness when emotional wounds remain unresolved, especially in contexts where expressions of hurt are more socially acceptable or expected. Cultural influences may also shape these tendencies. In collectivist cultures, for instance, men may be encouraged to preserve social harmony through tolerance and forgiveness, while women may be expected to uphold emotional boundaries in cases of relational betrayal (Hook et al., 2009). These cultural scripts, combined with gendered coping styles, likely contribute to the observed differences and highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches in forgiveness-focused interventions and research.

### Forgiveness and Place of Residence: The Role of Socio-ecological Context

First, this study revealed a significant difference in *Lessen Avoidance Motivation*, a key behavioral dimension of forgiveness, based on participants' residence. Individuals residing in mountainous areas reported higher levels of *lessen avoidance* than those from coastal regions, suggesting a stronger tendency to remain engaged with offenders rather than withdraw after interpersonal transgressions.

<sup>38</sup> P R Albert, "Why Is Depression More Prevalent in Women?," *Journal of Psychiatry & Neuroscience* 40, no. 4 (2015): 219–221.

<sup>39</sup> A J Miller, E L Worthington, and M A McDaniel, "Gender and Forgiveness: A Meta-Analytic Review and Research Agenda," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 27, no. 8 (2008): 843–876.



The medium effect size ( $rrb = 0.356$ ) highlights that geographical context meaningfully shapes forgiveness-related behavior.

One plausible explanation for this pattern lies in the social fabric of mountainous communities. Typically characterized by close-knit, interdependent relationships and limited mobility, these environments make prolonged avoidance of others difficult or socially disadvantageous. Maintaining interpersonal harmony—even in the wake of conflict—becomes a necessary and adaptive strategy, fostering forgiveness as a social norm.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, coastal regions—especially those that are more urbanized, economically dynamic, or socially fluid—offer greater anonymity and relational alternatives. In such settings, avoiding an offender may be a more viable and even preferable option, reducing the impetus for emotional reconciliation or relational repair.

Interestingly, these findings contrast with those of Nurlatifah, who found higher levels of avoidance among Salatiga, Central Java coastal residents. However, this divergence may not signal a contradiction but reflects regional socio-cultural variation. For instance, the coastal communities in Salatiga may foster stronger religious cohesion or community involvement that supports forgiveness behaviors more than in other coastal regions. Unlike Nurlatifah's study, which was localized, the present research drew from a broader geographical range across multiple islands, encompassing diverse coastal settings where urbanization, trade activity, and population mobility may foster more individualistic values and emotionally distant coping strategies.

These findings underscore the importance of environmental and cultural contexts in understanding forgiveness. According to socio-ecological theory, moral capacities such as forgiveness are not solely rooted in personal traits but are also shaped by adaptive responses to one's surroundings. Social norms in more stable, interdependent communities—such as those in mountainous areas—may discourage avoidance and promote reconciliation. Meanwhile, disengagement may be

socially acceptable or even expected in coastal contexts marked by transience and diversity. Thus, the expression of forgiveness, particularly in the form of lessened avoidance motivation, reflects internal dispositions and the demands and affordances of one's ecological and cultural environment.<sup>41</sup>

Second, this study identified a significant difference in *Benevolence Motivation*—a central dimension of forgiveness—between participants from highland and lowland areas. Individuals residing in highland regions reported significantly higher levels of benevolence toward transgressors than their lowland counterparts, with a small to moderate effect size ( $rrb = 0.206$ ). This suggests that highland residents may be more inclined to extend empathy, goodwill, and positive regard even after experiencing interpersonal harm.

A plausible explanation lies in the distinct socio-ecological characteristics of highland communities. Often marked by geographic isolation, enduring kinship ties, and relatively stable population structures, these areas tend to foster interdependent social norms emphasizing cohesion and long-term relational harmony.<sup>42</sup> In such tightly woven communities, forgiveness—especially in the form of benevolence—is not merely an individual moral choice but a social mechanism that sustains communal stability and emotional well-being. Acts of goodwill following transgression serve not only to restore relationships but to uphold the collective fabric of the community.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, lowland regions, which are often more accessible and include urban or semi-urban environments, typically feature greater social diversity, mobility, and economic competition. These settings may prioritize autonomy, self-reliance, and justice over interdependence, offering fewer social incentives for benevolent forgiveness. Within such contexts, individuals may lean more toward emotional detachment or justice-oriented responses, favoring personal boundaries over reconciliatory gestures.

<sup>41</sup> Rye et al., "The Role of Place and Culture in Forgiveness."

<sup>42</sup> S Oishi, "Socioecological Psychology," *Annual Review of Psychology* 65 (2014): 581–609.

<sup>43</sup> Brown and Phillips, "Letting Bygones Be Bygones: Further Evidence for the Validity of the Tendency to Forgive Scale."

<sup>40</sup> P L Hill and M Allemand, "Forgiveness across the Life Span," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 3 (2010): 199–206.

Viewed through the lens of socio-ecological theory, these findings reinforce the understanding that moral behaviors such as forgiveness are shaped not only by personal dispositions but also by the adaptive demands and affordances of one's social and physical environment. Benevolence—the capacity to extend kindness to those who cause harm—may flourish in environments that reward long-term cooperation and relational closeness. Psychological safety and relational stability are often found in highland communities, which may provide the emotional space necessary to cultivate such prosocial motivations (Worthington et al., 2007).

These results also resonate with cross-cultural research, showing that forgiveness is more commonly expressed in communities where interdependence, emotional intimacy, and spiritual or moral frameworks emphasize compassion toward wrongdoers. In this context, the observed differences in benevolence motivation underscore the need to examine forgiveness not only as a psychological construct but also as a socially embedded moral practice shaped by cultural and ecological conditions.

The demonstrated association between forgiveness and inner peace reinforces theoretical perspectives that view forgiveness not merely as an interpersonal virtue but as a vital intrapersonal process that contributes to emotional regulation, psychological tranquility, and existential coherence—especially within educational settings, where university students are continuously challenged to manage stress, interpersonal conflict, and identity development. This link supports the notion that forgiveness is central to cultivating inner peace by reducing emotional burdens such as resentment, anger, and rumination, thereby fostering a more balanced and harmonious inner life. By facilitating the release of negative affect and enabling cognitive-emotional integration, forgiveness allows individuals to maintain inner calm and psychological clarity in the face of adversity. Moreover, the spiritual dimension of forgiveness—particularly its capacity to transcend ego, pride, and material concerns—may further anchor individuals in values that promote lasting inner peace. In educational settings, particularly within universities, these insights highlight the importance of

integrating forgiveness-based approaches into mental health and counseling interventions that support students' emotional and spiritual development. Such strategies are especially valuable in culturally and spiritually oriented populations, where forgiveness aligns with sincerely held moral values and serves as a meaningful pathway to inner peace while being responsive to the unique needs of learners in higher education contexts.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents establishing causal relationships between forgiveness and inner peace, indicating the need for longitudinal research. Second, the sample's cultural and geographical focus limits generalizability, underscoring the need for studies in diverse settings. Third, self-report measures may introduce bias; future research could incorporate objective measures such as behavioral observations or physiological indicators. Fourth, the study did not explore mediating factors, like personality traits or coping strategies, that may clarify the relationship between forgiveness and inner peace. Fifth, although gender and socio-ecological factors were explored, further research is needed to investigate the role of other variables, such as age, education, and religious background, in influencing these constructs. Addressing these limitations could improve our understanding and inform more tailored interventions in counseling and mental health practices, particularly within educational settings where such support is crucial for promoting student well-being and holistic development.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant relationship between forgiveness and inner peace, suggesting that forgiveness is an effective coping strategy that promotes emotional stability, cognitive clarity, and spiritual growth in Muslim university students, particularly in navigating the challenges of academic and personal development challenges. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of place of residence, showing how socio-ecological factors influence forgiveness behaviors. The findings suggest that integrating forgiveness-based approaches into counseling, particularly in educational settings, could

foster greater emotional well-being among students, especially in culturally and spiritually oriented populations. However, the study's limitations, including its cross-sectional design and the use of self-report measures, highlight the need for further research with longitudinal designs and objective measures. Exploring additional variables such as age, education, and religious background will deepen our understanding of the dynamics between forgiveness, inner peace, and socio-ecological factors, leading to more tailored and effective interventions in both educational and counseling contexts.

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## Author Contribution Statement

The authors in this study contributed according to their respective roles and expertise. AN was responsible for conceptualizing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and drafting the manuscript. AH, SY and IL provided supervision, critical feedback, and revisions throughout the research and writing process. All authors collaborated to ensure the academic quality and coherence of the final article.

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