Research Paper

The Role of Altruism and Forgiveness in Predicting Meaning in Life among Adults

Muthyala Mounica Rao

*Research scholar (PhD), Department of Psychology, Arts college, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India,
500007. Email: mounicarao.official@gmail.com*

Dr Uma Rangan

Retired Professor, Department of Psychology, Arts college, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India, 500007

Abstract: *Altruism and forgiveness are essential psychological constructs that contribute to emotional well-being, social harmony, and personal fulfillment. Altruism, defined as selfless concern for others, has been linked to greater life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Reeve, 2018). Similarly, forgiveness, the ability to let go of resentment, fosters emotional healing and strengthens interpersonal relationships (Singh, 2012). While prior studies suggest that altruism and forgiveness enhance meaning in life (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Rafiq et al., 2013), empirical evidence remains inconclusive. This study examines the role of altruism and forgiveness in predicting meaning in life among adults. A purposive sampling method was used to select 100 adults aged 20 to 40. Participants completed the Altruistic Personality Scale (Rushton et al., 1981), Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005), and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ, Steger et al., 2006). Correlation analysis found a significant association between altruism and forgiveness (r = .492, p < .01), but multiple regression analysis revealed that neither altruism nor forgiveness significantly predicted meaning in life (R² = .025, p = .295). Interestingly, altruism and forgiveness of others were negatively correlated with the search for meaning. These findings suggest that meaning in life may be shaped by personal values, relationships, and existential reflection rather than altruism and forgiveness alone. Future research should explore additional psychological and cultural factors influencing meaning in life.*

Keywords: *Altruism, Forgiveness, Meaning in Life, Psychological Well-being, Motivation*

I. INTRODUCTION

Altruism, forgiveness, and meaning in life are essential for personal well-being and social harmony. Altruism fosters kindness and strengthens relationships by helping others without expecting anything in return. Forgiveness reduces stress, promotes emotional healing, and improves mental health. Finding meaning in life gives a sense of purpose, motivation, and resilience during difficult times. Together, these qualities enhance happiness, build stronger communities, and improve overall life satisfaction. Cultivating them leads to a more fulfilling and peaceful life.

Altruism

Altruism, a fundamental aspect of human motivation, has been extensively studied in psychological and social contexts. Rooted in selfless concern for the well-being of others, altruism involves actions driven by an intrinsic desire to help, support, and uplift others without expecting personal gain. The theoretical underpinnings of altruism can be linked to Atkinson's (1957, 1964) and McClelland's (1957, 1964) perspectives on achievement motivation, which suggest that human behavior is influenced by a dynamic interplay between striving for success and avoiding failure. Similarly, altruistic behavior can be viewed through a dual lens—while some individuals engage in altruistic acts for genuine care and concern, others may do so to avoid guilt or maintain social acceptance.

The significance of altruism extends to various domains, particularly in shaping an individual's sense of purpose and fulfillment in life. Acts of kindness and selflessness contribute to the well-being of both the giver and the recipient, fostering deeper social connections and enhancing psychological well-being. Studies have shown that altruism is associated with positive emotions, life satisfaction, and overall psychological resilience (Reeve, 2018). In an academic context, altruism has been observed to influence students' motivation,

collaboration, and emotional intelligence, which collectively contribute to personal and professional growth (Ajay, 2016). Given its strong link to social and emotional well-being, the role of altruism in predicting meaning in life among adults warrants further exploration. Understanding how selfless behavior contributes to a deeper sense of purpose can offer valuable insights into psychological well-being and personal fulfillment.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a crucial psychological and social process that influences emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and overall life satisfaction. It involves a conscious decision to let go of resentment, bitterness, and the desire for revenge against someone who has caused harm. Every individual develops attitudes toward forgiveness based on personal experiences, upbringing, and social influences. When people adopt a compassionate and understanding approach toward others, they are more likely to exhibit forgiveness, which fosters emotional resilience and psychological healing. The ability to forgive is deeply intertwined with personal growth, as it allows individuals to overcome negative emotions and cultivate inner peace (Knight & Holt, 2014).

Forgiveness is not merely an act of absolving others but also plays a significant role in self-growth and emotional regulation. Studies have shown a positive relationship between forgiveness and overall well-being, suggesting that individuals who practice forgiveness experience lower stress levels, reduced anxiety, and enhanced interpersonal relationships (Singh, 2012). In an academic and social context, forgiveness helps in conflict resolution, promotes empathy, and strengthens social bonds. Researchers have found that forgiveness contributes to better emotional intelligence, improved coping mechanisms, and psychological stability (Rafiq et al., 2013). Given its role in emotional well-being, forgiveness is an essential factor in predicting meaning in life among adults. Exploring the psychological mechanisms through which forgiveness influences personal fulfillment can provide valuable insights into enhancing mental health and overall life satisfaction.

Meaning in Life

Meaning in Life is a fundamental aspect of human existence, shaping an individual's sense of purpose, fulfillment, and psychological well-being. It serves as a guiding force that helps people navigate life's challenges and make sense of their experiences. Meaning in Life is thought to be a primary goal of human development, emerging from a combination of personal values, relationships, and life experiences. It is a deeply personal construct that varies across individuals but generally includes a sense of coherence, purpose, and significance in life (Estrada, 2005).

The pursuit of Meaning in Life is essential for an individual's emotional and psychological growth. It contributes to overall life satisfaction, mental health, and resilience. Research suggests that individuals who experience a strong sense of meaning are more likely to lead fulfilling lives and maintain a positive outlook despite adversities. Meaning in Life plays a crucial role in personal development, social engagement, and emotional stability, making it a key factor in well-being and personal fulfillment.

Research Objectives:
1. To examine the relationship between altruism and meaning in life.
2. To investigate the association between forgiveness and meaning in life.
3. To determine the combined predictive power of altruism and forgiveness on meaning in life.

Hypotheses
1. Altruism will positively significantly correlate with meaning in life.
2. Forgiveness will positively significantly correlate with meaning in life.
3. Altruism and Forgiveness together significantly will predict meaning in life.

Measures and Methods :

This study employs a quantitative, correlational, and predictive research design to examine the relationship between altruism, forgiveness, and meaning in life among adults. A total of 100 adults aged 20 to 40 years were selected from Telangana, India, using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in responses. To measure altruism, the Altruistic Personality Scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981) was used, assessing dimensions such as charitable giving, helping behavior, volunteering, and emotional support. Forgiveness was measured using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005), which includes self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and situational forgiveness. Meaning in life was assessed using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ, Steger et al., 2006), comprising presence of meaning and search for meaning subscales. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. Pearson correlation was used to examine relationships between variables, multiple regression determined the predictive power of altruism and forgiveness with

regards to Meaning in Life.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of Study

Category 20–30 Years (N) 31–40 Years (N) Total (N)

	20–30 Years (N)	31–40 Years (N)	Total (N)
Female	25	25	50
Male	25	25	50
Total	50	50	100

Study Variables:
Independent Variables (IVs): Altruism and Forgiveness
Dependent Variable (DV): Meaning in Life

Statistical Analysis:
Statistical Analysis: The obtained data were subjected to statistical analysis using Pearson correlation, multiple regression.

Procedure:
The study first identified adult participants aged 20–40 years using purposive sampling. Potential participants were approached from various community settings, workplaces, and educational institutions. A list of individuals meeting the inclusion criteria was compiled. Next, consent was obtained from participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The purpose and significance of the study were explained before data collection. Participants were provided with the Altruistic Personality Scale, Heartland Forgiveness Scale, and Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ). The questionnaires were administered individually and in small groups, either in-person or through an online survey platform. Participants were given sufficient time to respond. After data collection, responses were reviewed for completeness before statistical analysis.

Ethical Permission:
The ethical committee at Osmania University granted permission to conduct the study (No. 44/Psy/Head/OU). Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation of all respondents.

II. RESULTS

Table-2
Correlation Matrix for Adults : Relationships Between Altruism, Forgiveness, and Meaning in   Life

	Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Altruism	100	59.82	8.59	——							
2	Forgiveness of self	100	34.35	4.73	-.013	——						
3	Forgiveness of others	100	28.20	8.68	.492**	.073	——					
4	Forgiveness of situations	100	29.27	5.49	.398**	.257**	.585**	——				
5	HFS	100	91.82	14.26	.449**	.475**	.859**	.827*	——			
6	Presence	100	18.09	6.44	.041	.073	-.064	-.098	-.053	——		
7	Search	100	23.80	7.74	-.203	.133	-.269**	-.125	-.168	.232*	——	
8	MLQ	100	41.89	11.17	-.117	.134	-.224*	-.144	-.147	.738**	.828**	——

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table examines the relationships between altruism, forgiveness, and meaning in life among 100 participants. Altruism (M = 59.82, SD = 8.59) is positively correlated with forgiveness of others (r = .492, p < .01), forgiveness of situations (r = .398, p < .01), and overall forgiveness (HFS) (r = .449, p < .01). This suggests that more altruistic individuals tend to be more forgiving. Forgiveness of self, others, and situations is significantly associated with overall forgiveness, with the strongest correlation found between forgiveness of others and HFS (r =.859, p < .01). This highlights the importance of interpersonal forgiveness in overall forgiving tendencies. The meaning in life subscales show a strong relationship with overall meaning (MLQ). Presence (r = .738, p < .01) and search (r = .828, p < .01) are highly correlated with MLQ. Interestingly, altruism (r = -.203, p < .05) and forgiveness of others (r = -.269, p < .01) are negatively related to the search for meaning, suggesting that those who are more altruistic and forgiving may already experience a sense of meaning in life.

Table-3

(Predicting Meaning in Life from Altruism and Forgiveness Scale)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.158[a]	.025	.005	11.146

a. Predictors: (Constant), HFS, Altruism

Note: Weak model (**R² = .025**), meaning altruism and forgiveness explain only **2.5%** of MLQ variance. High error (**11.146**) shows poor prediction.

The above model table examines the predictive relationship between altruism, overall forgiveness (HFS), and the dependent variable. The R value (.158) indicates a weak correlation between the predictors (altruism and HFS) and the outcome variable. The R Square (.025) suggests that only 2.5% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by altruism and forgiveness. The Adjusted R Square (.005) is even lower, implying that after adjusting for the number of predictors, the model explains very little variance. The standard error (11.146) indicates a high level of unexplained variation. Overall, this model has weak explanatory power, suggesting that altruism and forgiveness do not significantly predict the dependent variable.

Table-4

(Testing the Overall Model Fit for Meaning in Life Prediction)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	307.535	2	153.767	1.238	.295[b]
	Residual	12050.255	97	124.229		
	Total	12357.790	99			

a. Dependent Variable: MLQ

b. Predictors: (Constant), HFS, Altruism

Note: Weak model (**F = 1.238, p = .295**). Altruism and forgiveness do not significantly predict MLQ (**p > .05**). Most variance remains unexplained.

The ANOVA table assesses the overall significance of the regression model predicting Meaning in Life (MLQ) based on Altruism and HFS (overall forgiveness). The F-statistic (1.238) and p-value (.295) indicate that the model is not statistically significant, meaning altruism and forgiveness do not significantly predict MLQ. The regression sum of squares (307.535) represents the variation explained by the predictors, while the residual sum of squares (12,050.255) indicates the unexplained variance. The high residual variance suggests that other factors influence MLQ. Since p > .05, the predictors do not contribute meaningfully to the model, confirming that altruism and forgiveness alone are weak predictors of meaning in life.

Table-5
Interpretation of Coefficients for Meaning in Life Prediction
Coefficients

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	55.38	8.90		6.22	.000
Altruism	-.083	.146	-.064	-.571	.569
HFS	-.093	.088	-.118	-1.054	.295

Note: Altruism (**p = .569**) and forgiveness (**p = .295**) do not significantly predict MLQ (**p > .05**). Weak effects (**Beta < |.12|**). Meaning in life is influenced by other factors.

The regression coefficients table indicates how Altruism and HFS (overall forgiveness) predict Meaning in Life (MLQ). The constant (55.38, $p < .001$) suggests that if altruism and forgiveness were zero, the predicted MLQ score would be 55.38. Both predictors have negative but non-significant effects on MLQ. Altruism (B = -0.083, p = .569) and HFS (B = -0.093, p = .295) show weak negative associations, meaning higher altruism and forgiveness do not significantly predict MLQ. The Beta values (-.064 and -.118) indicate minimal standardized effects. Since p-values are above .05, neither predictor contributes meaningfully to MLQ. This suggests that factors other than altruism and forgiveness may be more important in determining meaning in life.

III.   DISCUSSION

From Table 2, one can understand that several studies yielded contradictory findings regarding the role of altruism and forgiveness in predicting meaning in life. While previous studies suggest that forgiveness enhances psychological well-being and meaning (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Rafiq et al., 2013), the current study finds weak or negative correlations between altruism, forgiveness, and meaning in life. Altruism is positively associated with forgiveness of others (r = .492, p <

.01) and forgiveness of situations (r = .398, p < .01), indicating that more altruistic individuals tend to be more forgiving. However, despite this connection, altruism and forgiveness do not significantly predict MLQ (B = -0.083, p = .569; B = -0.093, p = .295), suggesting other factors may play a more dominant role in determining meaning in life. All participants showed close to average meaning in life scores (M = 41.89, SD = 11.17), which may explain why altruism and forgiveness did not play a significant role in predicting MLQ. Previous research suggests that searching for meaning is a dynamic process influenced by multiple psychological and environmental factors (Mayhall-Andrews, 2018). Interestingly, altruism (r = -.203, p < .05) and forgiveness of others (r = -.269, p < .01) were negatively correlated with the search for meaning. This suggests that individuals who exhibit higher altruism and forgiveness may already have a sense of meaning, reducing the need for an active search. Presence of meaning (r = .738, p < .01) and search for meaning (r = .828, p < .01) are strongly correlated with overall MLQ. These results indicate that personal experiences and existential exploration may be more significant predictors of meaning than altruism and forgiveness alone. Studies also suggest that individuals who have clarity in their life purpose experience greater fulfillment (Logan, 2019; Muneer, 2020).

From Table 3, the regression model shows low explanatory power (R^2 = .025), meaning only 2.5% of the variance in MLQ is explained by altruism and forgiveness. The F-statistic (1.238, p

= .295) confirms that the predictors are not statistically significant. These findings contradict studies that highlight forgiveness as a key component of psychological well-being (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Gunderson et al., 2012).

The study findings suggest that while altruism and forgiveness are important moral virtues, they do not independently predict meaning in life. The transformation of meaning may occur through a combination of personal values, social relationships, and existential reflection. Future research should explore additional psychological and social factors that contribute to a deeper understanding of meaning in life (Aithal & Aithal, 2020; Maringe & Gibbs, 2008).

IV. CONCLUSION

Findings reveal that correlational analysis revealed significant associations among forgiveness, and altruism. However, regression analysis indicated that neither altruism nor total forgiveness significantly predicted meaning in life. These findings suggest that other psychological or social factors may play a more substantial role in shaping an individual's sense of meaning. Future research should explore additional predictors, such as personal values, social connectedness, and life experiences.

LIMITATIONS

1. The study relied on self-report measures, which may introduce response biases.
2. The sample size was relatively small (N = 100), limiting the generalizability of the findings.
3. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences between the variables.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Interventions aimed at enhancing meaning in life should consider factors beyond altruism and forgiveness, such as personal goals and life purpose.
2. Mental health professionals may need to incorporate broader existential and psychological factors when helping individuals find meaning in life.
3. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impact of altruism and forgiveness on meaning in life.

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