



Understanding the Interconnectedness between Religion, Forgiveness, Self-compassion and Human Flourishing among Emerging Adults at the University of Lagos, Nigeria

Gbenusola Akinwale ¹  & Victor Ojakorotu ¹ 

¹ Department of Political Studies & International Relations, North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The study explored the relationship between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion and human flourishing among emerging adults at the University of Lagos. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which allowed for concurrent measurement of both the dependent and independent variables. Using the accidental sampling method, a sample of 408 participants comprising 215 males (52.7%) and 193 females (47.3%) were selected for this study. The scales used to assess these participants comprised three standardized psychological instruments, the secure flourish measure, the heartland forgiveness scale and the self-compassion scale short form (SCSSF). The result however showed a significant influence of religion on forgiveness with Christians reporting the highest in forgiveness compared to other religions, the result further revealed a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and human flourishing but no significant relationship between self-compassion and human flourishing. It, also, showed forgiveness and self-compassion as joint predictors of human flourishing. The findings of this study suggest that those who are more inclined to forgive may experience greater levels of personal growth and well-being. However, this study adds more contribution to scholarship by exploring the interconnectedness between religion, Religion, forgiveness, self-compassion and human flourishing which addresses the gap in existing literature by examining in specific context emerging adults in Nigeria.

Correspondence
Gbenusola Abike Akinwale
Email: gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng

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INTRODUCTION

In behavioural science and population -health studies, there has been a growing interest in how religion has helped shape human behaviour. Religion has played and will continue to play a significant role in the behaviour of humans particularly forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing. The importance of religion can be traced back to philosophical writings such as Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, as well as to the work of modern psychologists, epidemiologists, physicians, and social and behavioural scientists who have studied the influence of religion on behaviour, physical and mental health since the 1980s.

One of the most important human goals in life is to live well, serve God and achieve happiness.¹ Positive mental health research leads to a better understanding of the indicators that contribute to well-being.² Human Flourishing is a productive term that means living in a way that promotes good life, goodness and resiliency.³ Comprehending the factors that promote flourishing can aid in the development and mitigate adverse health consequences.⁴ Despite forgiveness and self-compassion being recognized as important factors in promoting well-being, there is a gap in understanding the relationship between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing.⁵ While research has shown that both forgiveness and self-compassion can lead to improved mental health outcomes, it is unclear how they may interact and contribute to overall human flourishing.⁶ Therefore, this study aims to explore the connection between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing, with the hope of providing insights into whether religion could promote human flourishing, especially among emerging adults at the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

The main objective of this study is to explore the relationship between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion and human flourishing among emerging adults from Lagos Mainland. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Explore religious differences in forgiveness and self-compassion among undergraduates.
2. Examine the relationship between forgiveness and human flourishing among undergraduates among undergraduates.
3. Explore the predictive factors between self-compassion, forgiveness, and human flourishing among undergraduates.
4. Examine gender differences in self-compassion, forgiveness, and human flourishing among undergraduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been said that religion is a multifaceted and multidimensional construct, with potentially wide-ranging causes and significant outcomes, which makes it a valuable area of study for researchers.⁷ The concept of religion and its influence on human behaviour is extensive, encompassing a vast array of positive human experiences. According to Holtge et al, human flourishing, also known as complete human well-being, might be defined as the condition in which a person's life is happy in every way.⁸ Diener, Wirtz, and Tov claimed that important social and psychological functioning such as relatedness, optimism, self-acceptance, feeling competent, having supportive relationships, and contributing to their overall feelings are all important for human flourishing.⁹ Additionally, they argue that all components of flourishing both psychological and social well-being, as well as social-psychological prosperity, are important. Spreitzer et al. note that while thriving includes positive human functioning, it is a narrower construct than flourishing and does not necessarily entail learning

¹ Justyna Mróz, "Forgiveness and Flourishing: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Self-Compassion," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 1 (2022): 666.

² Mróz, "Forgiveness and Flourishing: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Self-Compassion."

³ Corey L M Keyes, Dov Shmotkin, and Carol D Ryff, "Optimizing Well-Being: The Empirical Encounter of Two Traditions.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 6 (2002): 1007.

⁴ Mróz, "Forgiveness and Flourishing: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Self-Compassion."

⁵ Ruchi Pandey et al., "The Relationship between Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing: Inferring the Underlying Psychological Mechanisms," *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 2020, 23–36, https://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.oai-journals-pan-pl-115905/c/oai-journals-pan-pl-115905_full-text_2020-01-PPB-03-Pandey-et-al.pdf-1.

⁶ Filip Raes et al., "Construction and Factorial Validation of a Short Form of the Self-compassion Scale," *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 18, no. 3 (2011): 250–55.

⁷ Jeff Levin, "The Faith Community and the SARS-CoV-2 Outbreak: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 5 (October 2, 2020): 2215–28, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01048-x>.

⁸ J. Hölte et al., "A Systems Perspective on Human Flourishing: Exploring Cross-Country Similarities and Differences of a Multisystemic Flourishing Network," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 18, no. 5 (September 3, 2023): 695–710, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2093784>.

⁹ Ed Diener et al., "New Well-Being Measures: Short Scales to Assess Flourishing and Positive and Negative Feelings," *Social Indicators Research* 97, no. 2 (June 28, 2010): 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y>.

experiences.¹⁰ However, Diehl, et al stated that positive-to-negative balance is also crucial for defining well-being and flourishing.¹¹ Forgeard et al. suggest that human flourishing is characterized by "doing and living well" rather than simply "feeling good."¹² As such, it is distinct from the absence of mental illness but represents a form of positive mental health. Flourishers are emotionally vital and function positively in both personal and social aspects of their lives, without experiencing mental illness. Furthermore, flourishers perceive their lives as going well, realize their potential in various areas, and strive to achieve and contribute to society. They also have fewer work absences, positive personal and social lives, great emotional health, and high productivity.¹³

According to Toussaint et al., forgiveness and religion are complex concepts with multiple dimensions.¹⁴ The primary dimension of forgiveness involves pardoning others and entails replacing negative emotions, thoughts, and intentions toward an offender with positive ones which religion teaches McCullough et al.¹⁵ Although it is often misconstrued as condoning, excusing, denying, or justifying an offence, forgiveness is a distinct and selfless act that has benefits for both the offender and the victim, as stated by Enright et al.¹⁶ Moreover, forgiveness should not be confused with reconciliation or the absence of justice, as highlighted by Luskin.¹⁷ Tuck and Anderson, as well as Webb et al, argued that forgiving oneself is linked to both physical and mental health, as well as too disturbing symptoms and psychological issues which may be linked to health behaviours, interpersonal issues, flourishing, social support and resilience.¹⁸ Moreover, self-forgiveness has its advantages, especially for both intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions. A study of self-forgiveness is valuable in aiding individuals who are experiencing difficulties in relationships, such as those going through a divorce or facing adjustment issues.¹⁹ Additionally, self-forgiveness provides protective and fortifying qualities since it involves reparative actions, resilience, coping mechanisms, and improved self-acceptance.²⁰

The study investigates the connection between self-compassion and human flourishing. Self-compassion means not berating oneself with self-criticism when failure happens, suffering, or feeling

¹⁰ Gretchen Spreitzer et al., "A Socially Embedded Model of Thriving at Work," *Organization Science* 16, no. 5 (October 2005): 537–49, <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0153>.

¹¹ Manfred Diehl, Elizabeth L. Hay, and Kathleen M. Berg, "The Ratio between Positive and Negative Affect and Flourishing Mental Health across Adulthood," *Aging & Mental Health* 15, no. 7 (September 2011): 882–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2011.569488>.

¹² Marie J. C. Forgeard et al., "Doing the Right Thing: Measuring Well-Being for Public Policy," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 1, no. 1 (January 30, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v1i1.15>.

¹³ Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff, "Optimizing Well-Being: The Empirical Encounter of Two Traditions.," Nesrin Gokcen, Kate Hefferon, and Elizabeth Attree, "University Students' Constructions of 'flourishing' in British Higher Education: An Inductive Content Analysis," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 2, no. 1 (April 28, 2012): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v2i1.1>.

¹⁴ Loren Toussaint, Everett Worthington, and David R. Williams, eds., *Forgiveness and Health* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9993-5>.

¹⁵ Michael E. McCullough et al., "Interpersonal Forgiving in Close Relationships: II. Theoretical Elaboration and Measurement.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 6 (1998): 1586–1603, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.6.1586>.

¹⁶ Robert D Enright, Suzanne Freedman, and Julio Rique, "The Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness.," 1998.

¹⁷ Fred Luskin and Frederic Luskin, *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (HarperSanFrancisco San Francisco, CA, 2002).

¹⁸ Inez Tuck and Lorraine Anderson, "Forgiveness, Flourishing, and Resilience: The Influences of Expressions of Spirituality on Mental Health Recovery," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 35, no. 4 (April 4, 2014): 277–82, <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2014.885623>; Jon R. Webb et al., "Forgiveness and Health: Assessing the Mediating Effect of Health Behavior, Social Support, and Interpersonal Functioning," *The Journal of Psychology* 147, no. 5 (September 2013): 391–414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2012.700964>.

¹⁹ Juliet Rohde-Brown and Kjell Erik Rudestam, "The Role of Forgiveness in Divorce Adjustment and the Impact of Affect," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 52, no. 2 (February 17, 2011): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2011.546233>.

²⁰ Berit Ingersoll-Dayton and Neal Krause, "Self-Forgiveness," *Research on Aging* 27, no. 3 (May 19, 2005): 267–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027504274122>; Becki L Cornock, "Forgiveness: Is It a Resiliency Factor for Adult Children of Alcoholics?," 2005, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/7203>.

inadequate.²¹ The concept of self-compassion involves the need to improve one's suffering through some kind of self-improvement effort, without judging oneself as unworthy. Self-compassion is a valuable approach to promoting emotional well-being, contentment, and flourishing,²² as well as enhancing health-related behaviours.²³ According to Neff, self-compassion involves three elements.²⁴ The first is self-kindness and self-judgment, while the second one is common humanity and isolation, and lastly mindfulness and over-identification. Self-compassionate individuals accept their imperfections, failures, and life difficulties as inevitable, which leads to increased emotional equanimity as well as feelings of positive emotions of generosity and care that help them cope with difficulties. They are kind to themselves when faced with difficult situations, instead of becoming anxious when their goals are not met.²⁵ Common humanity involves recognizing that everyone experiences challenges, makes errors and sometimes has feelings of inadequacy.²⁶ Researches consistently demonstrate that self-compassion is strongly linked to flourishing, which is a crucial aspect of life satisfaction.²⁷ Moreover, Gilbert and Irons, posit that developing a self-compassionate perspective among individuals who struggle with high levels of self-criticism and shame may not only reduce negativity but also improve their overall well-being.²⁸ This study explores the gaps in the relationship between religious differences in forgiveness, self-compassion and human flourishing.

The study is also focused on investigating religious differences in forgiveness and self-compassion. Religion, in this research, refers to religious affiliation which refers to the specific religion or domination one identifies with. It examines the mean difference between different religious groups; Christianity, Islam and Traditionalists on forgiveness and self-compassion. A study by Fox and Thomas investigated the connection between religiosity and forgiveness among various affiliations.²⁹ The study found that religious groups report higher levels of forgiveness than secular groups. Many studies have focused on the influence of religiosity on these constructs, rather than religious affiliations.

Tiwari et al. investigated the function of self-esteem in moderating the connection between self-forgiveness and human flourishing.³⁰ The findings revealed a considerable dependency exists between self-esteem, self-forgiveness, and human flourishing, as evidenced by healthy relationships. Major predictors have been found between human flourishing, self-esteem and self-forgiveness

The study by Akin and Akin investigated the predictive influence of self-compassion on flourishing and found that more self-kindness and mindfulness indicated positive thriving.³¹ Ferguson et al. investigated if the self-compassion of female athletes at the beginning of their competitive season

²¹ Kristin D Neff, "Self-Compassion: Theory, Method, Research, and Intervention," *Annual Review of Psychology* 74 (2023): 193–218.

²² Kristin D. Neff, "Self-Compassion, Self-Esteem, and Well-Being," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 5, no. 1 (January 4, 2011): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00330.x>.

²³ Mark R. Leary et al., "Self-Compassion and Reactions to Unpleasant Self-Relevant Events: The Implications of Treating Oneself Kindly.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 5 (May 2007): 887–904, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.5.887>.

²⁴ Neff, "Self-Compassion: Theory, Method, Research, and Intervention"; Kristin D Neff, "The Science of Self-Compassion," *Compassion and Wisdom in Psychotherapy* 1 (2012): 79–92.

²⁵ Kristin D Neff, Kullaya Pisitsungkagarn, and Ya-Ping Hsieh, "Self-Compassion and Self-Constraint in the United States, Thailand, and Taiwan," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 39, no. 3 (2008): 267–85; Neff, "The Science of Self-Compassion."

²⁶ Lisa M Yarnell et al., "Gender Differences in Self-Compassion: Examining the Role of Gender Role Orientation," *Mindfulness* 10 (2019): 1136–52.

²⁷ Neff, "Self-Compassion: Theory, Method, Research, and Intervention."

²⁸ Paul Gilbert and Chris Irons, "Focused Therapies and Compassionate Mind Training for Shame and Self-Attacking," in *Compassion* (Routledge, 2005), 263–325.

²⁹ Adam Fox and Trang Thomas, "Impact of Religious Affiliation and Religiosity on Forgiveness," *Australian Psychologist* 43, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 175–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060701687710>.

³⁰ Gyanesh Kumar Tiwari et al., "Understanding the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem between the Relationship of Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing," *Authorea Preprints*, 2020.

³¹ Ahmet Akin and Umran Akin, "Examining the Predictive Role of Self-Compassion on Flourishing in Turkish University Students," *Anales De Psicología/Annals of Psychology* 31, no. 3 (2015): 802–7.

predicted psychological flourishing beyond self-criticism after the season.³² The findings imply that self-compassion may contribute in a long-lasting and helpful way to some aspects of human flourishing in athletics.

Jafari explored the relationship between character qualities and flourishing, with self-compassion acting as a moderator.³³ According to the study, loving, thankfulness and hope are character traits alongside the mediating role of self-compassion, which have an indirect impact on relationships. De la Fuente et al. evaluated the traits of young adults that are most connected with their flourishing in a total of 1502 emerging adults from Spanish university students aged 18 to 29 years who participated in the survey.³⁴ The study established that females flourished significantly more than males.

Krause examined the link between religiosity and life satisfaction among seniors in the United States.³⁵ The effect of religiosity on life satisfaction was also found to be stronger among people with lower levels of education and those who experienced more life stressors.

Pargament et al. study examined how religion and spirituality impact human flourishing.³⁶ They postulated that religion and spirituality can positively impact human flourishing by providing individuals with meaning, purpose, and social support. However, the authors also noted that negative religious experiences can lead to negative mental health outcomes. The study by Mroz explored the link between flourishing, self-compassion, and forgiveness, the relationship between forgiveness and flourishing was impacted and controlled by self-warmth, which is a positive aspect of self-compassion.³⁷

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits the discourse that focuses on how individuals learn through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. SCT posits that individuals learn from their social environments, including observing and imitating the behavior of others and receiving feedback and reinforcement for their behavior. Forgiveness and self-compassion are two psychological constructs that have been studied within the context of SCT. According to SCT, individuals may learn forgiveness and self-compassion through observing the behavior of others and through feedback and reinforcement. For example, individuals may learn forgiveness by observing others who have forgiven in the past and have experienced positive outcomes, such as improved relationships or reduced stress. Similarly, individuals may learn self-compassion by observing others who have shown kindness and understanding towards themselves during difficult times, and by receiving positive feedback or reinforcement for their self-compassionate behavior. In addition to observational learning, SCT also emphasizes the role of cognitive factors in shaping behavior. For example, individuals may engage in forgiveness and self-compassion if they believe that these behaviors are effective in achieving their goals, such as improving relationships or reducing stress. Overall, SCT helps provide a guide for analysing the development of forgiveness and self-compassion, as these constructs are influenced by

³² Leah J. Ferguson et al., "Self-Compassion or Self-Criticism? Predicting Women Athletes' Psychological Flourishing in Sport in Canada," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 23, no. 5 (June 29, 2022): 1923–39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-021-00483-1>.

³³ Forough Jafari, "The Mediating Role of Self-Compassion in Relation between Character Strengths and Flourishing in College Students," *International Journal of Happiness and Development* 6, no. 1 (2020): 76, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJHD.2020.108755>.

³⁴ Rocío de la Fuente et al., "Flourishing During Emerging Adulthood from a Gender Perspective," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 21, no. 8 (December 30, 2020): 2889–2908, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00204-9>.

³⁵ Neal Krause et al., "Gratitude to God, Self-Rated Health, and Depressive Symptoms," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 2 (June 10, 2014): 341–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12110>.

³⁶ Annette Mahoney and Edward P. Shafranske, "Envisioning an Integrative Paradigm for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.," in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Vol 1): Context, Theory, and Research.*, ed. Kenneth I. Pargament, Julie J. Exline, and James W. Jones (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2013), 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1037/14045-001>.

³⁷ Mróz, "Forgiveness and Flourishing: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Self-Compassion."

both social learning and cognitive factors. By understanding how these behaviors are learned and reinforced, people may be able to inculcate forgiveness and self-compassion in themselves and others.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research was carried out using a cross-sectional research method which allows the researcher to gather information from a large number of participants at a time.

Participants and Sampling Technique

408 participants between the ages of 16 and 39. 215 male and 193 female participants from the University of Lagos were the samples in this study. 408 emerging adults from the University of Lagos, Nigeria were conveniently selected for the study. The distribution of the questionnaire was carried out in learning faculties of the university as well as various halls of residence and was filled by both male and female participants. The descriptive statistics showed the frequency distribution of demographic information of undergraduates of the University of Lagos sampled in this study. It is shown that more of the respondents 52.7% were males. Also, more of them 49.3% were between 16 and 21 years, followed by those between 22 and 27 years (46.1%). Ethnic distribution revealed that more of the respondents 66.9% were from the Yoruba ethnic group. Finally, the majority of the respondents 77.7% indicated to be Christians, 21.1% were Muslims, while the other 1.2% were traditionalists.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study were printed and administered to the participants to fill out. The questionnaire was divided into four sections including Sections A; a sociodemographic questionnaire, Section B, C&D; and a measure of Human flourishing, Forgiveness and Self-compassion respectively.

Section A

This is the first section that requires participants to provide their socio-demographic information that as their gender, age, ethnicity and religious background.

Section B

This section contained the measure for Human Flourishing; the Secure Flourish Measure scale by Vanderweele (2017), a 12-item scale that assesses six domains of human flourishing via two items each; Happiness and Satisfaction with life, Mental and Physical Health, Meaning and Purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships and financial and material stability. The items were selected from a pool of existing questions that have been validated. The items were assessed on a scale of 0-10. The present study converted it to a scale of 1-5. The flourishing scale score is obtained by adding the scores from all six sections with the total ranging from 12-60. The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is obtained at Cronbach Alpha .84 which connotes a high reliability of the flourishing scale.

Section C

The Heartland forgiveness scale developed by Thompson & Snyder was used for measuring forgiveness.³⁸ It instruments has 18 items worded to explore a person's dispositional forgiveness which is one's ability to be forgiving. The Heartland forgiveness scale consists of three sections which are the forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others and the forgiveness of Situations sections. The HFS instrument consists of questions that reveal a person's inclination to forgive him or herself, the people around him or her, and the circumstances that led to the situation. The sample items included questions like; I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done, and I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me. With time I have the understanding of bad circumstances in my life. e.t.c. The

³⁸ L. Y. Thompson and C. R. Snyder, "Measuring Forgiveness," in *Positive Psychological Assessment: A Handbook of Models and Measures*, ed. Shane J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 301-12.

instrument originally used a 7-point Likert scale to measure forgiveness ranging from 1 (strongly disagree)- 7 (strongly agree), but was narrowed down to a 5-point Likert scale for this study, varying from 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5= Strongly agree. It also contains 9 reverse items out of 18 items to be scored in reverse. The reliability coefficient of the scale on Cronbach's Alpha of .75 was obtained indicating a high reliability of the scale.

Section D

The last section of the questionnaire is the Self Compassion Scale Short Form (SCSSF) by Raes et Al which measures self-compassion which means being kind and understanding towards one's self.³⁹ It has 12 items, the shorter version of the Self Compassion Scale of 26 items, and had a near-perfect correlation with it when examining total scores. To create the scale, two items from each of the six self-compassion sub-scales were selected that demonstrated high correlations with the long SCS total score and high correlations with their intended SCS subscale. It consists of six sub-scales, self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= Almost never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4=Often and 5= Almost always. It contains 6 reverse score items out of 12 items. The SCS-SF reported internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha \geq .86) when validated in three different samples and a good correlation with the long-form SCS ($r \geq$.97 in all samples). The SCS-SF is a reliable alternative to the long-form SCS, particularly in overall self-compassion scores.

Procedure

The researcher initiated the study by identifying the independent and dependent variables of interest and acquiring standardized instruments to measure them accurately. Given that the target population was undergraduate students in Nigeria, the researcher chose to conduct the study at the University of Lagos, which was conveniently located near the researcher and had a large population of undergraduate students. To reach the students, the researcher visited male and female halls of residence and various faculties on campus, where students typically spend most of their time. Using an accidental sampling method, the researcher approached students and explained that they were surveying a B.Sc. degree project and requested their participation. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out for one week and three days. An ethical clearance was obtained before the commencement of the research. However, before administering the questionnaires, the researcher also obtained consent from the subjects by thoroughly debriefing them about the survey. They were told the purpose of the survey was to test and generalize a hypothesis. The subjects were also informed about the nature of the study, assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. Those who agreed were given a questionnaire with clear instructions and a pen to fill it out. The researcher was available to assist with any questions and checked each questionnaire upon collection to ensure all sections were completed. These questionnaires were counted, numbered and submitted to the supervisor for approval. The researcher used a Microsoft Excel package to code the data for the questionnaire and analyzed the data using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software.

Data Analysis

The valid data collected from the respondents was imported from an Excel sheet into SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and included the frequencies and percentages of demographic characteristics as well as the mean and standard deviation of variables. Inferential statistics were used for hypothesis testing. The first hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson's product correlation to examine the relationships between forgiveness, self-compassion and Human flourishing. The second hypothesis was analyzed using Multiple regression analysis to examine the joint and independent influence of forgiveness and self-compassion on the dependent variable, human flourishing. The third hypothesis was analyzed using the independent t-test to explore the gender differences in all variables. Finally, the last hypothesis was analyzed using One-Way ANOVA and a

³⁹ Raes et al., "Construction and Factorial Validation of a Short Form of the Self-compassion Scale."

post-hoc test to examine the influence of religion on forgiveness and self-compassion. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One

Muslim participants will score higher on forgiveness and self-compassion than Christians among undergraduates. This was tested One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: One-Way ANOVA summary table showing results on the influence of religion on forgiveness and self-compassion

| | | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|-----------------|----------------|----------|-----|--------|------|------|
| Forgiveness | Between Groups | 405.78 | 2 | 202.89 | 3.86 | <.05 |
| | Within Groups | 20756.89 | 395 | 52.55 | | |
| | Total | 21162.67 | 397 | | | |
| Self-Compassion | Between Groups | 91.39 | 2 | 45.69 | 1.34 | >.05 |
| | Within Groups | 13554.74 | 398 | 34.06 | | |
| | Total | 13646.13 | 400 | | | |

Table 1 presents results on the influence of religion on forgiveness and self-compassion. It is shown that religion had no significant influence on self-compassion [$F(2, 398) = 1.34; p > .05$]. However, religion had a significant influence on forgiveness [$F(2, 395) = 3.86; p < .05$]. Further analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Post-Hoc and Descriptive of religion on forgiveness

| SN | Religion | 1 | 2 | 3 | Mean | SD |
|----|--------------|-------|------|---|-------|------|
| 1 | Christianity | - | | | 40.35 | 7.35 |
| 2 | Islam | 1.86* | - | | 38.49 | 6.80 |
| 3 | Traditional | 6.35 | 4.49 | - | 34.00 | 8.46 |

Hypothesis Two

There will be a significant positive relationship between forgiveness, self-compassion and human flourishing among undergraduates. This was tested using Pearson r correlation and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Zero-order correlation summary table showing results on the relationship among forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing.

**** Significant at 0.01, * Significant at 0.05**

| SN | Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----|-------------------|-------|------|-------|-----|---|
| 1 | Human flourishing | 40.10 | 8.09 | - | | |
| 2 | Forgiveness | 39.86 | 7.30 | .14** | | |
| 3 | Self-compassion | 32.22 | 5.84 | .06 | .08 | - |

Table 3. presents results on the relationship among human flourishing, forgiveness, and self-compassion among emerging adults at the University of Lagos. It is shown that human flourishing had a significant relationship with forgiveness ($r = .14; p < .01$). The direction of the relationship is positive, hence, implying that the higher the forgiveness attitude of the participants, the more they flourish.

Also from Table 3, it is shown that there exists no significant relationship between human flourishing and self-compassion ($r = .06; p > .05$).

Hypothesis Three

Self-compassion and forgiveness will significantly predict human flourishing among undergraduates. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis summary table showing results on the joint and independent influence of self-compassion and forgiveness on human flourishing

| Predictors | β | T | p | R | R ² | F | p |
|-----------------|---------|------|------|----|----------------|------|------|
| Forgiveness | .13 | 2.56 | <.01 | | | | |
| | | | | 14 | .02 | 3.76 | <0.5 |
| Self-compassion | .04 | .78 | >.05 | | | | |

Table 4 presents results on the joint and independent influence of forgiveness and self-compassion on human flourishing among undergraduates. It is shown that forgiveness and self-compassion were significant joint predictors of human flourishing [R = .14; R² = .02; F (2, 382) = 3.76; p < .05]. Collectively, forgiveness and self-compassion accounted for about a 2% variance in human flourishing. However, only forgiveness had an independent influence on human flourishing (β = .13; t = 2.56; p < .05). This confirms the stated hypothesis.

Hypothesis Four

Males will report greater self-compassion, forgiveness and human flourishing than females among undergraduates. This was tested using a t-test for independent samples and the result is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: T-test for independent samples summary table showing results on gender differences in flourishing, forgiveness, and self-compassion

| | Gender | N | Mean | SD | t | df | p |
|-----------------|--------|-----|-------|------|------|-----|------|
| Flourishing | Male | 209 | 39.51 | 8.60 | 1.52 | 398 | >.05 |
| | Female | 191 | 40.74 | 7.45 | | | |
| Forgiveness | Male | 209 | 39.81 | 7.34 | .15 | 398 | >.05 |
| | Female | 191 | 39.92 | 7.28 | | | |
| Self-compassion | Male | 209 | 32.31 | 6.22 | .33 | 398 | >.05 |
| | Female | 191 | 32.13 | 5.41 | | | |

Table 5 presents results on gender differences in human flourishing, forgiveness and self-compassion among undergraduates at the University of Lagos. It is shown that there exists no significant difference in human flourishing [t (398) = 1.52; p > .05], forgiveness [t (398) = .15; p > .05] and self-compassion [t (398) = .33; p > .05]. This negates the stated hypothesis. It is shown in Table 3.5a that there exists a significant mean difference between Christians and Muslims (MD = 1.86; p < .05). Also, it is shown that Christians reported the highest on forgiveness (Mean = 40.35; SD = 7.35), compared to other religion.

DISCUSSION

The study explored the relationship between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing among undergraduates at the University of Lagos. This study also explored the predictive factors of forgiveness and self-compassion on human flourishing. The study also examined gender

differences in self-compassion, forgiveness and human flourishing and explored religious differences in forgiveness and self-compassion among undergraduates.

The finding from this study showed that human flourishing had a positive relationship with forgiveness among undergraduates. This implies that the more an individual forgives, the more likely they are to flourish in life. This finding agrees with the study by Tiwari et al. who found a positive relationship between forgiveness and human flourishing.⁴⁰ Tiwari et al. study also revealed that self-forgiveness correlated positively with all the dimensions of flourishing.⁴¹ The finding of the present study is also in consonance with the study by Verma and Tiwari who found that many aspects of human flourishing were favourably correlated with the positive aspects of self-compassion.⁴² The finding of the present study aligns with the study by Pandey et al. who found that self-forgiveness correlated positively with all the dimensions of flourishing.⁴³

Findings from this study showed that forgiveness and self-compassion were significant joint predictors of human flourishing among undergraduates. The result indicates that only forgiveness influences human flourishing independently. The results of the study support the hypothesis that forgiveness and self-compassion will be significant joint predictors of human flourishing and suggest that these two constructs may work together to promote human flourishing. This is consistent with previous research by Webb who found that forgiveness and self-compassion can both help individuals cope with negative emotions and experiences.⁴⁴ The finding of the present study is also consistent with the study by Neff and Germer who found that participants reported larger increases in self-compassion, mindfulness, and wellbeing.⁴⁵ The present study revealed that self-compassion is not an independent predictor of human flourishing. On the contrary, the finding of the study does not align with the study by Ferguson et al. who found that self-compassion may contribute in a long-lasting and adaptive way to some aspects of psychological flourishing in athletics.⁴⁶ The difference between the findings of both studies may be a result of the difference in participants sampled. The present study sampled undergraduates while the Ferguson et al. study sampled athletes.

The finding of the present study revealed no gender differences in human flourishing, forgiveness, and self-compassion among undergraduates. This finding is in harmony with the study by Verma and Tiwari who found no gender differences in the human flourishing of male and female participants.⁴⁷ The finding of the present study is also in harmony with the study by Keyes et al. who found no gender disparities in the participant's self-forgiveness.⁴⁸ This finding aligns with Bluth and Blanton's study which found no gender difference in self-compassion.⁴⁹ The finding is not in harmony with Tiwari et al. study which found that gender was significantly negatively associated with human flourishing.⁵⁰ The difference between the findings of both studies may be a result of the difference in

⁴⁰ Tiwari et al., "Understanding the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem between the Relationship of Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing."

⁴¹ Tiwari et al., "Understanding the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem between the Relationship of Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing."

⁴² Yogendra Verma and Gyanesh Kumar Tiwari, "Self-Compassion as the Predictor of Flourishing of the Students," *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 4, no. 3 (2017): 10–29, https://dhsgsu.edu.in/images/psychology/Research_Articles/2017-YV.pdf.

⁴³ Pandey et al., "The Relationship between Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing: Inferring the Underlying Psychological Mechanisms."

⁴⁴ Rosemary Webb, "Leading Teaching and Learning in the Primary School," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 33, no. 1 (January 30, 2005): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143205048175>.

⁴⁵ Kristin D. Neff and Christopher K. Germer, "A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 69, no. 1 (January 15, 2013): 28–44, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.21923>.

⁴⁶ Ferguson et al., "Self-Compassion or Self-Criticism? Predicting Women Athletes' Psychological Flourishing in Sport in Canada."

⁴⁷ Verma and Tiwari, "Self-Compassion as the Predictor of Flourishing of the Students."

⁴⁸ Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff, "Optimizing Well-Being: The Empirical Encounter of Two Traditions."

⁴⁹ Karen Bluth and Priscilla W Blanton, "The Influence of Self-Compassion on Emotional Well-Being among Early and Older Adolescent Males and Females," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 3 (2015): 219–30.

⁵⁰ Tiwari et al., "Understanding the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem between the Relationship of Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing."

participants sampled. The present study sampled students from all faculties while Tiwari et al. study sampled students from the disciplines, including the arts, business, science, and law.⁵¹ The finding of the present study is not in harmony with De la Fuente et al. study which found gender differences in human flourishing.⁵² The difference in findings of both studies may be accounted for difference in the participants sampled. De la Fuente et al. study sampled Spanish university students while the present study sampled Nigerian university students.⁵³ In the same vein, the finding of the present study is not in harmony with the Yarnell et al study which found higher levels of self-compassion in self-identified men than in self-identified women.⁵⁴ The difference in findings of both studies may be accounted for difference in scales used to measure self-compassion. While Yarnell et al (2019) study used the 26-item Self-Compassion Scale, the present study used the Self Compassion Scale Short Form (SCSSF) developed by Raes et al.⁵⁵ This finding does not agree with Amemiya and Sakairi's study which found that female athletes scored lower on mindfulness, self-compassion, and one subscale of the Burnout Scale compared to male athletes.⁵⁶ The difference between both findings may be accounted for the difference in the participants sampled. Amemiya and Sakairi sampled athletes in Japan while the present study sampled undergraduates from Nigeria.⁵⁷

The present study revealed that religion had no influence on self-compassion but had a significant influence on forgiveness among undergraduates. This finding aligns with Fox and Thomas's study which found that in comparison to the secular group, religious groups reported much higher levels of projective and attitude forgiveness.⁵⁸

Discussion Summary

The current study investigated the relationship between religion, forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing among undergraduates at the University of Lagos. This study also investigated how forgiveness and self-compassion influence human flourishing. It further examined gender differences in self-compassion, forgiveness, and human flourishing, as well as religious differences in forgiveness and self-compassion among undergraduates. The present study demonstrated that human flourishing and forgiveness had a positive relationship. This shows that as the degree of flourishing increases, the practice of forgiveness increases. On the other hand, as the degree of flourishing decreases, the practice of forgiveness decreases.

The present study also demonstrated that forgiveness and self-compassion were joint predictors of human flourishing among undergraduates. This goes on to show that the constructs of forgiveness and self-compassion work together to predict and promote human flourishing among undergraduates. The present study demonstrated that there is no gender difference in forgiveness and self-compassion. That is, the study shows that males and females express the same level of forgiveness and do not differ. Likewise, the degree of self-compassion between males and females is similar and does not differ.

The present study demonstrated that religion did not influence self-compassion. Thus, the study asserts that Muslims, Christians, and Traditional worshippers express the same level of self-compassion. Also, the study demonstrated that religion influenced forgiveness. Thus, the study asserts that Muslims, Christians and Traditional worshippers express different levels of forgiveness with Christians reporting the highest level of forgiveness compared to other religions.

⁵¹ Tiwari et al., "Understanding the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem between the Relationship of Self-Forgiveness and Human Flourishing."

⁵² de la Fuente et al., "Flourishing During Emerging Adulthood from a Gender Perspective."

⁵³ de la Fuente et al., "Flourishing During Emerging Adulthood from a Gender Perspective."

⁵⁴ Yarnell et al., "Gender Differences in Self-Compassion: Examining the Role of Gender Role Orientation."

⁵⁵ Raes et al., "Construction and Factorial Validation of a Short Form of the Self-compassion Scale."

⁵⁶ Rei Amemiya et al., "Effects of Yoga in a Physical Education Course on Attention Control and Mental Health among Graduate Students with High Sensory Processing Sensitivity," *Cogent Psychology* 7, no. 1 (December 31, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2020.1778895>.

⁵⁷ Amemiya et al., "Effects of Yoga in a Physical Education Course on Attention Control and Mental Health among Graduate Students with High Sensory Processing Sensitivity."

⁵⁸ Fox and Thomas, "Impact of Religious Affiliation and Religiosity on Forgiveness."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- By understanding the relationship between forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing, students should develop strategies to improve their well-being and flourishing. Parents and lecturers should help the students develop the skills and behaviors necessary to manage stress, build positive relationships, and maintain a positive outlook.
- By promoting forgiveness, society will reduce conflict and promote peaceful resolution of disputes between and among individuals.
- This study provides empirical evidence of the relationship between these constructs, the study can help to refine and advance existing theoretical models.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the Nexus of Religion, Forgiveness, and Human Flourishing; This study delves into the intricate connections among religion, forgiveness, and human flourishing in emerging adults. It elucidates how religious beliefs and practices influence the ability to forgive and the subsequent impact on overall well-being and flourishing. This research underscores the importance of self-compassion within the realm of religious beliefs and forgiveness. Investigating how self-compassion acts as a psychological bridge between religious beliefs, forgiveness, and human flourishing, enhances scholarly knowledge by revealing the underlying mechanisms in operation. This study enhances academic discourse by offering a nuanced comprehension of the interplay among religion, forgiveness, self-compassion, and human flourishing in emerging adults within the unique setting of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The research outcomes provide valuable perspectives for advancing theoretical frameworks and implementing practical strategies in the realms of psychology, religious studies, and cultural research.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Gbenusola Abike Akinwale (PhD) is a Developmental Psychologist trained at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. A trained Psychologist and behaviour analyst, who also works as a gender specialist. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of International Relations and Politics, North West University, South Africa. She teaches Psychology at Undergraduate and graduate levels at the University of Lagos.

Victor Ojatorotu is a scholar of International relations and an astute Professor at North West University, South Africa. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. A First Class Honours graduate (BSc) from the prestigious Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria in International Relations and an MSc. Degree in the same school. He has actively worked at various capacities as an academic of repute in the last 28 years, specifically, he worked for Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and Monash University, Johannesburg. Currently, he holds a position as Deputy Director, School of Government Studies, North West University, Mafikeng – South Africa and was recently appointed as an Honorary Professor at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) South Africa. His research interests span several areas which are not limited to peace and conflict issues, social movements, environmentalism, peace advocacy and inter-ethnic harmony in local communities in Africa.