

It's easier to forgive when you are under chronic stress

July 7 2022



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Russian researchers have studied the correlation between personality authenticity (the ability to be oneself) and the ability to forgive under different levels of stress. They found that people experiencing chronic stress are more inclined to forgive, while people affected by everyday stress are less inclined to do so. The ability to forgive promotes

authenticity. The results of the study, which have been published in the journal *Clinical Psychology and Special Education*, can be used in life coaching programs.

Authenticity—the ability "to be oneself"—helps people cope with different life trials. The ability to forgive—to overcome the feeling of offense by the person who caused harm or difficult life circumstances—also helps in maintaining psychological well-being. Despite the importance of these phenomena for personality psychology studies, their correlation has virtually gone unstudied. The ability to forgive is only now beginning to be investigated in Russian personality psychology, while almost no papers have been published on its relations to other positive personality phenomena.

No research works have examined [authenticity](#), the ability to forgive as a moral quality, and levels of [stress](#). HSE Faculty of Social Sciences Professor Sofya Nartova-Bochaver joined her colleague Violetta Park to study how stress impacts authenticity and the ability to forgive. To establish the correlations, the researchers surveyed 140 young men and women aged 16 to 40.

The respondents belonged to different cohorts in terms of stress they were experiencing. They included the relatively well-off (students living in Moscow from a teacher training university), the [cohort](#) experiencing everyday stress due to routine responsibilities (students at one of Moscow's international classical universities), and the chronic stress cohort caused by a [severe trauma](#) with irreversible consequences (patients of a rehabilitation center with severe spinal injuries). Standardized questionnaires were used in the research.

The study showed that people with chronic stress demonstrate the highest levels of authenticity. The relatively well-off patients show average results, while the everyday stress cohort returned the lowest

levels. The same trends work for the ability to forgive.

Researchers explain the high inclination to forgive among representatives of the chronic stress cohort by post-traumatic growth effect. Despite the fact that these people face very severe life conditions—they depend physically on other people; their normal bodily sensations have changed, and many capabilities have been lost—they are more likely to discover their real purpose in life and the most important values. They feel "more like themselves" and are able to disregard the multiple misfortunes and imperfections in life by means of forgiveness in order to move on.

Representatives of the "relatively well-off" cohort adapt easily to themselves and the world, have moderately high authenticity and a readiness to forgive other people, themselves, and the circumstances that life presents them with. The lowest ability to forgive and the lowest level of authenticity were seen in the everyday stress cohort. Likely due to the 'invisibility' and 'unimportance' of everyday troubles, these people are unaware of their everyday stress until their reaction to it peaks. This is why people who believe that they deal with routine pressure well are in fact exhausted and become too demanding to themselves and others.

The researchers also looked into how authenticity correlates with the ability to forgive depending on stress levels. These phenomena are generally positively correlated: people who tend to show mercy and forgive others or unfavorable life conditions are more likely to feel the authenticity of their own personality; however, the strength of this correlation varies depending on stress.

In the [chronic stress](#) cohort, authenticity has almost no correlation with the ability to forgive; rather, it appears that they develop in parallel. For the relatively well-off and those under everyday stress, forgiveness of oneself has become the most important condition to experience

authenticity, but only in the everyday stress cohort have researchers detected a high importance of forgiving life circumstances and events. The more developed the ability to forgive oneself and life circumstances is, along with a greater readiness to forget about vengeance or restoring justice, the truer, more real life people live.

The scholars concluded that an ability to forgive really contributes to feeling authenticity, but at different levels of stress and under different types of stress the factors that cause it may change.

Nartova-Bochaver says that "in rapidly changing, highly ambiguous conditions, it is extremely important to have a wide range of life skills and personality qualities, among which the ability to forgive is undoubtedly essential."

More information: C.К. Нартова-Бочавер et al, Authenticity and Dispositional Forgiveness at Different Stress Levels: A Preliminary Study, *Clinical Psychology and Special Education* (2022). [DOI: 10.17759/cpse.2022110107](https://doi.org/10.17759/cpse.2022110107)

Provided by National Research University Higher School of Economics

Citation: It's easier to forgive when you are under chronic stress (2022, July 7) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-07-easier-chronic-stress.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.