

# Forgiveness, Anger, and Emotional Support among University-going Students in Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of anger level and emotional support on the forgiveness of university students in Bangladesh. To achieve this end, 157 university-going students were selected as the sample. There were 85 males and 72 females. The Bangla version of the Anger and Emotional Support scale (AAS), the Bangla version of the Level of Anger scale (LAS), and the Bangla version of the Tendency to Forgive scale (TTFS) were used for data collection. Independent sample t-test, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple regression were carried out to see the relationship between emotional support and the level of anger with the tendency to forgive. No significant difference was found between males and females for the three variables. Correlational analysis indicated that the correlation of forgiveness with emotional support was positively significant, and with the level of anger was negatively significant. Again, multiple regressions indicated that both anger and emotional support can influence the tendency to forgive in life, but the level of anger had a more significant effect. Mediation Analysis suggested that emotional support partially mediates the relationship between anger and forgiveness

**Keyword:** Anger, Emotional Support, Forgiveness

## INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is an individual process. It entails forming supportive attitudes, ideas, and actions towards the offender rather than hatred and hostility. According to Joanna North (1987), a modern philosopher, forgiveness requires giving up anger and resentment and offering the offender a gift in the form of “compassion, benevolence, and love”. One does not have to fully let go of their anger, excuse their wrongdoing, forget, or merely partially forgive to be able to forgive. It does not imply that one must reconcile or mend relations with the individual. However, one cannot reconcile if one does not forgive. At the individual level, forgiveness is an important component of well-being indicating that forgiveness has been linked to decreases in negative effects like anger, depression, and anxiety (Fitzgibbons 1986; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Reed & Enright, 2006; Seybold et al., 2001) as well as to increases in physical health (Seybold et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2008). The purpose of this study is to develop a measure of forgiveness and its link with anger and emotional support.

The topic of forgiveness with the adolescent population is an appropriate and applicable topic to explore because the constructs of forgiveness found in adults are already in place among adolescents, which include a propensity to lasting resentment, sensitivity to circumstances, willingness to forgive, and willingness to avenge (Chiamello et al., 2008). Furthermore, during adolescence, a sense of forgiveness begins to develop that goes beyond “childhood conceptions” and their reasoning about forgiveness is distinct from children and adult populations (Enright et al., 1989, p. 108). According to many studies, forgiving others can help adolescents transition from negative to more positive attitudes, behaviors, and emotions during adolescence (Klatt & Enright, 2009).

A considerable amount of research has found a relationship between forgiveness and the emotion of anger (Hansen et al., 2009; Seybold et al., 2001). Anger is one of the most commonly experienced emotions, and its origin and expression have been studied by a variety of theorists and views (Averill, 1983; Kemp & Strongman,

1995). Anger is defined as a "complex psychophysical phenomenon with far-reaching implications for physical, mental, and social well-being" and should be considered in a social and cultural context (Tavris, 1989).

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between emotions and the impacts of social support resources. (e.g., emotional and informational support). Emotional support is defined as expressing values for another person's worth and experiences, as well as acceptance despite any issues or personal flaws, whereas informational support is defined as assisting an individual in defining, understanding, and coping with unpleasant occurrences (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Cohen and Wills (1985) suggest that emotional and informational support may be the most universally required functioning components in response to a variety of stressful experiences. Emotional and informational support is assumed to have an impact on mental and physical health through influencing emotions, cognitions, and behaviors (Cohen, 1988). Social support is assumed to preserve the regulation of these response systems (e.g., emotions) in the case of mental health and to prevent severe responses associated with dysfunction (Cohen, 1988).

Relationships between forgiveness, anger, and the impacts of emotional support (e.g., emotion control) are still being studied (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). The regulation of emotions is defined as "extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions...to accomplish one's goal" (Thompson, 1994, pp. 26-27). Emotion regulation is also defined as the processes by which individuals determine which emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they experience and display these emotions (Gross, 1998, p.275). Emotion regulation also involves changes in the interrelationships of response components as the emotion evolves, such as when big increases in physiological responses occur in the absence of overt behavior (Gross, 1998, p.275).

Interventions with others provide the individual with an environment in which observational learning and conversation surrounding emotions and emotion regulation can occur, which aids in the development of acceptable emotional regulation strategies (Thompson, 1994). As developing individuals become more skilled at regulating arousal, emotion, and its expression, it can become "better integrated into the child's growing repertoire of strategic behavior" (Thompson, 1994, p. 26). Emotion regulation occurs by enhancing one's access to coping resources. In this sense, "what is regulated is the availability of external support for managing emotional arousal" (Thompson, 1994, p. 36). Access to coping resources, as an aspect of emotional regulation, is enhanced by seeking familiar and trusted social partners (Thompson, 1994). These interpersonal relationships are important not just because they have "mutual, long-term effects on the arousal and management of emotions" but also because of the "emotional dimensions of the relationship themselves", the "social expectations that they engender" and they influence the "interpretation of emotionally arousing situations and the coping resources that are available" (Thompson, 1994, p.42).

Adolescence is a critical time for focusing on social support because it is a time of various developmental shifts that may contribute to challenges with emotion regulation (Dahl, 2004). The ability to manage one's emotions through emotional regulation strategies is "central to the socialization process and its outcomes" (Thompson, 1994, p. 26). A lack of emotional management skills has been linked to an increased risk of non-suicidal self-injury and disordered eating (Adrian et al., 2011; Sim & Zeman, 2006). Hessler and Katz (2010) investigated the relationship between emotional competence (awareness, regulation, and comfort with expression) and adolescent risky behavior. Children from a longitudinal study participated at age nine and again at age 16. The findings indicated that youngsters with poor emotional regulation were more likely to use heavy drugs. In addition, trouble controlling emotions was linked to having more sexual partners and having more behavioral adjustment issues.

Due to this population's disproportionate exposure to negative life events (Gassin et al., 2005) and the profound changes in every dimension of the adolescent individual, including sexual maturity, abstract thinking, and social relationships (Rew, 2007), a focus on forgiveness, anger, and emotional support within the South Asian adolescent population is critical to investigate. Additionally, disproportionate exposure to negative life events and subsequent rage is linked to a variety of unfavorable psychological and physiological health effects (Cooley-Quille et al., 2001; Gad & Johnson, 1980). According to Worthington and Scherer (2004), forgiveness is not only associated with improved health outcomes, but it also mediates physiological processes, supporting the notion that forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping technique.

The goal of this study is to look into and describe the relationship between forgiveness with anger, and emotional support in Bangladeshi university-going students.

### Rationale of the study

Individual differences in forgiveness have been explored in previous studies. Forgiveness is negatively associated with anger, while positively associated with youth emotional support. Several studies have examined the tendency to forgive individuals worldwide. However, those studies were conducted in different regions around the world, but this study focused on the university-going students in Bangladesh, and also tested can emotional support mediates the association between anger and forgiveness.

### Objectives of the study

The objective of the present study was to investigate the impact of anger and emotional support on the tendency to forgive. The specific objectives of the study were (i) to see the relationships among the level of anger, emotional support, and tendency to forgive; and (ii) to examine whether emotional support mediates the relationship between anger and emotional support.

### Hypotheses

On the ground of the aforesaid objectives related to previous studies, it was hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a negative correlation between the level of anger and forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be a positive correlation between emotional support and forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 3:** Emotional support will mediate the relationship between the level of anger and forgiveness.

### Method

#### Participants

The present study was carried out sample of 157 (85 male & 72 female) students from different Universities in Dhaka city. By using the purposive sampling technique, data were collected from the students through structured, printed questionnaires.

#### Measures

**Demographic Questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire for this study was developed to assess variables that may contribute to identifiable differences in scale scores. The 6-item questionnaire consisted of demographic variables such as gender, educational qualification, parents' educational qualification, religion, type of neighborhood, and socioeconomic status (SES).

**Anger and Support Scale (AAS).** The Bangla version of AAS was translated by Rana & Rana (2023) and was used to measure the participants' perceived level of support surrounding anger within the past 3 weeks. The original scale was developed by Jaquaye Russell (2013). The questionnaire consisted of 6 items. Participants rated each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The scale had face validity, discriminant validity, and predictive validity, and was internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha =.875) found in item analysis. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found as .771 in the current study. AAS scores that are higher reflect a higher level of perceived support for anger.

**The Level of Anger Scale (LAS).** The Bangla version of LAS was translated by Rana & Rana (2023) and was used to measure a participant's perceived level of anger within the past 3 weeks. The original scale was developed by Jaquaye Russell (2013). The questionnaire consisted of 12 items. Participants rated each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The scale had face validity,

discriminant validity, and predictive validity, and was internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha =.935) found in item analysis. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found as .802 in the current study. LAS scores that are higher reflect a higher level of perceived anger.

**Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTFS).** The Bangla version of TTFS was translated by Rana & Rana (2023) and was used to measure a participant's perceived general level of forgiveness within the last 3 weeks. The original scale was developed by Jaquaye Russell (2013). The questionnaire consisted of 10 items. Participants rated each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The scale had face validity, discriminant validity, and predictive validity, and was internally consistent (Cronbach's alpha =.892) found in item analysis. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .751 in the current study. TTFS scores that are higher reflect a higher level of perceived unforgiveness.

## Procedure

### Translating the Scales into Bangla

The AAS, LAS, and TTFS scale items were first translated into Bangla by the researcher. Then it was given to three judges. Their native language was Bangla, but being professors at a university, they have a good command of English. Their job was to judge the accuracy of translation and the relevance/suitability of each item for measuring the tendency to forgive in Bangladeshi people. The final draft of the translation was used to acquire data.

### Data acquisition

On the day of the study, participants were provided with a print copy and read the Consent Form by the researcher. Participants were allowed to ask questions and assent before being instructed to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed during non-instructional class periods, study hall, or silent reading periods. Participants were given an identification number to keep their identity confidential. During the study, participants completed the following self-report questionnaires, designed for this study: Demographic Questionnaire, Translated Bangla version of the Level of Anger Scale (LAS), Translated Bangla version of the Anger and Support Scale (AAS), Translated Bangla version of the Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTFS). The LAS contained 12 items and was designed to measure a participant's perceived level of anger. The AAS contained 6 items and was designed to measure a participant's perceived level of support surrounding emotional expression. The TTFS contained 10 items and was designed to measure a participant's perceived level of forgiveness. In every circumstance, a standardized procedure was followed to collect data.

## RESULTS

Each participant's response was scored according to the scoring principles of the Anger and Emotional Support Scale, Level of Anger Scale, and Tendency to Forgive Scale for Youth. Then the obtained data was fed into a computer for analysis in SPSS version 29.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics and Gender Differences in Forgiveness, Anger, and Emotional Support

Variables	female(n=72)		male(n=85)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Forgiveness	29.21	7.58	29.21	7.73	.001	.978
Anger	34.28	9.63	32.41	9.54	-1.084	.486
Emotional Support	19.57	6.38	19.89	5.93	.202	.656

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, including mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD), along with gender differences in forgiveness, anger, and emotional support. For forgiveness, females scored 29.21 (SD =

7.58), while males scored 29.21 (SD = 7.73), and for anger, females scored 34.28 (SD = 9.63), while males scored 32.41 (SD = 9.54), and for emotional support, females scored 19.57 (SD = 6.38), while males scored 19.89 (SD = 5.93).

As well as for forgiveness, the t-test assuming equal variances ( $t = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.978$ ) indicated no significant gender-based differences in forgiveness scores. In the case of anger, females had a mean score of 34.28 (SD = 9.63), whereas males had a mean score of 32.41 (SD = 9.54). Again, the gender difference was not statistically significant ( $t = -1.084$ ,  $p = 0.486$ ). For emotional support, females had a mean score of 19.57 (SD = 6.38), and males had a mean score of 19.89 (SD = 5.93). The gender difference was also not statistically significant ( $t = 0.202$ ,  $p = 0.645$ ) here. For both anger and emotional support, the t-test demonstrated no statistically significant differences between male and female participants in anger and emotional support scores.

**Table 2** Correlations between Forgiveness, Anger, and Emotional Support

Variables	1	2	3
1.Forgiveness	1		
2.Anger	.662**	1	
3.Emotional Support	-.564**	-.647**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows the correlation between three variables forgiveness, anger and emotional support. Since the higher scores on TTFS reflect higher level of perceived unforgiveness, there was a strong negative and statistically significant correlation between forgiveness and level of anger ( $r = 0.662$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that participants' who have higher level of anger tend to have lower forgiveness attitude. There was a strong negative and statistically significant correlation between level of anger, emotional support ( $r = -0.647$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that participants' who have higher emotional support tend to have lower level of anger. The correlation between forgiveness and emotional support was positive, higher scores on TTFS perceived higher level of unforgiveness, and statistically significant ( $r = -0.564$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 3** Multiple regression coefficients for Anger and Emotional Support predicting Forgiveness

Variable		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	P
		$\beta$	Standard Error	Beta		
	Constant	21.550	4.022		5.358	.000
	Anger	.408	.069	.510	5.952	.000
	Emotional Support	-.295	.108	-.234	-2.733	.007

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether emotional support mediates the relationship between anger and forgiveness. Initial analysis revealed that anger significantly predicted forgiveness ( $c = 0.530$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Anger also significantly predicted emotional support ( $a = -.411$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and emotional support significantly predicted forgiveness when controlling for anger ( $b = -.295$ ,  $p = .007$ ). When emotional support was included in the model, the direct effect of anger on forgiveness decreased (from  $c = .530$  to  $C' = .408$ ), suggesting partial mediation.

To further confirm this, a Sobel test was performed, which indicated that the indirect effect was statistically significant ( $z = 2.626$ ,  $p = .0086$ ). These results suggest that emotional support partially mediates the relationship between anger and forgiveness.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the association between students' forgiveness, anger, and emotional support. The findings and their practical implications are discussed in this section. This study was carried out to investigate the following hypotheses: First, was there any significant relationship between forgiveness and the level of anger? Second, was there any significant relationship between forgiveness and Emotional support? Third, did emotional support mediate the relationship between the level of anger and forgiveness?

The findings of the independent sample t-test, in Table 1, suggested that there were no significant gender differences in forgiveness, anger, and emotional support. According to Konstam et al. (2003) study, there were no significant differences between men and women in dispositional forgiveness across several domains. However, a previous study conducted by Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) found that women are generally more forgiving than men, possibly due to stronger socialization in empathy and relationship maintenance. Many possible explanations exist for the absence of gender differences in forgiveness. Studies have revealed that gender differences in forgiveness are often small and inconsistent, and in some samples, non-significant (Miller et al. 2008). Forgiveness may be more related to personal values, cultural background, and emotional maturity than to gender alone.

According to Archer's (2004) study, males express anger more physically, while females internalize it more, leading to different coping strategies. Male students tend to report higher trait anger, but the difference is small and context-dependent (Deffenbacher et al. 1996). These findings imply that males may show more visible or reactive anger, but internal experiences of anger are not necessarily higher. The way anger is expressed may differ, but the intensity and frequency of anger experiences are often gender-neutral in youth. Cutrona (1996) found that women typically perceive and seek more emotional support in times of stress. In contrast, a large U.S. sample found no significant gender differences in perceived emotional support after adjusting for stress exposure and socioeconomic status (Breslau et al. 1995). One possible explanation for the absence of gender difference is, cultural and social norms may encourage women to develop closer emotional bonds and seek support more openly, but in academic or institutional contexts (e.g., universities), students may receive similar levels of peer and institutional support, regardless of gender. The difference in findings may arise from the sample's greater exposure to inclusive and supportive environments, which may have closed the gender gap in forgiveness, anger, and emotional support.

From the findings of the correlation analysis, shown in Table 2, it could be said that the higher the level of anger, the less forgiveness; the more emotional support, the more forgiveness, or vice versa. The first hypothesis is confirmed by this study and is also supported by Sukhodolsky et al. (2001) related to forgiveness. Both the results of this study and previous results show a negative correlation between forgiveness and anger (Barber et al., 2005; Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). The second hypothesis is confirmed and also supported by the findings of the study of Hoyt et al. (2005). Consistent with the study by Hall and Fincham (2008), the analysis provides preliminary support for the notion that emotional support is more likely to increase forgiveness.

In our study, the forgiveness model was significant, explaining 47% of the variance in forgiveness. Anger displayed significant positive associations with unforgiveness, while emotional support displayed a significant negative correlation, highlighting the strong explanatory power of these variables. The results of this study are consistent with previous research and suggest that there are negative relationships between higher levels of anger and forgiveness. McCullough et al. (1998) found that people who experience high trait anger are less forgiving. They tend to ruminate more and feel entitled to revenge. Anger, especially when intense or sustained (trait anger or state anger), makes it harder to forgive because it promotes rumination, retaliation, and inhibits empathy. On the other hand, previous research suggested that higher emotional support is associated with greater forgiveness. Lawler-Row & Piferi (2006) found that individuals who perceived more emotional support were more likely to forgive transgressions and report greater psychological well-being. Emotional support provides comfort, emotional validation, and helps individuals manage distress, making it easier to engage in forgiveness processes. As a result, individuals with a lower level of anger and higher emotional support tend to show greater forgiveness.

According to our present study, emotional support partially mediates the relationship between anger and forgiveness, which was consistent with the previous research findings. Toussaint et al. (2016) found that social support partially mediated the relationship between stress and forgiveness. Similarly, it was found that anger makes forgiveness harder, but supportive contexts increase the likelihood of forgiveness. McCullough et al. (2003) found that empathy (similar to emotional support perception) mediated the effect of offense-related anger on forgiveness. These findings suggest a clear emotional pathway: anger generates distress and impedes forgiveness, but the presence of emotional support can disrupt this cycle by soothing negative emotions and promoting understanding.

## LIMITATIONS

The present study used a purposive sampling technique to select participants. Selecting only those participants who were available may have led to bias in terms of lack of generalizability. In this study, the measuring instrument investigated only students' level of anger, emotional support, and tendency to forgive, but not about other people, like adults, job holders, and politicians. Therefore, further studies, considering all types of people, may provide a better picture of this matter.

## Practical implications & conclusion

Despite some limitations present in this study, the obtained findings have important implications in curriculum design and instruction aimed at infusing, becoming good humans, and enhancing others to increase emotional support and forgiveness. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on emotion regulation and forgiveness by highlighting emotional support as a significant mediator in the anger–forgiveness relationship, while previous studies have primarily focused on the direct effects of anger on forgiveness. Teachers, counselors, and organizational leaders can be trained to recognize the emotional needs of individuals who are struggling with anger. Creating emotionally supportive environments—whether in schools, families, or workplaces—may significantly increase the likelihood of reconciliation and reduce long-term resentment.

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