



## Predicting Collegiate Students' Aggression Based on the Amount of Forgiveness and Their Belief in a Just/Unjust World

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between Forgiveness and Belief in a Just/Unjust World with aggression among college students of Islamic Azad University. The sample of research included 187 subjects who were selected based on stratified random sampling. For the measurement of the variables Forgiveness Scale (FS), Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS) and Ahvaz Aggression Inventory (AAI) were used. Pearson correlation formula and multiple regression analysis were run to analyze the data. Results indicated that there were significant correlation between Forgiveness and aggression and also between Belief in an Unjust World and aggression. But there were no significant correlation among Belief in a Just World and Aggression. The results of regression analysis also showed that Forgiveness and Belief in an Unjust World were predictive variables concerned with Aggression.

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**Key Words:** Forgiveness, Belief in a Just /Unjust World, Aggression.

### INTRODUCTION

Anger is a universal emotion which has been inevitably experienced by all of us for several times, and aggression as a behavior seen in individuals due to the feelings of anger is very common in human being's lives and basically human beings consider it an obvious matter, in a way that the initial scientific researches about it as an unfavorable phenomenon do not date back to more than 100 years ago [1]. Aggression is a behavior happening deliberately in order to harm another person who is excited in order to avoid this harm [2]. Also it is a psychological mechanism through which the individual unconsciously reveals the pressures caused by his/her deprivations and frustrations in the form of attack and rape actions, vindictive and aggressive behaviors [3]. Aggression in individuals happens when the balance between the momentum and internal control collides [4], such that the contradictions caused by organic or neurological relations and disorders (by the increase of momentum, lack of mental stability, lack of effect of chemical inhibitors, and decrease of internal control) collide the balance and they bring about the aggression [5], and this could lead the individual toward desire for revenge.

One of the structures affecting the individuals' performances and their relations is forgiveness [6], which is considered as one of the important psychological processes which is ahead of communicational, emotional, spiritual and physical growth [7], and it is defined as a voluntary waiver from the right to become angry or disgusted from a committed harmful act, due to which the sadden individual takes a warm and kind behavior with the offender.

The forgiveness process includes four phases: irritation, kated, healing and forgiving and ultimately reconciliation and returning to others [8]. As Worthington states forgiveness is a good practice in which the harmed individual starts to restore his/her self-esteem, while he/she does not harm other person's self-esteem, and Worthington believes that forgiveness is both an actual decision and change in the individuals' emotional experiences, and this change in emotions has a correlation with physical and mental health [9 & 10].

In a research Karremans & Van Lange showed that people who hesitate about justice also show more amount of forgiveness [11]. As a matter of fact, believe in justice is one of the most proposed believes that has always been one of the main worries of human kind. It seems that when people encounter injustice which is difficult to heal, they may try to blame the victims or justify the current situation, and make the justice return. In order to define the justice-centered responses a few psychological theories are proposed, and one of the most influential theories is Lerner's theory based on which belief in just world could be an indicator of motivation of justice [12, 13]. Belief in just world consists of one infrastructural theoretical orientation enabling the understanding and perception of physical and social surrounding of the individual and it enables the individuals to confront with their physical and

social environment [14]. Belief in the just and unjust world is two different beliefs with two independent appendices [15, 16, and 17].

As such, beliefs in just world are a reflection of existence of order and fairness in the world but belief in unjust world is a reflection of a world full of injustice and inequity [16]. Theory of belief in just world states that human beings are motivated based on this idea that the world they live in is a place where people usually achieve what they are qualified for [18], and belief in unjust world explains the belief in world in which the innocent are punished instead of the guilty and guilty people escape from punishment with different methods and also qualification and merit are not rewarded [19].

Increasing research evidences show that belief in just world have different adaptive functions such as: Creation of obligation and internal commitment in individuals for fair behavior, security and safety for being aim-oriented in life, and achieve a framework for interpreting the accidents happening for individuals [20].

In a research, Golparvar et al. studied the correlation between belief in just and unjust world with aggression. The research result showed that belief in just and unjust world has a negative significant correlation with anger and hostility [21].

The research result of Be'gue and Muller conducted on 379 teenagers ranging from 10 to 16 years old showed that the higher the individuals in belief in just world the less aggressive intentions they will reveal [22]. In a research named belief in just world as a shield against anger, Dalbert also showed that a significant and negative correlation exists between anger and belief in just world [18]. But no significant correlation was achieved between the belief in just world and aggression. Also the regression analysis results showed that respectively two variables of forgiveness and belief in unjust world were two predictors of aggression.

In some researches the correlation between forgiveness and aggression is also studied and some of them will be provided here. In a research Webb and Dula studied the correlation of forgiveness and aggression among the Southern Appalachia university students. The research result showed that self-forgiveness and others' forgiveness and not the forgiveness from God has a correlation with aggression at lower levels [23].

Also the research result of Tibbits and et al. indicated that the educational program of forgiveness among the clinical population decreases the blood pressure and anger expression [24]. Also the effect of clinical forgiveness on the anger, temper and vulnerability toward using drugs among people who are addicted to drugs conducted by Lin and et al., showed that individuals attending the forgiveness therapy improved from anger, depression, anxiety and self-confidence [25].

Studies of Worthington and et al., and Maltby et al., also showed that a correlation exists between forgiveness and aggression [26, 27]. Based on the fact that aggression is a historical issue existing in the human being's lives, and resulting in numerous wars, struggles during times and eras, and it has been the cause of aggressive intentions of human beings, thus paying attention to factors which could reduce this feature are very important. Along with achieving this aim, the current research has been conducted with the aim of studying the correlation between forgiveness and belief in just and unjust world and the university students' aggression.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of the study is descriptive-correlational whereby the relationship between forgiveness and belief in a just/unjust world, with aggression is investigated in students at Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz.

### Participants

The population of the study consisted of all students at Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz. From among the population, a number of 187 students (both male and female) were selected as the participants using stratified random sampling. In this regard, a list of the current students was compiled by referring the Office of Statistics and Information. Then using stratified sampling, the subjects were selected so that they participated in the study in a proportion consistent with their proportion in the population.

### Instruments

**Forgiveness Scale:** It is a self-measuring tool designed by Rye et al. This scale includes 15 items and two sub-scales and the scoring is based on Likert scale from point 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) [28]. In a research Asgari and Roshani reported the concurrent validity of this scale and Thompson's forgiveness scale as 0.841 and they reported the scale reliability through Cronbach's alpha and it was 0.921 [7].

**Belief in a Just World Scale (BJWS):** developed by Rubin and Peplau, the scale consists of 20 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Eleven items address belief in a just world and nine items address belief in an unjust world [29]. The reliability and construct validity of the scale have been approved in different studies [30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35]. The reliability of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.672 and 0.678 for belief in a just and an unjust world, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha formula [15].

**Ahvaz Aggression Inventory:** This inventory includes 30 items in three factors (anger, invasion, insult, obstinacy and implacability, which was created by Zahedifaret al., Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz and they evaluated its validity with the scales of hostility and guilt and MMPI. They reported the correlation between the questionnaire as 0.56 at the significance level of  $P < 0.0001$ , and also they reported its reliability coefficients by the

use of Cronbach's alpha and bisection method as respectively 0.85 and 0.61 which are satisfactory [36, 37]. In a research Naderi et al., reported the questionnaire's reliability through the use of Cronbach's alpha and bisection method as respectively 0.88 and 0.81 [38].

## RESULTS

Descriptive results of the research variables as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum number related to the research variables are shown in table 1. According to this table the mean and standard deviation in the variables of forgiveness were respectively 42.2299 and 6.95419, in Belief in a just world 50.6524 and 7.52644, in Belief in an unjust world 41.9786 and 6.02054 and for the aggression it was 40.5080 and 11.33952.

**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores across the research variables

Variable	Mean	S.D	Minimum	Maximum	N	
<b>Forgiveness</b>	42.2299	6.95419	21.00	64.00	187	
<b>Belief in a just/unjust world</b>	Belief in a just world	50.6524	7.52644	22.00	69.00	187
	Belief in an unjust world	41.9786	6.02054	23.00	60.00	187
<b>Aggression</b>	40.5080	11.33952	13.00	73.00	187	

The table 2 showed the simple correlation coefficient between the forgiveness and aggression, as it is observable in table 2, the correlation coefficient between the scores of the forgiveness and aggression is -0.316 and it is significant at level  $p < 0.000$ .

**Table 2.** Simple correlation coefficients between the forgiveness and aggression

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	R	P
Aggression	Forgiveness	-0.316	0.000

Table 3 illustrates simple correlation coefficients of belief in a just/unjust world with aggression. As shown in the table, there is a significant reverse correlation between belief in an unjust world and aggression ( $r = 0.193$ ,  $\alpha = 0.01$ ). However, there is no significant correlation between belief in a just world and mental health ( $r = -0.014$ ,  $\alpha = 0.852$ ).

**Table 3.** Simple correlation coefficients between the Belief in a just/unjust world and aggression

Criterion variable	Predictive variable	r	P
Aggression	Belief in a just/unjust world		
	Belief in a just world	-0.014	0.852
	Belief in an unjust world	0.193	0.01

Table 4 illustrates the results of multiple correlations forgiveness, belief in a just/unjust world, and aggression. In order to examine the effect of forgiveness, belief in a just/unjust world on aggression variance, forgiveness and belief in a just/unjust world were considered as the predictive variables and aggression was considered as the criterion variable. Then the correlations were calculated using stepwise regression analysis. The results of variance analysis and regression between the mean scores of aggression and predictive variables showed that among the research variables, forgiveness, and belief in unjust world were predictors of university students' aggression.

**Table 4.** Multiple regression coefficients between forgiveness, belief in a just/unjust world, and aggression using stepwise multiple regression analysis

Variable	Independent variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F (P)	SE	B	Bet	T (p)
<b>Dependent variable</b>	Forgiveness	0.316	0.100	20.542 0.000	0.114	-0.515	-0.316	-4.532 0.000
	Belief in an unjust world	0.348	0.121	12.648 0.000	0.132	0.276	0.146	2.093 0.04

## DISCUSSION

Results of testing the 1st hypothesis showed that a correlation exists between the belief in just and unjust world and the university students' aggression. The current research results were consistent with the research results of Golparvaret al. [21], Be'gue and Muller [22], and Delbert [18].

For explaining this hypothesis it could be said that belief in a just world is used as an important adaptive action for the individual and people do not have tendency toward letting go of this belief and in case they confront evidences showing that world is not fair and orderly they may become irritated and also the studies about the

belief in just world show that human being needs this belief and he/she tries for justice in order to achieve the belief in just world. According to Tomaka and Blascovich [39, 40] the stronger the beliefs of individuals in the just world the more they interpret the daily stressors as challenges and not threats. It seems that belief in normal world acts as a barrier toward threat and ultimately results in the decrease of hostile attribution bias, and if the individuals be in the high levels of belief in just world they will have less aggressive intentions [22].

The result of testing 2nd hypothesis also showed that a significant correlation exists between the forgiveness and aggression. The current finding is consistent with the research results of Tibbits et al. [23] Khojasteh Mehret al. [10], Webb and Dula [24], Lin et al. [25], Worthington et al. [26].

Forgiveness is a process including the change of feeling and attitude toward the offender, a process which results in the reduction of intention to take revenge or continue the animosity with the offender [41]. The offended person is always put into a situation where he/she can tolerate, avoid the offender, ignore his/her agony, take revenge or choose forgiveness, and since forgiveness causes to control the hostile impulses and gradual overcoming hatred and rancor [10] thus the person who forgives feels less irritation, anger, revenge or hatred and he/she gets rid of them [42].

The result of regression analysis also showed that among the research variables, forgiveness and belief in unjust world are respectively predictors of aggression. In order to explain this finding it could be said that human being is a social being and he/she is always exposed to irritation and damage through interaction with others and this matter could affect the quality of his/her relations with others and endangers his/her mental health. Irritation has several personal and social consequences which anger, hatred, grudge, revenge, talking behind someone's back, defamation, jealousy and ultimately disconnection of the friendship are the main consequences [43], and forgiveness is a process for alleviating the irritations and it helps improving the mental health in interpersonal relationships of individuals, and it is more found in individuals who think about justice. It seems that the more the perceived unfairness in individuals the more they see the world unjust and the more anger and hostility they will have and in contrast the belief in just world increases the tolerance of individuals toward the shortcomings and bad results of daily life and ultimately results in the reduction of negative emotions such as sadness and anger [44].

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