



# *FORGIVENESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND CHRONIC PAIN: HAVE WE MISSED SOMETHING?*

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## *Current responses to pain*

- Focus on restoration of function through psychological interventions.
- Despite - or in the presence of - continued experience of chronic pain
- Treatment models using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

## *Current responses to pain*

- Development of *psychological flexibility* is conceived as the ability to respond effectively to:
  - What is presented by the environment  
rather than:
  - What is dominating the person's thoughts, emotions and sensations

## *Importance of this study*

- Chronic pain (CP) affects personal, family, social and work related experience
- Extends our understanding of forgiveness in relation to CP and its treatment - *in the sufferer's context*
- Possible use of an accessible cultural concept - *forgiveness* - to achieve meaningful change in response to CP

# What is “forgiveness”?

- Forgiveness is conceptualised as a response to transgressions caused by:
  - the person themselves;
  - by others;
  - or in the context of a situation.
- Forgiveness may serve as a catalyst for a different psychological stance to the inner conflict which may arise from adverse experiences

# *Implications of forgiveness*

- A forgiving response (the granting of forgiveness to self, others or a situation) may transform the way we relate to the powerful thoughts, emotions and sensations associated with CP experience.
- Forgiveness may address ongoing psychological distress in relation CP - and perceptions of the past, present and future.
- The Heartland Forgiveness Scale measures the overall construct of the disposition to forgive. Study included additional 3 questions on Blame

## *This study*

- Patients ( $N=90$ ) who had been referred by their medical practitioners for specialist services from the Pain Management Unit at a major teaching hospital. They completed:
- Measures:
  - PSQ (Hunter Integrated Pain Service)
  - Modified version of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale

**Table 1.** Summary statistics means standard deviation and correlations for variables pain severity, pain interference, psychological distress forgiveness and blame.

Variable	M	SD	Correlations													
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
<b>1. Pain Severity Total</b>	27.14	(7.05)	1.00													
<b>2. Pain Interference Total</b>	42.90	(11.44)	<b>0.73**</b>	1.00												
<b>3. Psychological distress (K10)</b>	28.80	(9.89)	<b>0.32**</b>	<b>0.51**</b>	1.00											
<b>4. Forgive Self</b>	28.37	(8.24)	-0.06	-0.11	<b>-0.40**</b>	1.00										
<b>5. Forgive Other</b>	29.00	(7.43)	0.01	-0.05	<b>-0.26*</b>	<b>0.54**</b>	1.00									
<b>6. Forgive Situation</b>	28.62	(7.65)	0.01	-0.11	<b>-0.44**</b>	<b>0.70**</b>	<b>0.68**</b>	1.00								
<b>7. Forgive Total</b>	85.99	(20.43)	-0.02	-0.10	<b>-0.42**</b>	<b>0.88**</b>	<b>0.83**</b>	<b>0.92**</b>	1.00							
<b>8. Blame Self</b>	3.04	(2.09)	0.11	0.20	<b>0.25*</b>	<b>-0.42**</b>	<b>-0.34**</b>	<b>-0.39**</b>	<b>-0.45**</b>	1.00						
<b>9. Blame Other</b>	2.93	(2.09)	0.17	0.15	0.15	<b>-0.34**</b>	<b>-0.30**</b>	<b>-0.37**</b>	<b>-0.38**</b>	0.07	1.00					
<b>10. Blame Circumstance</b>	4.10	(2.13)	0.09	0.07	0.08	<b>-0.38**</b>	<b>-0.24*</b>	<b>-0.29**</b>	<b>-0.35**</b>	<b>0.33**</b>	<b>0.46**</b>	1.00				
<b>11. Blame Total</b>	10.08	(4.57)	0.17	0.19	<b>0.22*</b>	<b>-0.53**</b>	<b>-0.41**</b>	<b>-0.48**</b>	<b>-0.54**</b>	<b>0.64**</b>	<b>0.70**</b>	<b>0.82**</b>	1.00			

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

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

# Key Correlations

- Correlations to Psychological distress (K10)
  - Pain Severity  $r = 0.32, p > 0.01$  level (2-tailed).
  - Pain Interference  $r = 0.51, p > 0.01$  level (2-tailed).
  - Forgiveness  $r = -0.42, p > 0.01$  level (2-tailed).

Table 2.

*Prediction of psychological distress by Pain Severity, Pain Interference, Blame and Forgiveness.*

*N* = 90, Psychological distress: Kessler 10 Q. 1-10, Forgiveness: Heartland Forgiveness scale, Pain severity: Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) Q. 3 – 7, Pain interference: Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) Q. 9, A-G

Predicting Psychological Distress				
Step and Predictors	$R^2$ change	$F$ change	Sig $F$ Change	
1. Pain Severity and Pain interference	<b>0.27</b>	15.72	< 0.0001	
2. Blame and Forgiveness	<b>0.14</b>	10.06	< 0.0001	
Coefficients	$\beta$	$T$	$p$	
Pain Severity	-0.05	-0.43	0.67	
Pain Interference	<b>0.52</b>	4.27	<b>&lt; 0.0001</b>	
Total Blame	-0.10	-1.01	0.32	
Total Forgiveness	<b>-0.42</b>	-4.22	<b>&lt; 0.0001</b>	

# *Uses of Forgiveness in CP*

- Further clinical research may develop interventions which utilise the restorative and transformative qualities of forgiveness to provide a catalyst for a new approach on the experience of CP
- Examples: Metaphors of letting go, dropping burdens, disentanglement from the past.

## *Use of forgiveness in CP*

- Measures of Forgiveness may indicate patient's capacity to be psychologically flexible and to benefit from and enter into treatment programs
- Forgiveness may also provide indicators for entry into rehabilitation and for return to work

# *Uses of Forgiveness in CP*

- Increasing a person's ability to forgive may allow for:
  - the development of their capacity to adapt and
  - make beneficial responses or attributions regarding the fault or causes of pain or illness.
- Such responses have the potential to increase flexible responses to life challenges and to lower distress in the presence of CP