

Optimism and Forgiveness in HIV+ Adults

Stacey Smith, B.S. and Mark Vosvick, Ph.D.*

University of North Texas

*Corresponding author: Mark Vosvick, Department of Psychology, UNT, P.O. Box 311280, Denton, TX 76203-1280. (940) 565-4715; Fax: 940 565-4682; vosvick@unt.edu.

Even though forgiveness has been thought of as a concept and thought of as being good for physical and emotional health, only recently has it been examined under the eye of theoretical models and by conducting empirical studies. This study explores the relationship between optimism/pessimism and forgiveness in HIV+ adults that were recruited from AIDS Service Organizations in the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex. Participants ($n = 259$; 49% male) included 54% African Americans, 31% Caucasians, 10% Hispanic, and 5% others with 73% taking HIV medications. Participants completed demographic, medical questionnaires, Extended Life Orientation Test (ELOT) measuring Optimism/Pessimism, and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Edwards, 2002) to measure Forgiveness. Optimism had significant positive correlations with all areas of forgiveness [self ($r=.37, p<.01$), others ($r=.25, p<.01$), situation ($r=.37, p<.01$) and total forgiveness ($r=.39, p<.01$)] while pessimism had significant negative associations with each area of forgiveness [self ($r=-.42, p<.01$), others ($r=-.25, p<.01$), situation ($r=-.47, p<.01$), and total forgiveness ($r=-.46, p<.01$)].

A hierarchical regression analysis of forgiveness [adjusted $R^2=.36$, $F(12,213)=11.30, p<.001$] found that as pessimism ($t=-7.43, p<.001$) decreased and as optimism ($t=6.75, p<.001$) increased, so did total forgiveness. Thirty percent of the variance in forgiveness of self [adjusted $R^2=.30, F(12,213)=8.99, p<.001$] was accounted for by the absence of pessimism ($t=-6.48, p<.001$), optimism ($t=5.81, p<.001$) and income level ($t=2.43, p<.05$) all playing a role. Additionally, 37% of the variation in forgiveness of the situation was accounted for in one model [$r^2=.37, F(12,213)=12.02, p<.001$] with optimism ($t=6.34, p<.001$), AIDS symptoms ($t=2.23, p<.05$) and the absence of pessimism ($t=-8.15, p<.001$) all playing a role. These findings suggest a consistent relationship with forgiveness and optimism/pessimism and suggest the state of mind that is most conducive to forgiving of self and of the situation in HIV+ adults.