

**Finding Justice Through Forgiveness in a Christian Worldview Perspective**

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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### **Abstract**

Although talking about forgiveness can be difficult, it is important because it is through forgiveness that survivors are set free. While forgiveness is an important concept in a Christian worldview and is based on biblical truth, survivors may find it difficult to accept this when they are experiencing pain. Trauma survivors seek some form of justice for their suffering and will stop at nothing to make this happen. Some survivors may obtain justice by speaking out, through the criminal justice system, or by forgiving others. This research paper examines scholarly articles that address the importance of forgiveness and how, from both a Christian and a secular perspective, one might find justice through this concept. Both worldviews are consistent with Biblical truth: forgiving others removes anger and bitterness and improves health. The purpose and importance of this research paper is to help readers look at forgiveness from a different perspective, and when one embraces it, a sense of justice emerges, and healing and empowerment follow, allowing victims to fully reclaim their lives.

*Key Words:* Forgiveness, justice, biblical truth, empowerment, healing

### **Finding Justice Through Forgiveness in a Christian Worldview Perspective**

In this paper, the researcher will focus on the theme of a Christian worldview. The research topic is “Finding justice through forgiveness in a Christian worldview perspective.” The researcher's own experiences guided her in selecting this subject. The researcher entered the foster care system after growing up in an abusive household from the age of four. The researcher also experienced drug addiction and spent twelve years on the streets, the result of being trafficked for twelve years at the hands of three different traffickers. God gave the researcher redemption and transformed her life. Through her healing process, the researcher discovered that the key to real freedom and justice is forgiving all those who have wronged her. Since none of the people who hurt the researcher were held to account, the researcher has found justice by telling her truth and embracing forgiveness. This in turn has inspired other trauma survivors of similar or analogous traumas to do the same. Forgiveness is an important concept in the Christian worldview, and believers are to entrust the offenses they have suffered to God and let Him defend them.

The research question is, “In a Christian worldview, what are some ways a survivor of trauma finds justice through forgiveness?” The researcher will answer this question through research, examining peer-reviewed articles, discussing biblical truth and highlighting her own journey. The thesis statement, “To find true justice to alleviate one’s pain, a survivor should embrace the concept of forgiveness through the lens of a Christian worldview. By embracing forgiveness as their avenue to healing, they are empowering biblical truths to bring the freedom they seek.” The researcher is truly excited to discuss this topic and share the evidence she finds in support of her thesis.

### **The Effects of Unforgiveness on a Survivor's Life**

In a Christian worldview, it is critical to forgive those who cause harm. The Bible discusses the importance of forgiveness; “All of these things should be removed from your life: negative feelings about other people, anger, temper, loud talking, terrible discourse that harms others, and negative feelings that harm others. You must be kind to one another. Think about the other person. Forgive others as God has forgiven you through Christ's death on the cross” (*New Life Version*, 1963/2003, Ephesians 4:31-32). Understanding what happens to a trauma survivor and what they endure is critical. Anger, fear, and unforgiveness can overwhelm someone who has experienced trauma caused by someone else. The survivor is unable to attain total freedom as a result of this bondage. Finch (2006) discussed that survivors of tragic events often move on with their lives, but the impact remains. It often triggers major physical and psychological changes, which can interact with each other. Trauma can impact a person's daily life, relationships, and health. Acute discomfort disorder (ASD) or PTSD occur when a person's life becomes overwhelmed by a traumatic event, surpassing transitory discomfort. Shalev (1996) describes the "biopsychosocial trap" as occurring when internal psychological processes become self-sustaining and cause further biological and psychological alterations, ensnaring the individual. They find themselves stuck. Trauma can present as a "black hole" in a victim's life, altering their views, perceptions, and relationships (p. 28). According to Finch, a person who has had a traumatic experience and becomes trapped in such a black hole will see an effect on every facet of their lives. Sometimes, a survivor may have a difficult time letting go of their unforgiveness since it is so deeply rooted. In the researcher's lived experience, she endured deep-seated suffering that became so intense that she turned to self-harm behaviors including

drugs and self-mutilation. Because of the depth of her pain, it took years for the researcher to accept the concept of forgiveness.

When trauma is left unresolved, it evolves into unforgiveness, which leads to bitterness and hatred, and keeps the survivor in the grips of the perpetrator. Uluğ, Bilali, Karasu, & Malo (2021) discussed that recognizing and addressing mass murder and genocide, whether recent or historical, can prevent resentment and hostility among victims and those they see as perpetrators or indifferent bystanders. Resentment can endure for generations. According to Vollhardt and Nair (2018, p. 416), Armenians saw the Turks' failure to acknowledge mass massacres as "salt in the wound." Denial of violence by perpetrator groups is a significant hurdle to reconciliation efforts. Victim groups often struggle to reconcile or forgive without gaining justice for previous wrongdoings. Forgiveness can reduce intergroup conflicts and give victims power back (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008) (p. 313). It is clear from reading this article that traumatic experiences can cause a great deal of suffering for a single individual, and that these effects can be passed down from one generation to the next. Uluğ, Bilali, Karasu, & Malo (2021) mentioned that researchers have looked for things that can prevent people from forgiving one another across groups. They have discovered that the experiences of conflict, competitive victimhood, fear, and anger (Van Tongeren et al., 2014; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Shnabel et al., 2013; Uluđ et al., 2020); and other negative emotions are the things that prevent people from forgiving one another across groups (Cehajic et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Voci et al., 2015) (p. 314). When trauma is not resolved, it can lead to the development of deep-seated feelings of unforgiveness, which in turn causes a survivor to live their life with feelings of anger, fear, and a victim mentality. In other words, anything that perpetuates resentment re-victimizes the victims as much as, or perhaps more than it affects the

perpetrators. In the researcher's lived experiences, she grew up without a functional and caring family; so, when she witnessed her friends with their loving families, she felt anger and resentment develop within her as a result of the trauma created by her own family. This unresolved trauma impacted her, not her delinquent family.

Unresolved trauma not only disrupts interpersonal relationships, but it can also cause anxiety, PTSD and depression, especially among sexual assault survivors. Rudolfsson & Portin (2018) mentioned that trauma reactions like sadness, anxiety, and PTSD are common among sexual assault victims (Wilson and Miller 2016). Negative effects include self-blame, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and guilt (Glenn and Byers 2009; Wilson and Miller 2016). Moreover, shame is a key emotional outcome for sexually abused persons (Fiering et al. 2002; Fiering and Taska 2005). Awareness of the potential repercussions of sexual abuse on victims' faith is growing (Farrell 2009). Previous research (Rudolfsson et al. 2012) found that 72.9% of 421 clerics reported encountering sexual abuse victims in their employment. Another study (Rudolfsson and Tidefors 2009) found that 77% of clerics have met sexual assault victims. Many victims of sexual assault seek direction and assistance from their congregations to cope with their experiences. When dealing with trauma like sexual assault, individuals may seek to understand and find meaning in the experience (Harvey et al. 1990; Park 2013). A sense of meaning is essential for understanding the world and providing purpose and direction in life (Park et al. 2013). (pp. 1-2). According to this article, sexual assault is a type of trauma that may trigger anxiety, fear, and PTSD throughout one's life. When this type of trauma occurs, especially if the individual believes in God, it is difficult to trust a God who is supposed to protect. The Bible highlights promises of peace; "I leave you in peace. I extend my peace to you. I do not give you the same peace that the rest of the world does. Do not allow your hearts to be worried or afraid"

(*New Life Version*, 1963/2003, John 14:27). This is the truth that is found in the Bible defining the peace that God provides; nevertheless, it is difficult to receive this promise if the lack of forgiveness has deep roots and other effects of trauma that have not been addressed. Referencing the researcher's personal experiences, she was recruited into sex trafficking at the age of 15 and sexually molested by several men. Because of the resulting trauma, it took many years for the researcher to learn how to develop and maintain healthy relationships, as well as how to overcome the reflexive triggers that were pulled when engaging in any normal activities with men, such as consulting a male chiropractor or doctor.

When working with trauma survivors, it is critical that we understand the whole picture. Alim, Due & Strelan (2019) stated that, unfortunately, victims of systemic injustice rarely seek remedy through the systems they view as complicit in the injustice they have faced. Persecution on religious, ethnic, or political grounds is a common form of systemic injustice experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. Sometimes, the perpetrator of an injustice is difficult to identify. Certain faceless policies may cause unfairness, while, alternatively, it may be the responsibility of multiple leaders in a country's government or local authority. Victims rarely receive justice in these circumstances. In addition, they often have to wait a long period for it. Unresolved injustice persists for victims of systematic injustice. Without justice, forgiveness is less likely, as it is costly and viewed as weak and disempowering (p. 256). An individual's life can be profoundly impacted by traumatic experiences, particularly when there are cultural barriers involved, as demonstrated in this article. In the researcher's experience, she would share her personal history with others so that they might understand the obstacles she encountered on her journey to healing. As we move further with this paper, it is essential to recognize the difficulties that a



person who has survived traumatic experiences faces, as well as the ways in which unforgiveness can take root and impact one's life over the long term.

### **Finding Justice Through Forgiveness in a Secular Perspective**

In this section of the research paper, the researcher investigates the various ways in which a person who has survived traumatic experiences can achieve forgiveness and receive justice through the use of a secular approach consistent with a Christian worldview. Weinberg (2020) discussed that Thompson et al. (2005) expanded the definition of forgiveness to include self-forgiveness, forgiving others, and forgiving the situation. Forgiveness is linked to reduced stress and relief from PTSD in trauma survivors (Hamama-Raz et al., 2008; Snyder & Heinze, 2005), with situational forgiveness being the most impactful (Weinberg, 2013; Weinberg et al., 2017). Spirituality is recently recognized as a valuable internal resource for trauma recovery and forgiveness (Langman & Chung, 2013). A sense of meaning and purpose in life is generally referred to as spirituality. Belief in a higher power beyond oneself indicates a connection with a universal force transcending current reality (p. 432). When it comes to healing and forgiveness, secularists believe that a relationship with a higher power is crucial. When forgiveness is embraced, PTSD and other limiting symptoms are reduced, allowing the survivor to completely embrace their healing journey and receive a sense of justice. This viewpoint is related to a Christian worldview as well, because connecting with God helps survivors of trauma forgive and heal. This connects to Biblical truth expressed directly in Scripture, “The Lord is higher than all nations. His shining-greatness rises above the heavens. Who is like the Lord, our God? He sits on His throne up high” (*New Life Version*, 1963/2003, Psalms 113:4-5). This Biblical truth sheds light on the fact that a secular approach to forgiveness can align with a Christian worldview. In the researcher's experience, she attended secular self-help groups at the beginning of her healing

process, where they discussed the significance of connecting with a higher power. This is when she met a sponsor who walked with God, and her spirituality inspired the researcher to deepen her relationship with God. Having a relationship with God helped the researcher to embrace the concept of forgiveness.

Embracing forgiveness and receiving justice is not easy, but there are approaches that may be used to overcome any barriers. Burns & Sinko (2023) mentioned that restorative justice seeks to hold responsible parties accountable by focusing on harm through a collaborative decision-making process involving impacted individuals, responsible parties, and others. In this model, responsible individuals accept responsibility for their offenses and actively try to repair the harm created by their actions in order to reduce the chance of reoffending. While the manifestations of restorative conferencing vary considerably from case to case, the process is usually conducted by a qualified facilitator who works with both parties to generate an honest discourse about the harm done and how the responsible party might make amends. The ultimate purpose of these encounters is for all parties to collaborate in the healing process and rebuilding community trust by earned redemption (Karp 2013) (p. 341). Another secular approach that might assist a trauma survivor in finding justice via forgiveness is restorative justice, which aligns well with a Christian worldview. Healing happens when the victim and the perpetrator meet in a safe space to work towards reconciliation. While this may not always be possible, when a victim is provided a safe space to express their pain, it opens a path towards forgiveness and a form of justice is created. The Bible discusses the importance of reconciliation; “Get rid of all bitterness, fury, and anger, as well as brawling and slander, and every other type of animosity. Be kind and compassionate to one another, and forgive one another, just as God has forgiven you in Christ” (*New International Version*, 1963/2003, Ephesians 4:31-32). Forgiveness and

reconciliation may be difficult to embrace in a secular viewpoint, but with strategies such as restorative justice, these concepts can be accepted when the time is right, and this approach is consistent with a Christian worldview. In the researcher's experience, she was able to describe her trauma to her relative in a safe environment during a meeting with a therapist; as a result, the researcher was able to attain a sense of justice for speaking her truth and moving toward forgiveness. The researcher also realized that the people who had previously harmed her were also once innocent children. They did not wake up one day and decide to begin harming people. So, what happened to them on their way to becoming perpetrators? Of course, accountability is required; however, what else can be done to break the cycle of violence in the perpetrators' lives? We must be open to seeing the big picture, one encompassing the entire set of circumstances triggering their ruinous actions.

Restorative Justice is simply one approach to forgiveness; there are more secular approaches to forgiveness that are nonetheless consistent with a Christian perspective. Suzuki & Jenkins (2023) mentioned that an apology may have a healing effect on victims since it shows that criminals accept responsibility for what they have done to their victims (Bennett, 2006), telling victims that victimization is not their fault (Pranis, 2004). This moral action can meet the victims' justice needs (Herman, 2005) and restore self-respect and dignity (Lazare, 2004), allowing them to move on from the consequences of crime (Vines, 2017). As a result, an apology may diminish victims' desire for vengeance against offenders (Walgrave 2011). Indeed, empirical research indicates that an apology helps diminish victim anger (Anderson et al., 2006). Surprisingly, the advantages of an apology extend beyond victims, since perpetrators can also benefit from apologizing (pp. 14-15). This secular approach uses an apologetic process to help survivors embrace forgiveness and a feeling of justice, which is consistent with a Christian

perspective. The Bible often emphasizes the need of being the first to make amends to those who have been harmed. When a survivor of trauma receives an apology, it may take some time for that apology to be processed, but gradually healing occurs and a sense of justice emerges. Unfortunately, this is not the case in every situation, but it is an effective strategy, especially if it is reciprocal, I.e., the victim acknowledges any legitimate grievances voiced by the offending party. In the researcher's experience, she was able to confront her relative about her past childhood trauma. The relative apologized for their role, which helped the researcher embrace forgiveness and receive a measure of justice for what had happened to her.

As leaders and community members, we must recognize the connections and importance of forgiveness and justice. Wenzel and Okimoto (2014) highlighted that the link between justice and forgiveness is complicated. On the surface, justice and forgiveness seem incompatible, as justice requires perpetrator suffering while forgiveness implies undeserved compassion. Justice and forgiveness can be considered separate concepts. Victims may forgive offenders regardless of their punishment or seek punishment regardless of their readiness to forgive. It is likely that justice and forgiveness are not only compatible but also functionally related. Justice can be restored through forgiveness (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010, 2012), and justice can also enable forgiveness (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2007). Despite being a common belief, the idea that reaching a semblance of justice promotes forgiveness has gotten less consideration in psychological research. This article focuses on this potential (p. 463). This article provides a perfect example of a secular perspective on finding justice through forgiveness. Despite the fact that there isn't much research on this concept, this article examines and discovers a connection between the pursuit of justice and forgiveness. This perspective aligns with a Christian worldview; once forgiveness is embraced, a person can receive a form of justice and move on.

When the researcher travels and speaks on public platforms, she finds that people with a secular viewpoint comprehend the concept of embracing forgiveness and finding justice through it just as well as people with a Christian perspective. The researcher has discovered immense freedom in forgiving because she refuses to let the perpetrators from her past hold her back.

Embracing forgiveness and receiving justice also improves mental health. From a secular standpoint, ensuring that survivors find ways to stay grounded is critical for their recovery process; this aligns with a Christian perspective. Gunjan (2023) stated that positive and healthy forgiveness can help individuals overcome psychological and neurological challenges (Trivedi, 2023). However, forgiveness involves active decision-making to release resentment, which can lead to feelings of empathy and compassion for others (Worthington et al., 2004). Finding serenity can help individuals focus on themselves and go forward in life. Releasing previous grudges and resentments makes for better mental health. Positive effect and self-esteem are linked to forgiveness (Karremans et al., 2003) (p. 1). Forsaking bitterness and unforgiveness is a decision that the survivor must make, and from a secular standpoint, finding ways to encourage a lifestyle endowed with better mental health can help in the process of forgiveness; when this occurs, justice prevails. Even while the secular perspective promotes forgiveness through a mental health approach, this concept is consistent with a Christian worldview because Biblical truth urges us to be still and trust God, which hovers a path to mental wellness. From the researcher's perspective, when she carried the burden of unforgiveness, she easily resented other people and found it difficult to love and trust since she feared being hurt again. When the researcher began to embrace her healing path, her mental health improved, freeing her to trust and love again, or perhaps even for the first time.

It is critical to understand the consequences of not letting go of one's pain, which can make it difficult for a person to feel empathy or compassion toward those they encounter in their daily lives. Słowikowski Andrzej. (2020) discussed that in his religious writings, Kierkegaard extensively used the rigor-leniency dialectic to characterize the relationship between man and God in Christianity. According to Kierkegaard (1990, pp. 72-73, 340, 1997b, pp. 128-134), one can only attain Christian leniency by rigorously relating to oneself and seeking redemption from sin. Rigorousness towards oneself is balanced with leniency towards others. As Christians, we are graced with the ability to love our neighbors, allowing us to overlook their sins and discover the divine good within them. Kierkegaard (1995, pp. 281-288) suggests that individuals who are harsh on others and attribute blame to others may be lenient on themselves, oblivious of their own sin or guilt. According to Kierkegaard, a person like this must accept that Christianity is internally consistent, as God applies the same standards to man as man does to his neighbors (Christian like-for-like) (p. 77). This article addresses the value of forgiveness and how when others practice it, they are not passing judgment on others, which allows them to embrace empathy while honoring God, who is forgiving by nature. Holding onto unforgiveness and bitterness, according to a secular perspective, leads to anger, sadness, PTSD, and other troubling effects. In the researcher's experience, she chose to forgive those who had hurt her in the past because she wanted to finally live the life God had planned for her. As a result, she eventually embraced the concept that hurt people extend the hurt to others. If God can forgive her for her shortcomings, she should be open to forgiving others.

### **Finding Justice Through Forgiveness in a Christian Worldview Perspective**

In this section of the paper, the researcher investigates how a survivor of trauma can find forgiveness and receive justice through a Christian worldview. Ely (2004) discussed that one of the students proposed a three-level process in response to Simon Wiesenthal's *Sunflower*. She suggests starting with "laying down the burden." According to Wiesenthal (1997), the encounter with a dying Nazi soldier who confessed and asked for forgiveness was a heavy burden and deeply disturbed him (p. 55). A second level involves forgiving to maintain internal health and avoid resentment and anger. One of the highest levels is the 'restoration of injured relationships.' A student suggested denying injury to avoid shame, followed by anger and reconciliation. Christians must consider the psychology of forgiveness to authentically put to practice Jesus' teachings on forgiveness. Forgiveness is a process (p. 120). In a Christian worldview, forgiveness is what frees the survivor from internal chains. Even if the perpetrator is not held accountable, when the survivor chooses to forgive and let go, they experience inner peace and a sense of justice. The Bible discusses letting go and allowing God to seek justice: "Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you" (*New International Version*, 1963/2003, Proverbs 20:22). From the age of four, the researcher endured physical and sexual abuse, as well as years of trauma. When the researcher completed her last prison term, she understood she needed to do a lot of internal work to break the generational cycle of poverty, dysfunction, and trauma in her family. It wasn't easy, but as she continued to walk with God, she recognized that forgiveness was essential to achieving the justice she had never received.

In a Christian worldview, forgiveness is essential for healing, restoration, and peace. Hendricks, Chelladurai, Marks, Dollahite, Kelley & Rose (2023) stated that according to the participants, their religious and spiritual beliefs, their encounters with divine forgiveness in a

spiritual setting, and their desire for relational peace with one another (in couples and parent-child interactions) all served as inspiration for their efforts to forgive. These families intertwined relational and religious/spiritual circumstances made forgiveness a crucial requirement. Many families stated that commitment, conflict resolution, and relationship harmony were the main reasons they felt compelled to forgive (p. 1020). Forgiveness is an essential component of the Christian worldview. The Bible emphasizes the need to forgive others as God has done. Forgiveness gives so much healing, and in the long run, justice is fulfilled since the survivor can move on with their lives and no longer be held captive to rancor. Relationships can be repaired through the power of forgiveness, yet mending may not be possible in some cases. In the researcher's experience, forgiveness was a critical component in her being able to begin her mission to share her truth and raise awareness of human trafficking. The researcher had been unable to speak about the trauma she had endured due to the shame she carried for so long; after she forgave, she was free of her perpetrator's chains and was able to speak with confidence and boldness and risk the vulnerability that comes with them.

Although forgiveness is encouraged in the Christian worldview, trauma survivors find it difficult to forgive, so they look for other ways to heal. Kim & Enright (2014) mentioned that ultimately, the distinction between divine and human forgiveness may be in who forgives and why. As a forgiving agent, God differs from us as He is not imperfect. In addition, God forgives sins to restore connections with sinners, not to change Himself. Those who cannot forgive others for their sins may seek to change themselves, such as releasing negative emotions, eschewing revenge, developing goodwill, and repairing relationships if desired (p. 200). From a Christian standpoint, survivors must forgive because God has forgiven them for their transgressions. The Bible discusses forgiveness: " For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your



Heavenly Father will forgive you as well" (*New International Version*, 1963/2003, Matthew 6:14). Even though this is Biblical truth, some survivors are unable to forgive right away due to deep-rooted trauma, so they choose to work on themselves in order to recover; forgiveness will become easier for them to embrace with time. Walking in total freedom from the grasp of trauma is a form of justice. Forgiveness was not easy in the researcher's experience, but as she healed, she became more open to the concept of forgiveness. As she embraced the process, she received the healing she had been seeking her whole life.

Forgiveness not only promotes healing, but it also improves one's overall well-being. Horowski Jarosław, & Kowalski Mirosław (2022) mentioned that forgiving is a key aspect of religious practice and understanding. Its importance and theological and psychosocial complexity cannot be disputed. Since personal (and spiritual) growth changes a person's worldview, so does forgiveness. Forgiveness is key to overcoming life's challenges, whatever the age of the individual. It expresses forgiving thoughts, actions, and intentions. Dealing with the decision to forgive is crucial for a person's holistic health, including physical, psychological, and spiritual factors (p. 1295-1296). This article promotes receiving justice through forgiveness from a Christian perspective because the authors emphasize how forgiveness is essential to overall wellness. When a survivor releases all of their deep-rooted trauma, their physical, emotional, and spiritual states begin to come fully alive, leading to freedom. In the researcher's experience, after she forgave, she began to walk with empowerment and excitement for the future. She began to care for herself and engaged in a variety of self-care activities such as hikes in nature and working out at the gym.

An important part of healing and restoration in the Christian perspective is accountability and forgiveness, although getting there can occasionally be a difficult process. Horowski (2023)

highlighted that forgiveness requires time and effort to bring about change in harmers, whereas condonation is simple. Forgiveness can coexist with punishment, which serves as a tool for education rather than a form of revenge. Forgiveness does not require repentance, but rather encourages it. Furthermore, forgiveness should not be extended to offenders who are not mature enough to accept it (Horowski & Jeziorński 2023) (p. 76). This article discusses a different strategy that includes forgiveness. When a survivor forgives and holds the perpetrator accountable, justice is produced in another way, and responsibility and repentance are essential in a Christian worldview. In this case, it is easier for a victim to forgive when the harmer expresses remorse; absent remorse or accountability, the survivor finds it difficult to forgive. For true freedom, forgiving is a strategy that is gradually accepted. In the researcher's experience, it was difficult for her to accept forgiveness because there was no accountability on the perpetrators' behalf. However, she was eventually able to forgive in her own heart and move on in life free of the bonds of resentment. As a result, she attained justice even when no one was held accountable.

### **Story Telling: A way a Survivor of Trauma can Find Justice through Forgiveness**

In this section of the paper, the researcher will investigate ways by which a survivor of trauma finds justice through forgiveness through storytelling. Kleiven, T. (2023) stated that a Christian perspective on forgiveness emphasizes intimate interpersonal forgiveness in two main areas. First, forgiveness requires responsibility (Graham, 2002). The violated may feel accountable, guilty, and ashamed, especially in unbalanced power relationships. This happens most often with victims of sexual abuse. The power dynamic in misconduct seems to shift accountability from the perpetrator to the violated. To shift the blame back from the violated to the offender, relational support is necessary (p. 151). It is difficult for a trauma survivor to find

justice through forgiveness when they feel responsible for what has happened to them. When the perpetrator is not held accountable and shows no remorse, the survivor is left with a broken spirit. When a survivor is in a safe space with other survivors and can share their truth, the burden of accountability shifts away from them. When a survivor is able to tell their truth, they begin to piece together all of the brokenness within them and realize that forgiveness is essential for them to move forward. When they reclaim their power and move on, they have just achieved justice. In the researcher's experience, when she first shared her story in a group setting, all of her shame and guilt dissipated because everyone in the circle listened and supported her. She was empowered to reclaim command of her own life and history, igniting a chain reaction of storytelling.

Storytelling isn't the only way a survivor can find empowerment; when a survivor is given a space to speak their truth and is heard, healing and a sense of justice emerge, and forgiveness becomes an easier goal to reach. Wyles, O'Leary, & Tsantefski (2023) discussed that bearing witness empowers survivors to share their experiences, promotes reconciliation, exposes the past, acknowledges trauma, and challenges the dominant historical account. Survivors emphasize the importance of acknowledging trauma and apologizing as crucial for recovery (Herman, 1992). This assessment highlights areas of risk, opportunity, and additional research, emphasizing the necessity for official processes to prioritize survivors in bearing-witness initiatives. While imperfect, bearing witness and focusing on survivors may help people, communities, and nations to achieve healing, justice, and truth (p. 3090). Another example that supports the researcher's theory about storytelling: Providing a safe space for survivors to express their pain gives them a sense of purpose and meaning, since they are using their experiences to help others. This approach results in forgiveness and a sense of justice, and it

bridges the gap created by the perpetrator's lack of accountability. In the researcher's experience, sharing her story widely has given her a sense of purpose while also giving a voice to the little girl who had been silenced for so long. In so doing, she has filled the gap created by not receiving justice for the crimes committed against her. In this process, forgiveness allows the researcher to speak about difficult topics in public because she now accepts that what occurred to her was not her fault and that she is not to blame for her past shame or guilt.

When a survivor tells their truth in a group setting with other survivors, they gain empowerment. Pietri, Roques, & Bouteyre (2020) discussed that trauma victims often benefit from self-help groups where they can discuss experiences similar to their own. Ranchin (2015: 99) suggests that self-help groups can help individuals discover themselves through the experiences of others. Self-help groups lend a supportive setting for victims to discuss their traumatic experiences, complementing traditional individual therapy. Fisher (1984, 1989) argues that people make sense of their surroundings through narratives (p. 197). When a trauma victim discovers a safe space with other survivors, the shame and guilt they've been carrying for so long begins to fade. Through storytelling, a trauma survivor might find meaning in their present situation and begin to hope for a better future. This healing route eventually leads to forgiveness and a sense of justice. In the researcher's experience, because she shared her experiences to help others who responded by reciprocating, she was able to find purpose in her past pain by turning it around and using it for good rather than letting it fester. The researcher has discovered that God transforms what is intended for evil into something beautiful.

When a victim shares their truth, they eventually shift their focus away from the perpetrator and toward the shining light, which unleashes forgiveness and produces a sense of justice. Philpott (2013) mentioned that it's not necessary to forget in order to forgive. The victim

might remember what happened to her as part of her life story and relate it to others, but she also knows that she has added to this story by committing not to blame the person who did this anymore. Not only that but forgiving someone doesn't always mean reestablishing a relationship (p. 402). When a trauma survivor chooses to forgive and embark on a healing journey, they do not forget the prior trauma, but they cease focusing on the perpetrator. A Christian survivor believes that God will replace what was stolen. This Biblical truth is discussed in the Bible; "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten" (*New International Version*, 1963/2003, Joel 2:25). Knowing and embracing this truth in everyday life creates a sense of justice. Because of the years of pain that the researcher had endured, she vowed not to waste any more of her life. She gained a sense of empowerment and became an advocate for social justice.

When a trauma survivor is given the opportunity to speak about their experiences, they feel supported, thanks to a fully engaged facilitator. Breed and Uwihoreye (2023) stated that being completely present and receptive to communication while actively listening means keeping an eye out for non-verbal cues including gestures, tones, pauses, and emotions that might convey information. Nancy Kline (1999) asserts that attentive hearing improves the quality of one's own thought processes, and that active listening stimulates the brain to improve one's own thought processes. In turn, this can help people listen to others and to themselves as they work to pinpoint and resolve issues (p. 165). This final article confirms the researcher's belief in the power of storytelling. When a survivor is given a safe environment to express their deepest pain, and the listeners are fully present and make eye contact with the survivor, the survivor is able to break free from their emotional bondage. They feel understood, supported, and believed. As a result, forgiveness and justice have become more accessible concepts. In the researcher's experience, she works with survivors of human trafficking, and when she speaks with these

women, she gives them her full attention, making eye contact and using hand gestures or facial expressions as confirmation that she is present for the survivor whose pain is valid.

### **Conclusion**

When writing this paper, the researcher learned how important forgiveness and justice are for trauma survivors. To find true justice to alleviate one's pain, a survivor should embrace the concept of forgiveness through the lens of a Christian worldview. By embracing forgiveness as their avenue to healing, they are empowering biblical truths to bring the freedom they seek. In this study, both secular and Christian views on the importance of forgiveness in a survivor's healing journey were found to be associated with differing ways that justice might be attained through forgiveness. Finally, the value of storytelling and how it promotes forgiveness and justice is a key on-ramp to a survivor's path to healing.

### Annotated Bibliography

Alim, M., Due, C., & Strelan, P. (2019). Perceptions of forgiveness in response to systemic injustice among Iranian refugees. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 25(3), 255–258. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000355>

Alim, Due & Strelan (2019) stated that research indicates that interpersonal forgiveness can improve both mental and physical health. However, there is limited research on the role of forgiveness in systemic injustice. This study examines how refugees perceive forgiveness in relation to their experiences of systemic injustice and its potential impact on well-being. Seven interviews were carried out with Iranian refugees. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. This study found that forgiveness is crucial for individuals with refugee backgrounds and can improve their well-being. However, there was a distinction between interpersonal and systemic transgressions (p. 255). This article supports the researcher's claim that forgiveness is a form of justice. Forgiveness has positive effects on one's physical and emotional well-being, as the article states.

Breed, A., & Uwihoreye, C. (2023). Sharing and listening to stories for peacebuilding in post-genocide Rwanda. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 28(1), 160–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2023.2185130>

Breed and Uwihoreye (2023) stated that this article examines how the Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP) initiative used storytelling to connect children, young people, educators, artists, civil society workers, and policymakers to each other during transitional justice processes in the wake of conflict. Sharing stories in the context of peace education can help heal personal and social wounds caused by past conflicts. MAP uses arts-based approaches to create a community of listeners, encouraging individuals to listen to themselves, communities to listen to one another, and society as a whole to listen in order to inform peacebuilding efforts (p. 160). Through the lens of a Christian

worldview, this article provides examples of how a survivor can find healing that leads to justice.

Burns, C. J., & Sinko, L. (2023). Restorative Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence Experienced in Adulthood: A Scoping Review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse.*, 24(2), 340–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211029408>

Burns & Sinko (2023) mentioned that sexual violence is a major human rights issue. When trauma is not properly addressed, SV survivors often experience profound dehumanization and poor health outcomes, making it crucial to honor and empower them during healing and justice processes. Restorative justice (RJ) is a promising option for survivors to repair harm and reach some form of accountability, as criminal adjudication is inadequate due to retraumatization, law enforcement scrutiny, and high case closure rates. Best practices for its use in SV cases are unknown. To address this need, a scoping review identified RJ implementation best practices after adult SV. The JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis scoping review methodology yielded 15 articles, including four empirical studies and 11 nonempirical research materials from five academic disciplines. After identifying RJ best practices and structures, key implementation phases were identified. This review can improve RJ processes for SV survivors, especially those from marginalized communities facing structural inequalities, and university campus survivors. As researchers, we can use science to help society create more effective healing spaces for SV survivors; optimizing safe RJ processes is crucial (p. 340). This article examines how a trauma survivor can obtain justice through a secular approach while also embracing forgiveness through a Christian perspective.

Ely, P. B. (2004). Forgiveness in Christianity. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning.*, 27(2), 108–126. <https://doi.org/10.3138/uram.27.2.108>



Ely (2004) discussed that he approached this subject from a number of angles. The first is his investigation of the relationship between God and evil, which started with an analysis of Paul Ricoeur's 1967 book, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Ricoeur first examines the fundamental symbols through which people have communicated their awareness of evil before outlining four myths regarding the beginning and end of evil. In a March 2001 paper published in the *URAM* magazine, he summed up Ricoeur's analysis of the Creation Myth, the Tragic Myth, the Adamic Myth, and the Orphic Myth. He carried out this inquiry two years ago, looking at the New Testament's interpretation of the Adamic Myth. He will investigate this topic more in this article by examining the Christian concept of forgiveness (p. 108). According to the researcher, this article will strengthen both her thesis and the idea of forgiveness as seen through the lens of a Christian worldview.

Finch, R. J. (2006). Trauma and Forgiveness: A Spiritual Inquiry. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 9(2), 27–42. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n02\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n02_03)

Finch (2006) discussed that the reality of trauma in our world is examined in this article, as is the potential for using forgiveness as a therapeutic strategy for helping trauma victims heal. It strives to define forgiveness and offers examples of circumstances when it is suitable to forgive as well as when it is obviously not (p. 27). The researcher argues that this article can still serve to promote the idea that forgiveness is essential to justice, even when it discusses situations that may not be forgiven.

Gunjan, & Singh, S. (2023/09//). Effect of Forgiveness on Happiness and Well-being. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(3), 360-363. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/effect-forgiveness-on-happiness-well-being/docview/2878101130/se-2>

Gunjan (2023) stated that today, maximizing pleasure and well-being is difficult. Recognition of a link between forgiveness and mental health has gained ground in recent decades. Human nature can help or harm, forgive or avenge. Genuine forgiveness is voluntary, active and intentional. Forgiveness demonstrates constructive thought; forgiving someone who has done wrong contributes to personal fulfillment. Gandhi once said "Weak people can't forgive. Strong people forgive (Sharma, 2017). Happy is "a general feeling and experience of contentment and joy" (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2012). College students who forgive are happier (Nelson et al., 2015). Well-being is happiness, satisfaction, and good physical and mental health. Forgiveness improves mental health (Brown, 2003). Forgiveness therapy decreases sadness, stress, and increases mental well-being (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018). This review examines how forgiveness affects happiness and well-being, and related research shows that forgiving people are happier and healthier (p. 360). The positive effects of forgiveness are discussed in this article, which supports the researcher's thesis.

Hendricks, J. J., Chelladurai, J. M., Marks, L. D., Dollahite, D. C., Kelley, H. H., & Rose, A. H. (2023). Exploring personal and relational motivations and processes of forgiveness in religious families. *Family Relations*, 72(3), 1014-1031. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12733>

Hendricks, Chelladurai, Marks, Dollahite, Kelley & Rose (2023) stated that they examined the reasons and processes of forgiveness in 198 highly religious Christian, Muslim, and Jewish families in the US (N = 480) using qualitative methods. Forgiveness has various relational effects, according to the study. More research is needed on forgiveness and motivation in very religious families. The findings show that forgiveness involves relational, religious, and spiritual motivations and processes, as well as religious/spiritual beliefs and behaviors. Participants' values of forgiveness and religious

and relational activities that build and strengthen it are also shown (p. 1014). In support of the researcher's thesis, this article provides evidence that a Christian worldview is crucial in determining the proper form of justice through forgiveness.

Horowski, J. (2023). The Christian concept of forgiveness and religious education facing the problem of individualism. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 46(1), 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2023.2262773>

Horowski (2023) highlighted that education must overcome the negative effects of contemporary individualism, such as utilitarian connections, since people grow up in a culture that promotes it. Thus, others co-creating these relationships are not held accountable. The author argues that the Christian concept of forgiveness is a good starting point for contemplating interpersonal relationships and responsibility for others, even when they are weak, and their actions cause disappointment and regret. Understanding forgiveness—the essence of the Christian attitude and the subject of many controversies—was the main focus of the analysis. The analysis of Bible excerpts showed that often-raised doubts about the moral value of forgiveness are caused by identifying God's forgiveness with people's decisions and misunderstanding the relationship between forgiveness and repentance. The conclusion that it can underpin modern social and moral education relied on addressing these objections (p. 71). The article supports the researcher's argument for embracing forgiveness and understanding God's forgiveness of His children.

Horowski Jarosław, & Kowalski Mirosław. (2022/04/). Human Health and Christianity in the Context of the Dilemma of Forgiveness. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61(2), 1282-1299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01424-1>

Horowski Jarosław, & Kowalski Mirosław (2022) mentioned that this article makes the case that, in terms of resolving the forgiveness dilemma, Christianity can improve health.

Paradoxically, then, the analysis begins with the assumption that an impulsive and fast decision to forgive could have a detrimental effect on the decision-maker's health and that Christianity might encourage some individuals to forgive reflexively without giving their decisions sufficient thought. The concept of health and its biblical interpretation are covered in the first section of the analysis. In the second section, forgiveness-related difficulties are discussed, along with the conflict that arises from choosing to forgive while harboring regrets that could be harmful to one's health. The final section discusses the Christian meaning of forgiveness in relation to the previously identified problems (p. 1282). The reason the researcher is referencing this article is that it validates her stance on forgiveness and the pull toward forgiveness among Christians. People who are not religious may view things differently.

Kim, J. J., & Enright, R. D. (2014). Differing views on forgiveness within Christianity: Do graduate-level theology students perceive divine and human forgiveness differently? *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 1(3), 191–202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000027>

Kim & Enright (2014) mentioned that the necessity of reconciliation in forgiveness has been questioned by various scholars. Theologians highlight complex connections between forgiveness and reconciliation, whereas psychologists separate them. One such explanation is the distinction between divine and human forgiveness: Human forgiveness of offenses may not lead to reconciliation, unlike heavenly forgiveness of sins. If asked to consider when God forgives vs when individuals do so, would theological trainees still believe forgiveness and reconciliation are linked? In the US, 276 graduate-level theology students from various denominations completed an online survey on forgiveness beliefs. The study had two sections: the first asked five questions on respondents' views on divine forgiveness, and the second used the same questions in the context of interpersonal

forgiveness. The third and last component gathered qualitative data on respondents' views on the distinction between divine and interpersonal forgiveness. The statistical analysis revealed significant variations in all aspects of divine and person-to-person forgiveness. We analyze qualitative data and explore its implications for clinical practice. The method recommends that theology students, like psychologists, distinguish between forgiving and reconciling when focusing on person-to-person forgiveness (p. 191). The researchers claim that this article supports embracing forgiveness and realizing its power to mend relationships.

Kleiven, T. (2023/04//). Power to Forgive: interpersonal forgiveness from an analytical perspective on power. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 93(2), 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-022-09857-8>

Kleiven, T. (2023) stated that this article examines how to understand interpersonal forgiveness from a Christian perspective by conducting a content analysis of forgiveness research literature. The analysis is based on the theory of power and uses the science of diaconia to describe a Christian perspective. The emphasis is on how forgiveness can be used and abused when encountering people who have had traumatic experiences of violation manifested by sexual misconduct in a church setting. This discussion aims to explore forgiveness in a way that benefits both the offender and the offended party. The content analysis identified three themes: (1) forgiveness of others in relation to God's forgiveness, (2) the role of forgiveness in personal life, and (3) forgiveness as a relationship issue. To avoid misusing forgiveness by neglecting to address responsibility, it's crucial to engage in dialogue from all three perspectives. To understand forgiveness, consider the impact of the violation on the violated's self-understanding (the inner relational dimension) and the context of the violator's position of power (the outer

dimension). This is how God forgives humans. This provides a basis for considering whether forgiveness can lead to an uplifting and liberating outcome (p. 147). The article supports the researcher's argument about the significance of seeking justice through forgiveness and describes how to do so.

Pietri, M., Roques, M.-A., & Bouteyre, E. (2020). Self-help groups and incest trauma. *Group Analysis*, 53(2), 194–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0533316419865952>

Pietri, Roques, & Bouteyre (2020) discussed that the purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a self-help group on the discourse of incest victims. Sharing a traumatic experience and discussing its main consequences with other participants creates a safe space for victims to express themselves and work through their emotions. This study was conducted in Marseille, France, in collaboration with the International Association for Incest Victims. The data were gathered during monthly self-help group sessions. We compared the evolution of the participants' discourse from September 2015 to June 2016. Tropes and Emotaix software were used to perform semantic analysis. Self-help groups foster a sense of trust and security by providing a safe space for talking and listening. Self-help groups also offer additional support to traditional, individual therapies by allowing victims to discuss their traumatic experiences (p. 194). This article addresses how a trauma survivor can find justice by speaking their truth, which is consistent with Biblical truth and leads to forgiveness.

Philpott, D. (2013), The Justice of Forgiveness. *J Relig Ethics*, 41: 400-416. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12021>

Philpott (2013) mentioned that forgiveness has entered the political sphere in countries all over the world as a response to past injustices such as war, dictatorship, genocide, and mistreatment of indigenous peoples. However, the practice is controversial in the

international community, with critics claiming that it unfairly burdens victims while avoiding dispensing deserved punishment. This essay contends that forgiveness is not incompatible with justice, but rather reflects it, if justice is defined as the restoration of proper relationships, a concept embedded in the scriptures and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When conceived in this way, forgiveness can avoid the potential injustices with which it is charged while also positively contributing to the reconstruction of political orders (p. 400). This article looks at the significance of accepting forgiveness while receiving justice from the Christian viewpoint.

Rudolfsson, L., & Portin, F. (2018). "It's Almost Impossible to Speak about It": Sexual Abuse, Forgiveness, and the Need for Restitution Rituals. *Religions*, 9(12), 421. <https://doi.org/10.3390/re19120421>

Rudolfsson & Portin (2018) mentioned that this study explores how Christian congregations might promote forgiveness and support victims of sexual assault, including proposing a restitution mass. Interviews with seven women and one male who experienced sexual abuse were evaluated using inductive theme analysis. (Our investigation focused on abuse outside the Church, not that committed by Church representatives.) Attending Church services might trigger memories of sexual abuse, and informants struggled with understanding forgiveness, including whom to forgive and what constitutes good forgiveness. They felt the Church should provide a safe space, acknowledge their experiences, and provide opportunities to connect with other victims of sexual assault. We believe Church leaders should learn about sexual assault and its effects before providing care. When victims of sexual assault are present in a congregation, it is important to prioritize their needs and concerns. Addressing forgiveness and offering rituals should not reinforce a victim's feelings of isolation,

guilt, and shame (p. 1). This article will back up the researcher's thesis regarding the importance of embracing forgiveness.

Słowikowski Andrzej. (2020/02//). Crossroads of forgiveness: a transcendent understanding of forgiveness in Kierkegaard's religious writings and immanent account of forgiveness in contemporary secular and Christian ethics. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 87(1), 55-80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-019-09733-y>

Słowikowski Andrzej. (2020) discussed that this paper attempts to contrast the problem of forgiveness, as defined in contemporary secular and Christian ethics, with Kierkegaard's thoughts on the subject. Kierkegaard's ideas are widely used in modern debates about forgiveness. It's worth exploring whether Kierkegaard's ideas can address current debates and contribute to our understanding of the issue. This paper argues that Kierkegaard's understanding of forgiveness differs fundamentally from modern thinkers. The Danish philosopher views forgiveness as a transcendent reality performed by God. However, in modern ethical and Christian thought, forgiveness is primarily formulated from an immanent perspective that aligns with human values. This distinction is demonstrated through an analysis of four key themes related to the current debate on forgiveness. These include the victim-offender relationship, the conditionality and unconditionality of forgiveness, the issue of condonation, and the problem of the unforgivable. The analyses presented here demonstrate that Kierkegaard's transcendent theses cannot be directly applied to immanent ethical thought (p. 55). This article examines the issues of forgiveness in modern times from both a secular and Christian perspective. The facts in the paper will assist in supporting the researcher's claim, because it presents an alternative perspective on forgiveness.

Suzuki, M., & Jenkins, T. (2023). Apology–forgiveness cycle in restorative justice, but how? *International Review of Victimology*, 29(2), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02697580221079994>



Suzuki & Jenkins (2023) mentioned that the apology-forgiveness cycle is a simple but effective method for conflict resolution. Given the prevalence of apologies and forgiveness in restorative justice (RJ), the apology-forgiveness cycle could occur. However, there is a lack of theoretical understanding regarding the relationship between apology and forgiveness in RJ processes. Based on existing literature, we develop a theoretical model of the apology-forgiveness cycle during RJ encounters. This typology explains how the apology-forgiveness cycle interacts with the RJ process, facilitating, blocking, and altering its sequence. There are four cycles: (1) apology that facilitates forgiveness, (2) apology without forgiveness, (3) forgiveness that encourages apology, and (4) forgiveness without apology. We conclude by suggesting future directions for research on the apology-forgiveness cycle in RJ (p. 259). This article discusses a secular approach to forgiveness and justice that is in line with a Christian perspective, supporting the researcher's argument.

Uluğ, Ö. M., Bilali, R., Karasu, M., & Malo, L. (2021). Obstacles to reconciliation and forgiveness among victim groups of unacknowledged past trauma and genocide. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 51(2), 313–325. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2740>

Uluğ, Bilali, Karasu, & Malo (2021) stated that conflicting groups frequently resist efforts to reconcile with the outgroup. Despite increased study into the processes that underpin support for reconciliation, we still know little about how resentment may motivate members of victim groups who have endured violence and atrocities to resist reconciliation and diminish their willingness to forgive the perpetrator group. Using the context of the Turkish-Armenian conflict, the current study investigated the relationship, among Armenians and in their homeland context, between ingroup identification, ingroup

glorification, and resentment and willingness to reconcile and to forgive (Armenia; Study 1), as well as among and Armenian-Americans in the host land context (the United States; Study 2). In Study 1, more Armenian identification and glorification predicted more resentment toward the Turks, which led to less forgiveness and support for reconciliation. Study 2 replicated Study 1's findings on the connections of ingroup glorification but not ingroup identification. However, Study 2 demonstrated that association with a diaspora identity (namely, American identity) predicted positive intergroup results. The findings indicate a significant relationship between different modes of identification in the homeland and host countries, and intergroup-related outcomes through resentment, as well as the barriers to reconciliation and forgiveness among victim groups for unacknowledged past trauma and genocide (p. 313). This post will help to support my research on the challenges that victims of trauma face when discussing forgiveness.

Weinberg, M. (2020). Differences in the association of spirituality, forgiveness, PTSD and stress among social workers and social work students treating trauma survivors. *Social Work in Health Care*, 59(6), 430–444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2020.1781739>

Weinberg (2020) discussed that professionals helping trauma victims may experience substantial emotional hardship. Significant personal resources are needed to manage such stress. This study evaluated how forgiveness, spirituality, PTSD symptoms, and stress affect frontline social workers and students (N = 157) who work with trauma survivors. Social work students exhibited higher stress levels but no significant differences in spirituality, PTSD, or forgiveness. Based on the subscales, social work students showed higher negative PTSD alteration symptoms while trained social workers had higher self-forgiveness. In addition, structural equation models showed that social workers with

self-forgiveness and spirituality had lower PTSD symptoms and stress. Self-forgiveness only reduced PTSD symptoms in social work students. The findings emphasize spirituality and forgiveness as crucial aspects in helping trauma survivors cope with the emotional toll, while differentiating trained and training experts. Discussed are theoretical and clinical implications (p. 430). This article discusses the value of forgiveness and how it promotes healing, which correlates to the researcher's research topic.

Wenzel, M. and Okimoto, T.G. (2014), On the relationship between justice and forgiveness: Are all forms of justice made equal?. *Br. J. Soc. Psychol.*, 53: 463-483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12040>

Wenzel and Okimoto (2014) highlighted that this study aims to determine if restoring justice after wrongdoing leads to forgiveness. Three studies, one correlational recall and two experimental scenario studies, show that forgiveness is positively related to a restored sense of justice. However, forgiveness is heavily influenced by whether justice is restored in a retributive or restorative manner. The study found that restorative, rather than retributive responses resulted in greater forgiveness. Both retributive and restorative responses increased forgiveness indirectly through feelings of justice. However, retributive responses had direct effects on forgiveness. Experiments revealed a positive correlation between feelings of justice derived from restorative responses and forgiveness, but not retributive responses (p. 464). This article supports the researcher's concept that a survivor of trauma might experience a feeling of justice when they forgive.

Wyles, P., O'Leary, P., & Tsantefski, M. (2023). Bearing Witness as a Process for Responding to Trauma Survivors: A Review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse.*, 24(5), 3078–3093. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221124262>

Wyles, O’Leary, & Tsantefski (2023) discussed how trauma survivors share their stories by bearing witness. In national and international commissions, inquiries, and tribunals, survivors of abuse and trauma have testified. This scoping review reviews trauma-bearing-witness research. In 2021, EBSCO, Informit, CINHALL, Clarivate, ProQuest, and Sage were searched, and the gray literature yielded 1,201 references for 1990–2021 studies. Following the Arksey and O’Malley framework, 21 studies met inclusion criteria. Studies where survivors testified about trauma in official processes—verbal or written—were included. The perspectives of 3,192 trauma survivors who had borne witness were represented in these studies using various methods and designs. Four themes emerged from the studies: healing versus re-traumatization, support and safety of survivors, engaging and involving survivors, and culture and context. Bearing witness is a crucial way to give trauma survivors a voice and acknowledge them, but its effects are unclear. More research is needed to understand how bearing witness can help survivors, and not harm or re-traumatize them (p. 3078). This article highlights the need to hear a survivor’s truth for their healing, which links into the researcher’s argument to find justice through forgiveness, since releasing the pain allows the survivor to regain power.