

THE PATH TO RECOVERY: BUILDING STUDENT RESILIENCE THROUGH GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS

JALAN PULIH DIRI: MEMBANGUN RESILIENSI PELAJAR MELALUI KEBERSYUKURAN DAN PEMAAFAN

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study aimed to examine the predictive relationship of gratitude and forgiveness on resilience among Muslim college students in Yogyakarta. However, previous studies have largely examined these variables separately and in non-Islamic contexts, leaving a gap in understanding their combined predictive role in the Muslim college student population. This study involved 331 Muslim college students who completed the Six-Item Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6), the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS), and the Connor-Davidson 10-Item Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10). Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. Results indicated that gratitude, both simultaneously and partially, had a significant and positive predictive relationship with resilience. Together, both gratitude (p -value < 0.001) and forgiveness (p -value < 0.001) significantly predicted resilience, explaining 22.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.222$). So, gratitude and forgiveness together explained 22.2% of the variance in resilience among Muslim college students; both variables are significant predictors, and resilience remains a multidimensional construct influenced by various additional psychological, social, and environmental factors outside the present model. Interestingly, forgiveness demonstrated slightly greater predictive power than gratitude, and the novel finding was that forgiveness demonstrated a stronger role than gratitude. These findings recommend forgiveness-based interventions along with gratitude counseling to strengthen students' resilience and forgiveness.

Keywords: Forgiveness, Gratitude, Resilience, Muslim Students, Recovery

ABSTRAK

Studi kuantitatif ini bertujuan untuk meneliti hubungan prediktif rasa syukur dan pengampunan terhadap ketahanan di kalangan mahasiswa Muslim di Yogyakarta. Namun, studi-studi sebelumnya sebagian besar meneliti variabel-variabel ini secara terpisah dan dalam konteks non-Islam, sehingga meninggalkan kesenjangan dalam memahami peran prediktif gabungan mereka pada populasi mahasiswa Muslim. Studi ini melibatkan 331 mahasiswa Muslim yang mengisi Kuesioner Rasa Syukur Enam Butir (GQ-6), Skala Pengampunan Heartland (HFS), dan Skala Ketahanan Connor-Davidson 10 Butir (CD-RISC-10). Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis regresi berganda. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa rasa syukur, baik secara simultan maupun parsial, memiliki hubungan prediktif yang signifikan dan positif dengan ketahanan. Bersama-sama, baik rasa syukur (nilai $p < 0,001$) maupun pengampunan (nilai $p < 0,001$) secara signifikan memprediksi ketahanan,

menjelaskan 22,2% dari varians ($R^2 = 0,222$). Jadi, rasa syukur dan pengampunan bersama-sama menjelaskan 22,2% dari varians dalam ketahanan di kalangan mahasiswa Muslim; Kedua variabel tersebut merupakan prediktor yang signifikan, dan ketahanan tetap merupakan konstruk multidimensional yang dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor psikologis, sosial, dan lingkungan tambahan di luar model saat ini. Menariknya, pengampunan menunjukkan daya prediksi yang sedikit lebih besar daripada rasa syukur, dan temuan barunya adalah pengampunan menunjukkan peran yang lebih kuat daripada rasa syukur. Temuan ini merekomendasikan intervensi berbasis pengampunan bersama dengan konseling rasa syukur untuk memperkuat ketahanan dan pengampunan siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pemaafan, Kebersyukuran, Resiliensi, Pelajar Muslim, Pemulihan

INTRODUCTION

Psychological health and an individual's ability to adapt to life have become important issues amid the numerous stressors faced by younger people, particularly students. Among these psychological health themes is resilience (Supriyanto et al., 2022). Resilience is viewed as the ability to bounce back and recover from negative experiences (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021; Neenan & Dryden, 2021; Smith et al., 2025; Wahyudi & Partini, 2018). This ability is not only crucial for coping with academic and social stress (Choi et al., 2023; Mulati & Purwandari, 2022; Ragusa et al., 2023) but also for achieving optimal psychological well-being (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2021; Padmanabhanunni et al., 2023). Without resilience, individuals, especially students, are vulnerable to declining psychological well-being (Beri & Dorji, 2021; Labrague, 2021), such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties adjusting (Ach & Pollmann, 2022; Fernández-Castillo & Fernández-Prados, 2022). Therefore, identifying and strengthening protective factors that can enhance resilience is an important focus in the study of positive psychology and guidance and counseling.

Two positive traits that have been extensively studied as significant predictors and mediators of psychological adaptation and well-being are gratitude and forgiveness. Although gratitude and forgiveness are consistently associated with resilience, gratitude appears to function as a cognitive-emotional resource, while forgiveness operates as a relational coping mechanism. This distinction suggests that the two constructs may contribute to resilience through distinct psychological pathways, rather than acting as interchangeable predictors (Arnout & Almoied, 2021; Kardaş & Yalçın, 2021; Yang et al.,

2025). Meanwhile, forgiveness involves releasing feelings of resentment, anger, or hostility toward someone perceived to have wronged them, which is also positively correlated with resilience (Almeida & Cunha, 2023; Barcaccia et al., 2023; Brady et al., 2023). Possession of these two traits is thought to promote adjustment, psychological well-being, and resilience, even in the face of adversity. Forgiveness contributes to resilience through emotional regulation and emotional release mechanisms.

Previous research consistently shows a positive and significant relationship between gratitude, forgiveness, and resilience. Specifically, gratitude often stands out as a stronger predictor of resilience than forgiveness (Hahn et al., 2024; Rudaz et al., 2025; Zarur, 2025). For example, in adolescents, gratitude is more strongly correlated with resilience than forgiveness (Rodrigues et al., 2024; Xiang et al., 2024; Zarur, 2025). In fact, gratitude in young adults serves as a protective factor against adversity, potentially enhancing mental well-being and resilience (Basit et al., 2024; Panhwar & Malik, 2023). In addition, gratitude can strengthen the adaptive abilities of cancer patients because it increases resilience in cancer patients (Tomczyk et al., 2021; Q. Wang et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2025). From the broaden-and-build perspective, gratitude functions as a cognitive-emotional resource that enables individuals to reinterpret stressful experiences in a more constructive and meaningful way. Individuals with higher gratitude tend to focus on available support, positive life aspects, and perceived blessings despite adversity, thereby facilitating cognitive reframing and adaptive coping. This process helps reduce hopelessness and strengthens resilience when facing academic and social pressures.

Although previous studies consistently demonstrate that gratitude and forgiveness are positively associated with resilience, most investigations have examined these variables separately and within non-Indonesian or secular cultural settings (Naeem et al., 2024; Panhwar & Malik, 2023; Riaz et al., 2023), athletes (L. H. Chen et al., 2024; Gabana et al., 2017), patients (Charzyńska et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025), or in specific Western and Eastern cultural contexts (like Tiongkok, Hong Kong, and Arab) (Alamri & Al-Abyadh, 2024; Kong et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2024). Consequently, limited evidence is available regarding their relative and simultaneous contributions to resilience among Muslim students in collectivistic religious cultures such as Indonesia. This raises a critical gap regarding whether these constructs operate similarly within Islamic cultural frameworks, where gratitude (*syukur*) and forgiveness (*afw*) are not only psychological

traits but also deeply embedded spiritual values. Furthermore, limited studies have simultaneously tested these variables using a predictive model, leaving unclear their relative and combined contributions to resilience.

Meanwhile, research specifically on Muslim students in Indonesia, particularly in the Yogyakarta region, is still limited, raising the need to verify whether similar findings can be generalized to subjects with distinctive Islamic cultural and religious backgrounds. So the main objective of this study is to test the predictive relationship of gratitude and forgiveness, both simultaneously and partially, on resilience in Muslim student subjects in Yogyakarta. This study is expected to provide more focused and detailed evidence regarding the simultaneous predictive relationship of these two predictors. This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends positive psychology by integrating gratitude and forgiveness within a single predictive model of resilience. Second, it contextualizes these constructs within an Islamic cultural framework, where both variables have theological significance. Third, it provides empirical evidence to inform culturally sensitive counseling interventions aimed at strengthening resilience.

METHOD

This research is a quantitative study with a cross-sectional design to test whether gratitude and forgiveness can predict resilience. The participants consisted of 331 students (mean age = 20.4 years, SD = 1.8), with 62% female and 38% male. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with inclusion criteria: (1) Muslim students, (2) aged 18–25 years, and (3) actively enrolled in universities in Yogyakarta. The research procedure guaranteed the ethics and confidentiality of participants through written informed consent and anonymity of personal data.

To collect data, three instruments were developed and used: the gratitude scale (Cowles & Medvedev, 2025; McCullough et al., 2001, 2002); the Forgiveness Scale (Gallo-Giunzioni et al., 2021; Sharif-Nia et al., 2025; Yamhure Thompson et al., 2005); and the resilience scale (Notario-Pacheco et al., 2011; Tourunen et al., 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2020; L. Wang et al., 2010). The instruments were evaluated using the Rasch model, showing acceptable item fit (INFIT MNSQ between 0.5 and 1.5) and high reliability (person reliability = 0.87) and can be used in the Indonesian context. The collected data were then analyzed using multiple regression analysis with the help of the SPSS program. Before regression analysis, assumption tests were conducted. The data met normality

assumptions with Kolmogorov-Smirnov/Shapiro-Wilk ($p > 0.05$), linearity was detected ($VIF < 5$), and heteroscedasticity was observed. Multiple regression analysis using the enter method was conducted to examine the predictive role of gratitude and forgiveness on resilience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The assumption tests indicated that the data were normally distributed based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p = 0.072$) and the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = 0.081$). Multicollinearity was not detected, with tolerance values of 0.756 and VIF values of 1.32 for both predictors. Furthermore, the heteroscedasticity test showed non-significant results ($p > 0.05$), indicating homoscedasticity in the regression model. The results of multiple regression analysis show that the variables of gratitude and forgiveness simultaneously and partially have a significant and positive predictive relationship with resilience. This is confirmed by the significance value for gratitude ($\text{Sig.} = 0.000$) and forgiveness ($\text{Sig.} = 0.000$), both of which are smaller than $\alpha = 0.05$, as well as the calculated t values (5.216 and 5.238), which are greater than the t table (1.65). The positive regression coefficient (B gratitude = 5.35; B forgiveness = 5.45) confirms that an increase in gratitude and forgiveness will be directly proportional to an increase in resilience. Overall, these two variables together contribute 22.2% ($R^2 = 0.222$) in explaining the variability of resilience, while the students' (77.8%) predictive relationship is by other factors outside this research model. The results of the study can be seen in the table below. Gratitude ($t = 5.216$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$, 95%) and forgiveness ($t = 5.238$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$, 95%) were significant positive predictors of resilience. To see the results of the study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. *Regression Analysis*

Variabel	B (Koef. Regresi	Sig	t hitung	t tabel ($\alpha=0.05$)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Information
Gratitud	5.35	.000	5.216	1.65					Significant
Forgiveness	5.45	.000	5.238	1.65					Significant
	4.10	.09	1.691)		4.72	.222	.218	4.86	

Throughout human history, gratitude and forgiveness have been integral components of religious beliefs. This study demonstrates that gratitude and forgiveness

significantly contribute, both partially and collectively, to individual resilience. These two positive traits are important predictors of an individual's ability to bounce back from adversity. The stronger role of forgiveness may be explained by its function as an emotion regulation mechanism. Unlike gratitude, which primarily enhances positive affect, forgiveness directly reduces negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and hostility, which are known to undermine resilience. In the context of Muslim students, forgiveness isn't only a psychological construct but also a moral and religious obligation rooted in Islamic teachings. This may intensify its psychological impact, making it more salient in shaping resilience compared to gratitude. University students often face interpersonal stressors, where forgiveness becomes a more immediate coping strategy than gratitude.

In addition to demonstrating the role of gratitude and forgiveness, this study found another theoretical perspective, where forgiveness plays a higher role than gratitude. This is despite numerous studies showing that gratitude is more dominant than forgiveness in influencing individual psychological dynamics (Gupta & Kumar, 2015; Hwei, 2017; Ma et al., 2023; Skalski-Bednarz et al., 2024). This finding is significant because it suggests that, within the cultural and religious context of Muslim students in Yogyakarta, forgiveness is a significant predictor of resilience. This discrepancy may be attributed to cultural and religious differences, as previous studies were largely conducted in non-Islamic or Western contexts. In contrast, within Islamic culture, forgiveness is strongly emphasized as a virtue, potentially amplifying its psychological role. Additionally, differences in sample characteristics (such as focusing on university students who are more exposed to interpersonal stress) may further explain why forgiveness emerges as a more salient predictor.

Forgiveness may also function as a form of spiritual coping among Muslim students. Within Islamic teachings, forgiveness is associated with patience (*sabr*), emotional restraint, and surrender to God, which may help individuals reinterpret interpersonal suffering in spiritually meaningful ways. This spiritual meaning-making process potentially reduces emotional distress and promotes psychological recovery during adversity. Consequently, forgiveness may not merely alleviate negative emotions but also strengthen existential acceptance and inner peace, which are closely related to resilience. In addition, the collectivistic orientation prevalent in Indonesian culture may further strengthen the role of forgiveness. Collectivistic societies generally emphasize

interpersonal harmony, social cohesion, and conflict avoidance. As a result, individuals may experience stronger social and moral pressure to restore relationships after interpersonal conflict. Under these conditions, forgiveness becomes not only a personal emotional process but also a socially adaptive strategy to maintain group harmony and social belonging, thereby contributing more strongly to resilience.

By testing variables using multiple regression analysis and standardized instruments, this study successfully confirmed the generalizability of global positive psychology findings to the unique cultural and religious context of Indonesia. The quantitative design with an adequate sample size provided sufficient statistical power to support the conclusions. Furthermore, by focusing on the primary predictive role without external mediating factors, this study provides a clear and focused picture of the direct, joint predictive relationship of gratitude and forgiveness on resilience (Lasota et al., 2022; Lipat et al., 2022; Xiang et al., 2024). From the perspective of emotion regulation theory, forgiveness may play a more direct role in resilience by mitigating maladaptive emotional responses, whereas gratitude aligns with the broaden-and-build theory, enhancing long-term adaptive capacity through positive emotions.

Theoretically, the main weakness of this study is the use of a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to definitively establish causality. This study can only conclude that there is a predictive relationship between gratitude and forgiveness and resilience. A weakness of the study is the coefficient of determination, which is only 22.2%. 77.8% of the variability in resilience is explained by factors outside the model, such as social support (Cao et al., 2024; Ortiz-Calvo et al., 2022; Y. Wang et al., 2024), or self-esteem (K. Chen et al., 2022; Hong et al., 2022; Popa-Velea et al., 2021), or self-esteem, which were not examined. The R^2 value of 0.222 indicates a moderate explanatory power, suggesting that resilience is a multidimensional construct with a predictive relationship with various psychological and social factors. This limitation suggests that although gratitude and forgiveness are important, they alone can't fully explain the dynamics of resilience and need to be combined with other psychological variables. Students with higher religiosity may internalize forgiveness as a religious obligation more strongly, thereby amplifying its psychological effect on resilience. Future studies should examine whether religiosity moderates or mediates forgiveness and resilience in Muslim populations.

These findings suggest that the relative contribution of gratitude and forgiveness to resilience is context-dependent, predictive relationship by cultural, and situational factors, rather than being universally fixed across populations. Because both variables proved to be significant predictors, it is recommended to design and implement structured self-development programs that focus on training and enhancing these positive traits. Guidance and counseling programs could include gratitude journaling activities to increase awareness of gratitude and cognitive-behavioral counseling techniques to help students process and release grudges, thereby enhancing forgiveness. Overall, the findings indicate that the psychological functions of gratitude and forgiveness are not universally equivalent across cultural contexts, but may vary depending on religious meaning systems, interpersonal norms, and contextual stressors experienced by individuals.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

These findings suggest that resilience should not be understood solely as an outcome of positive affect from gratitude but also as a function of negative emotion regulation processes, such as forgiveness. Theoretically, this study extends positive psychology by showing that the relative strength of protective factors such as gratitude and forgiveness is context-dependent, particularly shaped by cultural and religious values. Forgiveness plays a more dominant role than gratitude in predicting resilience within an Islamic cultural context. Future research is recommended to better capture causal relationships between gratitude, forgiveness, and resilience over time. Additionally, incorporating mediating variables such as emotion regulation or spiritual coping, as well as moderating variables like gender or socio-cultural background, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of resilience dynamics. Cross-cultural comparative studies are also needed to examine whether the dominance of forgiveness observed in this study is consistent across different cultural and religious contexts in guidance and counseling.

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