

LUTSI, ELLA S., Ph.D., May 2005

COUNSELING AND
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES

FORGIVINGNESS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIENTS' DISPOSITIONS
TO FORGIVE INTERPERSONAL TRANSGRESSIONS AND THEIR ANGER,
DEPRESSION, AND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT (209 pp.)

Co- Directors of Dissertation: Donald L. Bubenzer
John D. West

The primary objective of this study was to determine if, and how, clients' dispositions to forgive interpersonal transgressions were associated with anger, depression, and religious commitment. Previous researchers have studied the association between forgiveness, anger, and depression but typically have used university students or designated groups of people outside of the clinical realm. Furthermore, forgiveness in previous studies has been measured at an offense-specific level, rather than a more generalized disposition to forgive. The present investigation addressed these shortcomings by using a clinical population and measuring forgiveness at a dispositional level.

In addition, several researchers have examined the association between religiosity and forgiveness and discovered that religious people value forgiveness more than people who are less religious. However, it was not known whether religious people have a greater tendency to actually forgive interpersonal transgressions than people who are less religious. This study examined participants' tendencies to forgive interpersonal transgressions in relationship to religious commitment.

The participants were 150 counseling clients at an espoused Christian mental health facility in Northeast Ohio. The MMPI-2, TNTF, RCI-10, and a demographic questionnaire, containing an interpersonal transgression(s) survey question, were completed. Correlation matrices, independent *t*-tests, and multiple linear regression analyses were computed to examine research hypotheses.

The results of the study revealed that clients' dispositions to forgive interpersonal transgressions were negatively linked to depression and anger, while positively associated with religious commitment. In addition, the findings showed that clients with a stronger religious commitment had a tendency to forgive interpersonal transgressions more often than clients who were less religious. That is, religious activity distinguished between people high and low in forgivingness.

This research provided empirical support for the association between forgivingness and mental health. Namely, the findings suggest that people who are low in forgivingness might be more prone to anger, depression, and interpersonal difficulties than people who are high in forgivingness.