

# Betrayal, Trust and Forgiveness among Adolescent Friendship Groups in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

Objective: A lot of research has been conducted on betrayal among married couples, but literature regarding betrayal in context to same-gender adolescent friendship is scarce. This study was designed to assess whether betrayal, trust and quality of friendship predict forgiveness. The study further aimed to find out the impact of age, gender, and education on adolescents' forgiveness. Method: A cross-sectional survey was administered on 400 adolescents enrolled in educational institutions of Pakistan. Results: Betrayal was found to negatively predict emotional forgiveness ( $\beta = -.152, p < 0.01$ ), but it didn't predict decisional forgiveness ( $\beta = -.071, p > 0.01$ ). Trust ( $\beta = .180, p < 0.01$ ) and quality of friendship ( $\beta = .202, p < 0.01$ ) were found to positively predict both emotional ( $\beta = .179, p = 0.01$ ) and decisional forgiveness ( $\beta = .344, p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, age and educational level predicted betrayal, emotional and decisional forgiveness; whereas, gender was found to predict only betrayal and emotional forgiveness. Conclusion: Betrayal from close friends is getting prevalent these days, shattering the individual's trust as well as affecting the quality of relationship and forgiveness, thus needs serious consideration.

**Keywords:** Emotional forgiveness, Decisional forgiveness, Same-gender friendship betrayal, Trust, Unforgiveness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern competitive and material world, betrayal in a relationship, especially the ones based on trust such as friendship, has become fairly common. Betrayal of trust may result in the violation of relationship relevant norms and can be very hurtful to people involved in it. The most common forms of betrayal are disloyalty, disclosure of confidential information and dishonesty (Rachman, 2010) and can be defined as "the violation of explicit and implicit trust" as cited in Carnes (2018). As adolescents, nowadays, spend a large amount of time with their friends as compared to families, so betrayal from friends is also emerging as often as partner relationship betrayal. Studies have shown that though friendship by nature is different from a romantic relationship, yet it contains the same relationship rules (Ewing, 2015) and features (Kochendorfer & Kerns, 2020). For example, friendship may sometimes involve unpleasant experiences and hence may become a source of conflict that may disturb the harmony of friendship, especially if this conflict remains unresolved (Andayani, 2019).

The realization of being betrayed can create several negative feelings such as jealousy, loneliness, guilt, embarrassment and social anxiety (Leary, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to consider the rebuilding of trust after it has been destroyed (Yao et al., 2014). One way to rebuild trust and to restore difficult relations is through forgiveness (Kaleta & Mróz, 2018). In all sorts of relationships, forgiveness acts as an initial path to reconciliation, which not only decreases negative feelings of a victim towards the offender or towards oneself but also reduces the desire to take revenge (Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, & Wigboldus, 2010).

Worthington identified two types of forgiveness, namely decisional (deciding one's behavioural intentions toward the offender) (Davis et al., 2015) and emotional forgiveness ("the emotional replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive, other-oriented emotions like empathy, sympathy, compassion, or love for the offender") (as cited in Worthington Jr, Brown, and McConnell (2019)). Thus, the current study conceptualizes forgiveness as both emotional and decisional forgiveness and is based on both Worthington and Wade's Emotional Dissonance Model (as cited in Di Fonzo, Alongi, and Wiele (2020) and Di Blasio's Decisional Model (as cited in Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, and Fernández-Capo (2015)).

Relative to western countries, Pakistan has a different cultural background where dating and opposite-gender relationship is socially unacceptable and is often frowned upon. Here, friendship is mostly considered in terms of

the same-gender. Even though friendship always holds a risk of betrayal and the harmful aftereffects of unforgiveness, no previous research has specifically measured betrayal in the context of the same-gender relationships. Summing up, the unavailability of literature leads to the conclusion that betrayal is an important and emerging issue in same-gender friendships and needs to be explored in this context.

The study intended to:

- Find the relationship between betrayal, quality of friendship and forgiveness.
- Identify the predictive powers of betrayal, trust and quality of friendship on emotional and decisional forgiveness among adolescents.
- Determine the effect of adolescents' age, gender and education on emotional and decisional forgiveness.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Study Design and Sampling Strategy

The study was cross-sectional in design and comprised of 400 adolescents (203 girls and 197 boys) enrolled in public educational institutes of Lahore, Pakistan. Sampling was done in two stages. At first, non-probability sampling was utilized for selecting schools and colleges, as only complete boys and complete girls' colleges and schools were selected. Subsequently, probability random sampling was utilized for student selection.

### 2.2. Questionnaires

Our tools of data collection comprised of five questionnaires, along with a consent form, delivered to each participant by hand. The first questionnaire included demographic information such as age, gender and level of education.

The second tool was an indigenous betrayal scale for measuring betrayal adolescents faced by their same-gender friends. This scale was developed in the English language following an extensive review of the literature, listing of evidence-based indicators, interviewing 2-3 victims of betrayal, pilot testing and rephrasing of items following a process of peer review and ensuring reliability. Overall, 13 items were finalized for this construct. As relational closeness and time duration of a relationship play an important role in predicting transgression-specific forgiveness, thus this part contained some additional questions. For example, "how long have you been known the betrayer, how important to you your relationship with betrayer? How important is this relation to betrayer?" Cronbach alpha of the scale was measured to be .81.

The third tool used was an indigenous scale to measure trust one has on their same-gender friend before the event of betrayal. This was developed again following an extensive review of the literature, the listing of evidence-based indicators, pilot testing and the rephrasing some items following peer review. Overall, 14 questions were finalized for this construct. To get an overall trust score, all the items of each subscale were summed together. Cronbach alpha of the scale was measured to be .79.

Fourthly, the "friendship quality scale" developed by Thien, Razak, and Jamil (2012) was used. It consisted of 21 items which are divided into four subscales i.e. Safety, Closeness, Acceptance and Help. These items were rated on six points Likert scale. Cronbach alpha of the scale was measured to be .92.

The fifth set of questionnaires measured the forgiveness of adolescents towards their transgressor. As mentioned above, this study conceptualized forgiveness in two aspects; emotional and decisional; this questionnaire included two sections. The first section used "emotional forgiveness scale" (EFS) developed by Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams and Neil (as cited in Worthington Jr et al. (2015)) which was used to measure emotional forgiveness. Whereas, the second section used "decision to forgive scale" (DTF) developed by Davis et al. (2015) used to measure decisional forgiveness. Cronbach alpha of the scale was measured to be .64 and .86 for EFS and DTF respectively.

### 2.3. Ethics

Approval of the research proposal was received from the Board of Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Formal permission letters were submitted along with the research proposal to the selected educational institutions. Informed consent was also taken from the participants. The anonymity of students was also kept by allotting an ID number to each participant. Permissions from the authors of respective scales were also obtained before survey administration.

### 3. DATA COLLECTION AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

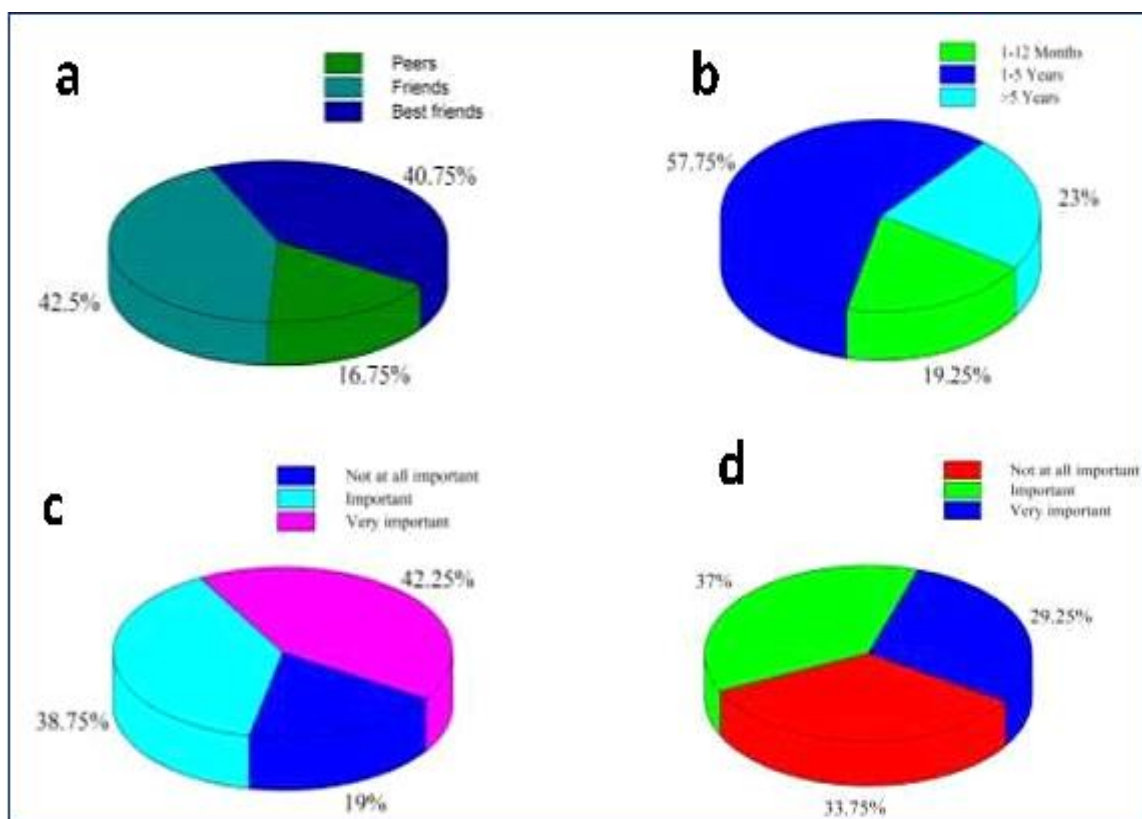
Firstly, using non-probability purposive sampling, those institutes hosting only boys and only girls were contacted. Out of these, three institutions who willingly agreed to participate were finalized. After this, to select  $n$  units out of  $N$  such that each participant has an equal chance of being selected, random number generator was used. These calculated numbers were matched with the student's enrollment numbers and finally, the questionnaires were distributed to students. Participants were explained about the purpose of the study. Because betrayal may lessen across time (Couch & Olson, 2016) the participants were specified to recall one perceived incident of betrayal (either from their peer, friend or best friend) from past 6 months.

The collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software through a special coding system. Firstly, to control Type I error; addressing multicollinearity for regression analysis or organizing multiple highly correlated variables into more meaningful information, composite scores were calculated for all measures (Song, Lin, Ward, & Fine, 2013). Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis. Spearman product coefficient correlation was used to for assessing relationship among study variables whereas, regression coefficient was used to find an impact of betrayal, trust and quality of friendship on forgiveness (both emotional and decisional forgiveness) among adolescents. Furthermore, one-way ANOVA (for adolescent's age, education) and independent sample t-test (for adolescent's gender) was computed to explore the effect of demographic characteristics on study variables.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics showed that the average age of adolescents was 17.58 years, 49.3% were males and 50.3% were females, 29% of participants were undergraduates and 37.3% were in intermediate. Further, Figure 1 shows the description of participants' relationship with the transgressor.



**Figure 1.** Description of relationship with transgressor; (a) type of friendship, (b) duration of friendship, (c) importance of relationship to victim and (d) importance of relationship to the transgressor.

#### 4.2. Relationship Among Variables

Before analyzing the relationship among study variables, assumptions of the Pearson coefficient and spearman correlation were checked. It was found that the data violated the assumptions of Pearson correlation coefficient

i.e. the data was not normally distributed, it contained some outliers and the majority of the variables showed monotonic relationship; thus Spearman correlation was used to find correlation among variables (Table 1). The results show that betrayal has a significant negative relationship with trust, quality of friendship, emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness, which means that lower the trust and quality of friendship; higher will be the betrayal. It also tells us that higher the betrayal lower will be the forgiveness (both emotional and decisional) towards the transgressor. The other three variables i.e. trust, quality of friendship and forgiveness (both emotional and decisional) has a significant positive relationship with each other; meaning higher the trust and quality of friendship, higher will be the forgiveness and vice versa. These results coincide with that of the study done by Guerrero and Bachman (2010) who found more forgiveness among those victims who rated the higher quality of the relationship. Concurrent to these, Tuli and Mehrotra also found a positive relationship between forgiveness and marital quality (Tuli & Mehrotra, 2017).

**Table 1.** Relationship between betrayal, trust, quality of friendship and forgiveness

Variables	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 Betrayal	2.135 (.580)	1.00	-.149**	-.134**	-.197**	-.129**
2 Trust	3.310 (.649)		1.00	.581**	.335**	.407**
3 Quality of friendship	4.291 (.972)			1.00	.323**	.458**
4 Emotional forgiveness	3.122 (.670)					.362**
5 Decisional forgiveness	3.534 (.964)					

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$

M= Mean; SD= Standard deviation

#### 4.3. Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted in order to explore the prediction of independent variables on a dependent variable (emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness). The results (Table 2) show that overall model is significant (with  $F(3,399) = 23.59$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and ( $F(3,399) = 40.46$ ;  $p < .001$ ) for both emotional and decisional forgiveness respectively. It further indicates that betrayal negatively predicted emotional forgiveness (with  $\beta = -.152$ ,  $t(399) = -3.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which means that emotional forgiveness decreased as betrayal increased, but it did not predict decisional forgiveness (with  $\beta = -.071$ ,  $t(399) = -1.60$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). The results further indicate that trust ( $\beta = .180$ ,  $t(399) = 3.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and quality of friendship ( $\beta = .202$ ,  $t(399) = 3.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) positively predicted both emotional forgiveness as well as decisional forgiveness (with  $\beta = .179$ ,  $t(399) = 3.31$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ;  $\beta = .344$ ,  $t(399) = 6.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) respectively; which means that higher the level of trust and quality of friendship, more was emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness towards the offender.

**Table 2.** Summary of regression coefficients indicating a prediction of independent variables on emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness among adolescents

Dependent Variable	Predictors	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Emotional forgiveness ( $R^2 = .152$ )	(Constant)	2.285	.219		10.451	<.001***
	Betrayal	-.176	.054	-.152	-3.267	.001***
	Trust	.186	.059	.180	3.174	.002**
	Quality of friendship	.139	.039	.202	3.559	<.001***
Decisional forgiveness ( $R^2 = .235$ )	(Constant)	1.441	.299		4.823	<.001***
	Betrayal	-.118	.074	-.071	-1.603	.110
	Trust	.265	.080	.179	3.310	.001***
	Quality of friendship	.342	.053	.344	6.389	<.001***

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

SE= Standard Error; B= Un-standardized Regression Coefficient;  $\beta$ = Standardized Regression Coefficients, p= Probability Value of Significance; t= t-test

#### 4.4. Effect of Adolescents' Age, Gender and Educational Level on Betrayal, Trust, Quality of Friendship and Forgiveness

One-way between-group ANOVA was conducted for the comparison of study variables with adolescent's age and educational level (Table 3). A significant main effect of age as well as educational level was found for betrayal ( $p < 0.001$ ), emotional forgiveness ( $p < 0.001$ ) and decisional forgiveness ( $p < 0.001$ ). Whereas, it shows no significant difference between trust and quality of friendship among different ages as well as the educational level of adolescents.

Post-Hoc Tukey analysis was further computed to find out which age and educational level results in more betrayal, emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness. It was found that same-gender friendship betrayal is highest in adolescents with 18 years of age having less forgiveness (both emotional and decisional) towards the transgressor, whereas adolescents with 16 years of age reported lesser betrayal and more forgiveness (both emotional and decisional) towards the transgressor. Moreover, adolescents enrolled in the intermediate level reported low betrayal from friends, more emotional as well as decisional forgiveness towards their transgressor.

**Table 3.** Comparison of betrayal, trust, quality of friendship and forgiveness with adolescent age and educational level

Variables	Age				Educational Level					
	16	17	18	19	Matric-		Inter	UG		
	(n=99)	(n=89)	(n=94)	(n=118)	(n=135)	(n=149)	(n=116)			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F	p	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F p
<b>Betrayal</b>	1.9 (.53)	2.16 (.59)	2.26 (.53)	2.20 (.61)	7.07	<.001***	1.89 (0.51)	2.27 (0.57)	2.25 (0.58)	18.71 <.001***
<b>Trust</b>	3.42 (0.612)	3.36 (0.67)	3.26 (0.70)	3.22 (0.61)	2.09	.101	3.37 (0.65)	3.35 (0.61)	3.19 (0.69)	2.69 .069
<b>Quality of friendship</b>	4.44 (0.88)	4.26 (1.06)	4.17 (1.04)	4.29 (0.92)	1.38	.250	4.28 (0.97)	4.26 (0.95)	4.34 (1.01)	1.47 .191
<b>Emotional forgiveness</b>	3.39 (0.98)	3.04 (0.74)	2.9 (0.63)	3.07 (0.55)	7.48	<.001***	3.32 (0.72)	2.95 (0.66)	3.12 (0.55)	11.81 <.001***
<b>Decisional forgiveness</b>	3.77 (0.93)	3.69 (0.91)	3.39 (0.96)	3.40 (0.98)	5.56	.001***	3.80 (0.88)	3.46 (0.93)	3.32 (1.04)	8.18 <.001***

Note: \*\*\*p < 0.001

F= F-test; p= Probability Value of Significance; UG = Under Graduate

Furthermore, Independent sample t-test was conducted in order to find out the effect of adolescent's gender with all study variables (Figure 2). The results shows that females reported more betrayal ( $M = 2.290$ ;  $SD = .576$ ) and quality of friendship ( $M = 4.500$ ;  $SD = 0.872$ ) but less emotional forgiveness ( $M = 3.025$ ;  $SD = .668$ ) as compared to males ( $M = 1.976$ ;  $SD = .541$ ); ( $M = 4.074$ ;  $SD = 1.022$ ); ( $M = 3.223$ ;  $SD = .659$ ) respectively). No significant difference was found between trust and decisional forgiveness with adolescent's gender. The value of "Cohen's d" determines that the effect size of adolescent's gender on betrayal ( $d = 0.55$ ) and quality of friendship ( $d = 0.45$ ) is medium, whereas that on trust ( $d = 0.15$ ), emotional forgiveness ( $d = 0.21$ ) and decisional forgiveness ( $d = 0.01$ ) is small.

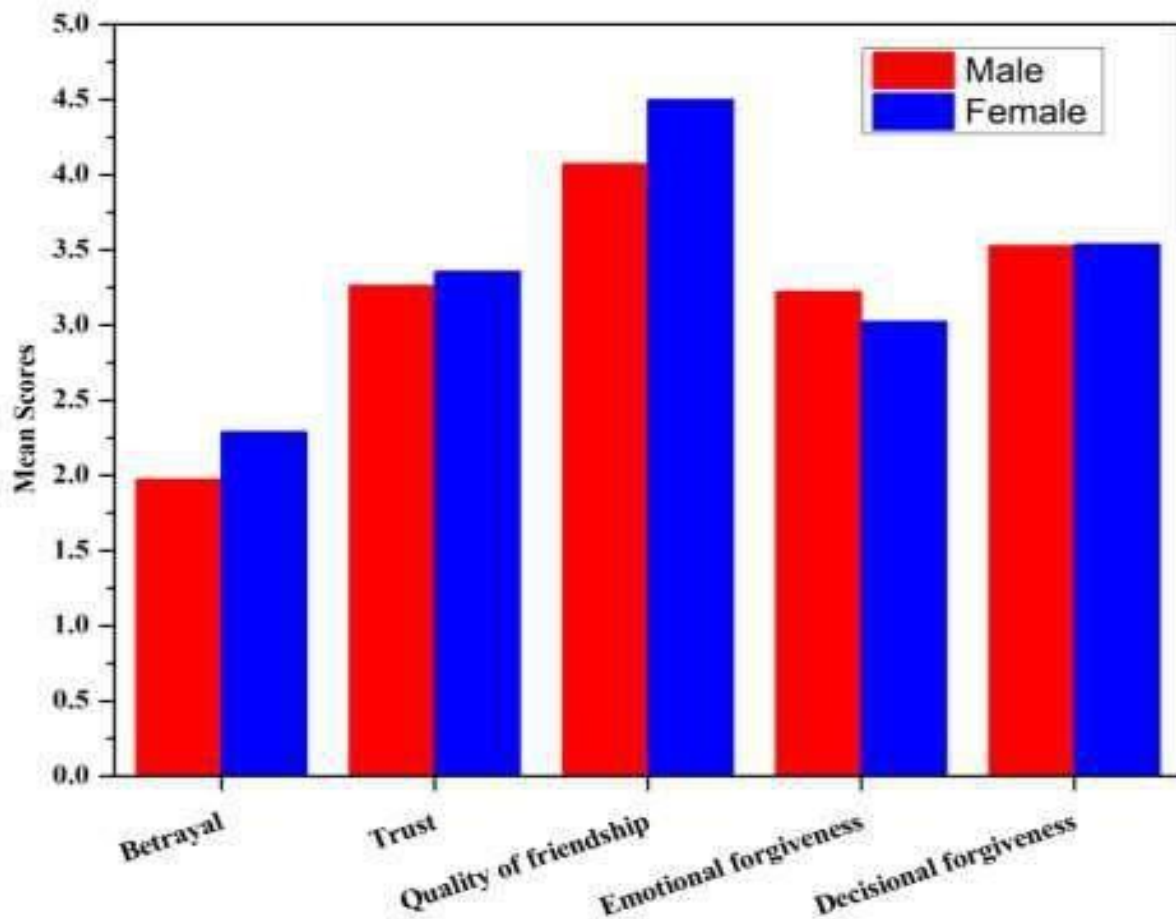


Figure 2. Comparison of betrayal, trust, quality of friendship, emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness with gender

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of the present study show that betrayal has a significant negative relationship with all the variables; whereas, trust, quality of friendship and forgiveness has a significant positive relationship with each other. These results coincide with that of the study done by Guerrero and Bachman (2010) who found more forgiveness among those victims who rated the higher quality of the relationship. Concurrent to these, Tuli and Mehrotra also found a positive relationship between forgiveness and marital quality (Tuli & Mehrotra, 2017).

The current study revealed significant differences of age as well as educational level with betrayal, emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness. Whereas, it shows no significant difference between trust and quality of friendship among different ages as well as the educational level of adolescents. Similar results were found in various researches (Kaleta & Mróz, 2018; Uysal, 2015) that reported willingness to forgive changes over a lifetime. Furthermore, the findings of the study under consideration found no differences between trust and age. Whereas, the study done by Hamidzadeh and colleagues (Hamidzadeh, Jazani, Hajikarimi, & Ebrahimi, 2011) revealed different results. These findings are consistent with the evidence provided by Zare (2011). Furthermore, the current study did not find any differences between trust and adolescent's belonging to different educational levels. These findings are in line with the literature studied in research by Hamidzadeh et al. (2011).

Lastly, the results show that females reported more betrayal and quality of friendship but less emotional forgiveness as compared to males. No significant difference was found between trust and decisional forgiveness with adolescent's gender. The findings of the current study coincide with the evidence provided by Hall (2011) which states that females' friendships tend to be higher in solidarity, reciprocity, overall friendship expectations than males. This result, on the other hand, contradicts with the study done by Neff and Pommier (2013) which suggested that women are more forgiving as compared to men. Furthermore, trust was found to have not affected by gender in the current research. These findings concur with the findings of the study done by Hamidzadeh et al. (2011) and WILLIAMS (2018).

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the researcher's best efforts, the study contains some limitations. Such as, the participants were drawn from only one city of Pakistan; therefore the sample needs to be extended for a wider diversity of educational systems, cultural and ethnic groups, as forgiveness towards an offender differs depending on culture (Joo, Terzino, Cross, Yamaguchi, & Ohbuchi, 2019). Secondly, the sample was only taken from public educational institutes, rather than both public and private sector. Regarding these limitations, certain recommendations can be suggested for future research studies. Such as, in the future, the sample should be taken from different cities of Pakistan as well as from both public and private sector so that results could be more generalized. To improve the generalizability of the results of this study, replication is needed in future with participants who are more diverse in ethnicity, religion and socio-cultural attributes.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Betrayal hurts millions of people, including many adolescents. Friendships can fall victim to gossip and treachery resulting in distrust, anger, rumination and other severe aftereffects. This study is the first to explore the relationship between betrayal, trust, friendship and forgiveness as well as to find the predictive power of the independent variables on forgiveness quantitatively in an adolescent population. The current study found that most of the participants reported having been betrayed by their friends (42.5%) and best friends (40.75%). Spearman correlation revealed a significant relationship between all study variables. Betrayal was found to negatively predict emotional forgiveness (with  $\beta = -.152$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but it did not predict a decisional forgiveness (with  $\beta = -.071$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). Trust ( $\beta = .180$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and quality of friendship ( $\beta = .202$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) were found to positively predict forgiveness (both emotional and decisional) (with  $\beta = .179$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ;  $\beta = .344$ ,  $p < 0.01$  respectively). Moreover, betrayal ( $p < 0.01$ ) and emotional forgiveness ( $p < 0.01$ ) were found to be related with age, gender and education whereas, decisional forgiveness ( $p < 0.01$ ) was found to be related with age and educational level of adolescents. Findings from this study may support both caregivers, educators and policymakers in realizing the importance of developing forgiveness traits in children during their early years. Findings may also assist in identifying the critical ages at which betrayal is most prevalent and harmful.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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