

Gender and the Outcomes of Forgiveness Education: A Quasi-Experimental Analysis of Anger and Depression Among Ghanaian Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore gender and outcomes of forgiveness education in relation to anger and depression among students in senior high schools in the Yendi Municipality, Ghana. The quasiexperimental design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was made up of students in Yendi Senior High School and Dagbon State Senior High Technical School in the Yendi Municipality. A total of 40 students were involved in the study. Specifically, 20 students each were in the experimental group and the control group. Data were collected using a questionnaire made up of the Level of Anger Scale and Beck's Depression Inventory. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance. The results showed that there was no gender difference in the effect of forgiveness education on anger and depression among the participants. It was recommended that in providing psychological assistance to students with anger and depression, school counsellors should not consider gender as a barrier. This can help them assist both male and female students.

Keywords: Anger, Depression, Gender, Forgiveness Education, Students

INTRODUCTION

In interpersonal relationships, there are bound to be issues that can affect the peace and sanity of relationships. People who have been harmed can experience a range of emotions, including persistent rage and animosity, which can lead to a cycle of violence in trying to exact revenge (Park et al., 2013; Shechtman et al., 2009). harbouring such negative emotions can be detrimental to the lives of people in the future (Chida & Steptoe, 2009; Goldman & Wade, 2012). The common negative emotions which usually emerge from bad interpersonal relationship are anger and depression (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016).

Anger is a basic human emotion which is characterised by a strong and mostly unvomforatble response to a perceived threat, injustice or provocation (American Psychological Association, 2020a). While anger is mostly viewed in a negative sense, it is viewed in psychology as an adaptive response which can energize individuals for some action and to communicate some displeasure (Deffenbacher et al., 2002). For students, anger be triggered by several factors including interpersonal conflicts and personal frustrations (Buss & Perry, 1992). Some existing studies have linked anger expression to symptoms of depression (Goodwin, 2006).

Depression is a negative emotional or affective state often seen as a mood disorder which is characterised by a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest or pleasure, ultimately interfering with daily functioning (American Psychological Association, 2020b). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) view depression as involving low mood, loss of interest, fatigue, poor concentration and feelings of worthlessness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Anger and depression can both affect individuals and the society at large and as such there is the need for authentic interventions to help assist and equip people to control or overcome their anger and depression. Considering the dire consequence of anger and depression among in-school adolescents, providing different forms of treatment for at-risk adolescents cannot be downplayed (Barcaccia et al., 2019). Forgiveness therapy

has been identified in the literature as a treatment mechanism for reducing anger and depression (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016).

In the school system, counselling is seen as a means of helping students in overcoming the negative repercussions of interpersonal injuries (Macaskill, 2005). Counselling provided with forgiveness education is becoming increasingly popular as a means of managing unpleasant emotions and reducing despair (Barcaccia et al., 2019). Forgiveness has been shown to be a powerful tool for managing unpleasant emotions (Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Barcaccia et al., 2018). This is due to the fact that when people forgive, they experience a decrease in anger and resentful feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and have an increase in positive feelings towards those who offended them (Wade et al., 2013). From this statement, it is clear that when there is forgiveness, feelings would change.

Theoretically, Enright Process Model of Forgiveness presented a four-phase model with 20 distinct parts to improve forgiveness (Enright, 2001). The uncovering phase, decision phase, working phase, and deepening phase are the four phases. Clients are exposed to materials aimed to raise understanding of psychological aspects that result from unjust acts and how they inhibit the client from moving on from the offense during the uncovering phase (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Enright and Fitzgibbons stated that in order to forgive, clients need to explore psychological defenses (e.g., denial, repressed or displaced anger) used in dealing with injustice. Clients need to acknowledge and express the anger and pain about the offense before they can forgive.

Globally, some researchers have discovered a connection between forgiveness and depression (Burnette et al., 2009), forgiveness and anger (Watson et al., 2017), and depression and anger (Balsamo, 2010). In spite of these numerous studies, the role of forgiveness education in dealing with both anger and depression has not been researched. In Africa, there have been some studies conducted on violence and anger (Gelaye et al., 2008; Halcon et al., 2003; Abraham & Jewkes, 2005) but not on anger and forgiveness.

In Ghana, the study of anger, depression and forgiveness education is fairly new. The study closely related to the current study was the study of Barimah (2019). Barimah, however, focused on the effect of Enright Process Model on levels of forgiveness and anger among college students in the Eastern Region of Ghana to the exclusion of depression. Thus, there is gap regarding the effect of forgiveness education on anger and depression in the Ghanaian literature, however, the problem of anger and depressive symptoms appear to be persistent among young people in the Yendi Municipality.

Specifically, the Yendi Municipality, there have been several incidents of violence because of the chieftaincy conflicts in that area. For example, there was a communal clash over a pig between Dagombas and Konkombas at Nakpanchie near Yendi in 2018. In 2019, the Konkombas fought the Chokosis of Chireponi over a piece of land in the Yendi area. The violence in the Municipality has the potential of increasing the anger and depressive symptoms of the young people and ultimately affecting every aspect of their lives. In this sense, the current study sought to examine gender and the outcomes of forgiveness education among adolescents in senior high schools in the Yendi Municipality, Ghana. Specifically, the study tested the following hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on anger in the experimental group with regard to gender.

H₁₁: There is a statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on anger in the experimental group with regard to gender.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group with regard to gender.

H₁₂: There is a statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group with regard to gender.

METHODOLOGY

Design

Quasi-experimental design, specifically, the pre-test-post-test control group design was chosen for the study. In pre-test-post-test control group design, there are two groups involved, one group is given the treatment and the results are gathered at the end. The control group receives no treatment, over the same period of time, but undergoes exactly the same tests. Therefore, in pre-test-post-test control group design, all individuals are assessed at the beginning of the study, the intervention is presented to the treatment group but not the control, and then all individuals are measured again. The justification for using this design was to help establish the actual impact of forgiveness education on the anger and depression levels of adolescents in the Yendi Municipality, Ghana.

Participants

The population of the study was made up of 3255 students in two senior high schools in the Yendi Municipality. This involved 1,855 from Yendi SHS and 1,400 from Dagbon State SHTS. The initial sample size for the study was 345. Multistage sampling procedure was used in the study. In the first stage, stratified random sampling in selecting the respondents on the basis of their schools. Specifically, based on the stratification, 197 students were sampled from Yendi SHS while 148 students were sampled from Dagbon State SHTS. Stratified sampling was considered appropriate because it helped ensure that students in the two schools (Yendi SHS and Dagbon SHTS) were sufficiently represented in the study.

The 345 students responded to the questionnaire and the respondents with high scores on the anger and depression inventories were selected for the experimental study. At this stage, purposive sampling procedure was used. In this study, the researcher was interested in students with high levels of anger and depression. This justified the use of the purposive sampling.

Through the purposive sampling, 40 students who had high levels of anger and depression were chosen for the experimental part of the study. Specifically, 20 (10 males and 10 females) respondents each were in the control group and experimental group.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected using questionnaire. This was made up of adapted version of the Level of Anger Scale (LAS) and an adopted Beck's Depression Inventory. The LAS was designed by Russell (2013) and measures perceived level of anger within three weeks preceding the study. The scoring range of the LAS are indicated below:

1-26 – Normal level of anger

27-51 – Moderate level of anger

52-65 – High level of anger

Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI) was adopted in its original state. The scoring and interpretation of the BDI is as follows:

1-10 - These ups and downs are considered normal

11-16 - Mild mood disturbance

17-20 - Borderline clinical depression

21-30 - Moderate depression

31-40 - Severe depression

Over 40 - Extreme depression

Content validity was established as well as reliability. Reliability coefficients were obtained for the two scales used after pilot testing with 30 students in the Zabzugu SHS. The adapted LAS had a reliability score of 0.821 while the BDI had a reliability of 0.782.

A letter of introduction was obtained from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and taken to the schools to obtain permission to collect the data for the study. This was done after obtaining ethical clearance from the Ethical Review Board, of the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast. Informed permission, anonymity, autonomy, and secrecy were important ethical issues addressed in the study.

The study had three main sections, comprising the pre-test, intervention and the post-test. The instrument was given to the sampled respondents for the pre-test (pre-intervention) stage. After the pre-test, an intervention was administered. The intervention comprised forgiveness education. Two main groups were set up, with one group getting the treatment and other group getting no treatment at all. Specifically, the treatment used the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness for the education.

Intervention Procedure

The intervention took six weeks to complete. Each week, there were two sessions. Each session lasted for an hour. The treatment followed the four stages of Enright's Process Model of Forgiveness. The four stages are as follows: the uncovering phase, the decision phase, the working phase, and the deepening phase.

Uncovering Phase (Two Weeks)

This was the first of the fourth stage. The objective of this phase was to help clients become aware of the effects of negative emotions like anger and depression. During the uncovering phase, I introduced the respondents to information meant to raise awareness of psychological elements like bitterness that arise as a result of unjust acts and how they impede the client from moving on from the offense (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). In other words, I helped the respondents identify the destruction that long-term anger and depression can cause and then after helped them learn how to express their negative emotions in suitable ways. During this phase, respondents were made to acknowledge and express the anger and pain about the offense. Thus, their anger was validated so that they do not use defense mechanisms such as denial, repression or displacement in dealing with offenses. Also, their negative depressive emotions were explored. The view that individuals can go beyond their experience of anger and other negative emotions was also introduced and some myths surrounding anger and forgiveness were nullified. How to express anger and negative emotions were also dealt with in this phase.

Decision Phase (Two Weeks)

The objective of the second phase was to help respondents make a decision on the need to forgive. During the decision phase, individuals were encouraged to view forgiveness in a different light by considering it as an active response to offense so that they can take steps to forgive. During this phase, forgiveness was offered as a way to cease harmful anger, and respondents were urged to think about forgiveness as a way to recover. The attendees spent time discussing how forgiveness is a decision that only the offended can make, and how forgiveness is a gift to both the aggrieved and the offender.

Working Phase (1 Week)

In this phase, the objective was to help respondents work through their negative emotions and thoughts can come out with a new perspective about their hurtful experiences. The working phase is where the individual begins to reorient him/herself by accepting what has happened and changing the way he or she views the offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Respondents learnt how to reframe or think about the situation and the perpetrator in a new way. Empathy and compassion are important concepts for this phase to help respondents gain a new perspective about the offender. Participants were asked to consider their offenders' weaknesses that may have caused them to engage in the act. Gaining understanding of the perpetrator's contextual experience was considered as a means to understand the offender more widely, but it was not used to justify his or her conduct. This phase was primarily concerned with learning to sympathize with the perpetrator by understanding the

individual within a specific context. The objective was to have empathy for the offender while also working to reduce negative sentiments and thoughts.

Deepening Phase (1 Week)

In this phase, the objective was to teach respondents how to deal with hurtful emotions in better ways in the future. The final phase, the deepening phase involves individuals finding meaning in their lives and seeking for support to be able to have lasting freedom from any mental torture created by the offense (Lin et al., 2004). Respondents were taught to deal with the hurt they have experienced and not remain stuck in it. They were made aware that forgiveness would be good for them instead of staying angry.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis 1 was tested using One-Way ANCOVA since there was one independent variable (Gender) comprising two categories (male and female), one dependent variable (Post-test scores for anger) and a covariate (pre-test scores for anger) which was controlled. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 was tested using One-Way ANCOVA since there was one independent variable (Gender) comprising two categories (male and female), one dependent variable (Post-test scores for depression) and a covariate (pre-test scores for depression) which was controlled.

RESULTS

HYPOTHESIS ONE:

H₀₁: There Is No Statistically Significant Difference In The Effect Of Forgiveness Education On Anger In The Experimental Group With Regard To Gender.

H₁₁: There is a statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on anger in the experimental group with regard to gender.

This hypothesis aimed at finding out the difference in effects of forgiveness education on anger in the experimental group with regard to gender. The post-test anger scores were compared for male and female respondents while adjusting for the effects of the pre-test scores using analysis of covariance. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post-test scores – Anger							
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	16.553 ^a	2	8.276	.338	.718	.038	.095
Intercept	152.648	1	152.648	6.238	.023	.268	.654
Pre-Test	5.302	1	5.302	.217	.648	.013	.072
Gender	13.345	1	13.345	.545	.470	.031	.107
Error	415.998	17	24.470				
Total	12097.000	20					

Corrected Total	432.550	19					
a. R Squared = .038 (Adjusted R Squared = -.075)							
b. Computed using alpha = .05							

Source: Field survey

It is shown in Table 1 that there was no statistically significant effect of forgiveness education on anger in the experimental group in relation to gender ($F_{(1, 17)} = .545$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .107$). This means that male and female respondents in the experimental group did not respond significantly different to the intervention.

Hypothesis Two:

H_02 : There is no statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group with regard to gender.

H_12 : There is a statistically significant difference in the effect of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group with regard to gender.

This hypothesis aimed at finding out the difference in effects of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group with regard to gender. The ANCOVA test was carried out in relation to this hypothesis. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post-test scores - Depression							
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	34.861 ^a	2	17.430	1.243	.313	.128	.234
Intercept	108.735	1	108.735	7.756	.013	.313	.747
Pre-test	10.661	1	10.661	.760	.395	.043	.131
Gender	25.718	1	25.718	1.834	.193	.097	.248
Error	238.339	17	14.020				
Total	5266.000	20					
Corrected Total	273.200	19					
a. R Squared = .048 (Adjusted R Squared = -.004)							
b. Computed using alpha = .05							

Source: Field survey

It is shown in Table 2 that there was no statistically significant effect of forgiveness education on depression in the experimental group in relation to gender ($F_{(1, 17)}=1.834$, $p>.05$, $\eta^2 = .248$). This means that male and female respondents in the experimental group did not respond significantly different to forgiveness education.

Power Analysis post-hoc

A post-hoc power analysis was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the sample size for detecting gender differences in the ANCOVA models. Effect sizes were derived from the observed partial eta squared values. The computation is shown below:

$$f = \sqrt{\eta^2/1 - \eta^2}$$

Power was estimated using an F-test for ANCOVA with: $\alpha = .05$. This approach is standard in behavioural and educational research and aligns with Cohen (1988). For anger, the gender effect size was small ($\eta^2 = .031$; Cohen's $f = 0.18$), yielding an observed power of approximately .05. For depression, the gender effect was small to moderate ($\eta^2 = .097$; Cohen's $f = 0.33$), with an observed power of approximately .05.

Although the achieved power was low, the observed effect sizes indicate that gender differences accounted for only a small proportion of variance in post-intervention anger and depression. This suggests that the non-significant findings are not solely attributable to insufficient power, but rather reflect genuinely minimal gender effects following forgiveness education.

DISCUSSION

From the results, males had reduced anger compared to females but this difference was not statistically significant. The import of the result is that males and females are likely to benefit from forgiveness education in the same manner. However, it is also possible that anger in males can be down when compared to females. This is because when males forgive, it is very likely that they have really forgiven and not keeping the hurt again. For females, there is a possibility that they may still keep some hurts even after forgiving. A lot more research may be needed to be able to substantiate this argument.

The current study's findings corroborate the findings of Anderson (2006), who discovered that gender had no statistically significant influence on anger treatment. Similarly, Boman (2003) discovered that the sensation of rage following treatment does not differ substantially across males and females. As a result, Bowman discovered no statistically significant gender differences in rage experience. This is similar to the current study. Furthermore, DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2003) revealed, among other things, that differences in overall anger scores between men and women were not statistically significant. Specifically, women were found to be angry longer even after receiving treatment. These were confirmed in the current study.

The results also showed that depression in males reduced compared to females but the difference was not statistically significant. In discussing with previous studies, it can be said that the present study's findings are consistent with those of other researchers. Birditt and Fingerman (2003) revealed that women evaluated their depression as more acute than men and experienced distress for a longer period of time than males. This is even after receiving the same treatment for depression. Statistically, however, the difference was not significant. This was the same finding in the current study. In the study of Birditt and Fingerman, the depression scores were self-evaluated but in the current study, the depression levels of the respondents were assessed by the researcher.

Similarly, Sloan and Sandt (2006) revealed that even though women are likely to experience more depression after receiving treatment, the gender difference was not statistically significant. This was like what was found in the current study. It is possible that the difference in the levels of depression of males and females may not be statistically significant even though there may be some differences. Further, in using several forms of treatment to deal with depression, it has been found that men and women respond comparably similar to the treatment (Sloan & Kornstein, 2003).

All the findings of the previous studies used in this work suggest that even though women may still have a lingering of depressive emotions after treatment, the difference between the women and the men may not be statistically significant. A key point to note is that for females, when they forgive their offenders for hurting them, they are likely to still keep some hurt while males are likely to completely let go off every hurt.

The absence of statistically significant gender differences in the effects of forgiveness education on anger and depression is better understood within the broader Ghanaian context because of the communal and relational nature of the Ghanaian society. Ghanaian societies are traditionally grounded in communalism, a worldview in which individual wellbeing is closely tied to group cohesion, social stability, and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Gyekye, 1996; Mbiti, 1990). Within such contexts, forgiveness is not merely a personal coping strategy but a socially reinforced moral practice aimed at restoring balance and preventing prolonged interpersonal conflict.

In Ghana, proverbs, storytelling, and community-based dispute resolution techniques are frequently used to teach both male and female children the principles of tolerance, harmony, and respect for social order from an early age. Because both sexes are equally taught to repress retaliatory impulses and prioritize peaceful cohabitation, these shared moral standards may lessen gender-based disparities in emotional responses after forgiveness education.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that when males and females are given forgiveness education, their levels of anger and depression would be similar at the end. This means that being male or female would not influence levels of anger and depression of students who have received forgiveness education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. School authorities should collaborate with school counsellors to arrange forgiveness education treatment sessions for students who have issues with depression so that they can be assisted for their levels of depression to reduce.
2. In providing psychological assistance to students with anger and depression, school counsellors should not regard demographic variables as barriers to counselling, since there were no statistically significant gender and age differences at post-test.

Limitations

The study was limited in the sense that the use of questionnaire in collecting data may lead to biases which may affect the study. Also, the quasi-experimental design is associated with weaknesses and this can affect the results. The main weakness of the quasi-experimental design is that randomization is not used, limiting the study's ability to conclude firmly on a causal association between an intervention and an outcome. Ideally, a true experimental design should have been used to maximize the outcomes of the intervention. Also, since the study used a small sample for the intervention, generalisation of the results to large group would be limited.

Suggestions for Further Research

It is suggested that future researchers could adopt longitudinal designs to examine whether reductions in anger and depression are maintained over time. Also, future researchers can use larger sample size to enhance the generalisability of the results of the study.

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