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## Forgiveness Flexibility

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### ABSTRACT

Forgiveness flexibility is the skill to minimize the negative effect of an event by using cognitive, affective and behavioral skills while taking a stand at the end of an injurious process. A number of studies were conducted to test the flexibility of the structure of forgiveness. The theoretical structure, structural validity and the confirmatory factor analysis supported the theoretical structure of forgiveness flexibility. The criterion validity evaluated in similar manners was found high. Forgiveness flexibility designed as a three dimensional structure and its sub-dimensions was confirmed theoretically as the recognition of forgiveness and the internalization of forgiveness through insight and its practice.

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Recognition Forgiveness, gaining insight, forgiveness as attitude.

### Introduction

Forgiveness has been defined as a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgement, and indifferent behavior toward offender (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998); responding with beneficence to the offender (Baskin & Enright, 2004); including empathy, humility and courage against offender (Worthington, 1998a). healing emotional wounds, restoring relationships (both inter- and intrapersonal), maintaining physical health, healthy intimate relationships and breaking the chain of violence (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993; Fincham, Hall & Beach, 2006; Szablowinski, 2010; Wade, 1989) are some functions of forgiveness. According to Fitzgibbons, Enright, and O'Brien (2004), "Forgiveness is a way to decrease negative feelings, hostile behaviors and obsessive thoughts". Wade and Worthington (2005) defines forgiveness as a positive method to cope with injury through reorientation of thoughts, feelings and behaviors toward offender. At the same time lay people describe the concept of forgiveness as a multidimensional concept which includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral components (Kearns & Fincham, 2004).

One of the most important elements in forgiveness is the victim's ability to evaluate -or rather re-evaluate- the offender not only within the framework of the incident that cause the offense, but within the offender's own circumstances (Enright & Kitle, 1999). It should be prevented that the offending incident's forgiveness does not harm the forgiving individual's sense of self-respect and mental health (North, 1998). In fact, the

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positive interest of the forgiving person towards the offender will increase (Wade & Worthington, 2005). Forgiveness is a concept that helps the individual remove the negative feeling from their life and turn it into a neutral or positive feeling. In literature, we can see tools to measure forgiveness. These measurement tools help determine to what extent the individual has forgiven or what exactly the individual has forgiven. In short, there are measuring tools are mainly result-oriented measures. However, forgiveness requires a process. The make sense out of the incidents and to make a decision of forgiveness requires an internal transformation within the individual. The term forgiveness flexibility has been suggested in order to explain this transformation process.

Flexibility is defined as a necessary component of an individual's capability of adapting to difficult situations and its communicational skills (Cheung, 2001; Martin & Anderson, 1998). Based on the conditions created by the values individuals are related to, flexibility enables people to be insistent in their behavior when they desire to live the present moment, or to change their behavior in order to learn how to do things and to have better mental health (Bond, Hayes & Barnes-Holmes, 2006). There have been developed a number of terms in literature related to the concept of flexibility. All these concepts commonly emphasize the harmoniousness of an individual and the protection of mental health. Psychological flexibility is a qualification including the acceptance of experiences and behaving in accordance with an individual's values (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006). Cognitive flexibility is an individual's ability to try new ways of communication and its desire to meet different situations (Martin & Anderson, 1998). Coping flexibility has been defined as the ability to realize and discontinue ineffective coping strategies, to develop new coping strategies and to implement them (Kato, 2012). Based on the literature work on forgiveness, we can define forgiveness flexibility as an individual's ability to extricate its cognitive, emotional and behavioral potential while determining a position in face of an offending incident in order to minimize the negative effects of this incident in an optimal amount of time. The individual goes through a cognitive preparatory phase by knowing what real forgiveness is. He/She tries to make sense out of the offensive incident or person, approaching the incidents with gained insight rather than evaluating the incident from its offensive perspective. Flexibility is predicted as the behavior the individual will adopt, from the moment he/she feels ready to remove the negative effects of the offense and its components that caused the offence, and shows an effort to increase positive feelings towards the incident. In this context, the requirements for a healthy forgiveness process have been identified as the individual's acknowledgement of the concept of forgiveness, to truly know and internalize the concept and to finally apply forgiveness through a method which is true to the individual.

### **Acknowledging the Concept of Forgiveness**

Acknowledging the concept of forgiveness is important by means of increasing awareness and to make sense out of the incidents. The process of forgiveness starts with a self-aware decision. A process model developed by Enright and the "Human Development Study Group" (1996) starts off with the acknowledgement of the concept. Diblasio (1998) believes that individuals have a cognitive control over deciding to forgive. The first step in the forgiveness process is the victim's decision to overcome the incidents (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993; Szablowinski, 2010); and as a result, an effort to try to understand the offender (Fitzgibbons et al., 2004). People are more inclined to forgive people they feel close to and they can emphasize with (McCullough, Root, Tabak & Witvliet, 2009), along with family members (Hantman & Cohen, 2010). These findings could be interpreted in two ways. First, external factors such as the nature of the offense or the status of the relationship before the offense are effective in taking the first step of deciding to forgive (Baskin & Enright, 2004). Another implication might be that people feel an obligation towards forgiving the people they feel close to. This obligation may result in a social expectation and thus cause the emotional forgiveness to fail (Karremans et al., 2011). Forgiveness is entirely subjective and can only happen when it is purged from external pressure. This indicates the importance of acknowledging the concept of forgiveness correctly.

## **Internalizing the Nature of Forgiveness**

Forgiveness requires insight (Worthington, 1998b) and this insight enables to break a vicious circle resulting from the offense (Hargrave, 1994). Forgiveness especially focuses on the individual's internal transformation (Enright et al., 1998) and includes the increase in feelings such as empathy and compassion (Haris, Thoresen & Kopeck, 2007). Findings have shown that individuals with high emotional stability and harmoniousness see forgiveness as a useful mechanism to maintain a relationship, and therefore forgive easier (Neto, 2007). After the offense, the individual should seek to make sense of the process, to accept what is experienced and to minimize the negative effects of the process. The individual who truly acknowledges the concept is fully aware what good the individual will do to him/herself by forgiving (Strelan, Mckee, Calic, Cook & Shaw, 2013). Besides extricating negative emotions, the recovery of the relationship could also be a side-product of forgiveness.

## **Actualization of Forgiveness**

From a behavioral standpoint, forgiveness is defined as the overcoming of destructive behavior within a relationship (McCullough et al., 2009). If forgiveness is not correctly acknowledged and the necessary internal transformation has not taken place, the process of condone, excuse, forget, ignore, reconciliation, deny (Enright et al., 1998; Enright & Kittle, 1999) will come into play instead of forgiveness. Another possibility is pseudo-forgiveness. Pseudo forgiveness includes the expectation of appreciation by the offender (Enright et al., 1998).

In order for an individual to correctly apply forgiveness, it is crucial that the individual knows what forgiveness is and what it is not. The awareness on forgiveness created by knowledge on a cognitive level will make the individual prepared for the initiation of the forgiveness process. With the internalization phase, the process with which the individual needs the most time begins. The individual becomes ready for the practice phase after he/she has accepted what has happened and has identified individual methods on how to integrate coping mechanisms with his/her own personal preferences. In practice, the individual -as a being with freedom of choice- decides on a forgiving attitude towards the offense.

## **Study 1<sup>2</sup>**

The aim of this study was to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure Forgiveness Flexibility. Forgiveness flexibility scale was designed as three dimensional and dimensionality of the scale was investigated with a wide sample. The study was conducted among 1040 participants.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on 401 individuals (229 female/ 172 male) aged between 19 and 63 years. Educational backgrounds of the participants range between literate to postgraduate. Of all the participants 60.8% are married, 36.4% are single and 2.7% has the marital status "other". Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed with 639 participants from different grades and departments of Faculty of Education, Sakarya University in 2012-2013 academic year.

The process followed in the development of the scale was planned by considering the six-step process suggested by Laster and Bishop (2000). Initially, related literature was reviewed. Secondly, academic books written on this subject and scales about the concept of forgiveness were examined. Conceptual and operational definitions of "Forgiveness Flexibility" was made after literature review. At the end of this entire process, an item pool was generated based on the question "what is forgiveness" answered by the students studying in different departments of Sakarya University. There were 84 items in the first item pool. At this stage, the items were reviewed and recurrent items were removed. To test the understandability of the items, it was applied to a group of 60 students consisting of first, second, third and fourth grade students in Psychological Counseling and Guidance. The necessary corrections were made on the items in this application by making interviews with the participants about the ambiguous items.

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<sup>2</sup> Study 1 is a part of PhD dissertation written by the first author.

As a result of factor analysis for which eigenvalue was considered 1, the number of factors is three as seen in scree-plot graphic. In this aspect, a three-factor structure was preferred regarding the scale. After determining the factors in the structure, the loads of the items in these factors were examined. Since 15 items have low item loading or there is a difference of less than .10 in two factors, they were excluded from the scale and re-EFA was performed over 15 items.

### ***Forgiveness Flexibility Scale (FFS)***

FFS is Likert type scale developed to measure if the individual has got forgiveness flexibility or not. The scale consists of 15 items and has three subscales. Example items for recognition subscale are "Forgiveness is deceiving self" and "Forgiveness is submitting". The example items for internalization subscale are "Forgiveness saves the individual from the trap of past" and "Forgiveness is an important factor for me to be peaceful". Example items for practice subscale are "I try not to make the wrongdoings a current issue" and "I allow the compensation of the mistake". The participants are asked to grade how much the described situation with the items of each subscale fits themselves with a score 1-5. The individual can grade the situation with 1= "I strongly disagree", 2= "I disagree", 3= "Neither agree nor disagree", 4= "I agree" and 5= "I strongly agree".

The scale gives a total score and three sub-scores. The lowest and highest total scores which can be obtained are 15 and 75. The lowest and highest scores which can be obtained from "Recognition" sub-scale is 4 and 20, "Internalization" sub-scale is 5 and 25. The lowest and highest scores which can be obtained from "Practice" subscale are 6 and 30. Low score indicates the incompetence in forgiveness flexibility and high score indicates the competence in forgiveness flexibility. The scale can be applied both individually and with group. Time for replying is 2 minutes.

The scale was applied to sample group for structure validity and reliability studies. According to the data obtained from the scales, EFA was performed for structure validity. In determination of the items to be included in the scale in EFA, it was taken into consideration that eigenvalues of the items are 1, loading values of items are at least .30, the items were included only in one factor and there was a difference of .10 between the factors if the item would be included in two factors (Büyüköztürk, 2010). In addition, varimax axial rotation of 25 degrees was performed during structure validity.

Model fit with item-factor structure obtained with EFA was tested with CFA. Reliability values of the scale were checked with internal consistency coefficients. SPSS 11.5 package program was used in determination of EFA and internal consistency coefficients and Lisrel 8.54 package program was used for CFA.

## **Results**

Statistical processes in the study were performed with the order of EFA, CFA and determination of internal consistency coefficients. The findings are presented in the statistical process order.

### ***Content Validity***

It is the content validity which indicates whether the items forming the test are quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient in measuring the behavior (attribute) to be measured (Büyüköztürk, 2010). The scale form of 52 items prepared was submitted for the opinion of six lecturers working in the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance at Sakarya University and Karadeniz Technical University for content validity based on expert assessment. The experts stated opinion on the understandability of the items and to which dimension each item belongs to. As a result of expert evaluations, it was asked to remove or correct 22 items. Since the number of experts who wanted the removal of 22 items was higher than those who wanted their correction, all of these items were removed. The analyses for psychometric properties of the scale were performed over 30 items.

### Structure Validity

It indicates test's degree of measuring an abstract concept (factor) properly in terms of a behavior to be measured (Büyüköztürk, 2010). To ensure the structure validity of the scale, EFA and CFA were conducted.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA is a statistical technique which aims to gather and measure the variables which measure the same structure or attribute and explain them with few factors (Büyüköztürk, 2010). Initially, EFA was performed for the structure validity of FFS. KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) test which tests the adequacy of the sample was first checked to make this analysis. KMO value was found as .85. According to Büyüköztürk (2010), it was concluded that factor analysis can be performed on such data for this value is acceptable over .70. Since, the data obtained by checking Bartlett Sphericity Test ( $\chi^2(105) = 1525.54, p=.000$ ) showed significant difference, it was determined to be proper for factor analysis (Büyüköztürk, 2010). Varimax (25) axial rotation was performed, primarily for principal component analysis in a way that eigenvalue of 30 items were 1 in factor analysis. Since 15 items have low item loading or there is a difference of less than .10 in two factors, they were excluded from the scale.

EFA was performed over 15 items. As a result of analysis, it was found that FFS has a three-factor structure (see figure 1). In the first one of these factors, there are four items in total which are 1st, 5th, 8th and 12th items. The loading values of these items in the factor vary between .60 – .79. This factor which explains 16.9% of the total variance was named "Recognition". The second factor in the scale consists of five items in total which are 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th and 14th items. The loading values of these items in the second factor vary between 0.50 – 0.73. This factor which explains 16.31% of the total variance was named "Internalization". The third factor in the scale consists of six items in total which are 4th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th and 15th items. The loading values of these items in the third factor vary between .46– .75. This factor which explains 15.73% of the total variance was named "Practice". 1, 5, 8, 12. Items are scored as reverse items. Three factors in the scale explain 48.94% of the total variance.

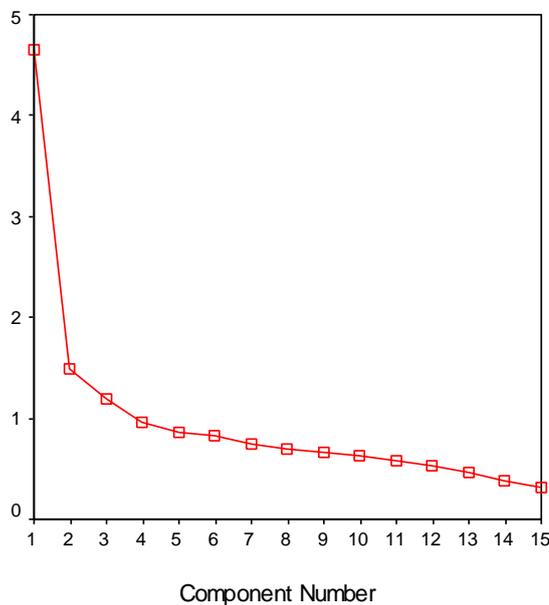


Figure 1. Scree-plot Graphic Factor Structure Shape

As a result of EFA, it was found that the structure consists of 15 items and three factors. The values indicate that the scale explains the "Forgiveness Flexibility" well. Model fit test of the obtained values and structure was checked with CFA.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

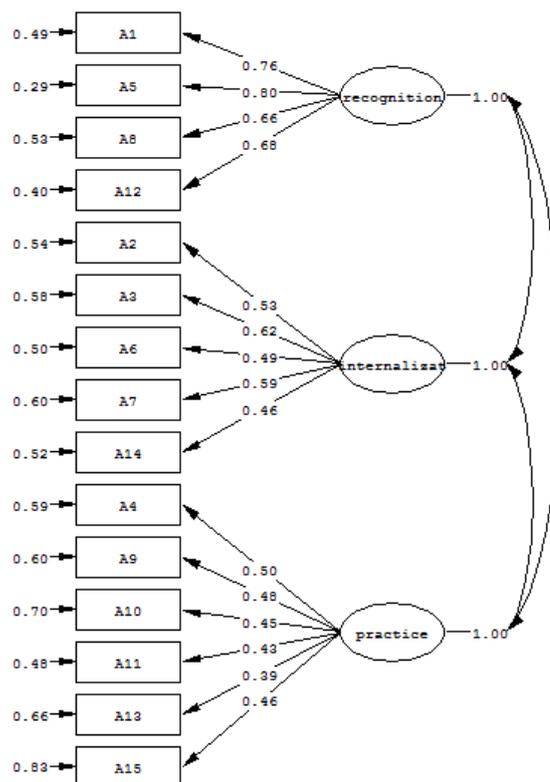
In the evaluation of the fit of the models established with CFA to the data, the evaluation is carried out by taking fit indexes such as  $\chi^2$  (chi-square), RMSEA, SRMR, GFI, AGFI, CFI, NNFI into consideration. In case that  $\chi^2/df$  rate is 5 or less, model-data fit is accepted as good fit (Sümer, 2000; Kline, 2011). Hu and Bentler (1999) suggests cutoff value lower than .08 for SRMR and .06 for RMSEA to conclude goodness of model. GFI and AGFI indexes are higher than .90 show that model-data fit is good. .90 and higher for CFI and NNFI shows that model-data fit is good (Anderson & Gerbing, 1984; Sümer, 2000; Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008).

Table 1: Goodness of fit statistics for FFS

	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	NFI	NNFI	GFI	AGFI
FFS	203.30	87	2.33	.046	.03	.95	.92	.94	.96	.94

Note:  $\chi^2$  = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; GFI = goodness of fit index.

When the fit indexes of the scale were examined, it was seen the fit indexes showed good fit (see Table 1). It can be stated that the structure validity of the scale was confirmed based on these findings. For the reliability studies of the scale, internal consistency coefficients (alpha) were calculated. As a result of CFA, the model consisting of 15 items and three factors was found to theoretically and statistically fit (see Figure 2).



Chi-Square=203.30, df=87, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.046

Figure 2. Forgiveness Flexibility CFA Explanation Rates and Error Variances

The relationship between total score and sub scale scores of forgiveness flexibility was examined (see Table 2). A significant, positive and high relationship was found between subscale score and total score in a level of .01. There is a significant and positive relationship between subscale scores in a level of .01. It means that

adequacy level of a subscale positively affects the adequacy level of other subscale. This may positively affect the cognitive efficacy, affective quality and behavioral skills of the individual regarding forgiveness flexibility.

Table 2: *The Relationship Between Forgiveness Flexibility Sub Scales*

		Correlations	
		Recognition	Internalization
Internalization	Pearson	0,449**	
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,000	
Practice	Pearson	0,356**	0,62**
	Correlation		
N=639	Sig. (2- tailed)	,000	,000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the findings, three sub-dimensions form a single forgiveness flexibility general structure. The factors affecting the general forgiveness flexibility structure are respectively; internalization ( $r=1.03$ ), practice ( $r=.87$ ) and recognition ( $r=.64$ ). In order to identify the discriminant validity based on the internal criteria, the difference between the subscale and total scale scores to the score average, based on a 27% subgroup and supergroup were analyzed.

**Item-total correlations-** Each item was compared with the score obtained from the general of the scale (see Table 3). Item test correlation coefficients vary between .43 and .66 and each scale has a significant level ( $p<.001$ ). These coefficients are the validity coefficients of that item and show the consistence with the entire of the scale. These values indicate that item-test correlations of the each of the items in the scale are in an acceptable level.

Table 3: Item-Test Scores Correlation and Independent Groups t-Test Results Regarding the Item Distinctiveness of Forgiveness Flexibility Scale

		Total	Group Statistics		
		N=639	Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation
A1	Pearson Correlation	,59**	Subgroup	4,72**	,56
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	2,97	1,42
A2	Pearson Correlation	,58**	Subgroup	4,31**	,68
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,09	1,02
A3	Pearson Correlation	,65**	Subgroup	4,39**	,64
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	2,90	1,02
A4	Pearson Correlation	,55**	Subgroup	4,23**	,69
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,03	1,02
A5	Pearson Correlation	,66**	Subgroup	4,76**	,45
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,00	1,37
A6	Pearson Correlation	,56**	Subgroup	4,40**	,65
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,23	1,04
A7	Pearson Correlation	,59**	Subgroup	4,09**	,84
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	2,80	,97
A8	Pearson Correlation	,61**	Subgroup	4,72**	,53
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,05	1,42
A9	Pearson Correlation	,52**	Subgroup	4,27**	,70
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,08	1,02
A10	Pearson Correlation	,49	Subgroup	3,86**	,75
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	2,73	,98
A11	Pearson Correlation	,53	Subgroup	4,49**	,59
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,44	1,00
A12	Pearson Correlation	,62**	Subgroup	4,78**	,57
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,24	1,30
A13	Pearson Correlation	,43**	Subgroup	4,06**	,85
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,14	,97
A14	Pearson Correlation	,52**	Subgroup	4,45**	,71
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	3,45	,97
A15	Pearson Correlation	,47**	Subgroup	4,16**	,78
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00	Top group	2,96	1,10

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level

N= 346  $p > .001$

### ***Concurrent Validity***

Concurrent validity is studying the correlation between the scores obtained by the participants from a test to be developed and a) a previous test measuring the same behavior, b) a test measuring another related behavior (Büyüköztürk, 2010). In the study, 7-point Likert type, 18-item Heartland Forgiveness Scale which was developed by Thompson et.al. (2005) and which was adapted into Turkish by Bugay and Demir (2010) was used to measure forgiveness level of university students to ensure the Concurrent Validity. The scale has three sub-dimensions which are forgiving oneself, forgiving others and forgiving the situation. As a result of validity and reliability studies, test-retest coefficient was found as .83 for self-forgiving, .72 for forgiving others, .73 for forgiving the situation and .77 for total score. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients are .75, .78, .79 respectively and .86 for total score (Thompson et al., 2005). The correlation between Heartland Forgiveness Scale and FFS was found as .60.

### ***Distinctiveness Attributes of the Items***

In order to determine the distinctiveness of each of the 15 items in the scale, item analysis was performed and t test was used for independent groups (Balci, 2009). To this end, raw scores obtained by each student from the scale were calculated firstly and then raw scores of 639 students were listed in decreasing order. Afterwards, groups of %27 from the bottom (173 participants) and 27% from the top (173 participants) were determined. Independent groups' t-test values were determined on the score averages of the students in bottom and top group (see Table 3).

It was found that the difference between the scores of the participants in bottom and top groups were significant in (  $t(344)$  ,  $p < .001$ ) level for each item. This result indicates that each item in the scale is distinctive in the required level, in other words, it can measure the behavior it was designed to measure without intermingling with other behaviors.

### ***Internal Consistency Coefficients for FFS***

Reliability analysis of FFS consisting of 15 items was calculated using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, correlation value between split-half, Spearman-Brown formula and Guttman split-half reliability formula.

Total internal coefficient for 15 items of FFS was found as .83. Internal consistency coefficients for subscales of the scale are as follows: .76 for "Recognition", .70 for "Internalization" and .70 for "Practice". These obtained values are acceptable values for reliability level of FFS. The values obtained as a result of validity reliability studies indicate that the scale is a useable one in terms of psychometric properties.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Forgiveness is very important concept in forming of dynamics such as trust, respect, cooperation, sharing, responsibility and communication which are necessary for social life. The fact that the individuals currently exhibit behaviors which may harm both others and themselves indicates that forgiveness tolerance threshold is decreased highly in the society. Besides exhibiting forgiving attitude for a mistake, it is also important to make correct choices in forgiveness process. Forgiveness is a process which includes explanation the hurting event in right way, acceptance past as it is and determination new attitude for future. All these basements of forgiveness need a skill which people should gain. This skill can be defined as "forgiveness flexibility". In this context, "FFS" was developed in order to determine whether individuals have forgiveness flexibility or not and psychometric properties of the scale was examined.

Firstly, a three-factor structure was obtained for FFS with EFA. Model fit of the structure obtained with EFA was tested with CFA. As a result of EFA and CFA, the model consisting of 15 items and three factors was found to theoretically and statistically fit. As a result of CFA of FFS, fit indexes was found as  $\chi^2 = 203.30$  ( $df=87$   $p = .00$ ),  $\chi^2/df = 2.33$ ,  $RMSEA = .046$ ,  $GFI = .96$ ,  $AGFI = .94$ ,  $CFI = .95$ ,  $NFI = .92$ , and  $NNFI = .94$  (see figure 2). In addition, it can be said that the results indicate the scale has structure validity. When internal consistency coefficients, it was found for entire items .83 that means the scale can be used in a reliable way.

Valid and reliable scale which was developed can be used as a scale to measure the forgiveness flexibility behaviors in the literature. It is considered that the scale can be used to reveal the personalities exhibiting forgiveness flexibility in adolescents and adults and to examine whether forgiveness flexibility behaviors differ or not in terms of demographic factors.

## Study 2

The correlation between the FFS total scale score and similar scales were identified in order to test the FFS structural validity.

## Method

### Participants

The data were obtained from a total of 625 students (234 male and 391 female) studying in different fields of the Sakarya University in the academic year 2014-2015. 20.8% of the participants are freshmen, 21% of them are sophomores, 35.2% of them juniors and 23% of them are senior students.

### Instruments

*Forgiveness Flexibility Scale*: Is a scale which was developed in order to measure forgiveness flexibility. The scale consists of recognition, internalization and practice sub-dimensions. Cronbach alpha internal coefficient of the scale is .83.

*Personal Meaning Profile (PMP)*: The scale consists of 57 items and 7 sub-scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .93 (Wong, 1998). Structure of the scale affirmed and fit indexes of the scale's adaptation version is  $\chi^2=2879.32$ ,  $df=1536$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $RMSEA=.054$ ,  $CFI=.90$ ,  $IFI=.90$ . Factor loadings of Turkish version of PMP ranged from .30 to .69 (Akin, Düşünceli & Çolak, 2012).

*Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)*: MLQ, was developed by Steger et al. in 2006, consists 10 items and 2 sub-scales (presence of Meaning in Life, and the Search for Meaning in Life). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the MLQ's Turkish version is .86 for entire scale and .87, .88 for sub-scales subsequently (Demirbaş, 2010).

## Results

Table 4: Correlation coefficients between FFS and PMP, MLQ

	Achievement	Relationship	Religion	Self-transcendence	Self-acceptance	Intimacy	Fair treatment or perceived injustice	PMP total score	Presence of meaning in life	Search of meaning in life	MLQ total score
Recognition	.08*	.07	.11**	.08*	.14**	.14**	.11**	.14**	.12**	.58**	.43**
Internalization	.12**	.13**	.12**	.15**	.15**	.14**	.14**	.17**	.10**	.88**	.61**
Practice	.18**	.18**	.09*	.17**	.20**	.16**	.11**	.18**	.09*	.69**	.48**
FFS								.17**			.61**

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The Personal Meaning Profile and Meaning in Life Questionnaire were taken as measurements in order to test the structural validity of the forgiveness flexibility scale. The correlation factors between these measurements and the total score and subscale score are given on Table 4. Except the recognition sub-dimension and the PMP's relationship sub-dimensions, all relationships between MLQ's two sub-dimensions and total scale scores were found significant. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between the internalization and practice sub-dimensions and all the sub-dimensions of PMP and MLQ and their total scale scores.

## **Discussion**

According to the findings obtained from the study, the relationship between MLQ and FFS measurements have a significant relationship to all sub-dimensions and total scale scores, which supports the data found in the literature. The ability to forgive plays a key role in giving life a new meaning for the individual (Hantman & Cohen, 2010). The findings clearly show that finding meaning despite all adversities eases the harmonization and forgiveness process of the individual (Boyras, Horne & Sayger, 2010; Burger, Crous & Rodt, 2013; Mason & Nel 2012). The fact that pain has a meaning is significant in the healing process and makes forgiveness easier (Coleman, 1998). Under the light of this knowledge, we can say that there is a significant relationship between forgiveness flexibility and the ability to find meaning in life. So we can say that having forgiveness flexibility is a factor that will contribute to the individual in living a meaningful life.

To actualize forgiveness helps the individual recover from the negative effects of the past and prevents that the past affects the present negatively. It is known that the extension of past experiences affects new relationships (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2012). Individuals that have unfinished work show ulterior emotions such as resentment, anger, hate and pain. If these emotions remain unresolved, they will stay in the background and affect the individual's present relationships negatively (Corey, 2005). If conflicts or problems remain unsolved, this negative effect will continue. The actualization of forgiveness helps the focus to shift from him/herself or the experienced offense to the relationship and to the values the individual naturally carries (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996). That the individual fronts a being other than him/herself could be explained as transcendence oneself. Whereas transcend the self can be defined as the individual using its inner potential in a way it pleases the self (Frankl, 2004); Marshall (2009) defined forgiveness as one of human spirit sources like self-transcend and self-distancing. Forgiveness flexibility causes awareness that there are still valuable things beyond the individual's personal disappointment. Findings obtained from the study show that there is a significant relationship between the subscales of PMP; namely Achievement, Religion, Self-transcendence, Self-acceptance, Intimacy, Fair treatment or perceived justice; and the subscales of forgiveness flexibility, recognition, internalization and practice. Even though a significant relationship between the relationship and recognition sub-dimensions could not be found, a significant relationship between the relationship and internalization and practice was found, which shows that recognition of the concept of forgiveness itself is not enough to create effective results in a relationship.

## **Study 3**

The literature on the concept of forgiveness shows that it includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral components as put forth by many researchers (for example: Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright & The Human Development Group, 1996; Kearns & Fincham, 2004). The term forgiveness flexibility has been constructed based on this information.

Many forgiveness models in our day are actually cognitive (Worthington, 1998a). When analyzing Worthington (1998b)'s decision based model and Enright & The Human Development Group (1996)'s progress based model, we see that following the cognitive questioning and emotional discovery phases, that forgiveness manifests as a behavior. Worthington (1998b) argues that forgiveness could happen by itself or unconsciously. DiBlasio (2000) argues that emotional readiness is not a factor in decision based processes, and that there is a distinction between the rational mind and emotions. He argues that the individual's readiness for forgiveness is a necessity, and that only deciding to forgive is enough. Even though forgiveness flexibility approximately includes these views, it holds the opinion that cognitive, emotional and behavioral

steps occur in this order and real forgiveness can only occur if it is a conscious process. The following model has been suggested in order to test this hypothesis (Figure 3).

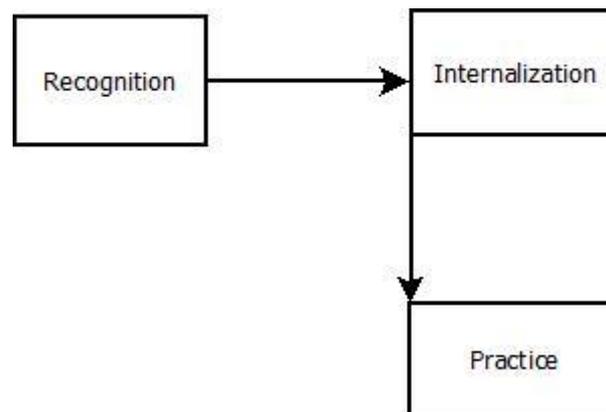


Figure 3. Structure of Forgiveness Flexibility model

## Method

### Participants

The participants consist of 318 female and 305 male participants, being 623 people in total. 98 of the participants (16%) is in the 18-20 age group, 110 of the participants (18%) in the 21-25 age group, 91 of the participants (14%) in the 26-30 age group, 112 of the participants (18%) in the 31-35 age group, 120 of the participants (19%) in the 36-40 age group and 92 of the participants (15%) are older than 41.

### Procedure

Structural equation modeling (SEM) utilized for hypothesis testing. Researchers hypothesized about forgiveness flexibility occur if the individual accomplishes the phases of recognition, internalization and practice subsequently.

## Results

Table 5: Goodness of fit statistics for Hypothesis model

$X^2$	df	$X^2/df$	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	NFI	NNFI	GFI	AGFI
209.16	88	2.37	.047	.03	.95	.92	.94	.96	.94

The result of SEM has shown that the model's fit indexes show "good fit" (see Table 5). In accordance with the obtained data we see that forgiveness flexibility structure occurs after following the steps recognition, internalization and practice in the respective order (Figure 4).

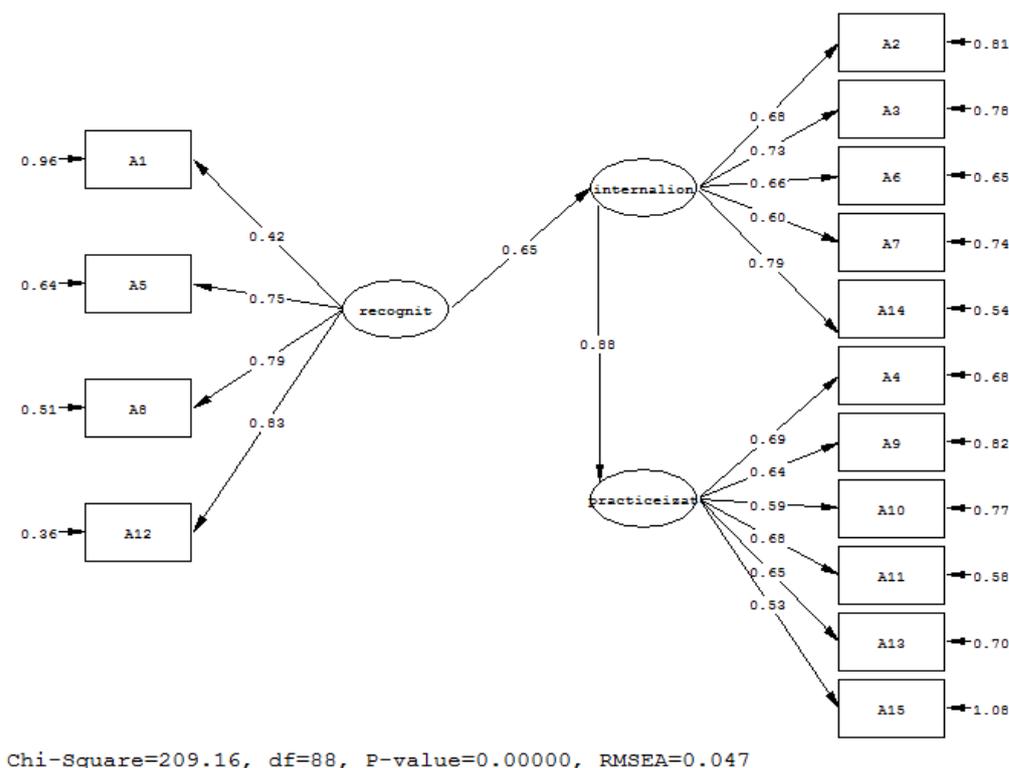


Figure 4. Forgiveness Flexibility Model

**Discussion**

There are basic two forgiveness models as decision based and process based forgiveness models. These models include decisional and emotional components. This study combines all components about forgiveness under a single roof. The study hypothesized that decisional, emotional and behavioral components of forgiveness must be handled as an entire structure and a process, and these components put into practice subsequently.

Since forgiveness is a term used in the resolution of past experiences and conflicts, it has a therapeutic purpose. However previous studies done in the field show a difference between how individuals define forgiveness and how the literature on the subject defines forgiveness, which prevents forgiveness to be used as a therapeutic tool (Kearns & Fincham, 2004). Wade and Worthington (2005) commented that defining forgiveness wrongly may cause terms such as compromise and forgetting to be confused with forgiveness. The findings of this study also support the findings found in literature. Worthington (1998b) commented that in order to true forgiveness to occur, the individual has to gain some insight. Only after the real definition of forgiveness and the individual’s gaining of insight can the true process of forgiveness begin. This process is concluded when it turns into behavioral practice. The findings of this study verify this structure.

**Overall Discussion**

The research is consistent of a range of works to verify the forgiveness flexibility structure. As a first step, the notion is presented describing the functional and conceptual characteristics of forgiveness flexibility. The notion of forgiveness can be described as an individual’s ability to recover with minimum damage after offensive situations, using their cognitive, affective and behavioral skills. Forgiveness is a behavior that an individual has the freedom of choosing and forgiveness flexibility can be improved in time (Çolak, 2014). The future studies will result in the better recognition of the forgiveness flexibility.

While pain, crime and death are inescapable in human life (Graber, 2004); recovery, forgiveness and finding meaning can be described as road maps to use overcoming these notions (Gloud, 1986). An individual’s ability to cope with offensive events is a factor that affects life quality positively. Creating emotional

maturity and improving coping strategies are sub outputs of forgiveness process for individuals. Aside from that, forgiveness is not a process that emerges automatically but a behavior that individuals must decide and work on. Karremans, et al. (2011) stated that without the ability to forgive, continuing a long relationship is not possible. In the literature, the negative effects in the individual's life caused by lack of forgiveness has been stated. Few examples to that are the emergence of negative feelings such as grudge, hate; the continuing increase of negative thoughts in the individual's mind; past problems effecting the daily relationships. Under the light of this information, it is crucial to develop forgiveness flexibility in an individual to implement the notion of forgiveness actively in their life. FFS, which was developed within this context, was added to the literature as a valid and credible measurement device to determine forgiveness flexibility structure.

Individuals that can find meaning in life have more fulfilling lives. The forgiving process helps individuals to find a meaning in their life by providing an ability to continuing interactions with other individuals and developing coping behaviors in face of an inescapable pain, which are the offensive past experiences. The researches support the relationship between spirituality and forgiveness (Younger, Piferi, Jobe & Lawler, 2004). It has been determined that the spirituality has a positive effect on quality of life and forgiveness is a factor to create this connection (Currier, Drescher, Holland, Lisman & Foy, 2015). The actual research results support the literature results revealing the positive relationship between forgiveness flexibility and finding meaning in life.

Forgiveness caused by expectations does not overlap with real forgiveness. According to research conclusions, forgiveness is a notion that reasons change according to the culture. It was discovered that especially in collectivist countries, individual's reasons to forgive are caused by the expectations of the society rather than individuals forgiving in response to their emotions (Karremans, et al., 2011). It was found that individuals who emotionally forgive, forgets the features of the offender he/she attribute to the offender, however individuals who decisively forgive were unable to do that (Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier & Fernandez-Capo, 2015). The individual who has forgiveness flexibility will experience all the positive results of forgiveness, since he/she will actualize forgiveness with the insight he/she gained, instead of the necessities various expectations bring. As a result of the cognitive readiness to forgive and the awareness the individual has by objectively evaluating the process, the individual will determine the course of the relationship according to the change happening in the individual's emotional state and thus demonstrate the forgiving behavior at his/her subjectively most optimal time. It is not possible to forgive when not ready cognitively or ignoring the negative feelings that have been emerged emotionally. So we can say that the forgiveness flexibility notion is progress that follows cognitive readiness, emotional maturity and behavioral implementation steps respectively.

## **Conclusion**

Forgiveness flexibility is a newborn notion which is ready to take part in the field. As a result of this research, a 15 item FFS was developed to measure forgiveness flexibility structure and test the measurement's psychometrical attributes . It is determined that FFS is a valid and reliable measurement. Correlation of similar measurements to test the validity of forgiveness flexibility structure was has been tried and between MLQ and PMP measurement devices total scores and sub-dimensions and FFS total scores and sub dimension correlation has related significantly. Forgiveness flexibility structure was supported. Finally, supported forgiveness flexibility structure was tested with a model and as a result it is determined that forgiveness flexibility structure is respectively consistent of recognition, internalization and practice dimensions.

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