

Forgiveness as a Method of Coping against Burnout in Private Security Professionals

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Purpose

This is an ongoing study examining the relationship between the dimensions of forgiveness (forgiven self, forgiven others and forgiven by God) and contributing factors toward burnout, to include occupational stress, shame, guilt and moral distress. The private security industry has been expanding rapidly since the 1980's, with many businesses and governmental organizations turning to private security businesses to supplement law enforcement services (Fixler & Poole, 1988). Over time, private security professionals (PSP's) have been increasingly tasked with law enforcement responsibilities. As a result, private security companies have begun structuring themselves similar to law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement officers (LEO's) have been shown to be at a substantial risk for developing burnout due to a myriad of factors pertaining to their job (Russell et al., 2014). One study found that 19% of participating LEO's reported severe levels of emotional exhaustion and 13% presented extreme depersonalization levels (McMarty et al., 2019). As PSP's continue to take over the responsibilities of law enforcement, they, too, are at an elevated risk of developing burnout. Despite this increased risk, there is little focus on examining burnout in the private security industry.

Hypothesis

I expect that the results of the study will be consistent with existing literature, showing that the subscales of forgiveness will be effective at alleviating shame, guilt, moral distress and occupational stress, in addition to an overall negative association between forgiveness and burnout levels.

Method

Participants are being recruited via snowball sampling and must be currently certified/licensed to work private security in the United States. Data is being collected via a 42-item anonymous Google Forms questionnaire.

Measures

- Stress** - Single Item Measure of Stress Symptoms (Fredriksson-Larsson et al., 2015)
- Burnout** - Single Item Measures of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization (West et al., 2009)
- Forgiveness** - Scale developed by Toussaint et al. (2001)
- Shame and Guilt** – PFQ-Brief (Rice et al., 2018)
- Moral Distress** - Moral Distress Thermometer (Wocial & Weaver, 2013)
- Depression and Anxiety** - PHQ-4 (Kroenke et al., 2009)

Results

I used a bivariate correlation of the data collected so far to evaluate the effectiveness of forgiveness practices against burnout and its contributing factors in my sample (see Table 1). The results of this analysis show that forgiveness practices are negatively associated with contributing factors of burnout in PSP's, though the significance of these associations varies. Forgiven self showed significant negative associations with self-critical and shame-related variables.

Forgiven others showed significant negative associations with stress, guilt and worrying, suggesting that it is effective at mitigating interpersonal or otherwise-external distress. Forgiven by God also showed negative associations with regret, feeling stupid, feeling disgusting and general anxiety measures, suggesting that it holds influence over both internal and external negative emotions.

	Forgiven Self	Forgiven Others	Forgiven by God
Stress	-.293	-.530*	-.291
Emotional Exhaustion	-.062	-.337	-.171
Depersonalization	-.046	.110	-.208
Mild Guilt	-.373	-.206	-.450
Intense Guilt	-.369	-.459*	-.454
Regret	-.677***	-.356	-.511*
Feeling Humiliated	.108	.236	.183
Feeling Stupid	-.575**	-.243	-.510*
Feeling Helpless	-.422	-.046	-.265
Feeling Disgusting	-.604**	-.313	-.488*
Moral Distress	.115	.122	-.216
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	-.318	-.404	-.536*
Uncontrollable worrying	-.450	-.586**	-.534*
Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	-.363	-.497*	-.318
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	-.185	-.213	-.185

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

Discussion

While responses are still being collected, there are trends already emerging in the data. The results have been mostly in line with my hypothesis. Overall, higher levels of forgiveness tend to be associated with reduced contributing factors of burnout. One observation I found interesting was that the practices of forgiveness seem to be most effective at combatting burnout when all three practices are implemented, as there are no burnout contributors that are significantly negatively associated with all three forgiveness practices. Additionally, I noted that variables such as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization did not show consistent significant associations with forgiveness practices, suggesting that forgiveness may have a stronger influence on internal emotional experiences rather than occupational stressors. Ultimately, the data thus far suggests that PSP's would benefit from the implementation of forgiveness practices in their professional, personal and spiritual lives.

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