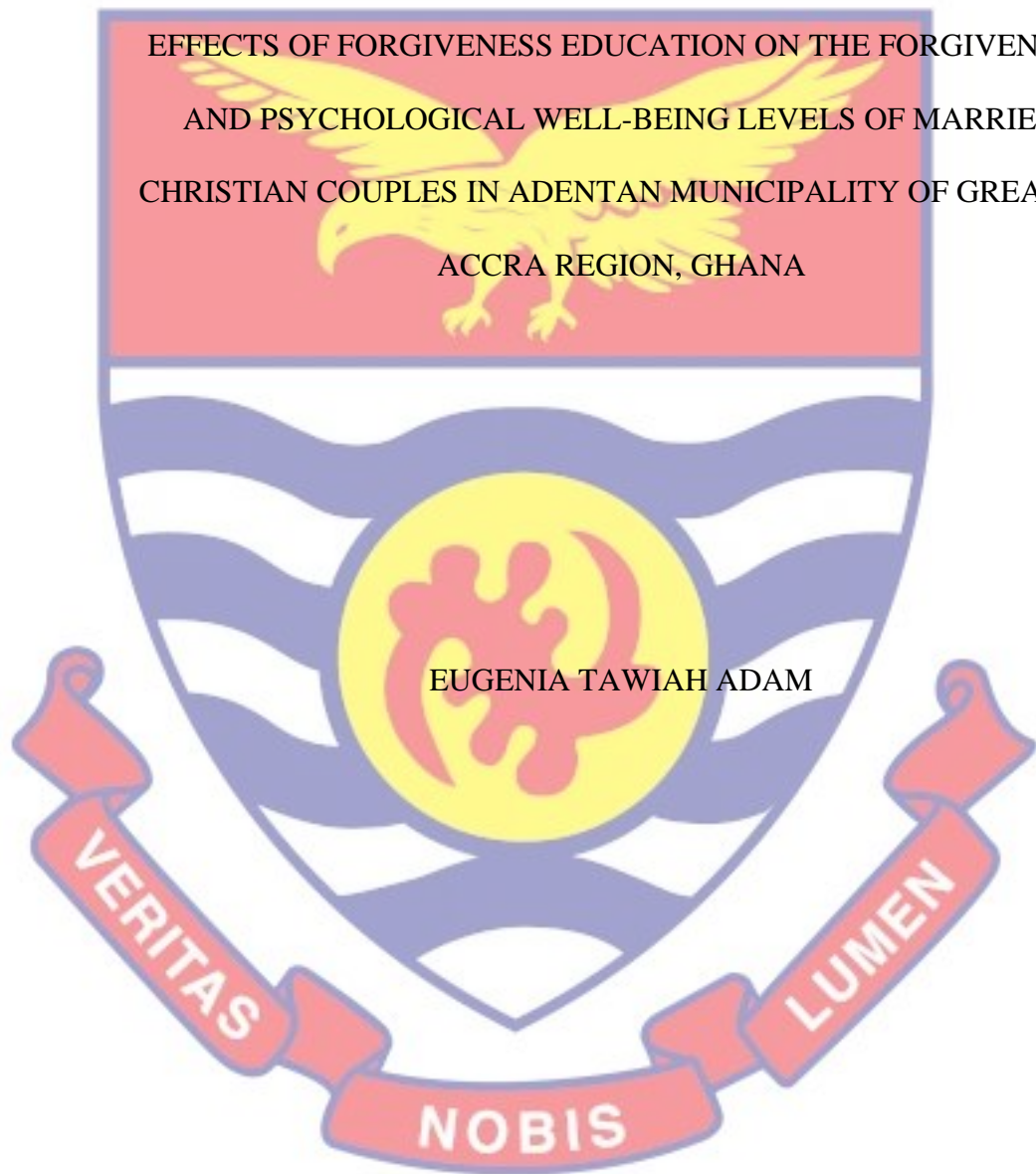


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EFFECTS OF FORGIVENESS EDUCATION ON THE FORGIVENESS  
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING LEVELS OF MARRIED  
CHRISTIAN COUPLES IN ADENTAN MUNICIPALITY OF GREATER  
ACCRA REGION, GHANA

BY  
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Thesis submitted to the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of  
Educational Foundations, College of Education Studies of the University of  
Cape Coast in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of  
Philosophy degree in Guidance and Counselling

JULY 2021

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Signature..... Date .....

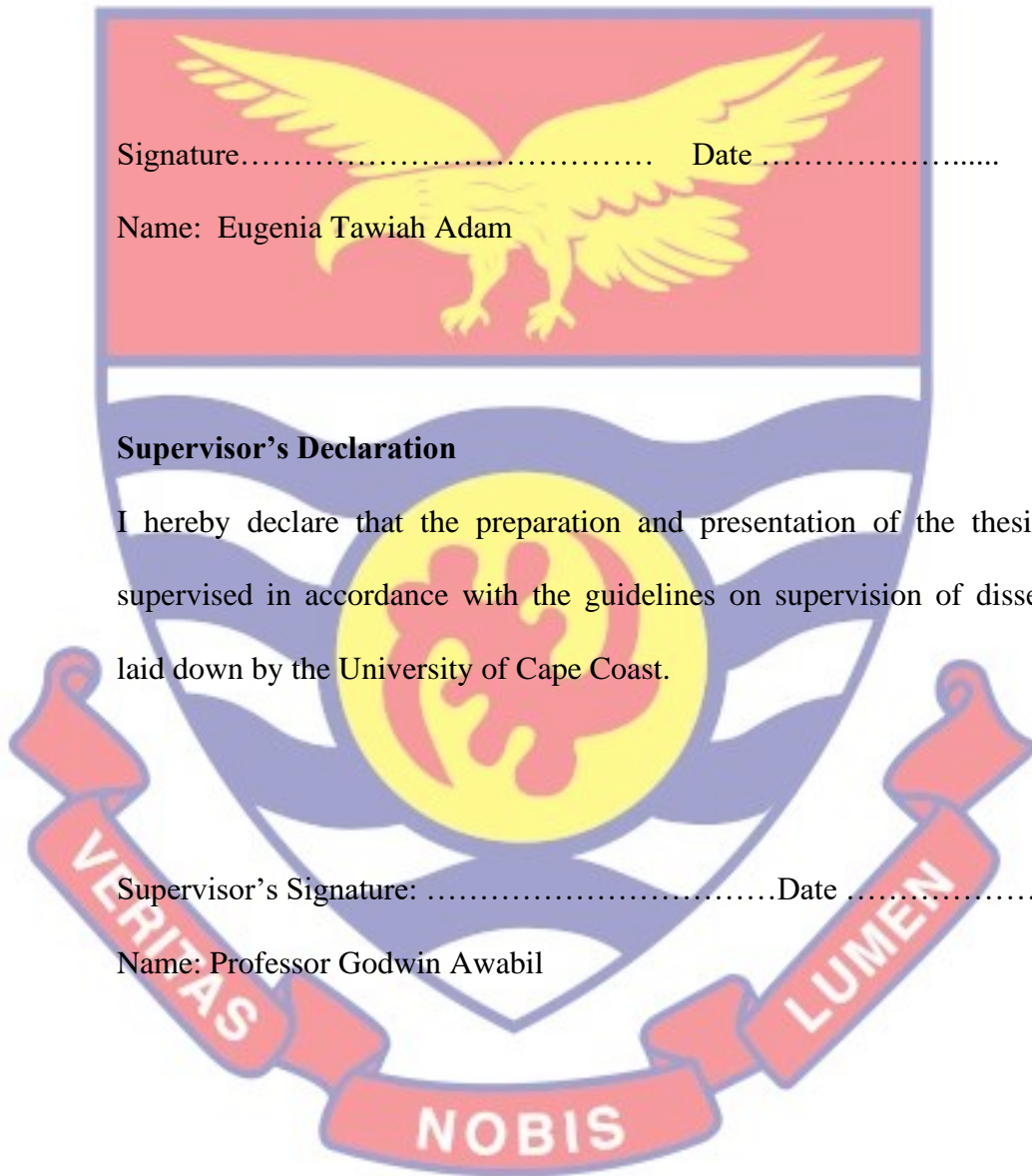
Name: Eugenia Tawiah Adam

### Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Supervisor's Signature: .....Date .....

Name: Professor Godwin Awabil



## ABSTRACT

The study sought to ascertain the effect of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples in the Adentan Municipality in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A quasi-experimental research design was used. Marital Offense Forgiveness Scale and the 18 item Ryff's psychological well-being scale were used to obtain pre and post-intervention data. A convenience sample of 104 participants consisting 32 couple pairs in experimental group and 72 couple pairs in control group were involved in the study. Participants in the control group were educated on forgiveness using C-REACH forgiveness education. Data were analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicates that forgiveness education had a significant effect on forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples. However, sex, age and duration of marriage did not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels. The study therefore supports the existing research that forgiveness education is beneficial to one's psychological well-being. It was, therefore, recommended that forgiveness education be utilised in improving the forgiveness level and mental well-being of married couples.

## KEYWORDS

Forgiveness Education

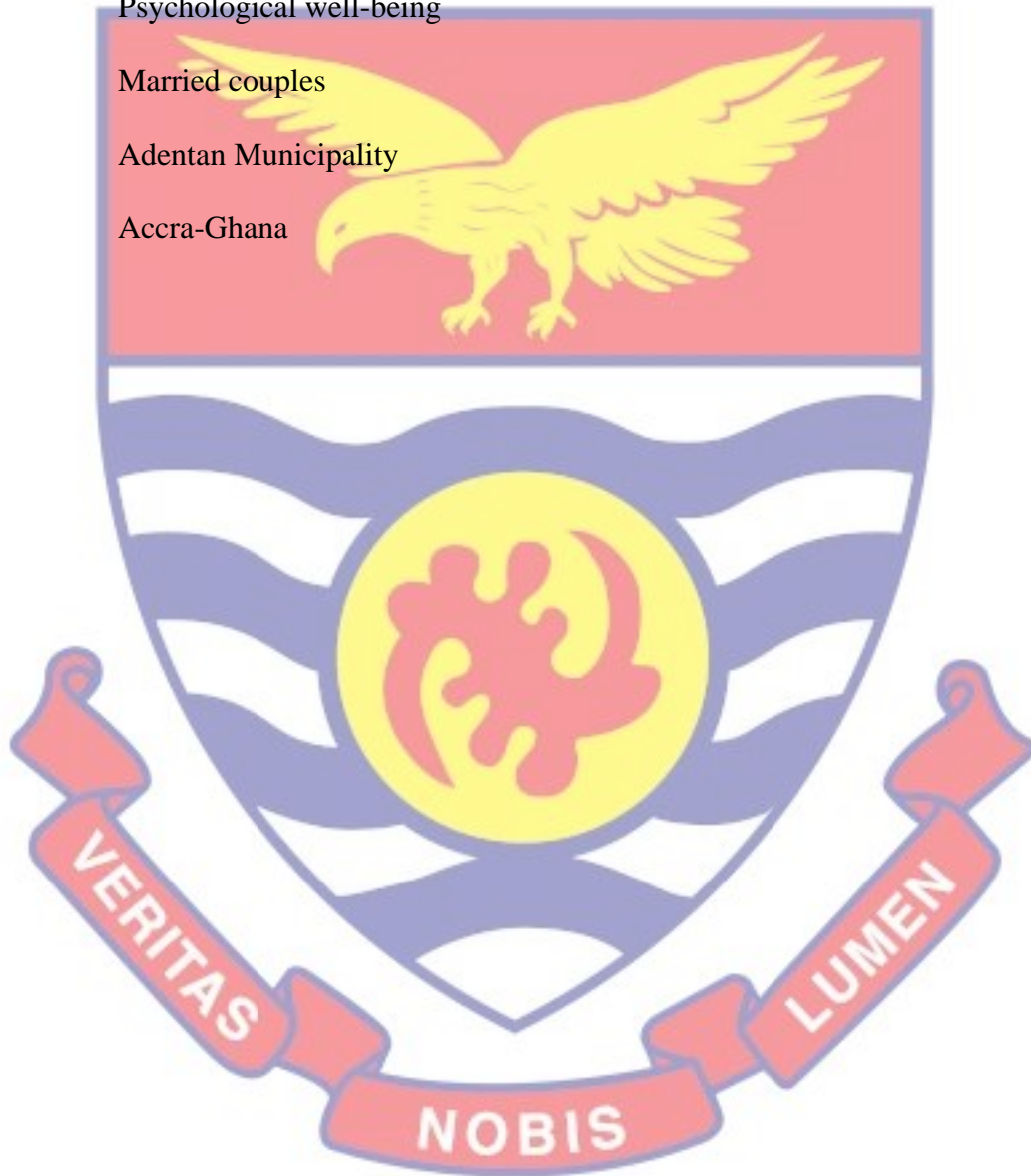
Forgiveness level

Psychological well-being

Married couples

Adentan Municipality

Accra-Ghana



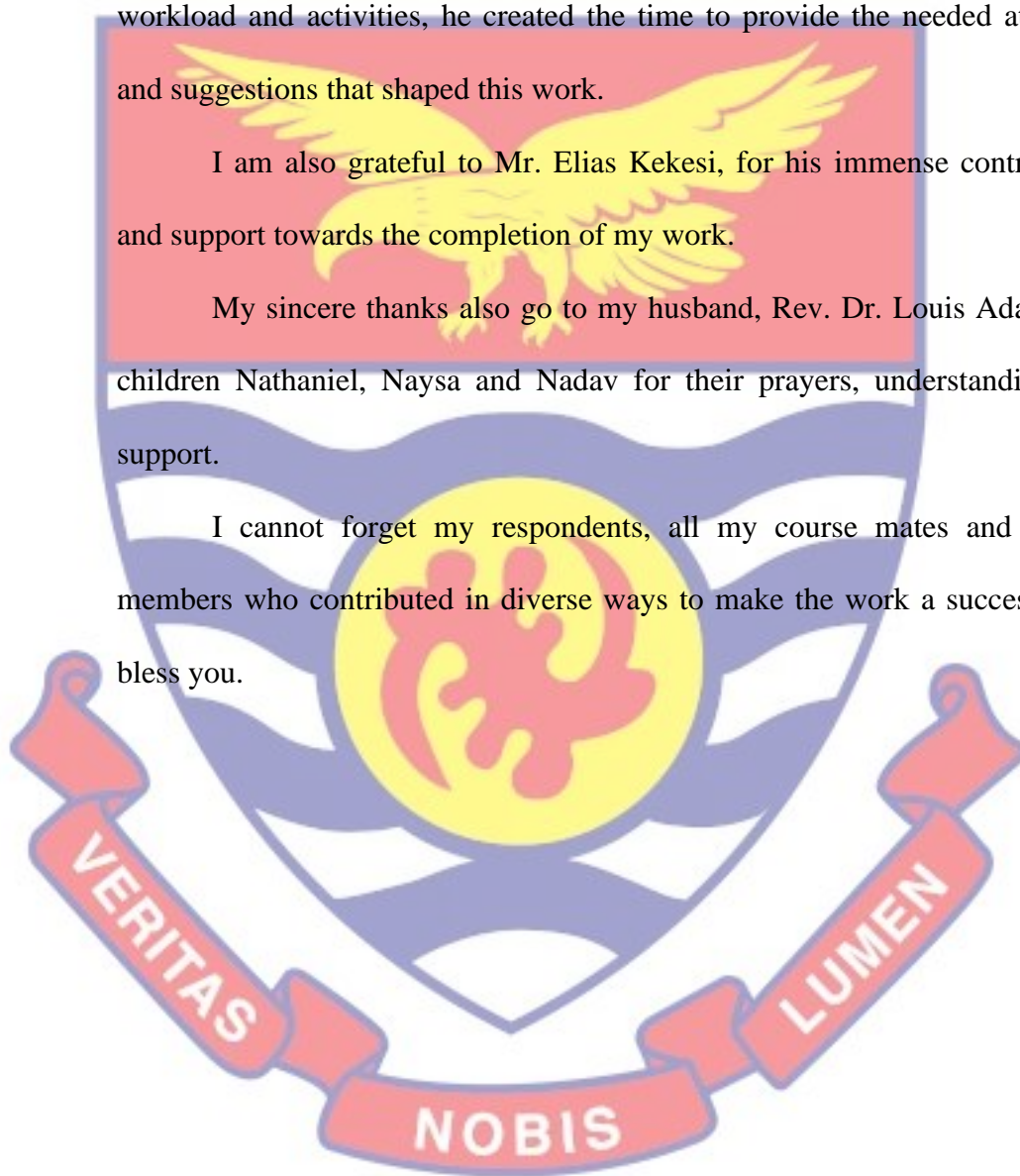
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My sincere thanks also go to my husband, Rev. Dr. Louis Adam, My children Nathaniel, Naysa and Nadav for their prayers, understanding and support.

I cannot forget my respondents, all my course mates and church members who contributed in diverse ways to make the work a success. God bless you.



### DEDICATION

To my lovely husband, Rev Dr. Louis Adam and children Nathaniel Y., Naysa P., and Nadav Nii Adam.



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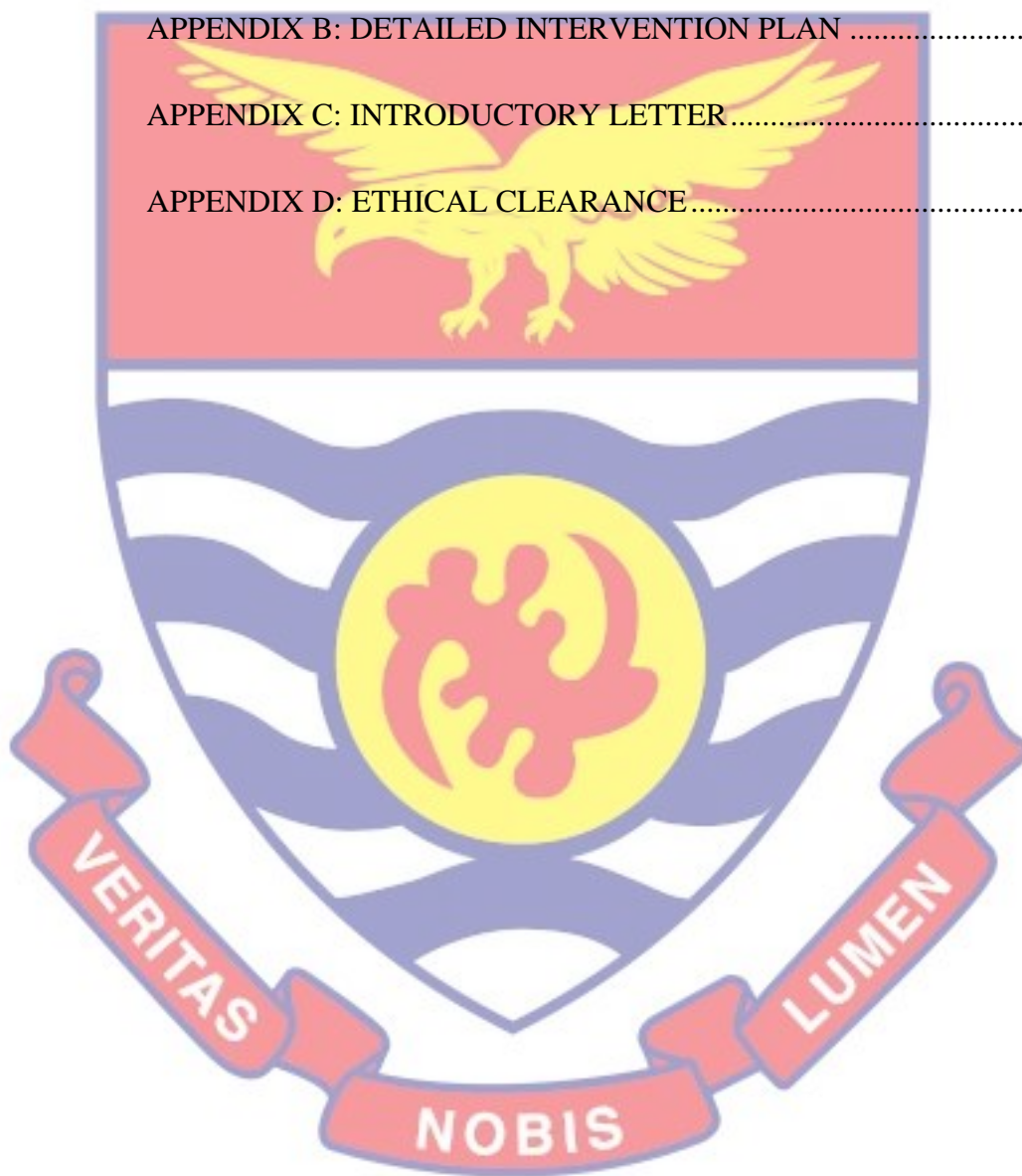


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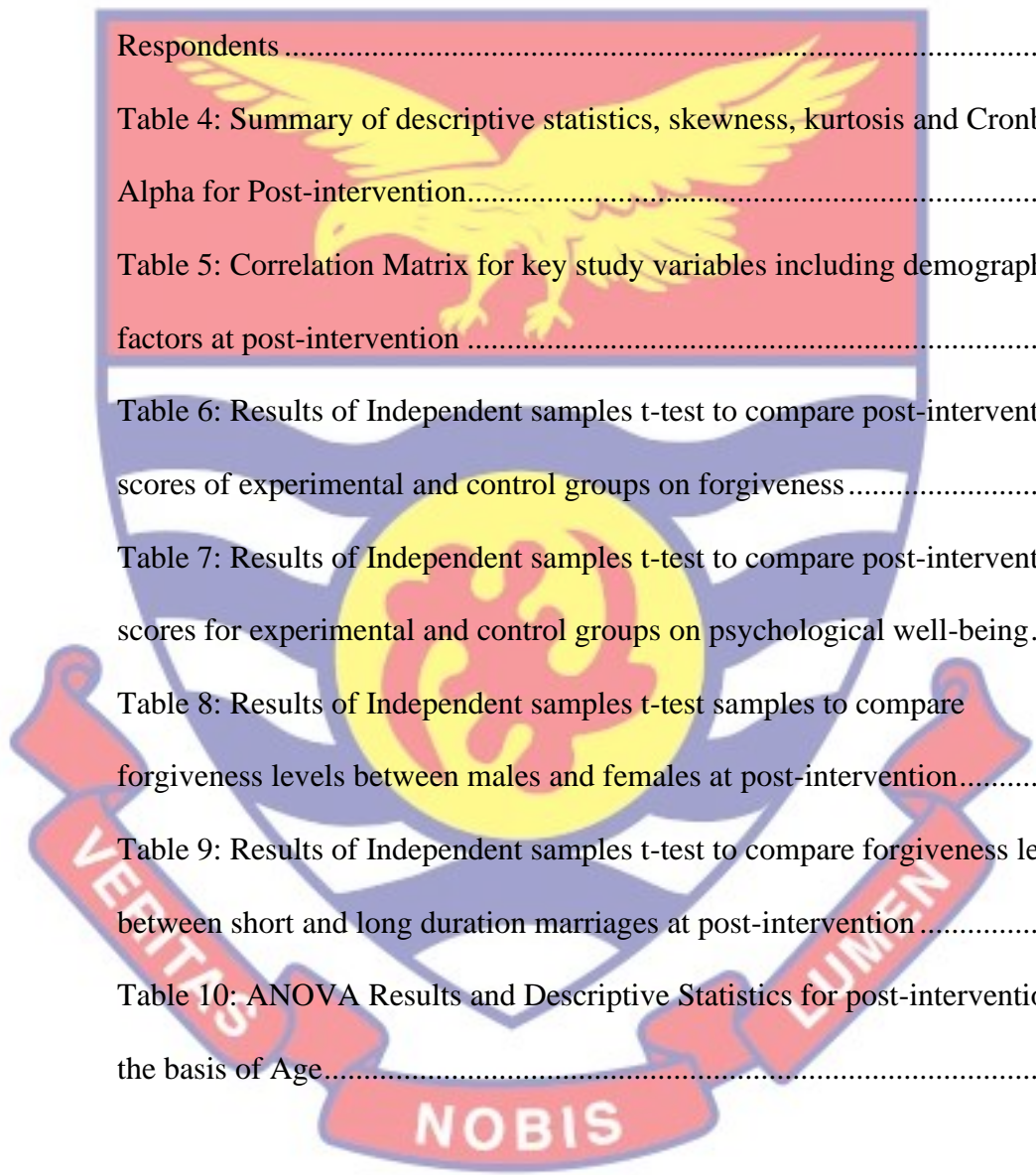
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### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANCOVA	–	Analysis of Covariance
ANOVA	–	Analysis of Variance
CBT	–	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
C-REACH	–	Christian- Recalling, Empathising, Accepting, Committing and Holding
EFI	–	Enright Forgiveness Inventory
FREE	–	Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing
HOPE	–	Handling Our Problems Effectively Empathy
MOFS	–	Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale
MRE	–	Marriage and Relationship Education
PWB	–	Psychological Well-being
PWS	–	Psychological Well-being Scale
REACH	–	Recalling, Empathising, Accepting, Committing and Holding
REBT	–	Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy
SMT	–	Social Motivation Training



## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This section introduces the examination area of the study and argues for its relevance in the current circumstance. The remaining sections of the chapter include problem statement, main goal, its specific objectives, hypotheses, significance as well as the limitations of the study.

“Forgive others, not on the grounds that they merit pardoning, but since you merit harmony”

Jonathan Lockwood Huie (n.d.)

The above quote on forgiveness spells out what forgiveness does for people with forgiving attitudes. “Forgiveness is described as an altruistic decision that relinquishes thoughts of vengeance, avoidance, and guilt by replacing feelings of anger, betrayal, fear, and hurt with positive emotions” (Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006). Studies have consistently confirmed varied benefits of forgiveness education in marital relationship. Some scholars have suggested the inclusion of forgiveness education in marriage counselling. Thus, forgiveness has become a topical issue in matrimony and household counselling, social work and other psychological well-being fields. The present investigation was aimed at ascertaining the impact of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological wellbeing levels of married individuals in the Adentan Municipality of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

### **Background to the Study**

Forgiveness research has increased in response to tragic events and issues since the early 1990s (Staub, Pearlman, & Miller, 2003; Rainey, 2008). In line with the Positive Psychology Movement of the early 2000s,



“forgiveness research has shifted from the traditional focus on illness and pathology, toward an emphasis on human strengths and virtues” (Bono & McCullough, 2006). Forgiveness has also been recognised to be increasingly common in research and practice for marriage and family counselling (Fincham et al., 2006), social work (Walton, 2005), and other mental health fields. Research suggests forgiveness plays a significant role in different relationships including marital and family (Fincham et al., 2006), dating (Kelley & Waldron, 2005), friendships, and workplace (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Cameron & Caza, 2002) etc.”

Studies further indicate that “forgiveness facilitates trust, collaboration, affiliation, and cooperation, which are necessary ingredients in maintaining meaningful and satisfying interpersonal relationships (Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi, & Jones, 2006). Research has also shown that forgiveness is healing and beneficial to one’s general psychological well-being (Freedman, & Enright, 2017; Hilbert, 2015). Studies conducted with various populations who have experienced deep, personal, and unfair hurts showed that forgiveness is a response that can allow the offended partner to release negative emotions, which, if left unattended, could interfere with continuing a healthy relationship (Gambaro, Enright, Baskin, & Klatt, 2008; Waltman, Russel, Coyle, Enright, Holter & Swoboda, 2009; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005). Other benefits of forgiveness are that it is significantly related to lower heart rate, less unhealthy physical symptoms, increased cardio-vascular health (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller, 2007); lower blood pressure and less alcohol use (Lawler-Row et al., 2008), and significant anger reduction (Harris et al., 2006).

To emphasise that forgiveness is not necessarily a natural process, but something that can be taught, a quasi-experimental study showed that when individuals participated in forgiveness therapy treatment, they were less vulnerable to substance abuse at post-test and a 4-month follow-up assessment than individuals in a certified substance abuse treatment (Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004). Reed and Enright (2006) found that women, suffering from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms, who received forgiveness therapy, experienced significantly greater improvement at post-test and 8-month follow up as compared to women who received an alternate treatment of anger validation, assertiveness training, and interpersonal skills building. In all, forgiveness research shows that the advantages of forgiveness are numerous.”

One of the contexts within which many of the above-mentioned forgiveness benefits exist is the marital space. “While marriage can be a source of mental ill-health, healthy marriages are a source of physical, emotional, and financial well-being for individuals, families, and children (Blanchard, 2008). Marital quality and its benefits to the state are so influential that developed nations have instituted educational efforts and initiatives to strengthen marriages. Thus, Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) has become a central tool in policy initiatives and this has been used to help couples create and maintain healthy marriages. In other words, the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is seen as one of the most significant factors contributing to marital longevity and marital satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2006). Also, marital therapists note that forgiveness is a critical part of the healing process for major relationship transgressions such

as infidelity (Gordon et al., 2005) as well as dealing with everyday relationship hurts (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004).

### Statement of the Problem

Forgiveness is an important attitude in every marital relationship which enhances the resolution of relationship transgressions and hurt. Couples who are able to forgive each other stay together. The researchers experience over a decade as a counsellor and interactions with married Christian couples revealed that most marital conflicts and challenges is as a result of couple's inability to forgive each other, leading to bitterness, transgression, hurts, anger, regret and slander which results in separation and divorce.

Several empirical research have examined the concept and role of forgiveness among the married population in Ghana. For example, Osei-Tutu, Dzokoto, and Belgrave, (2019) identified seven types of transgressions in marriage with adultery being the commonest, lying, disrespecting, insulting, and stealing as forgivable transgressions but adultery and causing physical harm as unforgivable transgressions.

In a related study to explore forgiveness in Ghanaian marriages, Osei-Tutu, Dzokoto, Oti-Boadi, Belgrave and Appiah-Danquah (2019) found “various conceptualizations of forgiveness including removal of negative emotions; relationship restoration; forgetting; revenge, punishment, or retaliation avoidance; refraining from making future references to the offence, and minimizing the offence”. They also identified three reasons for granting forgiveness to be marital stability; marital harmony; and personal well-being. The study also revealed that participants emphasized bodily expressions and gestures (like kneeling) in the forgiveness process, and more women than men

demanded pacification when they were wronged. A number of related studies conducted in other parts of Africa such as Mozambique (Cruz & Mullet., 2019), Kenya and South Africa (Agu & Nwankwo, 2019) revealed similar results; emphasising the influence of culture in the forgiveness process.

A scan through the recent literature revealed insufficient scientific knowledge on forgiveness and associated variables impacting the forgiveness, its healing power, and dire consequences on family and individuals in a Ghanaian context. "Although forgiveness research is increasing and evolving, a gap between what is known and what needs to be known exists for the practitioner and the researcher and this gap is scientific knowledge. For the practitioner and researcher to facilitate forgiveness intervention that produces clinically and statistically significant improvement in forgiveness, further investigation is also warranted to understand the forgiveness healing process and associated health-related issues. It is to this end that the empirical analysis in this study was performed to help fill the existing gap in scientific knowledge about forgiveness of another in marital relationships and the consequences for psychological well-being.

The reality of the situation in the Ghanaian context is that marital and family education takes the form of pre-marital counselling and often done once. This is often mainly based on biblical teachings and is perhaps inadequate. Empirical evidence in some countries shows that forgiveness can be unequivocally taught to derive benefits, which suggests that more research is needed to inform counsellors or practitioners in the marriage and family counselling space. Additionally, training young couples in forgiveness offer a lot of advantages during the early stages of their marriage, as current evidence

shows that a lot of couples are leaving with bitterness and unforgiveness (Researcher's experience with clients as a counsellor and pastor's spouse). Undeniably, there is the need for several empirical studies on forgiveness education and its inclusion to be in the marriage and family therapy curriculum or sessions. Hence the study sought to examine the effects of forgiveness education on forgiveness and psychological well-being of couples.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to explore the impacts of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and mental wellbeing levels of married couples in the Adentan Municipality of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the intervention and control groups
2. To ascertain the effect of forgiveness education on the psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.
3. To examine the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of gender.
4. To investigate the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of duration of the marriage.
5. To determine the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of age.

### Hypotheses of the Study

1.  $H_01$ : Forgiveness education has no significant effect on forgiveness levels of married Christian couples.

$H_A1$ : Forgiveness education has a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married Christian couples.

2.  $H_02$ : Forgiveness education will not have any significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A2$ : Forgiveness education will have a significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.

3.  $H_03$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will not differ significantly on forgiveness levels.

$H_A3$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on their forgiveness levels.

4.  $H_04$ : Duration of marriage will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A4$ : Duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

5.  $H_05$ : Age will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A5$ : Age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

### Significance of the Study

Examining the influence of forgiveness education on forgiveness and the mental welfare of married couple in Ghana would augment existing literature on forgiveness by establishing the usefulness or otherwise of forgiveness education on forgiveness level and psychological health of couples. Specifically, it would inform family therapist, counsellors and couples on the importance of forgiveness education in the counselling process. It would also serve as an important reference for researchers who may undertake similar studies.

The clinical importance of the study is due to its potential to inform the development of culturally sensitive and relevant forgiveness interventions, which may help to promote marital stability or reduce, divorce rates. Such interventions can also augment the quality of pre- and post-marital counselling and other psychosocial support services in Churches and other settings. Ample empirical evidence shows that forgiving underpins successful marriage and a critical element in the healing process after major transgressions. Additionally, being married is noted to be associated with general health and wellbeing. It has been noted that married individuals live longer, have lower risk for lifelong diseases and sound mental wellbeing compared with never-married counterparts (Worthington Jr, 1998; Ross, Joshi, & Currie 1990; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Since forgiveness and marital relationship outcomes are positively associated, understanding the nexus between marriage and forgiveness in the Ghanaian context would be worth the study.

Forgiving comes with the benefits of mending broken homes and marital life as well as affecting the health and overall quality of life of married

couples. This study would directly benefit the participants as they go through the process of forgiving in the forgiveness intervention to be deployed in the study. As a form of marital therapy, a couple would rejuvenate their marital relationships through participation in the study.

### **Delimitations**

The study was delimited to married couples in selected charismatic and orthodox churches in the Adentan Municipality of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The study is further limited to selected mainline or orthodox churches and charismatic churches in the municipality. Another delimitation was about the research questionnaires that were developed and adopted for the study. Again, only couples who were married for at least six months or older were involved in the study. The forgiveness education included lectures and group discussions with a focus on themes associated with forgiveness. Only quantitative data was collected and analysed to determine the effectiveness of forgiveness education. Worthington's Jr (2006) 'Experiencing Forgiveness: Six Practical Sessions for Becoming a More Forgiving Christian' programme was adopted for the study. It is a six-hour intervention to promote forgiveness. It has both the leader and participants manuals that guide both parties through the six practical sessions.

### **Limitations**

Like any other research study, this study was subject to methodological setbacks in as much as the use of questionnaire as a quantitative data collection tool was concerned. Respondents might not be honest as the case may be for reasons best known to them. In that sense, forgiveness and psychological well-being are positive variables and the



tendency for participants to respond in a socially desirable way may be high. This in one way or the other might have influenced the study findings.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

***Forgiveness education:*** Teaching married couples about what forgiveness is and what it is not, informing them about the benefits of forgiveness, as well as teaching them about the forgiveness process in a confined space for a period of three weekends.

***Forgiveness levels:*** The degree to which the couples can forgive

***Length of marriage:*** Period from when the marriage was blessed in a church to the time of data collection.

***Long period in marriage:*** Marriage relationship that is five years and beyond.

***Married Christian couple:*** A blessed union between a man and a woman in a gazetted Christian church.

***Middle-aged couple:*** Married couple who are between 35 and 50 years

***Older married couples:*** Married couple who are more than 50 years

***Psychological well-being:*** Mental health and well-being aspect that concerns positive human functioning.

***Short duration in marriage:*** Period from when the marriage was blessed in a church to up to five years

***Younger married couples:*** Married couple who are less than 35 years.

### **Organisation of the Study**

The study was organised into five chapters. The first chapter presents the background to the study, the problem studied, the purpose of the study, research objectives and hypotheses that guided the study. It described the significance, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Conceptual and

research literature relevant to the study was reviewed in chapter two. The chapter provided a review of the theoretical frameworks that underpinned this study, the concepts of forgiveness and psychological well-being and the factors that were associated with them. It ended with a summary of the findings of the review and its implications as far as this study was concerned.

The third chapter dealt with the research methods. The chapter described research design, population, sampling procedure, instrument development, how reliabilities and validity of the instruments were ensured and the statistical tools used in analysing the data gathered. Chapter four presented and discussed the findings from this study, the research questions as well as the hypotheses that were formulated and tested. Chapter five highlighted the major findings from this study, conclusions that were drawn, their implications for counselling practice, recommendations made and suggestions for future research.

### **Chapter Summary**

The introductory chapter of the study was the exposition of the research topic and its links with other surrounding factors. The antecedent, consequent and intervening variables of forgiveness were examined. It was argued that lack of scientific knowledge in the study area resulted in the conduct of the present study. The purpose, objectives and hypotheses of the study were outlined. Additionally, the significance, delimitations, limitations and operational definition of key variables were given. The chapter concludes with the composition of the remaining chapters of the report.

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter is focused on three key issues. It discusses the relevant concepts of the study, the key theories that explain the expected outcomes as well as the empirical evidence available in the literature. The existing forgiveness models have also expatiated.

### Conceptual Review

Two main variables in this study are forgiveness and forgiveness education. The study argues that forgiveness education as an intervention in marital transgressions can enhance couples' tendency to forgive. These (variables are conceptualised in this section.

### Meaning of Forgiveness

Forgiveness has gained increased attention over the past few decades in several fields of study. Its definition since the last three decades has been quite problematic due to the lack of consensus on a, particularly accepted definition. Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, and Miller (2007) argued that a consensus was reached on the definition but subsequent scholars have suggested varied definitions since then. Historically, the definitions are in two broad categories with one camp emphasising a reduction in negative experiences such as behaviour, feelings, motivations and thoughts. The other camp however advocated both the reduction in a negative experience and a resulting positive experience towards the offender (Lerner, 2006, Worthington Jr, Sharp, Lerner & Sharp, 2006).

Forgiveness can occur in the unilateral relationship; i.e. between the prospective forgiver and an individual whom the forgiver has no desire to

have any continual social relations i.e. in the situation of close social connections (McCullough et al., 1997; cited in Lerner, 2006). It is implied that total pardon varies in these two types of relationships. For instance, complete forgiveness may occur in a unilateral relationship if the negative experiences like the emotions, drives, and intentions reduce markedly to become negligible. On the other hand, in a close interpersonal relationship like in marriage, if a partner offends, complete forgiveness will not just be the end of or reduction in unconstructive views, moods, and drives. Mostly, the offended yearns to restore the relationship with complete forgiveness involving the mending of all negativity and possibly gain strong quality relationship (Lerner, 2006).

Studies confirm that experiencing positive emotions such as love, sympathy, and compassion foster in-depth. Similarly, non-self-focused emotional experiences such as gratitude, meekness, remorsefulness, or hope as they think about or imagine the transgression aid in emotional healing. Thus, the absence or reduced negative emotions are deactivated by positive emotions, known as the emotional replacement hypothesis (Lerner, 2006; Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, 2013). In the case of unilateral relationships, the negative unforgiving emotions are eradicated but in interpersonal relationships, the unforgiving emotions are removed and the better emotions become stronger leading to the experience of net positive emotional gain (Worthington et al., 2007).

Forgiveness is also defined within a decisional context. Exline, Worthington, Hill, and McCullough (2003) distinguished decisional forgiveness from emotional forgiveness. It is argued that decisional

forgiveness is choosing to regulate an individual behaviour in interactions, and laying aside the desire to revenge, show resentment, and liberate the wrongdoer from any social debt encountered by the offence (Griffin, Worthington, Lavelock, Wade, & Hoyt, 2015). In this regard, it has been labelled as the choice to let go revengeful wishes and rights for compensation.

It also requires that the offended put aside negative feelings and acknowledges the offender's actions. Worthington et al. (2015) refer to it as a behavioural intention to forego retaliate and to consider the wrongdoer as an individual worthy of love and respect.

Lerner (2006) defined forgiveness *“as consisting of two individuals with one receiving a deep, long-lasting hurt that is of a physiological, emotional, physical or moral nature, which happens slowly through an inner process where the offended releases himself or herself from negative feelings and is no longer motivated toward seeking revenge”*. The key elements of this definition include letting go of the right to retribution and releasing negative affect directed toward the offender. This notion challenges the unidimensional nature of forgiveness, which limits it to the reduction in negative emotional experiences. Thus, subsequent definitions emphasise both a decline in adverse emotions and an growth in constructive emotions.

Forgiveness is the readiness to desert one's right to bitterness, harmful decision, and unconcerned behaviour toward one who unfairly hurt us, while showing the unmerited virtues of kindness, generosity, and even love toward that person (Freedman & Enright, 2015). Researchers also define it as the process of overcoming bitterness regarding a person who intentionally hurt us. With regards to offences by an a stranger, forgiveness can be conceptualised

as the reduction of negative behaviour towards the offender (Freedman, & Zarifkar, 2016).

Another key issue in defining forgiveness is its context of offences. An offence has often been described as a hurt, transgression, wrongdoing, or injustice in forgiveness literature (e.g., Worthington, 2005; Exline et al, 2003; Worthington et al., 2007, Woodyatt, Wenzel & de Vel-Palumbo, 2017). An offence may be defined as wrongdoing, whether by direct commission or omission, that causes physical and/or psychological suffering to the victim and for which the wrongdoer may in like manner suffer, especially if they acknowledge responsibility for the wrong deed.

Forgiveness is used in the forgiveness literature to refer to the state of forgiving a specific offence situation in which both the offence and offender have specific characteristics. These include the nature, intensity, duration, and potential consequences of the offence and how the offender may be related to the victim (Suwartono, Prawasti, & Mullet, 2007; Worthington et al, 2007). Where individuals have the disposition, trait, or tendency of forgiving offences consistently across time, situations, and people, this overall disposition has been regarded as forgivingness (Suwartono et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2005; Allemand, Job, Christen & Keller, 2008; Worthington et al., 2007).

Other forms of forgiveness namely *State* and *trait* forgiveness have also been differentiated as well as their likely consequences on health outcomes. Toussaint and Webb (2005) differentiated between trait forgiveness and state forgiveness. Trait forgiveness resonates the propensity to give, feel or pursue change from harmful to constructive thoughts, behaviour and feelings

towards lawbreakers including oneself, others and God. State forgiveness involves the process of offering, feeling, or trying to change from negative to positive thoughts, behaviour, and feelings towards a specific offence that is believed to have been committed by oneself, others and God (Toussant et al., 2005). Empirical evidence suggests that both are related to positive wellbeing (Lavelock et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2005; Toussaint, Worthington & Williams, 2015; Worthington et al., 2007). Whereas the offended is not obligated in any way to forgive, most definitions recognise the healing of the offended as a key component of the definition.

Forgiveness is defined as medicinal and a form of healing for persons who have undergone a profound, personal, and unjust hurt (Aalgaard, Bolen & Nugent, 2016). It has also been seen to be vital for increasing the mental and emotional wellbeing among various populations (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018). Mental health practitioners and researchers acknowledge forgiveness as a complex cognitive, emotional, relational, and physical process. Again, they regard forgiveness as a deep, healthy process that needs adjustment at various levels i.e. volitional, cognitive, affective, relational, and behavioural (Rainey, 2008). In reality, forgiveness is not simple and can occur without the offender ever offering an apology or admitting to any wrongdoing (Enright, 1991). There are countless people who will never admit their wrongdoing and apologize.

Studies have identified at least three major contexts within which forgiveness can occur; interpersonal, intrapersonal, and spiritual contexts (Temoshok & Wald, 2005; Worthington, 2005). The interpersonal context of forgiveness is a social/transactional context that involves at least two

individuals; the offender and the victim, who may need to forgive the former (Hoyt & McCullough, 2005). Thus, interpersonal forgiveness involves other-oriented behavioural intentions and emotions following a transgression perpetrated by another (Worthington et al., 2007).

The intrapersonal context of forgiveness is an individual-level context, where forgiveness is extended towards one's own self – self-forgiveness. Extending forgiveness towards one's own self over an offence perpetrated against another (e.g., intentionally insulting a partner's parents) reflects self-forgiveness in interpersonal contexts. However, extending forgiveness towards one's own self for transgression committed by the individual against him/herself, constitute self-forgiveness in intrapersonal contexts (Woodyatt et al., 2017). This context is not often explored in marital relationships.

Another common context within which forgiveness of offences has been explored is spirituality. Generally, forgiveness in the spiritual context has been conceptualized largely as feeling forgiven by God for one's own transgressions (e.g., Temoshok et al., 2005). Where perceived offensive situations have been thought of as a punishment from God, forgiveness has also been explored as changes in behaviour towards God (e.g., a current view of God as kind/benevolent/all-knowing rather than unkind/harsh/judgmental) (Ironson et al., 2011). Additionally, Toussaint et al (2005) proposed these main contexts of forgiveness, the construct can play out in four other contexts: “forgiveness of God”, feeling others' forgiveness, seeking others' forgiveness; and seeking God's forgiveness. Similarly, the context of “forgiveness of God” seems relative under defined at present. In typically religious settings, where belief in an infallible sovereign God may be dominant, the context of



“forgiveness of God” may warrant further conceptualisation and measurement.

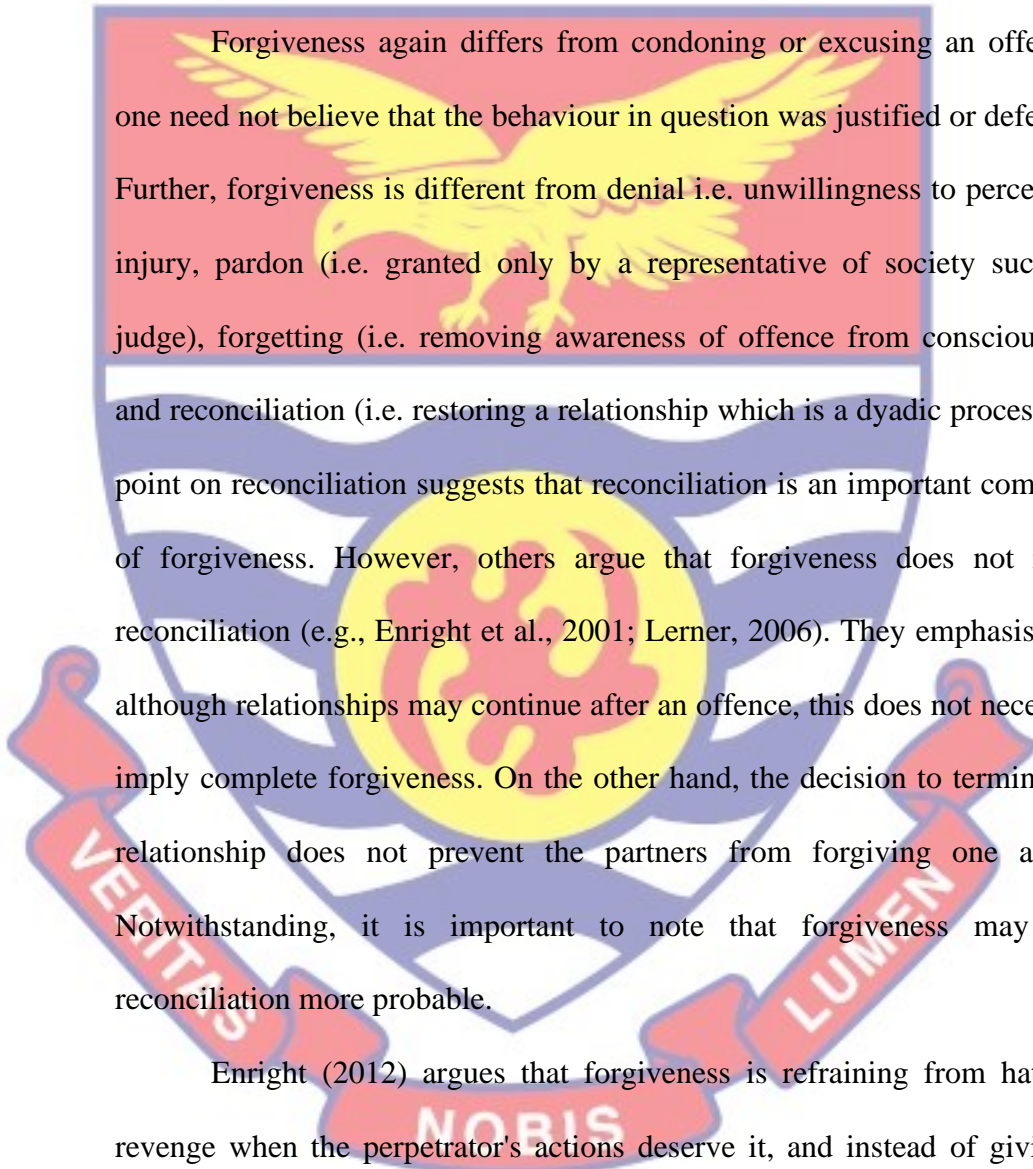
Culture has also been found to influence forgiveness. The aspect of culture often considered is the individualism-collectivism categorization. It is reported that how people understand and practice forgiveness may vary across cultures based on these two categorisations (Hook et al., 2012). Indeed, as societies grow more diverse and cultures become more complex, the extent to which societies may be collectivistic or individualistic warrant our understanding. There is enough evidence proposing significant individualistic-collectivistic differences between typical Western and non-Western cultures respectively (Dzokoto, 2010). Further, studies comparing forgiveness and health across countries have reported differences between Western and non-Western countries that have largely been associated with cultural differences in personal and relational orientations (Leach & Parazak, 2015). For example, in typical collectivistic countries such as Ghana, people may tend to prioritize group goals, social harmony, and relational restoration above their interests and well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002). It has been found that people in such collectivist cultures may be less focused on their inner emotions and hence less expressive of such emotions (Dzokoto, 2010). In line with these patterns of cultural behaviour, reports further suggest that decisional forgiveness may be more reported in generally collectivistic societies than emotional forgiveness (Hook et al., 2012). Even though not the focus of this study, it would be worth exploring variances in decisional forgiveness and passionate forgiveness and their associations with psychological health among married couples in Ghana.

Also, of note in the definition of forgiveness is the different contexts within which it occurs but the definitions revolve around the situations one is dealing with. For instance, when forgiving a stranger or an acquaintance, forgiveness seems to focus on forgiving as reducing negative emotions but when forgiving a spouse or family member, forgiveness may involve moving beyond reducing negative experiences to increasing positive experiences. “Forgiveness in marital or intimate relationships has emphasised both reductions of negative and increases in positive experiences” (Fincham et al., 2006). “Also, the definitions recognise several points of consideration, that there is an experience of deep hurt resulting in visible resentment, the offended has a moral entitlement to the resentment but overcomes it, a new response of compassion and love strengthens towards the offender and that this warm response occurs in the face of realisation of no obligation to feel affection for the offender. In other words, forgiveness is simply described as a gift from one person to another to enhance attachment, harmony and love among people.”

#### **What Forgiveness is Not**

Research has shown that “some people often have strong negative reactions towards forgiveness as they confuse it with excusing, condoning, pardoning, forgetting, and reconciling” (Toussaint, & Webb, 2005). According to Fincham et al. (2006), “lay conceptions of forgiveness equate it to other concepts such as acceptance but there are several distinctions”. Forgiveness needs to be distinguished from accepting, excusing, or condoning an offence. Whereas acceptance implies that the victim changes his/her view of the offence, forgiveness does not require the transgression to

be seen as anything less than it is. It is unacceptable and reprehensible. This is why Mahatma Gandhi says that the weak can never forgive because forgiveness is an attribute of the strong (Ghandi, 2000). Rather, an individual forgives despite the wrongful nature of the offence and the fact that the offender is not entitled to forgiveness.



Forgiveness again differs from condoning or excusing an offence as one need not believe that the behaviour in question was justified or defensible. Further, forgiveness is different from denial i.e. unwillingness to perceive the injury, pardon (i.e. granted only by a representative of society such as a judge), forgetting (i.e. removing awareness of offence from consciousness), and reconciliation (i.e. restoring a relationship which is a dyadic process). The point on reconciliation suggests that reconciliation is an important component of forgiveness. However, others argue that forgiveness does not require reconciliation (e.g., Enright et al., 2001; Lerner, 2006). They emphasised that although relationships may continue after an offence, this does not necessarily imply complete forgiveness. On the other hand, the decision to terminate the relationship does not prevent the partners from forgiving one another. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that forgiveness may make reconciliation more probable.

Enright (2012) argues that forgiveness is refraining from hatred or revenge when the perpetrator's actions deserve it, and instead of giving the perpetrator a gift of affection, generosity, and love or charity when the culprit is not worthy for them. In other words, when people forgive, they give up the anger they are entitled to and give gifts to those who are not. Depending on the seriousness of the offence and the length of time the offended person has

lived together and may reject the damage caused by the offence, forgiving can be a long, difficult and painful process.

Enright and his colleagues (2001) found that a common major obstacle to forgiving others is a misunderstanding of what forgiveness is. To them, people who benefit from forgiveness sometimes wrongly assume that they have to do the impossible or even wrong to forgive. Other constraints may grow in an environment where significant others may never forgive or model *pseudo-forgiveness*. For example, saying "I forgive you" can sometimes be a refusal to accept damage or self-destructive attempts to control, manipulate, or gain "moral superiority".

According to Sutton (2012), people often need to be educated about what is not forgiveness to acquire the strength to pardon others. For instance, true forgiveness does not mean forgetting that an offence has occurred, tolerating or forgiving an offence, refraining from seeking compensation or legal justice, or suppressing or no longer feel angry over what happened. In addition, real forgiveness does not require offenders to confess first, ask for forgiveness, provide reasonable restitution, or be willing and able to change their offensive behaviour. Although it may be easier to forgive offenders who respond in this way, people who have been offended should not be caught in unforgiveness because of the inability of the offender or unwillingness to do so. True forgiveness should not and should not lead to reconciliation. True reconciliation requires not only offering forgiveness from the offended but also receiving gifts from the perpetrators and the ability of both parties to restore mutual trust or interpersonal security in their relationship. Some perpetrators may not be trusted, unwilling, or unable to change their offensive

behaviour. Some people who have been hurt may have little or no confidence that the offender has changed or will change (Chapman & Thomas, 2008).

Another common misconception is that forgiveness and reconciliation must be done together (Freedman & Knupp, 2003). Reconciliation involves at least two people and occurs when the offender admits his mistakes and asks for forgiveness while forgiveness affects people who are persecuted when they go through the process of forgiveness, which includes recognition of the offence and its effects. Forgiveness can be emphasized and encouraged, but it should not be forced on people who have not gone through the process or are at risk of further damage in a relationship.”

### **Forgiveness and Psychological or Mental Health**

Extensive literature shows that “forgiveness leads to an increase in positive mental health symptoms and a decrease in negative mental health symptoms (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Brannan, Davis & Biswas-Diener, 2016; Hamidi, Makwand & Hosseini, 2010; Leo, 2011; Worthington et. al., 2010). In a meta-analysis, Wade and colleagues (2014) found that the use of forgiveness interventions led to a reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as increased hope. The interventions examined were a source of gain, even though they did not directly target mental health symptoms. The authors conclude that forgiveness interventions can indirectly help clients with other psychological outcomes.

Likewise, reviewing scientific evidence and theory reveals conditions and forgiveness with increased positive mental health outcomes i.e., positive affect, life satisfaction, optimism, and social support and reduces negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, stress, anger, and related

post-traumatic stress disorder (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016; Griffin, Lavelock & Worthington, 2014; Griffin et al., 2015; Askari, 2016). The consequence is that not forgiving is a stress response associated with negative mental health symptoms. Griffin et al. (2015) made important methodological observations about forgiveness research and conclusions that can be drawn from them.

Specifically, most studies examining forgiveness and mental health use a correlation or cross-sectional design. Therefore, these methods make it impossible to conclude that forgiveness is causally related to mental health. While it can be assumed that forgiveness leads to an increase in positive mental health outcomes and a decrease in negative mental health outcomes, it can also be assumed that positive mental health increases forgiveness (Griffin et al., 2015).

In addition, the relationship between forgiveness and mental health can be more complex than a simple causal relationship. Griffin and colleagues (2015) suggested that the relationship between forgiveness and mental health is mediated through social and psychological constructs such as contemplation, hopelessness, interpersonal involvement between victims and perpetrators, and psychological tensions. These results not only show bi-directionality but also mediating variables related to forgiveness and mental health. Further studies are, therefore, warranted in this regard.

This study examined a mental health and well-being aspect that concerns positive human functioning known as psychological well-being. This concept, Psychological Well-being (PWB), was introduced by Ryff and Keyes (1995) to comprise both positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. This variable is suitable in this context as it measures different dimensions of

mental health that had previously been individually found to be associated with forgiveness. Some of these factors are depression, anxiety, positive affect, life satisfaction, optimism, social support, stress, anger and related post-traumatic stress disorder. PWB measures six dimensions that relate to autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. These dimensions correspond to (1) the extent to which respondents felt their lives had meaning, purpose and direction (purpose in life); (2) whether they viewed themselves to be living in accord with their convictions (autonomy); (3) the extent to which they were making use of their talents and potential (personal growth); (4) how well they were managing their life situations (environmental mastery); (5) the depth of connection they had in ties with significant others (positive relationships), and (6) the knowledge and acceptance they had of themselves, including awareness of personal limitations (self-acceptance) (Ryff, 2014). This multidimensional perspective or eudaimonic perspective of well-being has been described as offering a fundamental distinction in scientific research on well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In line with existing literature, it is hypothesised that forgiveness education will be positively associated with higher psychological well-being. Conversely, unforgiveness of self and others will be negatively correlated with psychological well-being.

### **Religion, Spirituality and Forgiveness**

Religion and spirituality are understood as important components of human experience. They can function as lenses through which we can see the world. As defined by Ellison and McFarland (2013), religion refers to loyalty and institutional practices including Church, denomination, mass, prayer, etc.

These authors show that spirituality is a broader construct than religion. Spirituality includes transcendent experience which does not have to be limited in the context of organizational practice (Rye, Wade, Fleri & Kidwell, 2013). Forgiveness is promoted in most of the world's leading religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Carlisle &

Tsang, 2013). As shown, forgiveness is a virtue promoted in both monotheistic and non-theistic religious traditions. Jews, Christians and Muslims believe that people must forgive one another because God forgives people. Specifically, Judaism encourages victims to extend forgiveness after sincere remorse has been shown and the offender has made amends (Rye et al., 2013). In Judaism, for example, this religious model is God, and its forgiveness is illustrated on the Day of Atonement when priests make sacrifices that lead to God's forgiveness of the community (Newman, 1987).

In Islam, Allah and the Prophet Muhammad are religious models of forgiveness, and examples of their forgiveness can be found throughout the Quran. In the Islamic tradition, one must be forgiven by others and Allah, who forgives all those who sincerely repent of their sins (Rye et al., 2013) for real forgiveness to occur. The Quran also states that those who forgive others receive a gift from Allah (Rye et al., 2013). In Buddhism, the Buddha acts as a pioneer and Varuna, the god of water, is a model in Hinduism. Buddhist tradition sees forgiveness as a combination of compassion and patience; forgiveness is the opposite of hatred and represents a lack of anger towards the offender (Rye et al., 2013). According to Buddhist belief, forgiveness only occurs when both elements of behaviour are present without retaliation and anger reduction.



In Christianity, forgiveness is Jesus Christ and his forgiveness is demonstrated through many of his teachings about the forgiveness and sacrifice of his life to produce forgiveness of sins (Carlisle & Tsang, 2013). Christianity also places a strong emphasis on the value of forgiveness from others, because forgiveness relates to the death of Christ on the cross to save the world. Christians have to forgive others as Christ forgives them. If individuals cannot forgive, violations will continue to burden them and the offenders, preventing them from living as God wants to live with them and with others (Flanagan et al., 2012). Christians believe that God loves and that all people do not meet God's expectations. Understanding that all people do not live up to God's expectations can make it easier for some Christians to put themselves in the shoes of their wrongdoers rather than judge them (Rye et al., 2013).

In several published individual reports, Christians describe how they can only gain strength when they pray for God's help. It might be useful for participants in the forgiveness programme to learn about the biblical model of forgiveness. Many people may find it useful to meditate on Christ, who places himself in and forgives those who mock him and ultimately help nail it to the cross. Some people may also find it useful to work through forgiveness by considering Jesus as a role model who unconditionally offers forgiveness to others as a gift (Rye et al., 2013). These religious role models can play a role in forgiveness interventions, as indicated by Rye et al. (2013) who emphasize that these role models in forgiveness interventions are one way of incorporating religion and spirituality into clinical practice.

In the context of mental health, research shows that religion and spirituality are positively correlated with mental health outcomes (Bergin, Payne & Richards, 1996; Soenke, Landau & Greenberg, 2013; Wade, 2010), including forgiveness (Carlisle & Tsang), 2013). Literature shows that the relationship between religion, spirituality and forgiveness is influenced by many factors such as religious coping and closeness to God. This can be seen in Davis, Hooks and Worthington's (2008) study of relational spirituality and forgiveness. They find that forgiveness of an offence is reduced if the victim participates in overcoming a negative religious mechanism that has an insecure relationship with God, or if the violation is considered to be blasphemy. Forgiveness is also positively associated with positive religious coping mechanisms that have a secure bond with God. In a sample of African-American and white men and women over the age of 65, Torges and colleagues (2013) found that closeness to God mediates relationships to participate in organized religious activities such as attending services and prayer groups and global forgiveness, which is designed as forgiveness from oneself and others and receives forgiveness from others and God. It is important to note that religion and spirituality can affect forgiveness in several ways for different cultural groups.

Rye et al. (2000) conducted one of the first studies to investigate the explicit integration of religious or spiritual elements into forgiveness programmes. Participants were assigned to one of three interventions: secular forgiveness interventions, interventions that were religiously integrated, or no interventions. Religiously integrated interventions encourage participants to actively use their faith to forgive, and include components such as considering

the impact of evil on one's spiritual life, discussing religious models for forgiveness, and theological justification for forgiveness, by considering how Prayer can promote forgiveness, and reading religious parts. The results showed that participants in the two intervention groups increased forgiveness and well-being more than those in comparative conditions. Participants in both conditions of the intervention stated that they used religious strategies to seek forgiveness. Rye et al. (2005) conducted a similar study comparing the effectiveness of secular, religiously integrated forgiveness for divorced people. Religiously integrated interventions encourage individuals to rely on their beliefs when forgiving. The results showed that participants in both conditions of intervention increased more than participant comparisons concerning forgiveness from ex-spouses and understanding of forgiveness. Similar to previous studies, another study by Rye et al. (2000) recognize participants from both conditions of intervention to use religious strategies when trying to forgive. Studies conducted on forgiveness therapy among Islamic couples revealed that forgiveness therapy is effective in correcting thoughts, feelings and behaviour of offending couples and improving their relationships (Hamidi, Makwand, & Hosseini, 2010; Khojasteh Mehr, Ahmadi Ghazlojeh, Sodani & Shirali Nia, 2016).

In short, research has shown that religiously integrated forgiveness interventions that consider participants' religious and spiritual beliefs can improve forgiveness and improve mental health. Forgiveness-based forgiveness interventions have been shown to improve psychological, emotional, and relational well-being (Freedman & Knupp, 2003; Rye et al., 2000). Developing research also shows that people who participate in

forgiveness education programmes statistically experience a significant decrease in negative emotions and an increase in positive emotions, prosocial behaviour and interpersonal forgiveness (Holter et al., 2008). Despite these findings, trust-based forgiveness measures have never been evaluated. Faith-based forgiveness interventions among couples can therefore improve well-

being. The ecclesiastical context is an ideal framework in which the curriculum for forgiveness interventions can be implemented because it is very valuable and emphasizes forgiveness as a virtue. To some extent, Christian couples have been taught that forgiveness is a quality determined in the Bible and illustrated in the person of Jesus. The intervention programme will be another opportunity to systematically learn about forgiveness and the components involved in the forgiveness process.”

### **Forgiveness Education**

Forgiveness education includes helping people understand exactly what forgiveness is and what it is not, informing them about the benefits of forgiveness, as well as teaching them about the forgiveness process (Hilbert, 2015). The majority of the research done with forgiveness education in the past has been with various adult populations and with different types of relationships. A growing number of experimental studies have been conducted to evaluate the extent to which forgiveness education programmes promote the psychological health of people who have experienced interpersonal hurt or violence. Akhtar and Barlow (2018) note that all experimental studies assessed the effects of forgiveness interventions on domains of health such as psychological functioning and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or stress as well as other dimensions of well-being such as marital

satisfaction, gratitude, positive affect, self-esteem, hope, and spiritual well-being. Akhtar et al. (2018) observe that two main models of forgiveness education have been developed and investigated in the literature. Two types are process-based and decision-based interventions. The process-based interventions are made up of two common models. The first is the model promoted by Enright which encompasses 20 steps and four key phases, which include cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements. This has been used as the basis for forgiveness education in most previous studies. The second process-based model of forgiveness is the REACH model developed by Worthington Jr (2001). REACH is an acronym for a five-step forgiveness approach. These models will be further explained in the succeeding section.

Given the link between religion, spirituality and forgiveness in the field of psychology, therapists or interventionists can play an important role in the process of forgiveness. Wade (2010) states that therapists can help clients understand forgiveness and then work together to help them achieve forgiveness. Rye et al. (2013) also demonstrates the ability to include religion and spirituality in forgiveness interventions by helping clients understand violations of religious or spiritual frameworks and to promote forgiveness through prayer. While secular forgiveness interventions can be adjusted to include religious/spiritual aspects, some religious/spiritual interventions are explicitly supported by forgiveness interventions.

Hook and colleagues (2010) identified three interventions that were designed religiously and spiritually to overcome unforgiveness. These are Worthington's (1998) Christian-adapted REACH model of forgiveness, Hart and Shapiro's (2002) spiritual forgiveness group treatment for unforgiveness,

and Halter's (1988) Christian group CBT for marriage problems. All three interventions were rated as potentially effective and participants in all three interventions maintained their treatment benefit at follow-up (Hook et al., 2010). The Christian REACH forgiveness model (also known as C-REACH) is empirically supported (Greer, Worthington, Lin, Lavelock & Griffin, 2014; Kidwell & Worthington, 2013; Wade, Worthington & Meyer, 2005)). On average, psychotherapy adapted to religion is as effective as secular psychotherapy (Worthington et al., 2011). The same applies to forgiveness interventions that are religiously designed (Hook et al., 2010).

Wade, Bailey and Shaffer (2005) argue that forgiveness is indeed beneficial in reducing psychological symptoms caused by an offence. In a sample of 59 students, Wade et al. (2005) found that clients who explicitly talked to their counsellors about forgiveness had a significant improvement in psychological symptoms.

Among the forgiveness interventions, Enright's (2001) Process Model of Psychological Forgiveness and Worthington's (2006) REACH model of forgiveness are empirically supported and process-based (Wade et al., 2014). While Enright's model of forgiveness has been proven to be effective among female survivors of emotional abuse and patients with coronary artery disease, Worthington's REACH model of forgiveness has been proven to be effective with students (Sandage & Worthington, 2010; Stratton, Dean, Nooneman, Bode, & Worthington, 2008), parents (Kiefer et al., 2010), and couples (Burchard et al., 2003; Ripley & Worthington, 2002). However, Worthington and Enright's model does not differ significantly in their effectiveness (Wade et al., 2014).

It has been empirically found that forgiveness not only improves the emotional health of individuals but also improves relationships in the family. Early forgiveness studies show a relationship between family relationships and forgiveness. A study by Christensen et al. (2011) found a correlation between forgiveness of marital fathers and forgiveness of children from their fathers, showing that children can benefit from parents forgiving one another. In addition, forgiveness of marriage betrayal is positively related to marital satisfaction, parental agreement, and the child's perception of the function of marriage (Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon & Litzinger, 2009). In addition, the quality of relationships and positive emotions towards parents plays an important role in the willingness of adolescents to forgive their parents (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2003). Finally, learning to forgive can improve marriage and parent-child relationships, increase expectations, and reduce anxiety (Freedman & Knupp, 2003; Maio et al., 2008). These results are not surprising given the suggested mutual influence between forgiveness and family relationships.

### **Forgiveness in Married Couples**

So far, research on treatment outcomes regarding forgiveness in partner psychotherapy is still rare, though the notion of forgiveness plays an important role in the clinical and theoretical literature regarding infidelity in marriage. Forgiveness has been empirically assessed as a therapeutic alternative for couple therapy in about three cases: adultery and unfaithfulness, marital enhancement, and improvement in the quality of co-parenting after divorce. The treatment of infidelity is based on integrative forgiveness. According to Gordon, Baucom and Snyder (2004), “the first

phase of treatment helps couples develop skills to hold and regulate their negative emotions, and to discuss the effects of infidelity on themselves and their relationships more effectively”. Thus, the first session helps couples to set reasonable limits for exclusively and as partners, regulate their feelings, and express and identify their reactions to the effects of infidelity. The second phase involves the couple cognitively and insightfully understanding why the infidelity occurred and examine problems and developmental issues within themselves regarding what could have contributed to the infidelity. The injured partner is likely to know or have information concerning the factors that influenced the offending partners’ decision to have an affair but unaware of the deeper needs or motives that can influence their behaviour. Reaching this understanding often leads to a heightened level of affection for a spouse and patience for their mistakes. The forgiveness intervention to be deployed in this study is to help couples examine these elements in an unbiased, sympathetic and organized atmosphere; cultivate empathy and understanding with each other as much as possible; and try to change any problem that could affect their decision to have an affair.

The third phase, which is more future-oriented, requires more cognitive behavioural strategies. When couples begin to understand why infidelity occurs, they must assess the appropriateness of their relationship, the possibility for adjustment, and their commitment to change. The realization of forgiveness is the concentration of intervention. Interventionists explain to couples how they undergo the process of forgiveness while undergoing the treatment. Their misunderstanding and refusal of forgiveness are being investigated and resistance in this process are being addressed. Such



intervention enable couples to assess the beneficial components of their marriage to make good decisions about whether to remain in such relationship. Based on the informed decision, these individuals can continue to restore their relationship or receive support and guidance from the therapist as they work on the problems needed relating to ending the marriage. This last course continues its efforts to better understand and forgive traumatic events in marriage to continue in their personal lives.

DiBlasio (2000) came up with a “*decision-based forgiveness intervention*” that is unique to couples. The intervention thrive on the view that forgiveness or the choice to forgive would occur during a therapeutic session. He proposes that “this cognitive decision to forgive shifts an emotional response to betrayal and quickly leads to more emotional peace, while forgiveness, which is largely driven by emotions, leaves the client helpless”. Although DiBlasio recognizes that “forgiveness often requires time, he defines decision-based forgiveness as a cognitive release of hatred, bitterness, and revenge. Forgiveness based on the decision consists of 13 steps. The first three steps include defining decision-based forgiveness, discussing its benefits, and preparing the basis for decision-making. Then each partner is allowed to apologize for their wrongful actions to create an atmosphere of personal accountability”. During this step, DiBlasio suggests that therapists must take into account their client's expectations regarding their partner's response and help everyone avoid attempts to make their partner acknowledge the behaviour that is considered wrong by the individual. The pair then goes through steps 4 through 12 in turn. During these steps, the offence is determined, the offender explains his behaviour and the reason for

this behaviour is further investigated, as is the reaction of the offended person. After these steps, principals are encouraged to understand the effects of their behaviour on their partners and to develop plans to stop or prevent the behaviour. Then the offended partner is asked to recognize the feelings of the offender - such as guilt, shame or fear - about the violation or the effects of the violation. This can be facilitated by tracking patterns back to the offender's childhood or identifying offended partners by identifying their own mistakes in their relationship. The next two steps include recognizing the choice and commitment involved in letting go and formal rituals where partners ask forgiveness and give it.

Finally, the final step is a ceremonial ritual or action that symbolizes the couple's commitment to forgiveness and the decision to release the pain of betrayal. These steps are carried out in longer sessions of about 2 to 3 hours. While DiBlasio (2003) recognizes that many therapists will find this framework too compressed to deal with complex issues such as extramarital relations, he also believes that forgiveness sessions can be the first step which will then allow more traditional therapies for those relationships to cure completely. Likewise, he responds to criticism that forgiveness is a process rather than a decision by suggesting that treatment based on his decision is also a process, even though the process takes place in a very short space of time.

DiBlasio (2003) presented preliminary results from a treatment outcome project in which the effectiveness of this treatment was examined. Couples were randomly divided into three groups: secular groups, forgiveness-based; alternative treatment groups; and control groups without

treatment. Couples are also permitted to choose the option to join the Christian forgiveness group explicitly. The results showed no difference between the secular forgiveness group and the alternative treatment group and the trend towards a greater increase in forgiveness and satisfaction when comparing the secular forgiveness and control groups without treatment.

Statistically significant differences in forgiveness, marital satisfaction, and individual satisfaction were found when comparing groups based on Christian forgiveness with control without treatment. However, because this group was not randomly assigned to this treatment, it is not clear whether this difference was due to treatment or because of a systematic bias in the type of partner who would choose this treatment. Other studies have confirmed the effectiveness of decision-based forgiveness as associated with higher levels of relationship quality (Fehr et al., 2010; He et al, 2018, Sheldon, Gilchrist-Petty, & Lessley, 2014; Wieselquist, 2009).

Hargrave (1994) has developed a theoretical forgiveness framework for family and partner therapy that has been empirically supported. Hargrave's model shows that forgiveness includes responses to innate justice violations or interventions between the implicit balances between giving and take inherent in healthy family functions. He also suggested that members who have cheated i.e. people who have broken this balance and violated justice standards are likely to experience breaches of trust in previous relationships and therefore feel entitled to show hurtful behaviour in current relationships. As a result, the betrayed partner faces the realization that the betrayed family member may not be reliable or trustworthy, which can trigger various emotional reactions such as anger and shame. If this injustice is not remedied

satisfactorily, the defrauded person will likely translate the results into a new relationship and play their own role as a destructive claim in their own family relationships. Forgiveness is believed to be an effective means of ending the cycle of transmission of disputes and betrayals between generations (Leo, 2011; Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, & Burggraeve, 2008; Parker & Pattenden, 2007). Hargrave, therefore, believes that the work of forgiveness in the family consists of help and forgiveness to correct injustice and rebalance the relationship between commitment and claims in the family system. Help involves getting and understanding the motives behind treason. The knowledge gained in this state of forgiveness enables individuals to recognize how family patterns repeat and understand, or identify with, the position, limitations, developments, efforts and intentions of victims (Sandage & Worthington Jr, 2010).

On the other hand, forgiveness means that an injured person commits an open act of forgiveness that involves a direct discussion between the perpetrator and the victim about developing a new, trustworthy relationship in the future. In addition, forgiveness can also mean giving the perpetrator a chance to receive compensation, such as allowing the perpetrator to engage in various behaviours that show signs of more trust. Exoneration appears to be cognitive, while forgiveness is more behavioural. Hargrave emphasizes that these components are not phases that people go through in succession. Instead, he hypothesized that people differed between these strategies when they forgave. There is some empirical evidence for the use of this model in group therapy with partners. Sells, Giordano and King (2002) developed a protocol for group couple therapy based on Hargrave's theory, in which

couples receive modules in empathic listening, conflict resolution and anger management, and forgiveness. The treatment lasts 8 sessions for 8 weeks. The forgiveness module has three components: (a) expressing violations of relationships, (b) setting goals to regain trust and gain insight, and (c) focusing on the group's spontaneous response to homework materials. The participants were five couples who were recruited from large private practice agencies. It is not clear whether these couples were specifically recruited for treason. The results showed that after 3 months the couple managed to maintain some level of forgiveness, and that forgiveness correlated with marriage satisfaction and psychological symptoms. However, this correlation is low, and the researchers found increased anger, as did forgiveness, marriage satisfaction, and mental health. The general conclusion is that forgiveness can be achieved through this group intervention, but couples need a longer period of reinforcement and support to form an internal reorientation and maintain the development of new habits (Sells et al., 2002).

Worthington and colleagues have developed a pyramid model of forgiveness that presumes three main components for forgiveness: empathy, humility, and commitment (e.g. Worthington, 1998; Worthington & Drinkard, 2000). It is believed that empathy between partners regarding the situation of the other is very important to allow a milder atmosphere between the partners and to give them the chance of forgiving each other. The humility of each partner also reinforces this process by requiring the injured partner to acknowledge that they are not perfect, remembering the times when they injured the offending partner. Worthington (1998) theorized that recognizing a person's human fallibility and imperfections entails awareness that forgiveness

that frees the perpetrator of hatred, anger, or retribution is a fair or just thing; Forgiveness is therefore seen as a natural response to empathy and humility. Although an individual may experience forgiveness internally, Worthington suggests that forgiveness has no degree of reality until the individual is formally obliged to forgive through open behaviour. Based on this forgiveness

model, Worthington has developed a forgiveness intervention that is described under the acronym REACH. First, the injured person must remember the hurt by acknowledging the offence and reviewing the nature of the injury. The focus of the intervention is then on promoting empathy in each partner for the other partner's experience.

Interventions can include writing a letter from another person's perspective or describing a painful event in a session from another person's perspective. Third, partners are invited to give altruistic forgiveness gifts, where participants explore times when they are in need and receive forgiveness and the impact on them when forgiveness is received. This experience can achieve the quality of humility by accessing the awareness that someone is not perfect. It promotes awareness of your partner's suffering and the desire to alleviate suffering through forgiveness. The fourth step in the model is for couples to verbally commit to forgiveness once the therapist believes that the couple has had enough empathy and developed enough humility to take this step. Finally, partners are encouraged to find ways to adhere to forgiveness, as it is inevitable that past wounds will be remembered. In a way, the couple is inoculated against these inevitable recapitulations, and the therapist encourages them to make the difference between remembering the pain of the past and continuing bitterness and hatred.

The Worthington pyramid model of forgiveness was tested in two studies with interventions (Burchard et al., 2003; Ripley & Worthington, 2002). In both studies, forgiveness measures are used either as a preventive measure or as a means of enriching stable marriages. Neither spouse was recruited for existing betrayals and the need for forgiveness in either study.

Ripley and Worthington (2002) provide preliminary tests of the forgiveness pyramid model by comparing two marriage enrichment groups, the HOPE-based communication group (Handling Our Issues Effectively), a REACH forgiveness-based group and a no-treatment group using more varied married couples. These components together comprise what Worthington et al. (1997) named the enrichment of marriage, which focuses on hope. In Ripley and Worthington (2002), no treatment significantly affects the size of self-reports on the quality of marriage, communication, or forgiveness. The only difference between the groups is that the HOPE treatment speeds up the observation of partner communication considerably.

In a follow-up study (Burchard et al., 2003), 20 newlyweds were recruited from the community to participate in an intervention involving couples who met as a pair with a marriage counsellor. The aim is to prevent the development of marital problems and improve the function of their marriage. These couples are randomly assigned to one of two marriage enrichment programs, HOPE or Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy (FREE) or just judgment control. FREE is based on teaching couples the model of forgiveness and the reasons why forgiveness is important and teaches reconciliation skills. Couples practice their skills under the guidance of an advisor. The two interventions consisted of four sessions

each of about 2 to 2.5 hours (a total of 9 hours of consultation) for 3 to 5 weeks. The results showed that both interventions improved the quality of life of participants after treatment, while the overall quality of the control group declined.

However, the hypothesis that interventions based on forgiveness create a significantly better quality of life than conventional interventions based on communication is not supported. The two studies above are sequential pilot studies to improve the method used in a larger research effort with 156 newly married couples. Worthington et al. (2003) report preliminary results at a conference. Using the methods of Burchard et al. (2003), but using a 9-month follow-up, Worthington et al. report that only 1 month after treatment, both HOPE and FREE are superior in remission and marital satisfaction in controlling judgment. In just a few steps, HOPE reflects improvements over FREE. However, FREE is superior to HOPE 9 months after treatment and both are superior to assessment controls in most measures. In this preliminary result, only the self-reporting step is analysed. Worthington et al. (2003) show that FREE interventions have preventive benefits that result from longer follow-up after treatment. However, when couples are followed up in one month (ie Burchard et al., 2003; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Worthington et al., 2003, post-test), several positive preventive effects from forgiveness interventions are found.

In short, none of these treatment studies indicates that forgiveness interventions bring greater overall improvement in marital and individual well-being outside of the more traditional approaches to conflict resolution. However, it should be noted that these groups were not intended for certain



betrayals. Forgiveness-based interventions can be more beneficial than preventive measures for those who need forgiveness. In addition, the follow-up time for these two treatments is quite short; because there may not have been much pain or betrayal during this period, the research design might not provide an adequate sample of interesting behaviour or the possibility that the intervention might affect.

Rye et al, (2004) have developed interventions that aim to experience individual anger and bitterness after a divorce and are designed to increase the rate of forgiveness to ex-spouses. This treatment is loosely based on Worthington's REACH model and is carried out in group therapy modalities. It consists of five steps: (a) discussing the feelings of betrayal; (B) coping with anger; (c) forgiveness awareness, forgiveness obstacles and forgiveness strategies; (D) self-care and self-forgiveness; and (e) preventing and closing relapses. Samples of 149 divorced people were randomly assigned to secular forgiveness groups, religiously integrated forgiveness groups (similar to secular groups, except that participants were also encouraged to use their spiritual beliefs while working towards forgiveness) or waitlist control groups that were also similar, as it enables individuals to search for available community resources. The results show that there is a significant intervention effect for forgiveness and depression after treatment so that individuals in the two intervention groups have more self-reported forgiveness and less depression at the end of treatment. In contrast to the results of DiBlasio (2003), there are no differences between secular groups and religion in these variables. Rye et al. (2004) also asked friends and family members to report

on the degree of individual forgiveness. There was no significant intervention effect for this observer ranking.

In addition, participants took steps to forgive their parents, essentially assessing how well participants interacted with their ex-spouse on parenting issues. No significant differences in the treatment results for groups were found with this measure either. Although the results regarding forgiveness are different and not significant for parenting, these results still provide partial support, suggesting that the level of individual forgiveness of your ex-spouse can be increased with relatively short interventions. Given the emotional impact that parental conflict after divorce can have on children (Amato, 1996), any intervention that can reduce the scale of the conflict can ultimately have positive effects outside of the participants. As a result, this is an area of forgiveness intervention that deserves further study and innovation.

### **Theoretical Review**

Fincham et al. (2006) note that “many researchers, clinicians and spouses believe that forgiveness is the cornerstone of a successful marriage”. Though attempts to integrate forgiveness into broader theories of marriage and to develop theoretical perspectives on forgiveness in marriage are scarce, it is widely believed that forgiveness can help couples to deal with existing difficulties and prevent the emergence of future problems. Transgressions within marriage may be especially painful when they are seen to violate the sanctity of the marital bond, thus making forgiveness particularly challenging but critical to sustaining the relationship (Mahoney, Rye, & Pargament, 2005).

Explaining when and how forgiveness is necessary for marriage led to several theoretical viewpoints. Gordon et al. (2005) argued that forgiveness is

important in situations where marital assumptions or relationship standards have been breached. Similarly, in contextual family therapy, others proposed that forgiveness is important when transgressions violate partners' relational ethics and sense of justice in the marriage. Sadly too often than not, assumptions and standards of marital relationships are threatened such that forgiveness may be a regular component of marriage and owing to its importance and pervasiveness in marriage, forgiveness has been explored in regard to several other aspects of marriage.

The theoretical basis for this study is categorised into three. The first component focus on the theories or models that enhance our understanding of forgiveness. The second part concerned the theoretical models that explain the nature of and nexus between forgiveness education and its outcomes. The third component is the review of existing forgiveness education models and their application to the current study.

### **Conceptualised Models of Forgiveness**

There are different theoretical models to explain or define the concept of forgiveness and all these models specify that forgiveness is an intentional process driven by a deliberate decision to forgive. The interdependence theory based on Heider's (1958) attribution model was used to conceptualise forgiveness especially within marital relationship contexts (Karremans et al., 2011). This theory assumes that people influence each other's experience. This is important to consider when studying married couples because as defined, forgiveness is not just a static one-time process. It is a dynamic and interactive process where out of the relationships between couples' instances of transgressions may occur. Others see this interdependent nature of

forgiving as arising out of a continuous process of neglecting another individual's preferences, creating a cycle of forgiveness and unforgiveness (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). The limitation of this theory is its emphasis on interdependent behaviours. Since forgiveness is an internal experience, it is difficult to accurately infer these internal experiences through behaviours. A partner might show positive behaviour towards an offending partner suggesting that forgiveness has been complete. Nevertheless, the partner might have condoned, exonerated or exacted mental revenge on the partner by way of discharging the unforgiving emotions which resulted in the positive behaviour.

Another model worth considering is the Developmental Psychology Model of Forgiveness. Lerner (2006) suggests that developmental psychology especially the cognitive-structuralist approach provides another basis for conceptualising forgiveness. The model describes the developmental progression of reasoning about forgiveness. It speculates that there is a sequential progression of stages that reflect increasing capabilities of reasoning. For instance, young persons are thought to typically only manage revengeful forgiveness. They later move to external forgiveness characterised by passive coping strategies but the anger remains and forgiveness is expressed through external expressions. As adults or late adolescents, they progress to be capable of internal forgiveness where they actively seek to understand the motives of the offender, see the event from a new perspective and there is a possibility of promoting the inner release of anger and reconciliation.

The marital or couple model of forgiveness proposed by Gordon et al., (2004) asserts that there are major transgressions or betrayals in marriage such as infidelities, violations of trust and deceptions. Based on the psychodynamic theory, cognitive-behavioural theory and trauma theory, Gordon et al. (2004) believe that major betrayals can strongly resemble several features of recovery

from general trauma where people develop forgiveness by passing through three stages namely; *impact*, *meaning* and *moving on*. In stage one i.e. *impact*, people realise the effect of the betrayal resulting in a time of considerable cognitive, emotional and behavioural disturbance. In stage two i.e. *meaning*, people initiate efforts towards making the partner's behaviour more comprehensible and thereby increase the sense of control over one's life. In stage three i.e. *moving on*, people have fewer negative feelings toward the partner and make a decision about whether to continue the relationship or not.

Finally, the emotion-based model of forgiveness propounded by Worthington and Scherer (2004) view forgiveness as solely based on the alteration of emotions. The model however does not specify whether such changes are initiated directly or occurs after changing one's cognition, behaviour, motivations or situation. Following from the social psychology theory of behaviour, one would reason that forgiveness may be determined by the social-cognitive variables associated with the way the offended person thinks and feels about the offender and the resulting hurt (Fincham et al., 2005). Worthington et al. consider emotional forgiveness to be due to the process of replacing negative unforgiving emotion with positive forgiving emotions.

In effect, the varied theories and models, which facilitate our understanding of forgiveness, demonstrate the significance of how varying contexts of forgiveness can create relevant and differing perspectives. The varying contexts can include the type of offence and type of relationships between offended and offender etc.

### **Theoretical Basis of Forgiveness Education**

The models of forgiveness education are grounded on some psychological theories, which view forgiveness as an intentional process, multidimensional and in a relational context. In other words, forgiveness is based on the decision on the part of the offended to forgive the offender and this decision is influenced by a number of factors. These psychological theories take into account these factors in explaining forgiveness in the marital context.

The Cognitive-behavioural perspective posits that individuals hold a set of conscious and unconscious core beliefs about themselves and the world, through which they interpret and evaluate other's behaviours. In the cognitive-behavioural approach, little value is placed on the person's history, relying instead on behavioural analysis. A stimulus tends to provoke a particular response (S-R) and maladaptive behaviour is thought to be learned and can be changed by using learning principles. The psychoeducational approach is used to help the client learn more about a particular circumstance in order to manage relationships effectively or prevent a problem or symptom from further developing (Worthington, 2010).

This approach was also derived from psychoanalytic theory. It was first introduced by Alfred Adler in his holistic, educational approach. As the

psychoeducational model continued to advance, the more cognitive theory was incorporated, and, ultimately, no emphasis was placed on a person's history. The purpose of the psychoeducational model is to teach coping mechanisms with a non-pathological stance (Milton, 2010). The programmes are usually brief, practical, and cost-effective. The leader's role is that of an educator and/or group facilitator.

The experiential perspective proposes that it is important to be in the moment and focus on whatever is presented to the client (Pos, Greenberg & Elliott, 2008). They advocated using symbolic rituals to facilitate the client in identifying and releasing emotions. According to Hertlein, Piercy and Wetchler (2013), the goal of experiential therapy is to unblock emotional expression and open individuals to their inner experience; helping them to be more fully human. In experiential therapy, open communication, expression, and spontaneity are fostered. The emphasis is on here-and-now experiences while focusing on a heightened sense of competence, well-being, and self-esteem (Hertlein et al., 2013).

The Psychodynamic perspective is a brief therapeutic approach founded on Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Later, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler further developed the psychodynamic approach. In the psychodynamic approach, psychotherapy is viewed as a developmental process, in which early life experiences influence subsequent interpersonal relationships and one's view of reality or one's worldview (Hertlein et al., 2013). Individuals incorporate unconscious feelings from the past into current circumstances, which can exaggerate or distort their view. These distorted or exaggerated views require great psychic and emotional energy and result in distress. The

goal of psychodynamic therapy is to achieve an integrated view of reality through the therapist's empathic listening and insightful interpretations to access the client's meaning behind motives, attitudes, and behaviours. Release of anger and replacement with a healthy worldview of self and others is emphasized. Overall, in the psychodynamic model, the client looks beyond simple behaviours or symptoms into motivations and consequences.

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) was created by Albert Ellis (Ellis & MacLauren, 1998). REBT is purported to help people realise their distorted and illogical beliefs are the cause for their emotional distress. Through REBT, the person is taught to recognize the cognitive problem-causing event and pattern, which is influenced by their irrational beliefs. The goal is for the person to identify and modify irrational beliefs by bringing their thoughts under control.

Finally, the Social Motivation Training (SMT) is based on social conduct theory and Fincham and Jasper's (1980) theory of responsibility attribution. These theories were specifically designed to understand how people assess the event and interact with others after a broad range of interpersonal experiences (Struthers et al., 2005).

### **Existing Forgiveness Education Models**

The forgiveness education models are different from counselling models. Using the forgiveness education models, each researcher designs a systematic procedure to assist an individual to forgive an offender. This is usually based on the scholar's understanding of the fundamental emotional factors that make up forgiveness. The collective purpose encompasses the release of adverse emotions, thoughts, and conducts toward the wrongdoer



and introduces prosocial reactions toward the offender. There are about three main existing models in the literature, which were all centred on the researchers' distinctive explanations of forgiveness. Their approaches in the specific therapeutic methods included affective, experiential, and insight-oriented. The models are Enright, Luskin, Rye (religious and secular), Worthington (religious and secular) and Struthers et al. (2005).

The Enright model is a mental, behavioural, and affective psychodynamic method established on Kohlberg's (1969; cited in Lerner, 2006) moral reasoning development and Piaget's (1952; cited in Lerner, 2006) equality theories. Enright (1994; cited in Lerner) argued that forgiveness does not involve reciprocity because it is like a gift. Enright and colleagues (1991) brought up a 20-phase forgiveness model that involves 4 stages they considered as essential process to arrive at total forgiveness. The first phase in this model is the Uncovering Phase. An individual at this stage evaluates the extent of pain they underwent, starts to feel anger to the delinquent, and gains awareness of the damage their resentment could have on the perspective towards life.

The second phase is the Decision Phase. In this phase, the injured decides to commit to forgiving the offender. Thus, a spouse or the offended study what it means to forgive; reflect on the prospect of forgiveness as a response, and lastly commit to forgive the offender. At the third phase, known as the Work Phase, the offended work assiduously to pardoning the wrongdoer based on the decision in phase two. In the work phase, the offended direct their attention to committing to the practice of empathy and compassion towards the offender. Such virtues are deemed as challenging

stages in the process. The fourth phase is the Deepening Phase and deals with gaining insight about the essence of complete forgiveness. Here, people are motivated to discover meaning from the negative circumstance they suffered, acknowledging their peculiar previous faults, in which they desired forgiveness. Participants are also educated on the universality of being offended and the need to use the hurtful event to draw new meaning and purpose for life. The four phases are projected to aiding forgiveness intervention for people to experience low levels of undesirable emotions related to hurtful events and increased constructive emotions i.e., forgiveness (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade & Worthington, 2005).

The Worthington models are two; i.e. religious and secular. The secular, psychoeducational, cognitive-behavioural-affective model was devised to generate series of emotional, cognitive and behavioural experiences that change the person's emotional experiences, producing in turn, states of calm openness. They found empathy, humility, and commitment as three emotional experiences essential to the model's effectiveness. The first stage of the intervention is spending a great amount of time to recollect the hurtful events (Wade et al., 2013). Known as the Pyramid model, the basis for the model was Worthington's empathy-humility-commitment theory (Worthington Jr, 1998). As a form of process-based forgiveness intervention, the Pyramid model became known as the REACH model Worthington (2001). Others (e.g. Rainey, 2008) refer to it as the Pyramid model of REACHing Forgiveness. REACH was coined using the first letters (acronym) of the five stages of forgiveness method. The five stages are (1) Recalling the hurt, (2) Empathizing with the offender, (3) Accepting and understanding the Altruistic

gift of forgiveness, (4) Committing to forgive, and (5) Holding on to forgiveness, even if additional forgiveness is necessary.

One of the foundations of this method is educating people on the adverse impact of unforgiveness on the psychological, physiological, and social wellbeing. Throughout the intervention procedure, a quarter of the time allotted is exhausted on symbolic and experiential methods. There is much concentration on training people to identify, admit, and acknowledge their feelings of resentment, pain, and the desire to retaliate. This is to enable the individual acquire positive virtues such as compassion, authenticity, and positive regard toward the offender. Others adopted the Worthington faith-based model and incorporated biblical scripture within a Christian context (e.g. Lampton et al., 2005).

Exploring secular and religiously oriented psychoeducational-experiential models, Rye et al. (2005) centred their model on cognitive-behavioural-affective constructs and the fundamental attribution error. Throughout the intervention, the treatment consists of more than 50% symbolic-experiential techniques and processes. The treatment model also set a basis for developing self-care systems and providing educational information on the positive benefits of forgiving and the negative emotional and physical consequences of not forgiving to the offended.

Contents of their sessions include (a) exploring the negative effects harbouring a grudge and holding on to anger have on one's health, (b) finding meaning in painful events, (c) realizing the fundamental error in attributing characteristics to another as being all bad, (d) working toward self-forgiveness, and (e) exploring one's own need to forgive. Rye describes the

model as primarily cognitive-behavioural-affective-experiential. Rye's model also included relaxation techniques. In this model there are three essential elements namely spending time to release anger and resentment, allowing an offended to tell their story to a group, and provide support and concrete relationships through bonding. Each session is followed by a time of self-reflection in the form of assignment that participants must complete and submit during subsequent sessions, mostly the following week. In his Christian religious model, Rye also integrated biblical scripture.

Luskin's psychoeducational experiential model is another forgiveness education model. Differing from the Rye (1998) psychoeducational-experiential model, Luskin's model was primarily Cognitive-Behavioural (Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy; REBT) combined with 'HeartMath' (Luskin et al., 2005), an experiential physiological guided imagery method. His model also included meditation and relaxation. Unlike Rye model, Luskin model does not include emotional factors, and the need to share one's story to a group of participants. Luskin (1998) combined the REBT cognitive disputation methods developed by Albert Ellis with 'HeartMath', a stress management program, to create the cognitive-behavioural-experiential model. The anticipated consequence was for individuals to be less offended, desist from blaming others, and to enable people obtain comprehensive understanding (Luskin et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2006).

The other model, which was purposely applied to the workplace, was the Social Motivation Training (SMT) model developed by Struthers et al. (2005). It is a one-hour intervention centred on attributional reorientation, a reframing process devised to reconstructing people unproductive thinking and

opinions of a situation to a more productive perspective. According to scholars of SMT, the assumption is that people easily forgive offenders whose behaviour was unintended, inevitable, or lack understanding about the magnitude of the offences. Under the SMT, the offended is exposed to virtual scenes related to their situation, and goes on to write about the real events they had experienced. Subsequently, the individual is exposed to SMT techniques through a professional serving as coach for the therapeutic session. The coaching session and the videos accentuated the need to acknowledge their shortcomings and negative behaviours towards the wrongdoer and reframing the causal factors.

There are some differences and commonalities among the five main different models. The models are quite different in relation to the inception of some components such as concentrating on self-care, addressing unhealthy use of anger and the purpose it serves, educating about forgiveness as a release for unhealthy anger, “telling one’s story” and catharsis, reframing the hurt, examining different factors to assess the outcome of forgiveness, and encouraging empathy, compassion, and/or conciliatory thoughts toward the offender. The emphasis and time spent on each component contained in the models also varied. Each researcher specifically designed each phase or step in the process to facilitate the participant forgiving the offender based on the researcher’s view of the underlying emotional variables that make up forgiveness. The main aim is to overcome harmful emotions, attitude and thoughts that may hurt the offender and begin prosocial cognitions and affect toward the offender.

In each of the different models, the attention of the forgiveness procedure is centred victim's mindsets about pardoning an individual who is not involved in the intervention process. This study is adopting a similar model in which the process of forgiving is assumed to be intrapersonal even though the offending partner may be present during the intervention.

The similarities shared by each of the forgiveness education approaches include employing cognitive-behavioural and integrative strategies, using reframing and journaling techniques; recognizing the victim as mentally injured by the offender; and encouraging some understanding for the offender.

In line with the above conceptual, theoretical and forgiveness education models, this study seeks to explain the mechanism through which married couple can forgive their partners. The study posits that couples who initially have low forgiveness levels will develop high forgiveness levels after they have been exposed to forgiveness education or intervention using the C-REACH intervention for a total of eight hours divided into two-hour four weekly sessions. The choice of this model is informed by its popularity of use among Christian populations. The REACH model has been adapted to serve Christian participants which encourages group participants to draw on religious imagery, Biblical scriptures, and their faith to help them through the forgiveness process (Worthington, 2010). It is also proven as an effective model to follow for forgiveness education as it is recognised as one of the most thorough and comprehensive, and has research supporting its effectiveness (Sodani, Gholammohammadi, Khojastehmehr & Abbaspour, 2019). C-REACH may be more effective than REACH or any other model in

the context of this study because participants are recruited from churches who have undergone Christian marriage or are Christian couples.

### **Adopted Forgiveness Model for this Study**

As indicated before, Worthington's REACH forgiveness model (2006) contains five (5) steps: (a) Recall the hurt, (b) Empathize with the offender, (c) altruism - give an altruistic gift of forgiveness, (d) Commit to forgiveness, and (e) Hold on to (maintaining) forgiveness. Interventions can be carried out in a group format, which can take 6 to 18 hours, depending on the time required for each step. Before the intervention begins, participants are asked to indicate the hurt or offence they want to forgive during the intervention. It is recommended that participants choose offences that are less serious when first intervening. Worthington (2006) noted that participants applied the model first to less serious injuries and then to other, more painful injuries. A guidebook or manual for participants and leaders is available that illustrates group activities for each step of the REACH model (see Appendix). Activities are marked as "optional", "vital" and "extremely vital". This handbook states that activities that are marked "vital" and "extremely vital" should be included in the session, whereas activities that are marked "optional" are at the discretion of the facilitator. Manuals are available for the secular and Christian versions. Lampton and colleagues (2005) state that the secular version of REACH is based on Christian principles and that Worthington's publication *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (2003) explicitly adapt interventions to Christian populations.

Conceptually, the version of secular and Christian intervention has the same basic theories and models. However, the Christian version (C-REACH)

is different because it encourages participants to (a) access their religious beliefs as they work towards forgiveness, (b) use religious resources for forgiveness support, and (c) prayer and writing to help in the process of forgiveness (Hook et al., 2010; Person & Worthington, 2011; E. Worthington et al., 2010; EL Worthington, Berry et al., 2015; EL Worthington, Brown & McConnell, 2019; EL Worthington, Nonterah et al. ., 2015). Because this research is based on a Christian couple, the C-REACH model was adopted.

During the first meeting of the C-REACH intervention, an offended is asked to read some texts from the Bible concerning forgiveness and share their views regarding the texts. Notwithstanding, individuals involved in the REACH model review the nature of forgiveness in literary works and quotes, not in a biblical context. In session 2, participants are requested to describe forgiveness and to determine its significance. Unlike the REACH, the C-REACH advocates that members are trained to identify the spiritual essence of forgiveness. Session three (3) requires participants to recall the hurts from the viewpoint of an objective third-party observer and the perspective of the perpetrator. Worthington (2010) claims that taking offences from the standpoint of an objective third-party observer aids in overcoming the harmful views held against the offender, which can increase the possibility of forgiveness.

Likewise, taking back the wound from the perspective of the offender encourages empathy by understanding the perspective and feeling of the offender during an offence. C-REACH also encourages victims to remember hurts from God's viewpoint and to take into account God's involvement in the hurtful situations. The idea of God's involvement is not considered in the



REACH model. Session 4 is dedicated to promoting affection for the offender. C-REACH participants do this specifically by remembering the times when the Lord forgives their sins and by acknowledging God's heart for their perpetrators. The C-REACH curriculum also emphasizes loving the enemy. Session 5 creates gratitude for times when participants were given forgiveness. Participants are encouraged to give their offender an altruistic forgiveness gift at this session and are requested to measure their current level of emotional forgiveness. In addition to these activities, C-REACH participants are instructed to consider times when they have received forgiveness from God. They are also involved in physical activities where they imagine giving forgiveness as a gift to God and the doer.

In session 6, participants are instructed to consider how to forgive from time to time. Spontaneous recovery from negative thoughts and emotions is explained to participants as a way for the body to protect people from danger. In addition, C-REACH participants pray for their perpetrators and promise to become more forgiving Christians by confessing bitterness and hatred to God, praying that God shows them how to love their wrongdoers, and considering how God works through the pain they experienced from the offender.

While the secular version of REACH has been extensively studied, few studies have examined the effectiveness of the C-REACH model (Lampton et al., 2005; Rye et al., 2005; Rye & Pargament, 2002); Stratton et al., 2008; Worthington et al., 2010). The earliest published study relating to C-REACH was published in 2002 and examined the effects of REACH and C-REACH on a sample of white-dominated college women who were mistreated

in romantic relationships (Rye & Pargament, 2002). The results showed that participants who dealt with REACH or C-REACH significantly increased forgiveness and existential well-being compared to participants in the control group without treatment. However, there was no significant treatment effect on hope, depression, religious well-being, or hostility. Also, when comparing REACH and C-REACH, there were no significant differences in outcome measures. A similar design was used in a study by Rye and colleagues (2005) with people who had been abused by their ex-spouse. Again, the sample is mostly white; however, the sample expanded beyond students whose age ranged from 23 to 73 years (Rye et al., 2005). Similar to Rye & Pargament's (2002) study, both secular and religious participants in REACH interventions found significant changes in forgiveness compared to those in the control group. In contrast, only participants in the secular version of the intervention experienced a significant decrease in depressive symptoms compared to the control group. There were no significant changes in trait anger under the two experimental conditions.

In a sample dominated by white students at a Christian university, Lampton and colleagues (2005) found that those who participated in C-REACH exhibited preventive behaviour and thoughts and feelings that were more positive towards them than the control group. This study did not examine mental health outcomes. This study also did not determine the violations committed by the participants. Stratton et al. (2008) compared the effects of C-REACH, expressive writing, a combination of C-REACH and expressive writing, and a control group with a sample of white students dominated by students at a Christian college. The results showed that those in

the C-REACH and Expressive Writing treatment groups showed increased motivation for forgiveness over time. Those in the combined C-REACH treatment and Expressive Writing group showed a more positive response to the perpetrators than those in the C-REACH condition on the first post-test. During the follow-up, those in the C-REACH and group writing expressions responded more positively to the perpetrators than those in the control group and writing group expressions.

The third step requires participants to give an "altruistic gift" of forgiveness. This step is achieved by experiencing humility through guilt, gratitude, and gifts. Worthington (1998) defines guilt as the experience of knowing that we can hurt others. Participants realize that they can hurt others just as the offender hurts them. Gratitude is experienced in this case when the participants think about when they hurt someone and received forgiveness from the person. When you relive the experience of forgiveness, your emotional state turns positive and empathic projections occur when you want to project positive feelings to others, and the participants feel a feeling of oneness between themselves and the wrongdoer. Gift refers to the participant's motivation to give forgiveness. After experiencing gratitude for receiving forgiveness and realizing that the offender needs forgiveness, participants must feel motivated to give the gift of forgiveness.

The fourth step is "Commitment to forgive" Given that fear conditioning is never removed, but modified, Worthington (1998) claims that participants must revive fear and hurt in the future. This occurs especially when (1) the perpetrator is seen again, (2) the participant has hurt again in the same way, 3) the person suffers severe stress or 4) the perpetrator hurts the

participant again. Although forgiveness can be achieved at this point, spontaneous recovery can occur. For this reason, participants can ask whether they forgive the offender. Through a public commitment to forgiveness, Worthington (1998) says that participants will experience a greater sense of forgiveness. Worthington linked this effect to several theories of social psychology such as cognitive dissonance theory, attachment theory and self-awareness theory.

The final step of the REACH model encourages participants to "Hold on to forgiveness". Once again, the fear conditioning is never removed; thus, participants tend to experience fear and hurt in certain conditions. This can cause participants to wonder if they forgive their perpetrators. Worthington (1998) sets out various things that participants and facilitators can do to maintain forgiveness, including identifying the difference between spontaneous recovery and unforgiving tendencies, emotion-management techniques, and encouragement to go through the five steps. Worthington (1998) also shows that forgiving one offence and forgiving all hurtful relationships are two very different things. He explains that it is impossible to forgive every hurt that has occurred in a hurtful relationship. Instead, it is recommended that participants use a single symbolic offence to work through REACH in dealing with hurtful relationships."

### **Empirical Review**

The extant literature has extensively focused on forgiveness in marriage contexts broadly while little focus has been placed on forgiveness education and its impact on an individual's ability to forgive. In addition, most recent studies conducted on the effect of forgiveness intervention also focused

on other outcome variables such as marital or relationship satisfaction and psychological or mental well-being factors such as depression, anxiety, stress, emotional functioning. Even most of these studies were done on different populations including adolescents, people in dating relationships among others. Only a few of the studies examined the impact of forgiveness education on the forgiveness levels among married couples.

A related study by Hilbert (2015) on the impact and evaluation of forgiveness education with early adolescents at the University of Northern Iowa's Centre for Urban Education in Waterloo, Iowa revealed that adolescents' understanding and personal definition of forgiveness as well as the level of forgiveness increased after they have been educated on forgiveness. The adolescent population has different characteristics from the adult married population. Besides, the study was done in Canada which implies that the difference in cultures could impact findings.

Ahktar and Barlow (2018) "conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on the role of forgiveness therapy in promoting mental well-being among populations who have experienced diverse types of hurt, violence, or trauma such as adolescents and adults. Based on their meta-analysis of 15 studies, they provided quality evidence that process-based forgiveness interventions are effective in improving mental well-being following a range of significant hurts among diverse population groups. These findings suggest that forgiveness interventions could have an important role to play in promoting the general psychological well-being of individuals and populations who experience a range of problems resulting from having been traumatized. The results also suggest the need for more research, particularly

to assess the impact of different types of forgiveness interventions and their effectiveness in treating adolescents and adults who have experienced different types of abuse outside a U.S. context.

Another related study by Abadi, Khodabakhsh and Kiani (2017) investigated the effectiveness of forgiveness-oriented group counselling based on Islamic perspective to restore the marriage relationship after marital infidelity in 30 married women who referred to counselling centres in Tehran. The pre-test and post-test interventions involved using a forgiveness questionnaire, undertaking nine-weekly sessions of forgiveness therapy based on the Islamic perspective and using the same questionnaire for intervention and control groups. Results revealed that the forgiveness-oriented group consulting based on the Islamic perspective had a significant effect on increasing women's willingness to forgive. Again, this study was done not only outside the present Ghanaian context but also within an Islamic perspective. This study will be done among the Ghanaian Christian married population.

Lavafpour Nouri et al. (2015) examined the efficacy of forgiveness education in reducing the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among high school girls in Iran. A quasi-experimental study was conducted with pre-test, post-test design and including a control group. To collect the data, TRIM-18, DAS-21, and a demographic questionnaire were used. After performing the pre-test, the students in experimental group participated in Forgiveness Education Program. Post-test was administered to both groups at the end of the intervention. Data was then analysed using one-way ANCOVA. Statistical

analysis revealed that Forgiveness Education has led to a significant decrease in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

In addition, Aalgaard, Bolen and Nugent (2016) conducted a literature review to examine the use of forgiveness as a therapeutic intervention to increase relational satisfaction for the opposite- and same-sex couple dyads in the USA. Their extensive reviews revealed that certain kinds of forgiving personalities benefit from less stress and improved health. The literature also revealed that forgiveness affected marital and family functioning and also reported a positive relationship between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction with some mediating mechanisms. They cautioned about the limitations of forgiveness interventions. A very recent study by Sodani and colleagues (2019) in Iran on the effectiveness of the Robert Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) and marital quality of women affected by infidelity showed that marital quality increased in women in the treatment and follow-up phases. Thus, as the Robert Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) aims to change beliefs, advocate positive thinking, increase the sense of tranquillity, reduce the sense of revenge and teach communication skills; this study affirmed that the inventory can increase the marital quality of women affected by infidelity.

Quite a few existing studies also considered some socio-demographic factors to be associated with forgiveness, forgiveness education and increase in the ability to forgive. For gender differences concerning predictor and outcome variables, Lerner (2006) conducted a literature review of 95 studies and an empirical study of 314 couples from a Virginia State community in the US who had been married less than one year. The design for the empirical

study was a mainly cross-sectional correlational study. The study found that males were more forgiving and were more committed to marriage. However, females were more successful at granting forgiveness. In addition, females were more religious and reported more symptoms of depression, anxiety, and hostility. Four structural equation models were tested for gender differences.

Structural models including the latent variables of marital satisfaction, marital commitment, marital forgiveness, and mental health fit the data better for males than for females.

For the review of 97 gender comparisons in forgiveness, 54 comparisons identified gender differences while 43 comparisons revealed no gender differences. Of the 54 identified gender differences, 40 comparisons reported females were more forgiving than males, 9 comparisons reported males to be more forgiving than females and 5 comparisons did not specify the direction of gender difference. Results support the conclusion that there are gender differences in forgiveness in recently married couples. According to Lerner (2006), research on forgiveness intervention or education was silent on gender differences until the early 2000s. A few of the studies also did not find any dominant differences between men and women. Generally, both men and women equally benefit from forgiveness interventions. However, some studies have reported conflicting outcomes. For instance, Rye et al. (2005) have found men to be more forgiving than women after attending forgiveness interventions. Wuthnow (2000) also reported a similar finding. Worthington, Sandage and Berry (2000) on the other hand, found women to be more forgiving after intervention than men. A meta-analysis consisting of 1,010 participants from 13 different studies dealing with group interventions



promoting forgiveness found that both males and females tended to be more forgiving after interventions but females tended to show more improvement than males.

To understand gender differences, Lerner (2006) used two major theories. The first theory is Kohlberg's (1984; cited in Lerner, 2006) cognitive-developmental stage theory of moral development which based on reasoning about justice. Lerner (2006) contend that females tend to be in stage four which deals with the desire to preserve relationships and to live up to the expectations of others whereas males belong to stage four which concerns with the desire for law and order where the laws have to be upheld to maintain social order. Supporting this assertion, Gilligan (1981, cited in Lerner, 2006) also theorised that females are oriented toward a caring voice distinguished by the wish to preserve relationships and to respond to the needs of others while males are oriented toward a need to see justice done through the consideration of fairness and equity. Thus, there is empirical evidence that men and women morally reasoned differently with women having a stronger desire to maintain relationships while men have a stronger desire for justice (Jaffe & Hyde, 2000).

Based on these theories, it is argued that females desire to preserve relationships and to live up to the expectations of others more than males. Therefore, the desire to maintain relationships with women would drive them to forgive more than men. On the other hand, since men are oriented toward justice-seeking more than women, it is expected that in the event of transgression, men would seek to pursue societal or formal justice more often than women. If social justice is not exacted, men would pursue individualised

attempts to seek justice, get even, or seek revenge more than women. In sum, both theories seem to suggest that gender is a significant factor in forgiveness and that women are expected to forgive more than men. Thus, the current study hypothesises that females who have undertaken forgiveness education are more likely to have increased forgiveness levels than their male counterparts.

Other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, employment status, number of children, religion, culture, personality disposition, profession and number of years in marriage in the context of forgiveness have been examined (Enright & Zell., 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; McCullough et al., 2002; Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, & Burggraeve, 2008; Pronk, Buyukcan-Tetik, Iliás, & Finkenauer, 2019; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002).

Walker et al. (2002) found that personality factors aid in understanding dispositional forgiveness, but researchers such as McCullough et al. (2002) have suggested that a number of demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, culture, profession, and so forth might affect the act of forgiveness. Enright et al. (1989) found that age appears to be related to forgiving in their study on the relationship between age, justice, and forgiveness and found that the reasoning of adolescents differed from adults and children, in line with the developmental psychology theory. Girard et al. (1997) also found an increase in the propensity to forgive from adolescence to old age. In addition, Walker et al. (2002) suggested that as people grow older, there is a slight increase in the disposition to be more forgiving. Mullet et al. (1998) also found that elderly individuals are more inclined to forgive than young adults. In addition,

they found that people who had completed secondary school had lower scores in forgiveness than people who had not. However, they did not find whether people are single, married, or divorced, to have any significant effect on their forgiveness.

Pronk and colleagues (2019) investigated the effect of age, gender, education, employment status, number of children, and number of years in marriage on the forgiveness of first-married and remarried adults. Controlling for selected demographic factors there was a significant main effect of the number of children on forgiveness. There were also significant main effects of gender on forgiveness with women's forgiveness found to be significantly higher than men. Number of children and educational attainment of women also indicated a significant positive association with forgiveness. They argue that forgiveness increases throughout a relationship. Studies show that people tend to forgive others as their commitment to the relationship increases (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro & Hannon, 2002). Partners who start to appreciate their relationship more, increase their bond with their partner and enter into a longer-term relationship become more motivated and more likely to forgive.

In addition, the forgiveness tendency may increase, as the partners are likely to, directly and indirectly, confirm the forgiveness behaviour of the other. This is because forgiveness is beneficial for a better climate with less aggression and less risk of future violations (Wallace, Exline & Baumeister, 2008). It also has extensive positive relationship outcomes, such as greater relationship satisfaction, commitment and trust (Fincham et al., 2007; Gordon et al., 2009). Forgiveness not only benefits the relationship but also improves

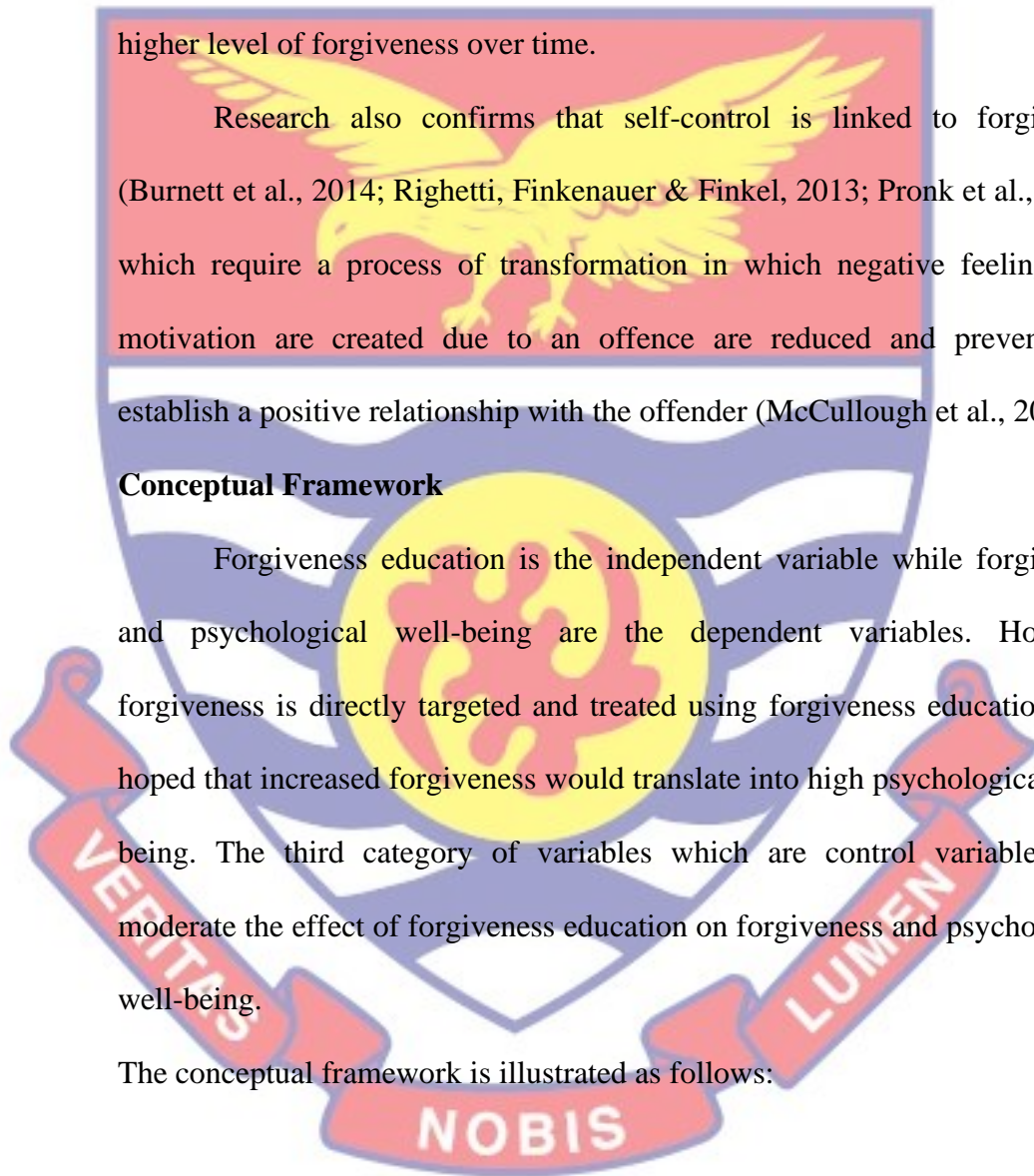
the psychological and even physical well-being of the individual (for example, Karremans et al., 2003; Witvliet et al., 2001). Experiencing these many positive effects in different areas can further encourage people to forgive their partners more over time. It is therefore suggested that marital relationships provide the ideal context for strengthening forgiveness, which may lead to a higher level of forgiveness over time.

Research also confirms that self-control is linked to forgiveness (Burnett et al., 2014; Righetti, Finkenauer & Finkel, 2013; Pronk et al., 2010), which require a process of transformation in which negative feelings and motivation are created due to an offence are reduced and prevented to establish a positive relationship with the offender (McCullough et al., 2002).

### **Conceptual Framework**

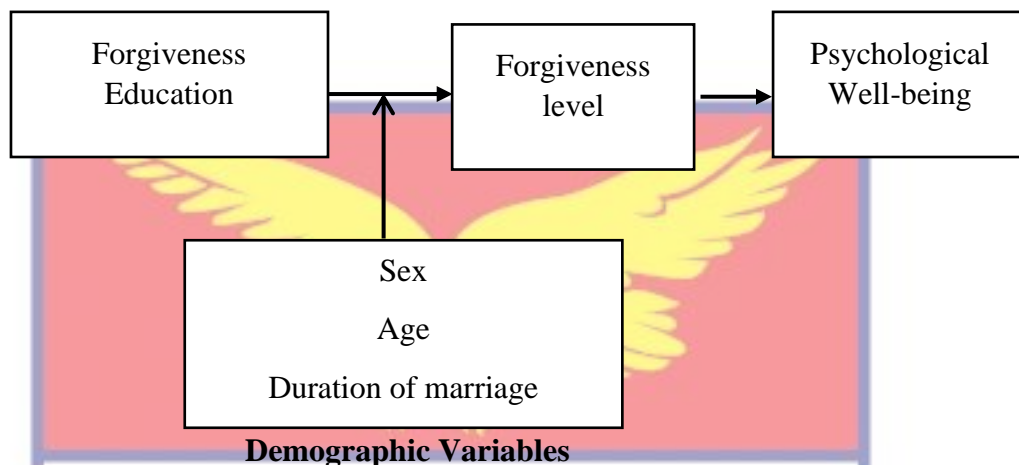
Forgiveness education is the independent variable while forgiveness and psychological well-being are the dependent variables. However, forgiveness is directly targeted and treated using forgiveness education. It is hoped that increased forgiveness would translate into high psychological well-being. The third category of variables which are control variables may moderate the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness and psychological well-being.

The conceptual framework is illustrated as follows:



**Independent Variable**

**Dependent Variables**



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study*

Source: Researcher's Construction

**Chapter Summary**

In sum, the studies reviewed on the impact of forgiveness intervention or education and some socio-demographic variables on forgiveness levels especially among married couples have established the rationale for the current study. Though the studies lack ecological validity, they inform the hypotheses of the current study.

## CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODS

### Introduction

The study is concerned about investigating whether forgiveness education decreases or increases the ability to forgive and psychological well-being among Christian married couples in Adentan Municipality of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The current chapter is a discussion of methods used in collecting and analysing the empirical evidence for the study. This included the research design, study area, population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, procedures and data processing and analysis.

### Research Design

In this study, a quasi-experimental design with control group was used. The choice of the quasi-experimental design allowed the researcher to study the causal relationship without ethical issues. It ensured that as much as possible, only the independent variable, in this case, forgiveness education was varied to be able to observe its effect on the dependent variables, forgiveness and psychological well-being levels. Thus, the pre-test/post-test design was appropriate to determine the intervention's effect. The Worthington's (2006) C-REACH Model of Forgiveness was the basis for forgiveness education.

The quasi-experimental design has some strengths and weaknesses. The greatest advantages of quasi-experimental studies are that they are less expensive and require fewer resources compared with true experiments. Quasi-experimental studies are appropriate when randomization is deemed impracticable and or unethical. Thus, the participants have some characteristics that pre-assigns them into experimental or control group.

Quasi-experimental studies are often performed at a population level, not an individual level, and thus they can include participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria, such as those with high forgiveness and psychological well-being scores during pre-screening.

Quasi-experimental studies are also pragmatic because they evaluate the real-world effectiveness of an intervention implemented by a practitioner, rather than the efficacy of an intervention implemented by research staff under research conditions. Therefore, quasi-experimental studies may also be more generalizable and have better external validity.

The greatest disadvantage of quasi-experimental studies is that randomization is not used, limiting the study's ability to conclude a causal association between an intervention and an outcome. There is a practical challenge to quasi-experimental studies that may arise when some participants are introduced to intervention, while others know and feel that they have been excluded. This limitation was however handled by measuring all participants at baseline.

Importantly, researchers need to be aware of the biases that may occur in quasi-experimental studies that may lead to a loss of internal validity, especially selection bias in which the intervention group may differ from the baseline group. Types of selection bias that can occur in quasi-experimental studies include maturation bias, regression to the mean, historical bias, instrumentation bias, and the Hawthorne effect.

## Study Area

The Adentan Municipality with a projected population of 111,105 is one of the 26 districts in the Greater Accra Region. Adentan is unique for its hosting of the elite population in the nation's capital and is also noted for its well-planned physical layout, which has attracted many Real Estate Companies to the municipality. Adentan, which previously had been part of the Tema municipality assumed a full municipal status in 2008 following the passage of LI 1888.

The Adentan Municipality lies 10 kilometres to the Northeast of Accra, specifically located on latitude 5° 43' North and longitude 0° 09' west. The Municipality has a land of about 85 sq. km (33 sq. miles). It shares boundaries with Kpone-Katamanso and Ashaiman Municipalities in the East, Madina/LaNkwatanang Municipality in the West, Kpone-Katamanso in the North and Madina/LaNkwatanang and Ledzokuku Krowor Municipalities in the south. The municipality serves as a nodal point where the main Accra/Aburi/ Koforidua and Accra/ Dodowa trunk roads pass. The municipality can be located at 1<sup>st</sup> ADMA Drive on Digital Address: GD-009-1853.”

## Population

The population of the study consist of 150 married Christian couples from charismatic and orthodox churches in Adentan Municipality. The choice of these churches is based on their large population size from which to sample. The availability and willingness of potential participants and cases of marital conflicts (personal interaction with counsellors of some branches of these churches) were some other reasons for the choice of this population. As



of October 2020, data at the Department of Marriage and Divorce Registration at the Municipality revealed that there were 3,700 registered marriages of which more than 1,500 were gazetted in orthodox churches and about 1,000 in charismatic churches. Thus, there were about 2,500 marriages that qualified to be included in the study. Owing to the lack of adequate data from the Municipality, it was difficult to determine the demographic characteristics of the population of the couples.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

One hundred and fifty (150) participants were initially pre-screened, but one hundred and four (104) met the inclusion criteria and thus, data on these participants was used for the study. Out of the 104 participants, 32 participants were in the intervention group while the remaining 72 were in the control group. The thirty-two (32) participants were made up of 14 couple pairs and 4 married females. Thirty-two (32) participants were considered appropriate for group guidance and counselling.

The research utilized the non-probability sampling method in ascertaining data for the study. This is because it was difficult to gather all married couples and randomly select participants for the study. Additionally, most couples are busy and are not used to completing questionnaires and returning them. “The incompleteness of responses and lack of respondent cooperation usually complicate the process of data collection in such cases. This results in problems regarding both the validity and reliability of responses. Accordingly, when gathering primary data in such situations, convenience sampling is believed to be the most appropriate form of

sampling. Other sampling methods would be unlikely to generate the desired responses.

Therefore, the current study employed convenience sampling. A convenience sample is a type of non-probability sample in which subjects are selected based on their accessibility or convenience to the researcher. This type of sample is sometimes called accidental sample as the elements composing the sample may be drawn into the sample simply because they just happen to be located where the researcher is collecting the study data.

Convenience samples are very common in social research and are widely used in couple studies since they help save time, effort and money (Bryman, 2008). Additionally, purposive sampling was adopted which helped to identify the respondents for the study. Participants were purposefully pre-screened and those who met the criteria were included in the experimental group and the control group. Inclusion criteria included very low forgiveness and psychological well-being scores.

Other criteria were that the couple be married (Christian church marriage) for at least six (6) months and be a member of a charismatic or an orthodox church in Adentan Municipality.

#### **Data Collection Instruments**

A questionnaire was used as a pre-test and post-test assessments in this study to determine the impact of forgiveness education on forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples. First, Marital Offence – Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS) by Paleari, Regalia and Fincham (2009) was used to screen all participants. The MOFS consists of 10 items: 6 assessing resentment- avoidance motivations (e.g., “I still hold some grudge

against my wife/husband because of what she/he did,” “I would like to behave to my wife/husband the same way that she/he behaved toward me”, "Since my wife/husband behaved that way, I have been less willing to talk to her/him”) and 4 items assessing benevolent motivations (e.g., “Although she/he hurt me, I definitely put what happened aside so that we could resume our relationship”). It is rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) – See Appendix A. For this study, Benevolence items 2, 5, 9, and 10 were reverse-scored so that total scores range from 10 to 60. Higher total scores imply higher levels of forgiveness whilst lower scores mean lower forgiveness. The psychometric properties of this scale have been reportedly high and suitable for use in different contexts. In the present study, Cronbach alpha of 0.79 was reported which suggested that the scale was reliable. The choice of this scale in this study was because of its specificity to marital context, unlike the general forgiveness scale. Additionally, this scale is very short and simple to respond to compared to the others.

The 18-item Ryff’s (2014) Psychological Well-being scale was adopted to measure psychological well-being. There are other longer versions (42 items, 84 items, 120 items) but the short version (18 items) was reported to be suitable for all categories of the adult population and has high reliability and validity (Li, 2014). It was on a 6-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) – See Appendix A. There are selected items for each dimension. The Autonomy subscale items are Q15, Q17, Q18. The Environmental Mastery subscale items are Q4, Q8, Q9. The Personal Growth subscale items are Q11, Q12, Q14. The Positive Relations with Others subscale items are Q6, Q13, Q16. The Purpose in Life subscale items is Q3,

Q7, Q10. The Self-Acceptance subscale items are Q1, Q2, and Q5. Items: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q17, and Q18 are reverse-scored. To calculate subscale scores for each participant, respondents' answers to each subscale's items are summed. Higher scores mean higher levels of psychological well-being.

### **Pre-testing**

The questionnaire was pre-tested with married couples at Harvest Church, Adentan to ascertain their forgiveness and psychological well-being level. These couples had similar characteristics as those that were used for the actual study in the selected charismatic and orthodox churches. Ten pairs of couples were selected for the pre-test. Thus, there were 10 males and 10 females who took part in the pre-test with each respondent responding to the two instruments. The researcher retrieved the instrument from the participants immediately after completion and the data obtained analysed and checked for content validity and reliability.

### **Reliability**

The reliabilities of the instrument were estimated by using Cronbach's alpha to determine whether each item under the various sections was related to each other after the actual data collection for the study. Results obtained from the study were compared against the initial reliabilities. After the pilot testing, the reliability estimates obtained were 0.79 and 0.74 for the MOFS and PWS respectively. Table 1 presents the reliability estimates of the instruments for the pilot test.

**Table 1: Reliability Estimates of the Research Instruments**

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
MOFS	0.79	10
PWS	0.74	18

**Source:** Field Survey, Adam (2021)

These reliability estimates were considered appropriate based upon the threshold of 0.70 suggested by Field (2013) to be an acceptable reliability coefficient in determining whether a research instrument is reliable or not and revealed that these scales were reliable.

**Validity**

The questionnaire was given to the researcher's supervisor to define the content and face validity of the instruments. The researcher relied on instruments used by previous researchers in the same area. Information from other sources enhanced the validity of the instruments; including comments from preliminary study participants and my supervisor on the representativeness of items. Through this process, the appropriateness of the language used was checked so that the participants understood the items. Again, certain wordings which were perceived to be ambiguous were also modified as well as checking the various items to attest that the item statements actually assessed what they were intended to measure.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Before beginning this study, approval was sought from the College of Education Studies Review Board at the University of Cape Coast. There were three main phases in this study. There was the pre-intervention stage where baseline data were collected to determine those who qualify to participate in

the study. The pre-testing involved as many couples as possible to identify those with low forgiveness levels. Thus, only couples screened to have low forgiveness and psychological well-being levels on the MOFS were included in the study. The pre-intervention screening was done with a questionnaire survey. The pre-intervention assessment was administered one week prior to the forgiveness education. This ensured that not much time is given for other significant events to occur which can influence the findings. Whilst it was ensured to involve a couple pairs in the study, it was realised that four married females scored very low on forgiveness and psychological well-being than their male partners. Therefore, 14 married couple pairs and 4 married females were included in the intervention.

The second stage, which was the intervention stage, was where forgiveness education was provided to the participants in the experimental group. Participants in the experimental group received six 45 to 55-minute forgiveness education sessions, administered by the researcher who has some years of experience in interpersonal relationships and the processes involved in forgiveness. The researcher has had over 10 years of experience in a counselling role.

The remaining participants who did not qualify for the intervention were used as the control group since it was difficult to get participants with low levels of forgiveness and psychological well-being to constitute the control group. It was expected that if the forgiveness education was effective, then there might not be any significant differences between the intervention and control groups. However, it turned out that, the intervention group reported even higher forgiveness levels than the control group; affirming the

effectiveness of the forgiveness education. Worthington’s (2010) ‘*Experiencing Forgiveness: Six Practical Sessions for Becoming a More Forgiving Christian*’ programme was adopted for this study. It is a six-hour intervention to promote forgiveness. It has both the leader and participants’ manuals.

The forgiveness education sessions lasted for three consecutive weekends. The intervention started on November 14<sup>th</sup> and ended on November 28<sup>th</sup> 2020. All sessions were done on Saturdays and Sundays because some couples were engaged with work or other activities on week days. Each session was largely about a minimum of four hour in length with a cocktail break for an averagely of 10 minutes. The six-step C-REACH Model of Forgiveness (Worthington Jr, 2006) was adapted and used in the sessions, and other materials such as literature on forgiveness, biblical texts were relied upon. The sessions included a lecture component, as well as group discussions and exercises. The rest of the activities for the three weeks were summarised as follows:

**Table 2: Week-by-week overview of forgiveness intervention activities**

Week	Sessions	Activity*	Duration
1	Session 1	Forgiving in Christian Context	50mins
	Session 2	What Is Forgiveness?	50mins
	Session 3	How to Recall the Hurt (In Helpful Ways)	50mins
2	Session 4	Empathy with the One Who Hurt You: The Hard Part of Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness	40mins
	Session 5	Giving a Humble Gift of Forgiveness: Altruism and	55mins

3	Commitment
Session 6	Holding on to Forgiveness and Becoming a More Forgiving Christian
	55mins

\* Based on a Leader’s Manual and Guide on a 6-hour Intervention to Promote Forgiveness

Each of the sessions has its specific number of activities and exercises as well as allocated time (Appendix B). The adapted manuals for participants and facilitators on C-REACH by Worthington (2010) spell out what each party should do during the intervention phase. The participants’ manual was printed and given to all participants. The third stage is the post-intervention phase where post-test data was collected to determine the impact of the forgiveness intervention. This data was collected with the same questionnaire from both the control and experimental groups to enable comparison with the baseline data.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted with data entered in SPSS version 20.0. The following statistical analyses were done for each of the stated hypotheses.

1.  $H_01$ : “Forgiveness education has no significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples.

$H_A1$ : Forgiveness education has a significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples.

Independent samples t-test was used to compare the means on forgiveness score of experimental and control groups at post-intervention.



1.  $H_02$ : Forgiveness education will not have any significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A2$ : Forgiveness education will have a significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare post-intervention scores of experimental and control groups on psychological well-being.

2.  $H_03$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will not differ significantly on forgiveness levels.

$H_A3$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on their forgiveness levels

Independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores on forgiveness score of males and females at post-intervention.

3.  $H_04$ : Duration of marriage will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A4$ : Duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

Independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores on forgiveness of couples with longer duration and those with shorter duration at post-intervention.

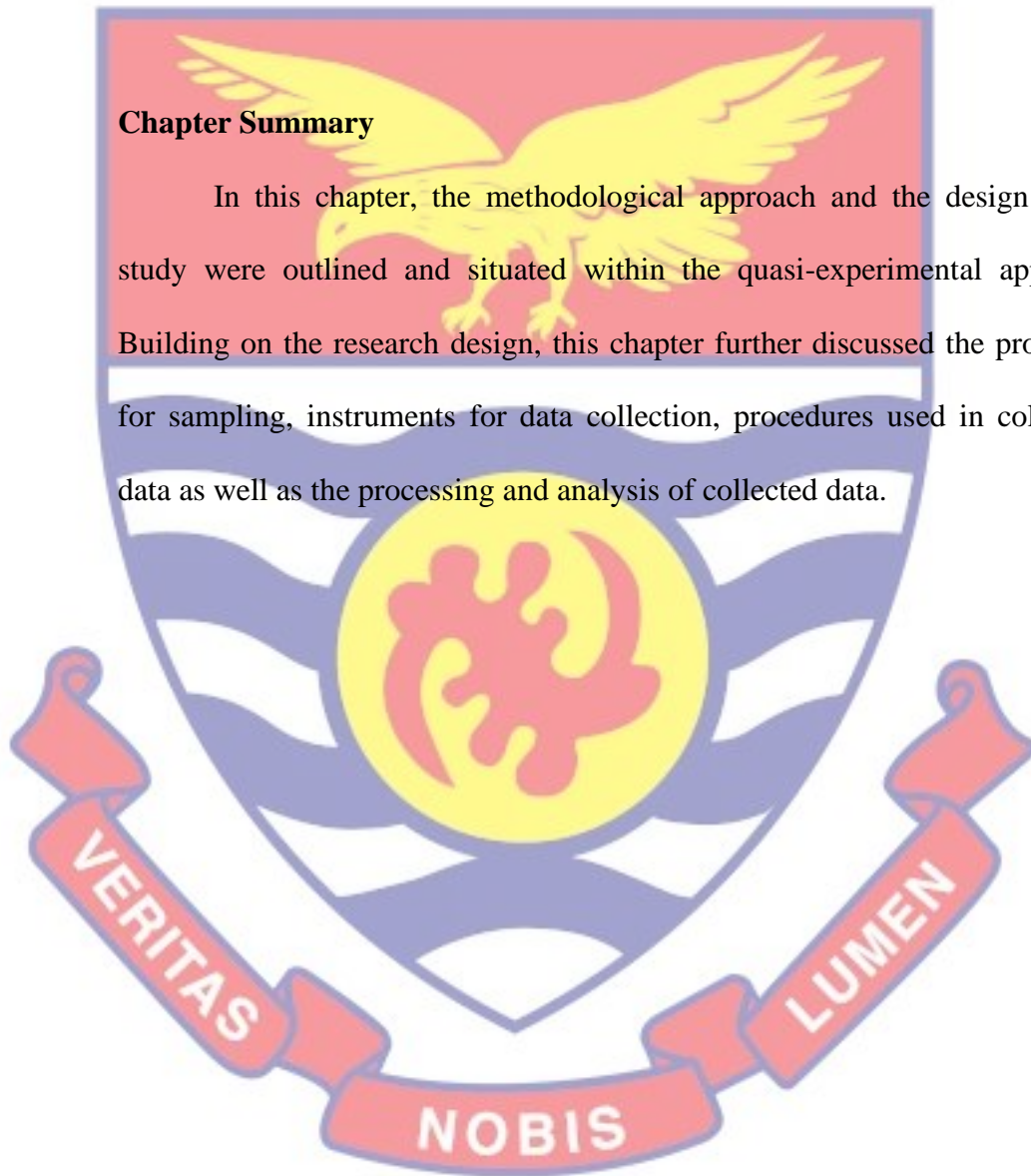
4.  $H_05$ : Age will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A5$ : Age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

One-way ANOVA was used to analyse the effect of age of couple on forgiveness levels. Age was categorised into three levels; Older married couples (more than 50years), Middle-aged couple (between 35 and 50 years) and younger married couples (less than 35 years).

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the methodological approach and the design of the study were outlined and situated within the quasi-experimental approach. Building on the research design, this chapter further discussed the procedure for sampling, instruments for data collection, procedures used in collecting data as well as the processing and analysis of collected data.



## CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings on the data collected to investigate the effects of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples. The objectives of the study were to find out whether forgiveness education has a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples as well as whether gender, age of couple, and duration of marriage influence forgiveness levels. The study further examined the correlation between forgiveness levels and psychological well-being of couples. The analyses are made up of two main parts namely; preliminary analysis and hypotheses testing. Preliminary analysis which is the first part deals with summaries of the entire data into an interpretable form. Thus, “descriptive analyses are presented in preliminary analyses followed by statistical tests of the hypotheses proposed in the second part. The chapter is concluded with discussion of the results from the analysis.

### Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary analyses include descriptive statistics and tests of normality conducted to check whether the assumptions for the use of parametric statistical tests are met. Parametric tests were mainly used for the analyses of the research data. Parametric tests make assumptions about ratio or interval scale of measurement, normality of distribution, homogeneity of variances and independent errors or residuals (Creswell& Creswell,2005). These assumptions ensure that the samples used in a study have the same characteristics as the population of concern. They consequently place constraints on the interpretation of research findings and strengthen inferences

drawn about the population on the basis of samples. The present study tested for normality and homogeneity. Skewness and kurtosis were used to test normality. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), indices within  $\pm 2$  is acceptable; indicating that no transformations of the data are needed for statistical analysis to be conducted. The first part of the preliminary analysis is frequencies of the demographic characteristics of the entire sample as well as for intervention and control groups followed by the descriptive statistics of the key study variables. This is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variables	Sample (n=104) Freq.(%)	Intervention (n=32) Freq.(%)	Control (72) Freq.(%)
Gender			
Male	52(50.0)	14(43.7)	38(52.8)
Female	52(50.0)	18(56.3)	34(47.2)
Age			
Less than 35yrs	27(26.0)	6(18.7)	21(29.2)
35-50yrs	26(25.0)	12(37.5)	14(19.4)
50+yrs	51(49.0)	14(43.8)	37(51.4)
Duration of marriage			
Less than 5yrs	29(27.9)	7(21.9)	22(30.6)
More than 5yrs	75(72.1)	25(78.1)	50(69.4)
Denomination			
Charismatic	66(63.5)	16(50.0)	50(69.4)
Orthodox	38(36.5)	16(50.0)	22(30.6)

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

From Table 3, the distribution of gender of the entire sample for the study was 52 each for males and females whiles for intervention and control groups, a male sample of 14 (43.7%) and 38(52.8%) and a female sample of 18 (56.3%) and 34(47.2%) were used respectively. Thus, even though married

couple pairs were used, more married women qualified for the intervention than men. Age which was categorised into three including those below 35 years (young), between 35 and 50 years (middle) and above 50 years (old), showed that older couple (n=51; 49%) were recruited for the study than middle (n=26; 25%) and young couple (n=27; 26%). The age distribution of the intervention group showed that 14 representing 43.8% were 50 and above years while 37.5% were between 35 and 50 years. The remaining 18.8% of them were less than 35 years.

On the other hand, most participants in the control group were 50 and above years (51.4%) followed by those less than 35 years (n=21; 29.2%). Fourteen (14) representing 19.4% were between 35 and 50 years. Duration of marriage was also categorised into two; namely, those whose marriage was blessed in the church less than five years had a short duration while those above five years had a long duration. The data showed that more of the recruited participants had marriages older than five years (n=75; 72.1%). For the intervention group, only seven of them representing 21.9% had marriages shorter than five years while the remaining 25 (78.1%) had their marriage older than five years. For the control group, 50 (69.4%) of them had more than five years duration while 22 (30.6%) had less than five years duration. For church denomination, more charismatic couples (n=66; 63.5%) were recruited than orthodox (n=38; 36.5%). The intervention group had equal number of 16 (50%) each while for control group, 50 (69.4%) were charismatic while 22 (30.6%) were orthodox. These characteristics show that data was gathered from diverse married sample within the study setting which could enrich the findings as well as the discussion of the results.

The next preliminary analysis was the descriptive results of key study variables including skewness, kurtosis, reliabilities of key study variables, and expected minimum and maximum scores for post-intervention data which are provided in the following table.

**Table 4: Summary of descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis and**

<b>Cronbach Alpha for Post-intervention</b>							
Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alph a ( $\alpha$ )	Min	Max
Forgiveness	18.47	5.79	0.60	0.81	0.79	10.00	33.00
Psychological well-being	23.76	8.01	0.59	-0.70	0.74	10.00	41.00

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

From Table 4 above, average scores for the key variables show that a maximum score of 41.00 out of a possible 60.00 for forgiveness and an average score of 18.47 (SD=5.79) indicates that most couples had high forgiveness after the intervention. Similarly, a maximum score of 41.00 out of a possible 108.00 and an average of 23.76 (SD=8.01) for psychological well-being implied that most couples reported high psychological well-being after the intervention. Both variables were measured such that high scores indicated high levels of forgiveness and psychological wellbeing.

The results on skewness and kurtosis indicated no significant issues with the normality of the data; hence, no transformations of the data were needed for statistical analysis. The final step in the preliminary analysis was the computation of Pearson Product Moment Correlations Coefficient ( $r$ ) among demographic and key study variables. This is in line with the assumption that at least there should be a relationship between the

independent and dependent variables for other inferential analysis to be performed.

**Table 5: Correlation Matrix for key study variables including demographic factors at post-intervention**

No.	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Gender	-					
2.	Age	-0.21*	-				
3.	Marriage duration	-0.02	0.45**	-			
4.	Denomination	-0.04	0.13	0.16	-		
5.	Forgiveness	0.05	-0.10	-0.14	0.01	-	
6.	Psych. well-being	0.01	0.28**	0.12	0.04	0.37**	-

\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \* =  $p < .01$ , gender (0=male, 1=female), age and duration (numeric), denomination charismatic=0, orthodox=1).

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

From the correlation matrix above, the correlation coefficient among the demographic and key study variables are worth noting. It is revealed that except for age which was positively associated with psychological well-being ( $r = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), no other demographic variable was associated with the study variables. The positive association between age and psychological well-being suggests that age increases with lower psychological well-being or older couples tended to have poorer psychological well-being. It was further found that forgiveness was significantly correlated with psychological well-being ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) such that lower forgiveness was associated with poorer psychological well-being or higher levels of forgiveness were associated with better psychological well-being.

## Hypotheses Testing

The study sought to investigate the effects of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples. Hypothesis one investigated the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels. Independent samples t-test was used to compare post-intervention scores for experimental and control groups on forgiveness. Hypothesis two sought to determine the effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being at post-intervention. Thus, post-intervention scores for experimental and control groups were compared on psychological well-being using independent samples t-test. Hypothesis three sought to investigate gender differences in forgiveness levels at post-intervention and independent samples t-test was used. The fourth hypothesis was based on duration of marriage effect on forgiveness levels at post-intervention and since duration was categorised into two independent levels, independent samples t-test was used. Lastly, the fifth hypothesis examined age of couple effect on forgiveness levels at post-intervention. Age was categorised into three; young, middle-aged and older couple, hence, the One-Way ANOVA was employed.

### **Hypothesis One: Forgiveness education will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples**

The independent samples t-test was conducted to compare post-intervention scores on forgiveness. Results are displayed in Table 6 below.



**Table 6: Results of Independent samples t-test to compare post-intervention scores of experimental and control groups on forgiveness**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p
Experimental*	32	18.47	5.79			
control	72	23.76	8.01	102	-3.37*	.001

\*Significance,  $p < .05$

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

Results of the independent samples t-test at post-intervention shows that intervention group ( $M = 18.47$ ,  $SD = 5.79$ ) had higher forgiveness levels compared to the control group ( $M = 23.76$ ,  $SD = 8.01$ ) at the .05 level of significance ( $t = -3.37$ ,  $df = 102$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI for mean difference -8.42 to -2.17). This suggests that forgiveness education had impacted the forgiveness levels of couples after the intervention. In other words, there was a statistically significant difference in mean forgiveness after forgiveness intervention. Thus, the hypothesis that forgiveness education has a significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples was supported by the data of the study.

**Hypothesis Two: Forgiveness education will have a significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.**

Hypothesis two sought to examine the effect of forgiveness education on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group. This was achieved by comparing post-intervention mean scores of the experimental and control groups on psychological well-being.

**Table 7: Results of Independent samples t-test to compare post-intervention scores for experimental and control groups on psychological well-being**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p
Experimental	32	42.38	6.15	102	2.58*	.011
Control	72	38.69	6.94			

\*Significance,  $p < .05$

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

Results of the independent samples t-test to compare post-intervention scores for experimental and control groups on psychological well-being shows that experimental group ( $M = 42.38$ ,  $SD = 6.15$ ) had higher psychological well-being scores compared to the control group ( $M = 38.69$ ,  $SD = 6.94$ ) at the .05 level of significance ( $t = 2.58$ ,  $df = 102$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI for mean difference 0.85 to 6.51). This suggests that forgiveness education had impacted the psychological well-being levels of couples. In other words, there was a statistically significant difference in mean psychological well-being scores after forgiveness intervention. Thus, the hypothesis that forgiveness education will have a significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples was supported by the data.

**Hypothesis Three: Females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on forgiveness levels**

The third hypothesis proposed that females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on forgiveness levels. Their forgiveness scores were compared post-intervention to determine the differences. Results are displayed in Table 8 below.

**Table 8: Results of Independent samples t-test samples to compare forgiveness levels between males and females at post-intervention**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p
Male	14	19.93	6.33	30	-1.27*	.21
Female	18	17.33	5.22			

\*Significance,  $p < .05$

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

Results of the independent samples t-test at post-intervention shows that those males ( $M=19.93$ ,  $SD = 6.33$ ) had slightly lower forgiveness levels than females ( $M = 17.33$ ,  $SD = 5.22$ ) but it was not significant at the 0.05 level of significance ( $t = -1.27$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that there were no significant sex differences in forgiveness levels among married couples after the forgiveness education programme. Thus, the hypothesis that females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on forgiveness levels was not supported by the data.

**Hypothesis four: Duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.**

The four-hypothesis stated that duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group. Duration of marriage was in two categories such that marriages that were less than five years old were defined as short duration while those above five years were termed as long duration. Thus, independent samples t-

test was used to compare the two groups on forgiveness scores at post-intervention. Results are displayed in Table 9 below.

**Table 9: Results of Independent samples t-test to compare forgiveness levels between short and long duration marriages at post-intervention**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p
Long	25	18.24	5.79	30	-0.42*	.42
Short	7	19.29	6.16			

\*Significance,  $p < .05$

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

Results of the independent samples t-test at post-intervention shows that long-duration marriages (M=18.24, SD = 5.79) had similar forgiveness levels as short-duration ones (M = 19.29, SD = 6.16) at the 0.05 level of significance ( $t = 0.42$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This suggests that after forgiveness education intervention, the duration of marriage did not have a significant effect on the forgiveness levels of married couples. In other words, all married couples irrespective of the duration of marriage had the same level of forgiveness after the forgiveness education. Thus, the hypothesis that duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels was not supported by the data.

**Hypothesis Five: Age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group**

Hypothesis five sought to determine the effect of age on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group. It stated age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels at pre-and post-intervention. Age was

in three categories of young (less than 35years), middle (between 35 and 50years) and old (above 50years). Since three independent levels are involved, the one-way ANOVA was used. Results are displayed in Table 10 below.

**Table 10: ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for post-intervention on the basis of Age**

Post-Intervention scores				
Age	Mean	SD	n	
Young	19.17	6.31	6	
Middle	19.08	6.39	12	
Older	17.64	5.36	14	
Source	SS	df	MS	F
Age	17.00	2	8.50	0.24 <sup>ns</sup>
Error	1020.96	29	35.21	

Source: Field survey, Adam (2021)

Results of the one-way ANOVA to compare post-intervention scores on the basis of age showed that no statistically significant mean differences were obtained among the three age groups; [ $F_{(2,31)} = 0.24, p > 0.05$ ]. Thus, the age of married couple did not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels. Therefore, the hypothesis that age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels at post-intervention was not supported by the data.

In all, the results of the study revealed that forgiveness education had a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples. It was however found that sex, age and duration of marriage did not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples. Lastly, it emerged that forgiveness education had a significant effect on the psychological well-being of married couples.

### Discussion of Findings

Data were analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. Five main hypotheses were tested. The main outcome of the study was that

forgiveness education had a significant impact on forgiveness levels of married couples. The second relates to the effect of forgiveness education on the psychological well-being of married couples. The third aspect shows that there is no significant effect of demographic factors such as sex, age and duration of marriage on forgiveness levels. These major findings are discussed in the ensuing sections.

### **Effect of Forgiveness Education on Forgiveness levels among married couples**

The first hypothesis revealed that forgiveness education had a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples. From the literature, it was reported that forgiveness education programmes improve forgiveness attitudes (Abadi et al., 2017; Aalgaard et al., 2016; Hilbert, 2015; Hui & Chau 2009; Gambaro et al. 2008; Sodani et al., 2019). In line with the Positive Psychology movement, forgiveness education programmes facilitate people to move from suffering to a new and positive perspective and coordinate their attitudes to resolve conflict and overcome injustices, leading to a life of greater hope and happiness. The between-group comparison on forgiveness scores indicated that participants in the intervention group benefitted from the C-REACH intervention programme in terms of increasing forgiveness. This suggests that C-REACH was facilitative of forgiveness of marital transgressions. With regard to C-REACH as a forgiveness intervention to couples, studies found similar results; showing that forgiveness levels increased after taking couples through a C-REACH programme (Worthington Jr et al. 2006; Martinez, 2018).

Current results from the study and other scientific literature (Wade et al., 2014; Worthington et al., 2000) support the notion that forgiveness is a process that includes making a choice to grant forgiveness and replacing negative thoughts and feelings towards the offender with more positive thoughts and feelings. Similarly, Worthington et al. (2000) indicate that forgiveness interventions involve “a series of activities” that promote forgiveness. Given that one must take multiple steps towards forgiveness and must spend considerable time working towards forgiveness, it seems that forgiveness after an offence is not automatic or instantaneous. Even though forgiveness levels among participants were high, the C-REACH intervention enhanced their forgiveness levels even though they were devout Christians.

The Christian dimension of the C-REACH forgiveness education could also explain the current finding. As illustrated, forgiveness is demonstrated through many of Christ’s teachings about forgiveness and sacrifice of his life leading to forgiveness of sins (Carlisle & Tsang, 2013). With much emphasis on the value of forgiveness as Christ died on the cross to save the world, Christians have to forgive others as Christ forgives them. This is in line with the model developed by Worthington et al (2000). The intervention process of the present study involved taking the couple through remembering the hurt by acknowledging the offence and reviewing the nature of the injury, promoting empathy in a partner for the other partner's experience; giving altruistic forgiveness gifts, verbally committing to forgiveness and finally, finding ways to adhere to forgiveness. The literature is in support of the view that forgiveness can be, as a lot of changes in attitudes towards God (Ironson et al., 2011). Toussaint et al (2005) indicated

that forgiveness can be “forgiveness of God”, feeling others’ forgiveness, seeking others’ forgiveness; and seeking God’s forgiveness.

### **Effect of Demographic Factors on Forgiveness levels among married couples**

The study showed that no demographic factor was significantly associated with forgiveness levels. Specifically, sex, age and duration of marriage did not have a significant effect on forgiveness levels before and after forgiveness education. In other words, couples’ forgiveness attitude and behaviours were not determined by whether they are men or women, young or old, or how long their marital relationship has been in existence.

The literature on sex differences in forgiveness has not been conclusive but most studies found that women tend to be more forgiving than men (Pronk et al., 2019) owing to their higher need for relationship preservation and to live up to the expectation of others. Lerner (2006) argues that the desire to maintain relationships drive women to be more forgiving than men. Thus, the current study is not consistent with extant studies which found sex differences in forgiveness (Lerner, 2006; Rye et al., 2005; Worthington et al., 2000; Wuthnow, 2000). Consistent with the present finding, Brannan, Davis and Biswas-Diener (2016) indicated that there is no compelling evidence suggesting distinct sex differences in the propensity to forgive others. Similarly, other studies reported no significant sex differences in forgiveness (Rana & Nadine, 2013; Rana, Hariharan, Nandinee & Vincent, 2014; Berry et al., 2001; Toussaint & Webb, 2005).

This outcome suggests that both men and women were equally desirous of the marital relationship; hence were driven to forgive in order to



maintain the relationship. Other contextual factors could explain the current outcomes. For instance, the high regard for marriage as sacred and not to be ‘put asunder by no man’ in Christianity would propel married couple to forgo their hurts and forgive. Additionally, the Biblical teaching of ‘living at peace with all manner of persons’ could also be implicated in this finding where both men and women would equally strive to be at peace with their partners. The societal expectations of Christian marriage as long-lasting i.e. “till death do us part” behoves the married to be committed to the marriage irrespective of the hurtful occasions.

It was expected that older couples and those in longer marital relationships would be more forgiving than their younger or short duration married couples. This is based on theory and research on socio-emotional development across the lifespan suggest that older adults engage more often in strategies that optimize positive social experiences and minimize negative ones by avoiding conflicts, whereas younger adults behave more confrontationally when they are upset (Birditt et al. 2005; Luong et al. 2011). But the findings were inconsistent with expectations and the existing literature. Many pieces of research have demonstrated that older people are more forgiving (Cheng & Yim, 2008; Steiner et al., 2011; Rana & Nadine, 2013), experience fewer recurring transgressions, and display more prosocial reactions about wrongdoings than younger people (Steiner et al., 2011).

However, it appears the majority of the participants of this study who were quite older and had longer marital relationships had equally the same forgiveness as the few younger married counterparts. This affirms forgiveness as a universal social phenomenon that cuts across different age groups. Thus,

studies have found forgiveness to be evident among children, adolescents, adults and the aged (Rana & Nadine, 2013; Rana et al., 2014; Miller & Worthington Jr, 2020; Ghaemmaghami, Allemand & Martin, 2011); suggesting that forgiveness could be taught among age-specific populations.

### **Effect of Forgiveness on Psychological Well-being among married couples**

The study has revealed that forgiveness has a significant effect on psychological well-being. In other words, there was a positive association between forgiveness and psychological well-being. This outcome is compatible with some previous studies (Aalgaard et al, 2016; Ahktar & Barlow, 2018; Lavafpour Nouri et al., 2015; Sodani et al., 2019) which showed that there is a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and subjective, mental or psychological well-being. This result can be interpreted in the light of previous literature. As has been indicated in the literature, interpersonal relationships are considered an important source of social support and security. For instance, marriage is considered one of the sources of social support which protect the couple from the consequences of stress and thus leading to well-being (Eid, 2019).

However, relationships are sometimes challenged by serious conflicts, which may arise when one or both partners neglect the other's preferences or desires, or when breaking promises, telling secrets to others. The partners can overcome these conflicts through forgiveness and forgiveness is an important factor for achieving psychological well-being. Successful resolution of conflicts entails drawing satisfaction from affiliating with others and focusing more on what one can give to others. Forgiveness helps establish and maintain relationships that bring such satisfaction and account for an individual's

psychological well-being, so the individuals who refuse resentment and tend to forgiveness, have a feeling of well-being (Ahktar & Barlow, 2018).

In line with the literature, forgiveness helps to have positive knowledge about the self and the spouse, narrow the use of negative strategies to resolving conflicts and allows the couple to break out of the vicious cycle of conflict that leads to distressful relationships. Forgiveness paves the way to reconciliation, intimacy, and cooperation between the spouses and it facilitates effective communication between them without showing abuse towards the other partner; which helps the couple for future management of conflicts (Braithwaite, Selby & Fincham, 2011; Mirzadeh & Fallahchai, 2012). Additionally, forgiveness is making the person feel happiness, well-being, positive emotions, satisfaction, relaxation, a sense of power and control as a result of overcoming the negative feelings associated with unforgiveness, and also forgiveness leads to low negative thoughts, emotions and feelings, positive social interaction, and the development of social relations with others. Unforgiveness leads to depression, lack of self-confidence and a lack of inner peace (Akhtar, Dolan & Barlow, 2017).

Indeed, forgiveness has great importance to the relationship between couples; as it enhances marital satisfaction, and commitment to the relation, reduce conflicts and also improves the quality of a couple's relationship (Aalgaard et al., 2016; Sodani et al., 2019). The relationship between forgiveness and health appears in the context of marriage; in that marital conflicts have dangerous effects on an individual's health. It was revealed that when couples experience stress, they may be at risk of many illnesses such as heart diseases, which leads to decreasing marital satisfaction (Karimzadeh &

Salimi, 2018; Paleari et al., 2011). Nonetheless, being married is associated with general health and well-being; with married men and women living longer, less likely to have chronic illnesses, have lower levels of depression, anxiety and other psychological distresses compared with never-married counterparts (Fincham, 2006).

“In the light of the results of the present study, it could be argued that psychological well-being includes couples’ ability to form kind relationships with each other, making tasks efficiently and enthusiastically, being satisfied with one’s life, and with relationships with others, and having positive feelings, leading to having positive interactions and feeling satisfied with marital life. Thus, having a partner who cares, shares similar interests and satisfies one’s needs helps to build psychological well-being. The couple who is characterized by forgiveness is a person who has decided to abandon the abuse and the negative feelings associated with it and then try to give the partner a chance to start again and to regain the friendship and love with him/her. This helps her to settle down with her partner and provide feelings of happiness. This is supported by Bono, McCullough and Root (2008) who found that the strong relationship between forgiveness and psychological well-being was due to two relationship qualities i.e. (1) greater closeness and commitment to the relationship and (2) a high degree of apology and making amends from the transgressor following the transgression.

This finding is largely consistent with the idea that psychological well-being can serve as an indicator of the availability of positive social relations, that positive social relations are a crucial human need (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and that helping to restore valuable social relations is how forgiveness obtains

its positive association with well-being. Bono et al. (2008) argue that if a relationship is personally valuable to the victim (for example, if the offending spouse was closely connected and loved), then the disruption of this relationship also limits the victim's access to the social and psychological resources that the marriage provided (emotional and material social support, love, a sense of social inclusion, etc.), which leads to psychological distress.

By forgiving and thereby promoting the restoration of the relationship, those social and psychological resources become available again to the victim. They likewise contend that failures to forgive an apologetic partner are more negatively associated with well-being than are failures to forgive an unapologetic one, perhaps because apologies send signals that a relationship is likely to possess value to the forgiver in the future, whereas an unapologetic offender's future relationship intentions remain more uncertain. The notion that it is the close, committed relationships that are likely to have future value to the forgiver are the ones in which forgiveness is most closely linked to better psychological well-being is highly consistent with evolutionary accounts of the psychological processes underlying reciprocal altruism.

Thus, it is suggested based on this finding that forgiveness is particularly beneficial when considering the type of relationship that a victim and transgressor have. That is, when commitment levels are high between the victim and the transgressor (in this case, spouses), well-being can be bolstered through forgiveness. Indeed, it has been empirically confirmed that that forgiveness is the key to better relationships and higher levels of psychological well-being.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that forgiveness is an adaptive process that mends relationships by restoring positive feelings between the victim and the transgressor, provides both parties with inner peace, and higher levels of psychological well-being. Nevertheless, forgiveness is a complex process that is worthy of research. Researchers should continue to examine how gender, age, duration of the relationship, context, and other important variables influence the impact of forgiveness.”

### Final Hypothesised Model

In the final model below, only the independent and dependent variables are retained. The moderating variables did not have any significant effect on forgiveness, hence, are excluded in the final model.



Figure 2: Final Hypothesised Model of the Study

Source: Researcher's Construction

### Chapter Summary

This chapter offered the results and discussion of the study. A sample of 104 participants including 32 couples (18 females and 14 males) in experimental group and 72 couples in control group was involved in the study. Data was analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. It was found that most couple largely had high forgiveness and better psychological well-being. 50% percentile score was thus used to screen couple who require forgiveness intervention. Based on this, 32 couple participants were recruited and educated on forgiveness using C-REACH forgiveness intervention

guidelines. Comparative analysis revealed that forgiveness education had a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples. However, sex, age and duration of marriage did not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels. It was also found that forgiveness had a significant effect on the psychological well-being of married couples. These outcomes were discussed in line with previous studies and within the context of the study.



## CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, implications for practice, conclusions and recommendations of the study. Suggestions for further research are also given.

#### Summary

The study aimed at investigating the effects of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of married couples in Accra, Ghana. Specifically, the study was based on five objectives and hypotheses.

#### Research Objectives

1. To investigate the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the intervention group
2. To ascertain the effect of forgiveness education on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.
3. To examine the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of gender.
4. To investigate the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of duration of marriage.
5. To determine the effect of forgiveness education on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples in the experimental group on the basis of age.



## Hypotheses

1.  $H_01$ : Forgiveness education has no significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples.

$H_A1$ : Forgiveness education has a significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples.

2.  $H_02$ : Forgiveness education will not have any significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A2$ : Forgiveness education will have a significant effect on psychological well-being of married couples in the experimental group

3.  $H_03$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will not differ significantly on forgiveness levels.

$H_A3$ : Females and males who received forgiveness education will differ significantly on their forgiveness levels.

4.  $H_04$ : Duration of marriage will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A4$ : Duration of marriage will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

5.  $H_05$ : Age will not have any significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

$H_A5$ : Age will have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of married couples in the experimental group.

Theories and literature related to the study were reviewed. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was chosen for the study. This design ensured that not much manipulation could be done with the participants except for the independent variable which was varied by giving the experimental group the forgiveness education, and the control group, no education. A sample of 104 participants including 32 couple participants (i.e. 18 females and 14 males) in the experimental group and 72 couple participants in the control group were selected via purposive and convenience sampling procedures. The data were analysed descriptively and inferentially.

### **Key Findings**

Forgiveness and psychological well-being levels were largely high among all the sampled couple participants. This is evident in the lower than the original median score of the MOFS and PWS instruments adopted.

1. Forgiveness education had a statistically significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples
2. There was a statistically significant effect of forgiveness on psychological well-being of married couples.
3. There was no significant gender effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples as a result of forgiveness education.
4. Duration of marriage did not have a significant effect on forgiveness levels of Christian married couples as a result of forgiveness education.
5. There was no statistically significant age effect on forgiveness levels as a result of forgiveness education.

## Conclusions

This study has confirmed that forgiveness education is effective in enhancing forgivingness among married couples in Ghana. The findings of the study have also shown that forgiveness has a significant impact on psychological well-being of married couples. The data from this study was largely statistically significant with regard to the main purpose of the study; suggesting that forgiveness education is beneficial to married couples. Married couples' understanding of the nature of forgiveness as encapsulating divinity and human love, sacredness, virtuousness, devotion and higher Grace which are contained in the C-REACH forgiveness intervention in this study; have been shown by the statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on the MOFS.

If the participants were to receive more extensive forgiveness education sessions, I would anticipate that their understanding of forgiveness would increase even more and that their forgiveness would increase as illustrated on the MOFS and their level of well-being would increase as illustrated on the Psychological Well-being Scale. Per the literature, it takes a while to work through the forgiveness process, so a forgiveness education programme needs to be longer than six weeks if one wants to see stronger results and changes in forgiveness towards a specific offender.

Despite the short duration of this study though, forgiveness education proved to be beneficial to married couples. Thus, this study supports the existing research that forgiveness education is beneficial to one's psychological well-being. The more research that supports the value of forgiveness the better, as it will help illustrate the worth of including

forgiveness education in marriage counselling. This study is one of the few that may inform Christian Marriage pre- and post-counselling practice in Ghana.

### **Implications for Counselling**

There are a number of counselling implications that can be gleaned from the current results. First, forgiveness education has many benefits for both the forgiving and the offending couple. Further, being more forgiving has implications for psychological health for married couples. Results show that both men and women couple are equally capable of forgiving and thus, being unforgiving for one reason or another may result in psychological distress. In sum, forgiveness education produces greater effects on marital relationship and represents a viable way to improve marital stability, which have broad implications for couples' and society's well-being. Additionally, irrespective of age or duration of the marriage, forgiveness education appears to be equally beneficial for couples and it is particularly effective in increasing their use of positive conflict resolution behaviours.

The study further implies that Worthington's C-REACH forgiveness education approach was confirmed as producing a statistically significant effect for couples in Ghana; thus, could be used in similar contexts of conventional marriage and family counselling, mental health or pastoral counselling. However, because of the complexity of forgiveness and the developed models (Enright's, Worthington's, Rye's etc.) for specific contexts, counsellors need training and supervision before attempting to utilize them. The results of the study would to some extent inform marriage counsellors'

practice in Ghana as they seek to enhance marital relationships through forgiveness education and counselling.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings, conclusions and implications for practice of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

Currently, in Ghana, there is no evidence of available forgiveness education in marriage counselling, specifically in the area of marital infidelity, or for less severe transgressions. A psychoeducation component on forgiveness could be introduced in marriage counselling. This is especially relevant for correcting misconceptions about forgiveness. According to Fincham et al. (2006), it is important to know how people think about forgiveness in order to address any negative notions that they may have about it.

The study revealed that forgiveness enhances personal growth and reaps many positive benefits in terms of enhancing psychological well-being. Thus, it is recommended married couples be made to understand the influences of forgiveness on mental health which could further be applied toward the cultivation and practising of forgiveness in marriage.

It also emerged that forgiveness is universal and it equally exists among men and women, young or old and whether the marital relationship is long or short. This suggests that forgiveness education could be introduced at any period of the marital relationship. The current practice of offering on-off pre-marital counselling in most Christian denominations should be revisited. Couples encounter transgressions throughout marriage, hence; it is important to offer them the necessary skills to overcome obstacles to marital bliss.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Further research regarding the value of forgiveness education is needed if it is to become part of Christian marriage counselling. Future research should examine the impact of forgiveness education in a more targeted population for which forgivingness is a problem to relationship partners, especially married couples. This would result in an accurate gauge of the impact of forgiveness education among such populations. Future research regarding the best way to educate married couples on forgiveness in a collectivist culture is also warranted, because there may be better approaches within such contexts than were used in this study which were mainly based on the Westernised approaches. According to Worthington Jr. et al. (2015), developing culturally sensitive interventions for Africans may inform some of the interventions already developed for Western populations. Thus, researchers should consider not only how to present the interventions but also how the content is modified to be particularly useful and engaging for Africans from particular contexts.

In addition, a study taking place over a longer period that allows participants more time to work through the forgiveness model would be an important study to conduct for future research. Finally, a study including follow-up assessments regarding how well couples retain and practice what they were taught about forgiveness would be beneficial to future research. This research is a starting point for researchers interested in the benefits and impact of forgiveness education with married couples in Ghana. Forgiveness education must be included in marriage counselling, but further research in this field would be helpful in making this happens. If couples learn about

forgiveness, the possibility of positive consequences for their children, family, community, and themselves would be large.



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APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

### DEPARTMENT OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COUPLES

This questionnaire forms a part of study been conducted by a student from the department named above. You are kindly requested to read through the items and respond to them as frankly as possible. Information provided shall be treated as confidential and used solely for academic purpose. Besides, your anonymity will be granted. Thank you.

#### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Tick (✓) the appropriate boxes that correspond to your choice concerning each statement below

1. Sex: Male [  ] Female [  ]
2. Age:
  - 20 – 29years [  ]
  - 30-39 years [  ]
  - 40 – 49 years [  ]
  - 50– 59 years [  ]
  - 60 years and above [  ]
3. Duration of marriage: How old is it since you had your marriage blessed in church?
  - 0 – 5years [  ]
  - 5 -10 years [  ]
  - 10 – 15 years [  ]
  - 15 – 20 years [  ]
  - 20 years and above [  ]
4. Denomination: Which Christian Denomination do you belong?
  - Charismatic [  ]
  - Orthodox [  ]

**Section B: Marital Offence – Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS)**

Each of the following statements describes possible feelings, thoughts and behaviours you might currently experience in response to an offence from your partner (i.e. wife or husband). Please indicate the extent to which you

agree or disagree with each statement by using the rating scale below: Please **circle** the **number** that applies to you.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	
1	Since my partner behaved that way, I have been less willing to talk to her/him	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Although she/he hurt me, I definitely put what happened aside so that we could resume our relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Since my partner behaved that way, I get annoyed with her/him more easily	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I make my partner feel guilty for what happened	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Since my partner behaved that way, I have done my best to restore my relationship with her/him	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I would like to behave toward my partner in the same way that she/he behaved toward me	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Because of what happened, I find it difficult to be loving and caring toward her/him	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I still hold some grudge against my partner because of what she/he did	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I forgave her/him completely, thoroughly	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I soon forgave her/him	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Section C: Psychological Well-being Scale

Based on your experiences as a married person, indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about your well-being? Please indicate your agreement by **circling** the **number** that applies to you.

	1	2	3	4	5	6				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree				
1	I like most parts of my personality.				1	2	3	4	5	6
2	When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.				1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.				1	2	3	4	5	6
4	The demands of everyday life often get me down.				1	2	3	4	5	6
5	In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.				1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.				1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.				1	2	3	4	5	6
8	In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.				1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.				1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.				1	2	3	4	5	6
11	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.				1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I think it is important to have new experiences				1	2	3	4	5	6

	that challenge how I think about myself and the world.						
13	People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.	1	2	3	4	5	6

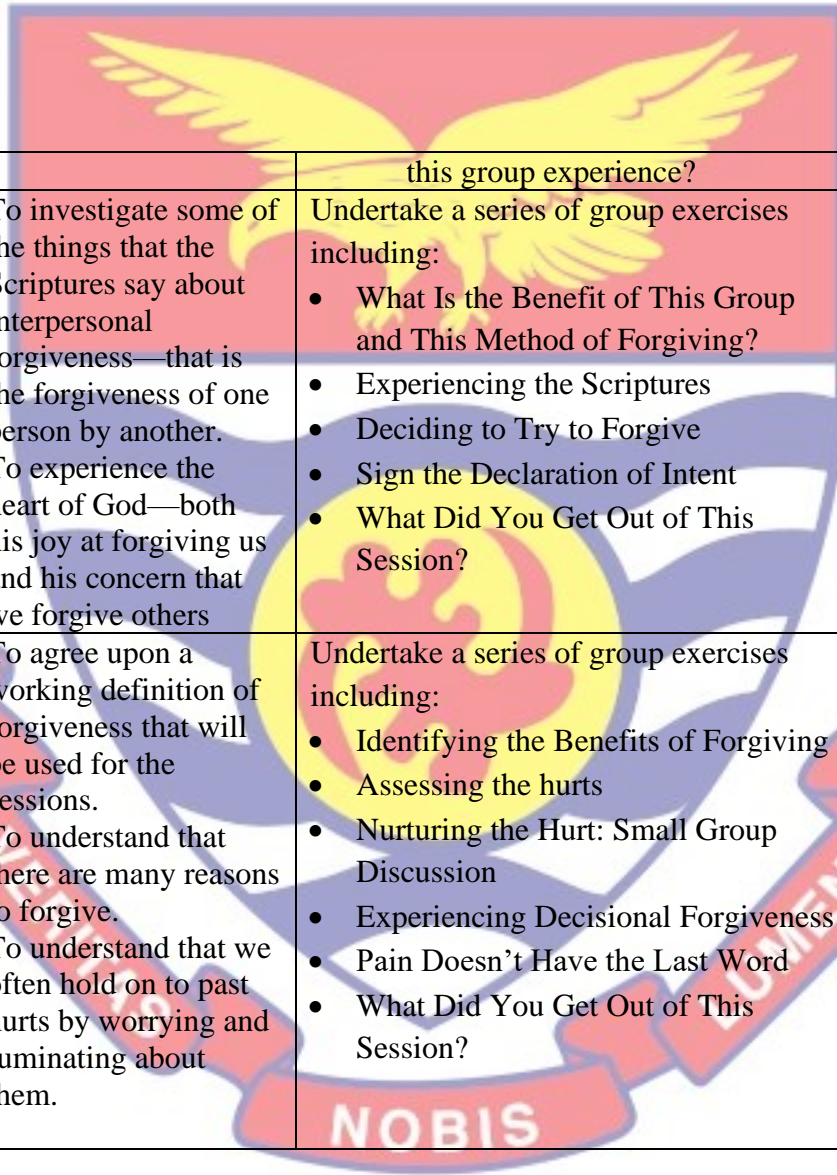
Thank you for your time!



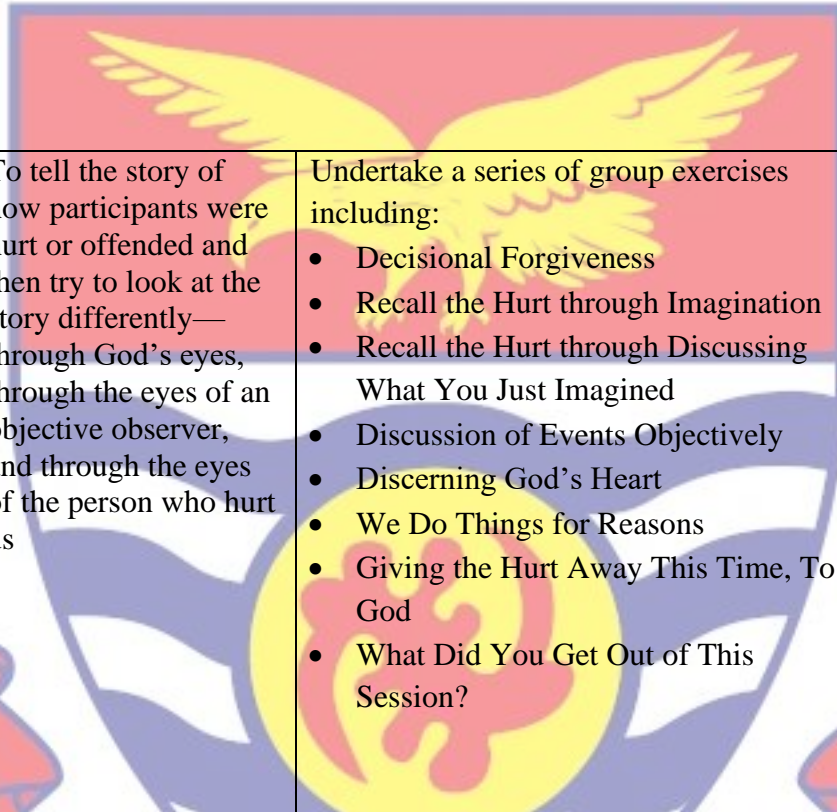


**APPENDIX B: DETAILED INTERVENTION PLAN**

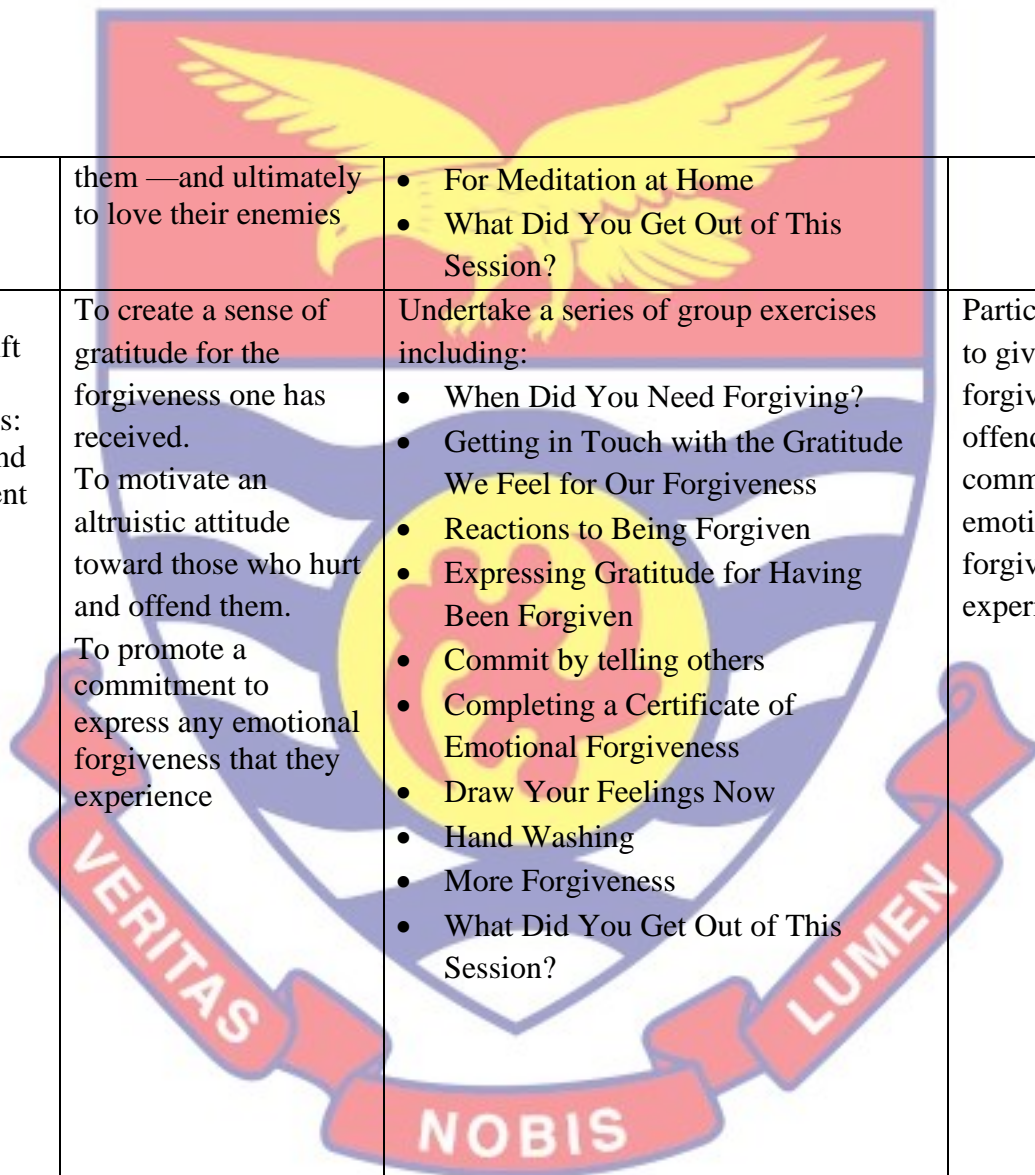
Session	Activity	Objective	Methodology	Expected outcome	Duration
Introduction	Opening and Housekeeping issues	To have an opening ceremony to commence the programme. To determine modalities for modulating participants' behaviour	Group counsellor welcomes participants officially to the programme	Programme officially opens Programme ground-rules set	10mins
	Self-introduction	To enable participants introduce themselves, state their expectations for the programme	Each participant will be given an A4 sheet Each participant will be asked to write the name he/she will want to be addressed on it and pasted on his/her seat Each person introduces himself or herself by telling the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your name, age, job (college major), family</li> <li>• Your favourite dessert.</li> <li>• Brief description of the hardest thing that you have ever forgiven successfully</li> <li>• What do you want to get out of</li> </ul>	Participants introduced and expectations for the programme known	20mins



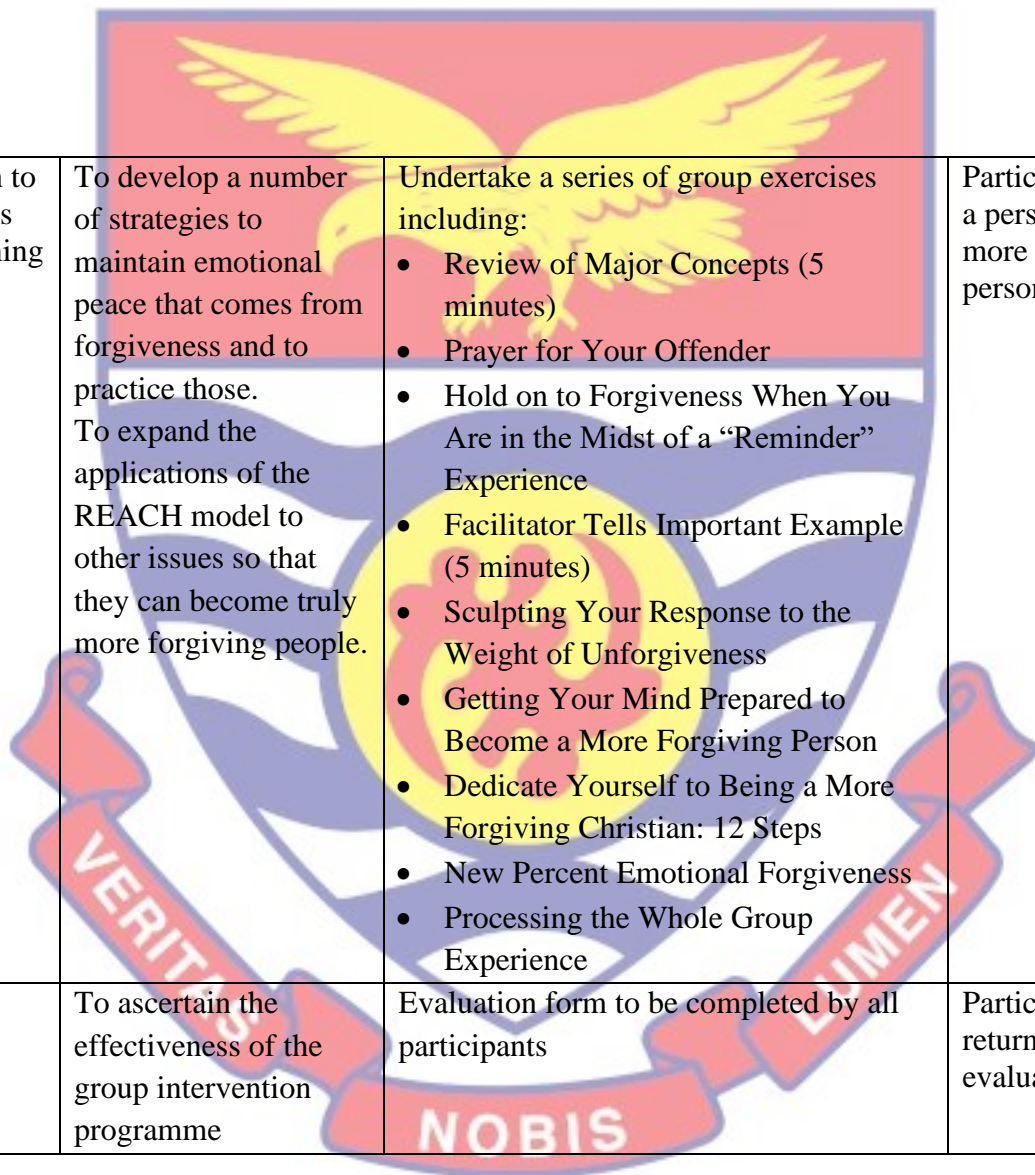
			<p>this group experience?</p>		
Session 1	Forgiving in Christian Context	<p>To investigate some of the things that the Scriptures say about interpersonal forgiveness—that is the forgiveness of one person by another. To experience the heart of God—both his joy at forgiving us and his concern that we forgive others</p>	<p>Undertake a series of group exercises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What Is the Benefit of This Group and This Method of Forgiving?</li> <li>• Experiencing the Scriptures</li> <li>• Deciding to Try to Forgive</li> <li>• Sign the Declaration of Intent</li> <li>• What Did You Get Out of This Session?</li> </ul>	<p>Participants become a more forgiving person through getting closer to God and learning and practicing a five-step method of forgiving</p>	50mins
Session 2	What Is Forgiveness?	<p>To agree upon a working definition of forgiveness that will be used for the sessions. To understand that there are many reasons to forgive. To understand that we often hold on to past hurts by worrying and ruminating about them.</p>	<p>Undertake a series of group exercises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the Benefits of Forgiving</li> <li>• Assessing the hurts</li> <li>• Nurturing the Hurt: Small Group Discussion</li> <li>• Experiencing Decisional Forgiveness</li> <li>• Pain Doesn't Have the Last Word</li> <li>• What Did You Get Out of This Session?</li> </ul>	<p>Participants get to understand forgiveness in conceptual and Biblical terms</p>	50mins



Session 3	How to Recall the Hurt (In Helpful Ways)	To tell the story of how participants were hurt or offended and then try to look at the story differently—through God’s eyes, through the eyes of an objective observer, and through the eyes of the person who hurt us	<p>Undertake a series of group exercises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisional Forgiveness</li> <li>• Recall the Hurt through Imagination</li> <li>• Recall the Hurt through Discussing What You Just Imagined</li> <li>• Discussion of Events Objectively</li> <li>• Discerning God’s Heart</li> <li>• We Do Things for Reasons</li> <li>• Giving the Hurt Away This Time, To God</li> <li>• What Did You Get Out of This Session?</li> </ul>	<p>Participants’ decision to forgive is strengthened. Participants think of transgressions in a new way rather than in the same way they usually thought of it. Participants place transgressions in a divine context rather than focusing on the personal responses of vengeance that they are prone to.</p>	50mins
Session 4	Empathy with the One Who Hurt You: The Hard Part of Experiencing Emotional Forgiveness	To empathize with the person who hurt us. To learn ways that we can promote empathy. Even if one cannot empathize, to learn ways to sympathize and experience compassion for those who have harmed	<p>Undertake a series of group exercises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We Do Things for Reasons</li> <li>• Empty Chair</li> <li>• Empathizing with the Heart of God</li> <li>• When Did You Do Something Altruistic for Someone Else?</li> <li>• We Are All Capable of Evil</li> </ul>	<p>Participants experience emotional forgiveness through trying to empathize, sympathize, feel compassion for, or even love the person who harmed them</p>	40mins



		<p>them —and ultimately to love their enemies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For Meditation at Home</li> <li>• What Did You Get Out of This Session?</li> </ul>		
Session 5	Giving a Humble Gift of Forgiveness: Altruism and Commitment	<p>To create a sense of gratitude for the forgiveness one has received.</p> <p>To motivate an altruistic attitude toward those who hurt and offend them.</p> <p>To promote a commitment to express any emotional forgiveness that they experience</p>	<p>Undertake a series of group exercises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When Did You Need Forgiving?</li> <li>• Getting in Touch with the Gratitude We Feel for Our Forgiveness</li> <li>• Reactions to Being Forgiven</li> <li>• Expressing Gratitude for Having Been Forgiven</li> <li>• Commit by telling others</li> <li>• Completing a Certificate of Emotional Forgiveness</li> <li>• Draw Your Feelings Now</li> <li>• Hand Washing</li> <li>• More Forgiveness</li> <li>• What Did You Get Out of This Session?</li> </ul>	Participants are able to give a gift of forgiving to the offender and committing to the emotional forgiveness experienced.	60mins



Session 6	Holding on to Forgiveness and Becoming a More Forgiving Christian	To develop a number of strategies to maintain emotional peace that comes from forgiveness and to practice those. To expand the applications of the REACH model to other issues so that they can become truly more forgiving people.	Undertake a series of group exercises including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Major Concepts (5 minutes)</li> <li>• Prayer for Your Offender</li> <li>• Hold on to Forgiveness When You Are in the Midst of a “Reminder” Experience</li> <li>• Facilitator Tells Important Example (5 minutes)</li> <li>• Sculpting Your Response to the Weight of Unforgiveness</li> <li>• Getting Your Mind Prepared to Become a More Forgiving Person</li> <li>• Dedicate Yourself to Being a More Forgiving Christian: 12 Steps</li> <li>• New Percent Emotional Forgiveness</li> <li>• Processing the Whole Group Experience</li> </ul>	Participants become a person who is more forgiving as a person.	60mins
Conclusion	Evaluation	To ascertain the effectiveness of the group intervention programme	Evaluation form to be completed by all participants	Participants fill and return the evaluation form	5mins

**APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

**DEPARTMENT OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

Telephone: 0332091854  
Email: [dgc@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:dgc@ucc.edu.gh)

UNIVERSITY POST OFFICE  
CAPE COAST, GHANA



Our Ref: DGC/L.2/VOL.1/131

30<sup>th</sup> July, 2020

Your Ref:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

We introduce to you, Eugenia Tawiah Adam a student pursuing an M.Phil Programme in Guidance and Counselling at the Department of Guidance and Counselling of the University of Cape Coast. As a requirement, she is to submit a Thesis on the topic: *"Effects of Forgiveness Education on Forgiveness and Psychological Wellbeing Levels of Couples in Accra"*. We are by this letter affirming that, the information she will obtain from your Institution will be solely used for academic purposes.

We would be most grateful if you could provide her the necessary assistance.

Thank you.


Dr. Stephen Doh Fia  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

**NOBIS**

**APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES  
ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD

UNIVERSITY POST OFFICE  
CAPE COAST, GHANA

Our Ref: CES-ERB/ucc.edu/v4/20-77  Date: 1st October, 2020  
Your Ref: .....

Dear Sir/Madam,

ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS CLEARANCE FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Chairman, CES-ERB  
Prof. J. A. Omotosho  
[jomotosho@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:jomotosho@ucc.edu.gh)  
0243784739

Vice-Chairman, CES-ERB  
Prof. K. Edjah  
[kedjah@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:kedjah@ucc.edu.gh)  
0244742357

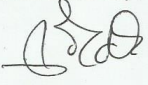
Secretary, CES-ERB  
Prof. Linda Dzama Forde  
[lforde@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:lforde@ucc.edu.gh)  
0244786680

The bearer, Eugenia Tawiah Adam, Reg. No. EE/CA/19/0003 is an M.Phil. / Ph.D. student in the Department of Guidance and Counselling ..... in the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana. ~~He~~ / She wishes to undertake a research study on the topic:

Effects of forgiveness education on the forgiveness and psychological well-being levels of Christian married couples in Adentan Municipality of Greater Accra Region

The Ethical Review Board (ERB) of the College of Education Studies (CES) has assessed ~~his~~ her proposal and confirm that the proposal satisfies the College's ethical requirements for the conduct of the study.

In view of the above, the researcher has been cleared and given approval to commence ~~his~~ her study. The ERB would be grateful if you would give ~~him~~ her the necessary assistance to facilitate the conduct of the said research.

Thank you.  
Yours faithfully,  


Prof. Linda Dzama Forde  
(Secretary, CES-ERB)