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## ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

# Personality, family relationships and school climate dimensions as predictors of dispositional forgiveness in adolescence

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## KEYWORDS

Dispositional forgiveness,  
Personality,  
Family relationships,  
School climate,  
Adolescence

## ABSTRACT

The mental health benefits of forgiveness are well-established in the literature. The growing research on dispositional forgiveness in adolescence is indicative of the need to better understand its role in youth's well-being. In order to examine dispositional forgiveness in adolescence, measures regarding Big 5 personality factors (individual level), family relationships, school climate (system level), and sociodemographic variables at an individual and system level were used. Participants were 1,378 adolescents attending junior and senior high schools located in the broader area of Attica, Greece, randomly selected. Younger age, lower levels of neuroticism, and higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness and quality communication with the mother predicted higher forgiveness of self. Higher levels of openness to experience, agreeableness, quality communication with the father, positive behavior, positive attitude, and lower levels of lack of respect in the school predicted higher forgiveness of others. Finally, lower levels of neuroticism, higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and positive behavior in the school predicted higher levels of forgiveness of situations. The findings highlight the important role of personality factors and indicate the significance of primary prevention interventions in the school community regarding school climate that could contribute to the promotion of dispositional forgiveness and well-being of adolescents.

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In recent years, there is growing research in the field of positive psychology both internationally and in Greece (Pezirkianidis & Stalikas, 2020). Forgiveness is a concept of positive psychology that has increasingly drawn the attention of researchers worldwide (Jia et al., 2020; McCullough, 2001, 2008; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Wade & Tittler, 2019; Worthington, 2007). This is understandable, considering that “taking revenge”, which may have destructive consequences to the individual and to others, is perceived as fundamental in human motivation (McCullough et al., 2012). In addition, nowadays, with the extended use of social media by adolescents and the emergence of the phenomenon of social revenge - that is, revenge that occurs online (Paulin & Boon, 2021) - the notion of forgiveness seems more and more significant.

Within this perspective, it is important to understand the notion of forgiveness, especially in adolescence, as the willingness to forgive is likely to promote well-being, psychosocial development, and adjustment (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Pareek et al., 2016). Therefore, in this study, we investigate the possible predictive role of certain basic factors at an individual and system level in the three aspects of dispositional forgiveness -self, others, and situations- in adolescence (see Figure 1). This study is largely explorative in the sense that it aims at enriching the limited database regarding adolescents' dispositional forgiveness and at contributing to the development of appropriate school-based interventions.

## *Dispositional forgiveness*

Forgiveness, in general, can be defined from different perspectives (Papadopoulou et al., 2017). As McCullough and Witvliet (2004) state, “As a response, forgiveness may be understood as a prosocial change in

a victim's thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviors toward a blameworthy transgressor [...] As a personality disposition, forgiveness may be understood as a propensity to forgive others across a wide variety of interpersonal circumstances [...] As a quality of social units, forgiveness may be understood as an attribute that is similar to intimacy, trust, or commitment" (pp. 447-448). As a personality disposition, in particular, forgiveness may be viewed as a tendency to forgive self or others that is relatively stable, irrespective of time, situations, or offenders (dispositional forgiveness) (Cabras et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2005).

A more recent definition includes: "(a) the reduction in vengeful and angry thoughts, feelings, and motives that may be accompanied by (b) an increase in some form of positive thoughts, feelings, and motives towards the offending person" (Wade et al., 2014, p. 154). Further, terms such as cognitive or emotional forgiveness are used, and it has been supported that in order for true forgiveness to exist, all aspects (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) need to change (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; Worthington, 2007).

Research in adults has led to the identification of four constructs of forgiveness: propensity to lasting resentment, sensitivity to circumstances, willingness to forgive, and willingness to avenge (Muñoz Sastre et al., 2005). It has been suggested, though, that these constructs are evident in adolescents' behavior as well (Chiaramello et al., 2008). In addition, several self-report measures have been developed in order to assess mainly dispositional forgiveness in situations where people are being offended [e.g., Forgiveness Likelihood Scale by Rye et al. (2001), in which scenarios are used such as "A family member humiliates you in front of others by sharing a story about you that you did not want anyone to know. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the family member?"]. The associations of these measures with other positive concepts such as well-being, happiness, psychological health, or other individual and/or system variables are also examined (Cabras et al., 2017).

### ***Dispositional forgiveness and personality***

Many researchers have approached forgiveness as a personality construct in an effort to identify the forgiving personality (McCullough, 2001; McCullough et al., 2009). The Big Five personality taxonomy has been used in several studies as a useful approach in order to understand dispositional forgiveness (Emmons, 2000). Empirical evidence supports the relationship of forgiveness with the higher-order dimensions of the Big Five Personality Model in different cultural contexts. For example, in a study conducted in Taiwan with 155 college students, it was found that agreeableness and neuroticism were related to State and Trait Forgiveness (Wang, 2008a). Also, Walker and Gorsuch (2002) found that neuroticism, versus emotional stability, was correlated with dispositional forgiveness. In a research conducted by McCullough and Hoyt (2002) it was found that agreeableness predicted revenge, whereas both neuroticism and agreeableness predicted avoidance and benevolence. Regarding revenge, Rey and Extremera (2014) found that people who exhibited increased motivation for revenge had significantly higher scores on neuroticism and lower scores on openness to experience and agreeableness.

Extraversion was also found by Oral and Arslan (2017) to be the only significant positive predictor of forgiveness of self among university students. In the same study, extraversion and agreeableness were found to be positive predictors, and conscientiousness was found to be a negative predictor of forgiveness of others. Finally, in a study with children aged 7 to 10, extraversion and agreeableness were the main personality traits associated with dispositional forgiveness (Ahirwar et al., 2019). In general, neuroticism and agreeableness stand out in most studies as the most significant dimensions related to dispositional forgiveness, suggesting that a forgiving personality is characterized by high agreeableness, emotional stability, and relatively low neuroticism (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Rey & Extremera, 2014, 2016; Wang, 2008b).

### ***Dispositional forgiveness and family relationships***

Family is crucial for children's development and psychosocial adjustment. Children gradually internalize forgiveness patterns by observing their caregivers or by being taught how to develop social and emotional skills for recovering after hurtful relational events (Denham et al., 2005). Forgiveness, in general, is suggested to be part of a value transmission process from parents/caregivers and has a significant impact on children's psychosocial development and relationships (Fincham, 2015; Maio et al., 2008).

Attachment parenting has been largely considered as the basis for children's psychosocial adjustment and development (Hong & Park, 2012). It has been found that secure attachment leads to a higher ability to forgive

(Burnette et al., 2007). For example, in a study with 543 men and women aged 18 to 72 (average age of 23), with the majority being college students (65.9%), secure attachment was found as a significant predictor of participants' willingness to forgive (Ashy et al., 2010). In another study with young adults, those that were securely attached were more forgiving, had higher levels of trait forgiveness, and expressed more positive emotion (Lawler-Row et al. 2006).

### ***Dispositional forgiveness and school climate***

School is the second most critical environment for children and adolescents. Forgiveness in the contexts of school and peer relationships has been largely examined in relation to bullying and negative experiences (Barcaccia et al., 2017; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015). For example, in one study (Flanagan et al., 2012), forgiveness was found to be an adaptive coping strategy in the face of negative peer experiences in early adolescence.

Generally, findings indicate that forgiving can have positive effects on peer relationships and can contribute to creating a positive, healthy, and respectful school climate. Further, it seems to promote teamwork, cooperation/collaboration, and empathy among peers/classmates (Worthington, 2007). As Kumar and Nayar (2020) reported, “forgiveness is essential for a fully functional school and has considerable personal benefits – increasing our potential for making connections with others and having a more positive, happier learning environment” (p. 1).

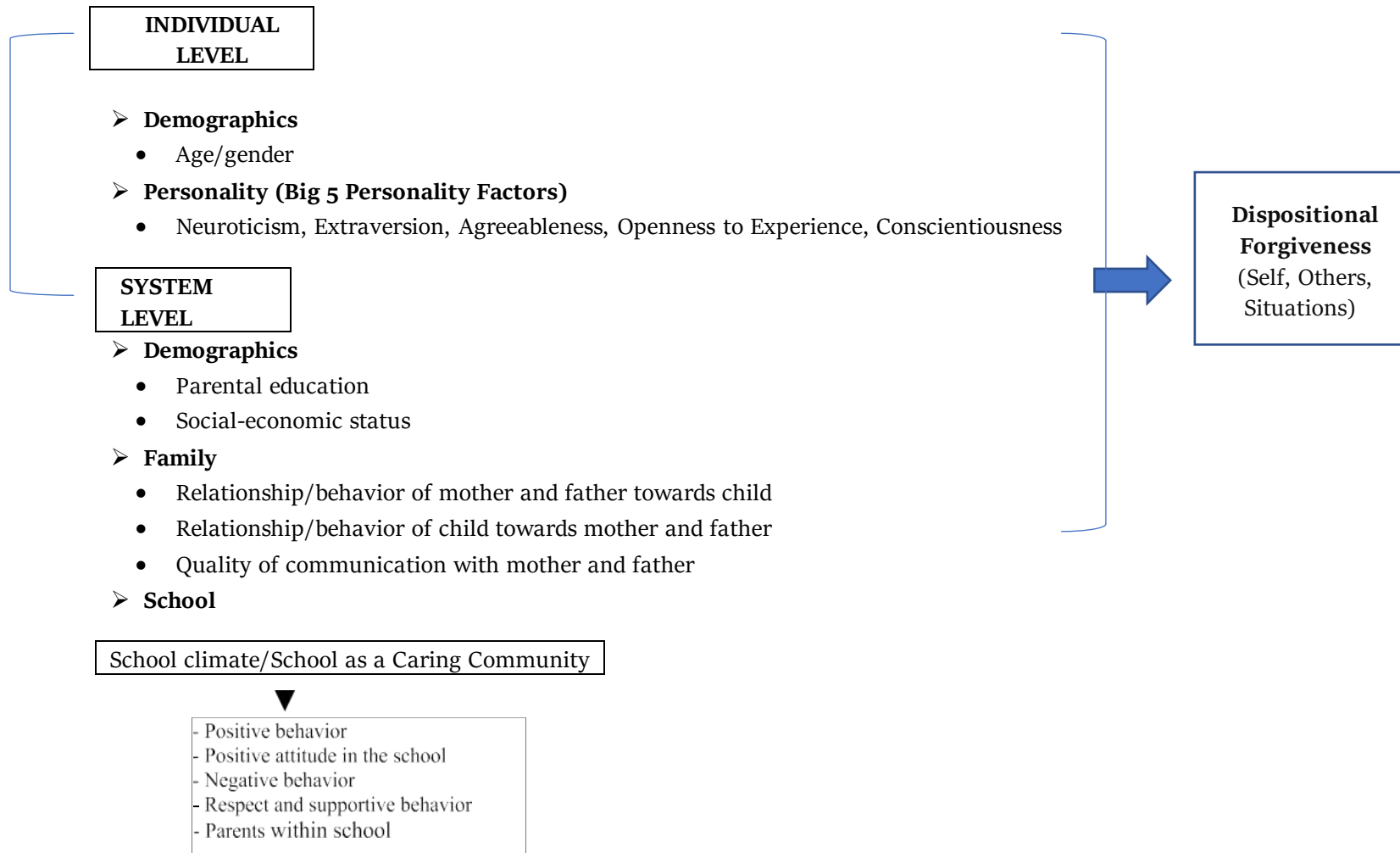
The role of dispositional forgiveness in developing positive relationships within schools is also evident in research regarding forgiveness intervention and education (Freedman, 2018; Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). Forgiveness education is largely related to social and emotional learning because it deals with emotions, perspective-taking, empathy, and compassion. It also highlights the importance of respecting and responding with kindness and compassion to others, even if they are the offenders, by viewing them as human beings (Enright et al., 2014). Finally, it is related to the notion that human capacities underlying dispositional forgiveness can be altered, which is a very promising view in order to “make the world a more forgiving and less vengeful place” (McCullough, 2008).

### ***Dispositional forgiveness and sociodemographic variables***

The associations of sociodemographic variables with dispositional forgiveness have been examined in several studies (McCullough et al., 1998; Miller & Worthington, 2015). As far as age is concerned, people tend to be more forgiving as they grow older (Cabras et al., 2017; Chiaramello et al., 2008). Regarding gender, findings show that men and women are equally forgiving (Toussaint & Webb, 2005), whereas other studies support that women are more forgiving than men (Finkel et al., 2002; Mullet et al., 1998). Further, existing data indicate differences in relation to education, with lower educational level being related to higher scores in dispositional forgiveness. Finally, family status does not seem to play a significant role (Finkel et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2008; Mullet et al., 1998).

### ***Rationale of the study***

Dispositional forgiveness is an effective way of regulating negative affect, which is a crucial issue in adolescence, where emotional instability and mood swings are rather usual phenomena (Barcaccia et al., 2019). In addition, dispositional forgiveness largely determines the quality of adolescents' relationships with all significant others (parents, friends, teachers, etc.). However, despite the importance of dispositional forgiveness in adolescence, relevant research in non-adult samples is not so extensive (Denham et al., 2005; Lawler-Row, 2010; Mulvey et al., 2021) maybe because the focus has been on vulnerable adolescents such as at-risk, victimized, or abused adolescents (Freedman, 2018; Liu et al., 2013). Hence, it is important to further understand dispositional forgiveness in adolescence by examining not only personality but also family and school dimensions as the two most influential domains in adolescents' lives.



**Figure 1.** Variables at an Individual and System Level explored as Predictive Factors of Dispositional Forgiveness (Self, Others, Situations)

## ***Aim and hypotheses of the study***

From a positive psychology perspective, dispositional forgiveness is seen as a strength that facilitates people's well-being. As such, dispositional forgiveness is also related to other positive psychology concepts such as subjective well-being. In a recent meta-analysis, it was found that people high in dispositional forgiveness had higher subjective well-being, greater life satisfaction, more positive emotions, and fewer negative emotions (Gao et al., 2022). Subjective well-being has been the focus of a previous study examining the role of adolescents' personality and their perceptions regarding family relationships and school climate in their level of subjective well-being (Lampropoulou, 2018). Following that research effort, the goal of the present study is to investigate the same domains at an individual (personality and sociodemographics) and system (family and school) level in relation to dispositional forgiveness.

Concerning sociodemographics, we could not formulate a clear research hypothesis due to the previous contradictory data. Therefore, we pose the following research question: What is the effect of sociodemographic variables, such as gender, age, parental educational level, and family SES, on dispositional forgiveness (RQ1)? Regarding personality, it is hypothesized that all Big-5 personality factors will be related to dispositional forgiveness (H1). Specifically, dispositional forgiveness is expected to positively correlate with Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness and negatively correlate with Neuroticism (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Positive family relationships play a significant role in adolescents' well-being (Diener & Diener-McGavran, 2008). Hence, as long as dispositional forgiveness is expected to be related to positive well-being (Karremans et al., 2003), it is also expected that a positive relationship between family relationships and adolescents' willingness to forgive will be identified (H2). Furthermore, positive school climate is characterized by adolescents' sense of belonging, connectedness, respect, and acceptance (LaSalle et al., 2018); thus, we hypothesize that it will have a positive relationship with dispositional forgiveness (H3). Finally, the role of individual factors (i.e., gender, age/class, personality traits) and system factors (i.e., parental education, socio-economic status, family relationships, and school climate) in the levels of dispositional forgiveness reported by adolescents is investigated (RQ2).

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The sample consisted of 1,378 adolescents, 606 (44%) identified as males and 772 (56%) as females. The mean age was 15.6 years ( $SD = 1.52$ ,  $min = 12$   $max = 19$ ). The participants were attending junior and senior high schools. Specifically, 290 (21%) attended first Junior High, 398 (29%) second Junior High, 299 (22%) first Senior High, and 391 (28%) second Senior High class. All schools were randomly selected from the broader area of Attica, where the capital of Greece, Athens, is located. The majority of the participants (1,254, 91%) were Greek. Additionally, 1,210 (87.9%) parents were married, 142 (10.3%) were divorced, 21 (1.5%) were remarried and four participants (0.3%) answered that one of their parents had passed away. Ninety-six fathers (7.1%) and 99 mothers (7.2%) had attended only elementary education (K-6), 202 (14.9%) fathers and 152 (11.1%) mothers had attended junior high school (K-9), 341 (25.2%) fathers and 482 (35.3%) mothers had attended senior high school, 329 (24.3%) fathers and 236 (17.3%) mothers had a technological degree from a tertiary educational institute and 387 (28.6%) fathers and 397 (29.1%) mothers possessed a University diploma. Finally, 424 adolescents (30.8%) reported low family income, 644 (46.7%) reported medium, and 310 (22.5%) reported that their family's income was high.

### ***Measures***

All measures used in this study have been largely used in Greek samples and have undergone confirmatory factor analyses within the context of the broader research project mentioned above (Lampropoulou, 2018).

#### **The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)**

The Greek version of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Moraitou et al., 2004; Thompson & Snyder, 2003) was used to assess dispositional forgiveness. It includes three subscales: *Forgiveness of Self*, indicating how forgiving someone tends to be of him/herself (e.g., "Although I feel bad at first when I mess up, over time I can give myself some slack"), *Forgiveness of Others*, indicating how forgiving someone tends to be of other people

(e.g., “I continue to punish a person who has done something that I think is wrong”); and *Forgiveness of Situations*, indicating how forgiving someone tends to be of negative situations that are beyond anyone’s control, such as illness or natural disaster (e.g., “With time I can be understanding of bad circumstances in my life”). Each subscale consists of six items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *almost always false of me* to 7 = *almost always true of me*). A total scale score can also be calculated, although the focus of the analysis in this study was on the three subscales of dispositional forgiveness in order to obtain more details regarding its manifestations and correlations in adolescence. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for each of the aforementioned subscales were satisfactory: .85, .80, and .78, respectively.

### **Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience Personality Inventory-Revised**

Personality was assessed using the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) on the basis of the Big-Five traits model. In this study, the short form of the questionnaire was employed, which consists of 60 items, 12 for each aspect investigated, rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*; 3 = *moderately*; 5 = *very much*). This version was standardized in Greece and has been widely used (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 1998; Pavlopoulos & Besevegis, 1999). All Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were acceptable: *Neuroticism* (e.g., “I often feel inferior to others”),  $\alpha = .73$ ; *Extraversion* (e.g., “I like to have a lot of people around me”),  $\alpha = .69$ ; *Agreeableness* (e.g., “I try to be polite to everyone I meet”),  $\alpha = .69$ ; *Conscientiousness* (e.g., “I keep my belongings neat and clean”),  $\alpha = .78$ . Regarding *Openness to Experience* (e.g., “I don’t like to waste my time daydreaming”) the internal consistency coefficient was rather low:  $\alpha = .50$ . However, we decided not to exclude this subscale from further analyses. Similarly, other studies have shown rather low internal consistency of this factor (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 1998; Pavlopoulos & Besevegis, 1999; Tackett et al., 2012).

### **Family Relationships Scale (FRS)**

Family relationships were measured with the Family Relationship Scale (FRS) (Gronvold, 1988), which assesses adolescents’ relationships with their parents. In this study, the Greek translation and adaptation was used (Lampropoulou, 2008). It comprises 13 items (e.g., “To what extent your mother/father understands you?”) assessed on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 6 = *very much*. For each parent, there are three subscales: *Relationship/behavior of Mother/Father towards Child* (e.g., “To what extent you feel that your mother/father respects you?”); *Relationship/behavior of Child towards Mother/Father* (e.g., “To what extent you feel that you respect your mother/father?”); and *Quality of Communication with Mother/Father* (e.g., “How close is your relationship with your mother/father?”). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for this study ranged from .80 to .91. It should be mentioned that this scale was used because it can be completed for mothers and fathers separately. Moreover, it has also been used in a previous study with other positive psychology concepts (Lampropoulou, 2018), and this was expected to facilitate the comparability of results.

### **School as Caring Community Profile-II**

School climate and in particular adolescents’ perceptions of their school as a caring community were evaluated with SCCP-II (Lickona & Davidson, 2001). The Greek validation of this scale (Lampropoulou, 2008) included five factors, namely *Positive Behavior* (14 items; e.g., “Students try to support their classmates when they are sad”); *Positive Attitude in the School* (10 items; e.g., “Teachers do their best to help students in need”); *Respect and Supportive Behavior* (6 items; e.g., “Students resolve their differences without fighting”); *Parents within School* (6 items; e.g., “Teachers treat parents with respect”); and *Negative Behavior* (5 items; e.g., “Students do not respect their classmates”). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for this study were satisfactory: .85, .80, .75, .70, and .70, respectively.

### **Sociodemographic variables**

Gender was treated as a binominal variable (1 = boys, 2 = girls). Instead of age calculated in months, the four classes that adolescents attended were used (1 = first Junior High, 2 = second Junior High, 3 = first Senior High, 4 = second Senior High). Five educational levels of mothers and fathers were assessed (1 = Elementary School, 2 = Junior High School, 3 = Senior High School, 4 = Technological Tertiary Education, 5 = University). The socio-economic status (SES) of the families was determined on the basis of the reported family income (1 = low SES, i.e., < 20,000 Euros; 2 = medium SES, i.e., 20,001 to 40,000 Euros; 3 = high SES, i.e., > 40,001 Euros).

## Design and procedure

Schools in the broader area of Athens were randomly chosen, representing the three basic SES levels (low, medium, high). The pen-and-pencil method approach was used. This study was part of a broader research project investigating “*Individual and System Factors Related to Adolescence Well-Being*” and was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All adolescent participants and their parents gave oral consent for participation. Permission for the survey was granted by the Greek Ministry of Education and the Institute of Educational Policy.

## Data analysis

Multivariate normality was estimated by Mardia’s multivariate kurtosis skewness and test (Mardia, 1970). The null hypothesis was retained for all tests (with all  $p$ -values  $< 0.0001$ ), suggesting a normal distribution of the data. Therefore, differences in sociodemographic variables were tested with parametric tests (Student’s  $t$ -test for two-sample comparisons, one-way ANOVAs for three and more) and Tukey’s pairwise tests were carried out for post-hoc analyses. Levels of correlation strength were interpreted as low when in the .10 to .30 range, moderate when in the .30 to .50 range, and large when over .50. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (v. 27) at a specified critical  $p$ -value of  $< .05$ .

## Results

### Sociodemographic variables

The results of the independent-samples  $t$ -tests for the HFS dimensions by adolescents’ gender yielded no statistically significant differences. There are no gender differences regarding *Forgiveness of Self*, *of Others*, and *of Situations*.

Table 1 presents the results of the ANOVA tests for the HFS dimensions by adolescents’ age/class. One significant difference was identified in *Forgiveness of Self*. Post-hoc tests indicated that both first- and second-grade junior high students reported higher levels of *Forgiveness of Self* than second-grade senior high students,  $t(1,346) = 3.86$   $p < .001$  and  $t(1,346) = 2.94$   $p = .018$ , respectively. Moreover, although a marginally significant difference was identified in *Forgiveness of Others*, post-hoc tests showed that first-grade junior high students reported a higher tendency to forgive others than second-grade senior high students,  $t(1344) = 2.71$   $p = .034$ .

Comparisons’ tests for the HFS dimensions by parents’ educational level showed no statistically significant differences. However, one significant difference was identified for *Forgiveness of Situations* and family SES,  $F(2, 736) = 4.31$   $p = .014$ . Adolescents from families with medium SES ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) reported higher levels of *Forgiveness of Situations* than adolescents from families with high SES ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $t(1346) = 2.81$ ,  $p = .014$ .

### Correlations

Table 2 shows Pearson’s  $r$  correlation coefficients among the variables as well as their means and standard deviations. The three dimensions of forgiveness were significantly correlated with all variables, with the exception of *Openness to Experience* and *Forgiveness of Self*. The correlations were rather low to medium in some cases. More specifically, correlation coefficients for *Forgiveness of Self* ranged from .09 ( $p < .001$ ) to  $-.35$  ( $p < .001$ ) regarding *Positive Behavior* and *Neuroticism*, respectively. Other correlation coefficients for forgiveness ranged from .08 ( $p = .003$ ) to .40 ( $p < .001$ ) regarding age/class and *Agreeableness*, respectively. Correlation coefficients for *Forgiveness of Situations* ranged from .09 ( $p < .001$ ) to  $-.35$  ( $p < .001$ ) regarding *Openness to Experience* and *Neuroticism*, respectively.

Furthermore, to investigate which variables predict Dispositional Forgiveness, three hierarchical linear regression analyses (stepwise mode) were conducted, one for each dimension of Dispositional Forgiveness. Predictors were entered into the models in four sequential blocks: (1) sociodemographic variables (gender, age/class, education of father, education of mother, SES), (2) personality traits, (3) family relationships, and (4) school climate (i.e., sense of school as a caring community).

As shown in Table 3, all predictions were significant. The total variance of the dependent variables explained in each model was 17% for *Forgiveness of Self*, 17% for *Forgiveness of Others*, and 17% *Forgiveness of Situations*.



Regarding the first step, sociodemographic variables contributed significantly to the prediction of *Forgiveness of Self*,  $F(5, 1247) = 5.04, p < .001$ , but with a rather unimportant determinant coefficient,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ . Specifically, younger adolescents tend to be more self-forgiving. In the next step, personality further contributed to the prediction,  $F(5, 1242) = 43.61, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .14$ . Higher *Forgiveness of Self* was related to lower levels of *Neuroticism*, and higher levels of *Extraversion*. The third step (family relationships) contributed significantly to the prediction of *Forgiveness of Self*,  $F(6, 1236) = 2.16, p = .045$ , but with a rather unimportant determinant coefficient,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . Higher levels of *Quality of Communication with Mother* were related to higher levels of *Forgiveness of Self*. Finally, the fourth step (school climate) added no significant contribution to the prediction,  $F(5, 1213) = 1.81, p = .107$ . Interestingly, however, higher levels of *Parents within School* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Self*.

Regarding the prediction of *Forgiveness of Others*, sociodemographic variables did not contribute significantly,  $F(5, 1248) = 1.69, p = .134$ , on the first step of the model. In the second step, personality contributed significantly to the model,  $F(5, 1243) = 46.58, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .16$ . Higher *Forgiveness of Others* was related to higher levels of *Openness to Experience* and higher levels of *Agreeableness*. The third step (family relationships) did not contribute significantly to the prediction of *Forgiveness of Others*,  $F(6, 1237) = 1.66, p = .128$ . However, lower levels of *Relationship/behavior of Child towards Father* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Others*, and higher levels of *Quality of Communication with Father* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Others*. School climate (fourth step) contributed significantly to the prediction of the model,  $F(5, 1232) = 4.08, p = .001$ , but with a rather unimportant determinant coefficient,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . Higher levels of *Positive Behavior* and *Positive Attitude in the School* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Others*. On the other hand, lower levels of *Respect and Supportive Behavior* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Others*.

Regarding the prediction of *Forgiveness of Situations*, sociodemographic variables contributed insignificantly,  $F(5, 1248) = 1.22, p = .296$ . In the second step, personality contributed significantly to the model,  $F(5, 1243) = 46.82, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .16$ . Higher *Forgiveness of Situations* was related to lower levels of *Neuroticism*, higher levels of *Extraversion*, and higher levels of *Agreeableness*. The third step (family relationships) contributed insignificantly to the model,  $F(6, 1237) = 1.23, p = .270$ . School climate (fourth step) contributed significantly to the prediction of *Forgiveness of Situations*,  $F(5, 1232) = 4.23, p < .001$ , but with a rather unimportant determinant coefficient,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . Specifically, higher levels of *Positive Behavior* were related to higher *Forgiveness of Situations*.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Results of One-Way ANOVAs for HFS Dimensions as a Function of Adolescents' Age/Class*

Forgiveness	1st Junior High (13-year-olds)			2nd Junior High (14-year olds)			1st Senior High (16-year olds)			2nd Senior High (17-year olds)			F	df	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD			
Forgiveness of Self	282	4.50 <sup>a</sup>	.87	388	4.42 <sup>b</sup>	.76	296	4.33	.82	384	4.25 <sup>a,b</sup>	.77	5.69	3, 711	< .001
Forgiveness of Others	282	4.55 <sup>a</sup>	1.04	386	4.43	1.01	296	4.42	1.11	384	4.33 <sup>a</sup>	1.02	2.49	3, 715	.059
Forgiveness of Situations	283	4.43	.91	383	4.45	.88	296	4.42	.87	387	4.33	.83	1.58	3, 716	.192

\*Note. <sup>a</sup> and <sup>b</sup> indicate pair differences.

**Table 2**  
*Pearson's r Correlation Coefficients between Personality, Family Relationships, School Climate, and Dispositional Forgiveness Dimensions*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Neuroticism	1																		
2. Extraversion	-.28***	1																	
3. Openness to Experience	-.07**	.17***	1																
4. Agreeableness	-.28***	.20***	.08**	1															
5. Conscientiousness	-.22***	.21***	.22***	.36***	1														
6. Relationship/behavior of Mother towards Child	-.11***	.20***	.13***	.24***	.35***	1													
7. Relationship/behavior of Child towards Mother	-.18***	.13***	.13***	.24***	.34***	.75***	1												
8. Quality of Communication with Mother	-.13***	.14***	.14***	.30***	.37***	.70***	.67***	1											
9. Relationship/Behavior of Father towards Child	-.22***	.11***	.15***	.26***	.29***	.40***	.51***	.50***	1										
10. Relationship/behavior of Child towards Father	-.26***	.12***	.13***	.21***	.24***	.41***	.40***	.35***	.76***	1									
11. Quality of Communication with Father	-.15***	.16***	.13**	.26***	.32***	.49***	.40***	.53***	.72***	.70***	1								
12. Positive Behavior	-.10***	.15***	.11***	.26***	.24***	.12***	.16***	.18***	.18***	.15***	.15***	1							
13. Positive Attitude in the School	-.10***	.14***	.14***	.29***	.31***	.30***	.32***	.34***	.32***	.27***	.33***	.41***	1						
14. Respect and Supportive Behavior	-.12***	.01	.07**	.19***	.21***	.13***	.14***	.14***	.18***	.16***	.16***	.61***	.40***	1					
15. Parents within School	-.09**	.25***	.10***	.33***	.28***	.25***	.30***	.32***	.27***	.16***	.27***	.22***	.47***	.12***	1				
16. Negative Behavior	.15***	-.06	-.02	-.29***	-.22***	-.14***	-.15***	-.19***	-.14***	-.13***	-.17***	-.28***	-.32***	-.33***	-.31***	1			
17. Forgiveness of Self	-.35***	.21***	.03	.18***	.12***	.13***	.15***	.15***	.13***	.12***	.11***	.09**	.12***	.10***	.16***	-.12***	1		
18. Forgiveness of Others	-.11***	.11***	.09**	.40***	.14***	.13***	.12***	.14***	.15***	.11***	.16***	.17***	.19***	.11***	.16***	-.17***	.10***	1	
19. Forgiveness of Situations	-.35***	.24***	.09**	.23***	.19***	.10***	.11***	.12***	.14***	.15***	.14***	.18***	.17***	.11***	.16***	-.15***	.30***	.24***	1
<i>M</i>	3.04	3.68	3.21	3.36	3.54	5.03	4.94	5.02	4.86	4.53	4.82	2.73	3.22	2.17	4.26	2.49	4.37	4.43	4.41
<i>SD</i>	.61	.49	.41	.44	.57	.94	.94	.85	.92	1.13	.95	.68	.73	.71	.64	.68	.80	1.04	.87

\*Note \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001

**Table 3***Prediction of Dispositional Forgiveness Dimensions from Personality, Family Relationships, and School Climate*

Predictors	Dependent variables								
	Forgiveness of Self			Forgiveness of Others			Forgiveness of Situations		
	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$
<i>Step 1</i>									
Gender	1.40	0.163	0.04	-1.24	0.215	-0.04	1.59	0.113	0.05
Class	-3.01	0.003	-0.08	-0.06	0.956	-0.01	0.03	0.976	0.001
SES	1.93	0.053	0.05	1.17	0.241	0.03	0.04	0.969	0.001
Education (father)	-1.06	0.292	-0.03	0.98	0.328	0.03	-1.20	0.233	-0.04
Education (mother)	-2.58	0.010	-0.08	-1.48	0.139	-0.05	0.56	0.578	0.02
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.02			n.s.			n.s	
<i>Step 2</i>									
Neuroticism	-10.35	< .001	-0.31	-0.15	0.884	-0.01	-9.16	< .001	-0.27
Openness to Experience	-0.24	0.811	-0.01	2.74	0.006	0.07	0.60	0.550	0.02
Extraversion	3.53	< .001	0.10	0.23	0.816	0.01	3.48	< .001	0.10
Agreeableness	1.55	0.122	0.05	11.83	< .001	0.36	2.30	0.022	0.07
Conscientiousness	-1.72	0.086	-0.05	-1.69	0.091	-0.05	1.28	0.204	0.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.16			.16			.16	
<i>Step 3</i>									
Relationship/behavior of Mother towards Child	-0.75	0.451	-0.04	0.84	0.404	0.04	-0.69	0.490	-0.03
Relationship/behavior of Child towards Mother	0.91	0.365	0.04	-0.16	0.873	-0.01	-0.99	0.322	-0.05
Quality of Communication with Mother	2.12	0.034	0.09	-0.95	0.342	-0.04	1.17	0.240	0.05
Relationship/behavior of Father towards Child	-0.56	0.577	-0.03	0.95	0.340	0.05	-0.09	0.932	-0.01
Relationship/behavior of Child towards Father	1.21	0.226	0.06	-2.25	0.025	-0.11	1.05	0.296	0.05
Quality of Communication with Father	-1.28	0.200	-0.06	2.23	0.026	0.10	0.22	0.824	0.01
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.17			.16			.16	
<i>Step 4</i>									
Positive Behavior	-0.07	0.943	-0.01	2.77	0.006	0.10	3.41	< .001	0.12
Positive Attitude in the School	-0.60	0.548	-0.02	2.46	0.014	0.08	1.80	0.072	0.06
Respect and Supportive Behavior	1.28	0.201	0.045	-2.00	0.045	-0.07	-1.86	0.063	-0.07
Parents within School	2.48	0.013	0.08	-0.73	0.461	-0.02	-0.06	0.957	-0.001
Negative Behavior	-0.17	0.862	-0.01	-1.47	0.141	-0.04	-0.97	0.333	-0.03
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.17			.17			.17	

## Discussion

The main goal of the study was to examine the ways individual (sociodemographics and personality) and system (family and school) factors are associated with and possibly, predict the three dimensions of dispositional forgiveness in adolescence, that is, forgiveness of self, of others, and of situations. The study attempted to contribute to the existing literature by providing a better understanding of dispositional forgiveness in adolescence that would lead to the development of appropriate interventions within the school community.

The research findings seem to confirm the first research hypothesis (H1) regarding the relation of the Big-5 personality factors with dispositional forgiveness. More specifically, it was found that dispositional forgiveness was positively correlated with conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness and negatively correlated with neuroticism. These findings are largely in accordance with the forgiveness literature (Ahirwar et al., 2019; Rey & Extremera, 2014, 2016; Wang, 2008). It seems that adolescents who exhibit lower levels of neuroticism and higher levels of extraversion are more inclined to forgive themselves. Likewise, adolescents with higher levels of openness to experience and agreeableness are prone to forgiveness of others. On the other hand, “neurotic” adolescents seem to be less forgiving in unpleasing situations. Finally, adolescents with high levels of extraversion and agreeableness tend to show higher levels of forgiveness of situations. These findings are in accordance with other studies that show significant associations between the Big 5 personality factors and dispositional forgiveness in all age groups (Ahirwar et al., 2019).

It seems that an increased level of sociability, which is typical among extroverts, and increased levels of friendliness and kindness that are attributed to agreeableness are characteristics that facilitate proneness to forgiveness. A friendly and kind person, who is sociable and desires to maintain good relationships, may be more forgiving in order to achieve that goal. Similarly, it is possible that a person who is self-disciplined, organized, and goal-oriented – as is the case for conscientious persons – will be more willing to overlook offensive situations in order to achieve his/her goals. Further, people who are more open to new experiences may be more willing to forget difficult or offensive situations that might be perceived as obstacles in seeking new experiences. Finally, a person who is less calm or tranquil – as is the case for neuroticism – will probably face more difficulties in forgetting or getting over feelings of anger. In addition, results showed that calmness and emotional stability (low levels of neuroticism), kindness and friendliness (agreeableness), and sociability (extroversion) are the main predictors of dispositional forgiveness. It seems that these characteristics are more important determinants of dispositional forgiveness because they facilitate the effective management of difficult emotions, such as anger, and are highly connected with individuals’ ability to get along with other people and the desire to have good relationships with others.

Regarding the second research hypothesis (H2), the findings showed certain significant positive relationships. When adolescents have a good relationship with their parents, they are more willing to forgive. Perhaps good relationships are the result of positive parenting and teaching of social and emotional skills that, in turn, result in dealing more efficiently with difficult feelings such as anger or revenge. However, these correlations, though statistically significant, were not particularly high. Furthermore, higher levels of communication quality with mother were related to higher forgiveness of self, indicating that adolescents who perceived their quality of communication with their mother as good tended to be more self-forgiving. This seems to be in line with psychodynamically-oriented research, which supports that a good relationship with the mother contributes to better self-regulation (Fonagy et al., 2004).

Adolescents who perceived their quality of communication with their father as good also tended to be more forgiving of others. However, adolescents who had a less trusting relationship with their fathers tended also to be more forgiving of others. Probably, good communication with the father, as a third in the mother-child relationship, even on the ground of less trust, could contribute to a better negotiation with the other, which in turn could support a more forgiving attitude towards other people. This finding resonates with research that correlates paternal acceptance and social competence, that is, being more accepting of others (Lianos, 2015).

Regarding school climate, a positive relationship with dispositional forgiveness was anticipated (H3). Similar to family relationships, statistically significant yet low correlations were found. It seems that when an adolescent feels accepted in school and perceives his/her classmates and teachers as respectful and kind, s/he tends to be more forgiving. Findings suggest that adolescents’ perceptions of their school as a caring community do not contribute to the prediction of forgiveness of self. The way school behaves towards parents was the only factor associated with forgiveness of self, indicating that the more school collaborates and positively involves

parents, the more self-forgiving adolescents tend to be. A harmonic relationship between these two major systems for adolescents' development seems to be internalized by adolescents and, thus, contributes to better self-regulation. Moreover, adolescents' sense of their school as a caring community contributed significantly to forgiveness of others and forgiveness of situations, perhaps because a caring school environment leads adolescents to adopt a more positive attitude towards other people and the situations they face in general.

Adolescents who seem to experience their peers and teachers as supportive and respectful are more willing to forgive other people and adverse events that might occur. These findings are quite significant as they support the link between feeling connected, accepted, and cared for in schools not only with dispositional forgiveness but in general with well-being and positive mental health aspects (Lampropoulou, 2018; Manchula & Patra, 2015). Anyway, good climate and positive relations in the school context are highly related to multiple positive psychology concepts indicating the importance of school for students' adjustment and development (Hatzichristou et al., 2018; La Salle et al., 2018; Lampropoulou, 2018).

Concerning sociodemographic variables, it seems that gender does not contribute significantly to the prediction of any of the dispositional forgiveness dimensions. This finding is in accordance with other relevant findings in the literature in which gender differences are not significant, indicating that other variables may be more important for dispositional forgiveness in adolescence (Fehr et al., 2010). This is dissimilar to adult samples, in which gender differences in forgiveness are found (Kaleta & Mróz, 2021). This finding could be interpreted as indicating developmental differences. Friendships are the most important domain for all adolescents regardless of gender, and as long as forgiving largely contributes to the maintenance of friendships, the lack of significant gender differences in this age period might be understandable.

Age seems to play a more significant role in predicting dispositional forgiveness. More specifically, it was found that younger adolescents tend to be more forgiving both towards their self and others. This finding is not in agreement with other studies indicating that older people tend to be more forgiving (Cabras et al., 2017; Chiaramello et al., 2008; Steiner et al., 2011). However, the fact that in most of these studies, the participants were in their late adolescent years or older or other aspects of forgiveness were examined may account for this difference.

In addition, it has been argued that children and young adolescents' attitudes, along with their willingness to forgive, tend to be influenced more by external factors, norms, expected roles, and behaviours in groups/families (Ashy et al., 2010; Maio et al., 2008; Pehar et al., 2020). Therefore, the differences between the finding of this study and existing research could be attributed, at least partly, to the different cultural contexts within which this study was conducted. Finally, age did not contribute significantly to the prediction of forgiveness of situations. Possibly, in contrast to forgiveness of self and others, forgiveness of situations is not affected by the developmental characteristics of adolescence.

Regarding parents' educational level, there were no significant findings for dispositional forgiveness. It seems that other factors that are not directly affected by parents' education, such as personality characteristics, may play a more significant role in dispositional forgiveness. Further, regarding socio-economic status, middle-class adolescents exhibited higher levels of forgiveness of situations than their upper-class counterparts. Maybe adolescents of higher SES have more means to resolve difficulties or are less used to deal with difficult situations affecting their tendency to forgive adversities.

### ***Limitations and suggestions for future research***

The fact that self-report measures were used should be taken into consideration when investigating highly subjective factors such as relationships and cognitive-emotional states such as dispositional forgiveness. Additionally, this study investigated some aspects of the family and school systems. Investigation of other aspects, such as family interaction or academic performance, could further contribute to understanding the role of family and school in adolescents' dispositional forgiveness. Results concerning openness to experience should be regarded with caution due to the low internal consistency coefficient of this subscale. Further, researchers have argued that the Big 5 Personality scale and the relevant model may constitute an important but not an integrative model of personality (e.g., Boyle, 2008; John & Srivastava, 1999; Najm, 2019). In particular, McAdams (1992, p. 1) reported six important limitations of the Big-5 model: "(a) inability to address core constructs of personality functioning beyond the level of traits; (b) limitations with respect to the prediction of specific behavior and the adequate description of persons' lives; (c) failure to provide compelling causal explanations for human behavior

and experience; (d) disregard of the contextual and conditional nature of human experience; (e) failure to offer an attractive program for studying personality organization and integration; and (f) reliance on simple, noncontingent, and implicitly comparative statements about persons". Hence, the analysis of contextual and conditional nature of a person's experience, for example, could provide a better insight into dispositional forgiveness. Consequently, the results of this study regarding personality could be different if other personality models were employed. Finally, it should be stressed that, although the large sample size could be considered a strength of the study, due to the cross-sectional, correlational design of this study, no causal relationships could be identified.

Future research should further explore the role of socio-economic status in forgiveness. In addition, other aspects of family or school characteristics could be investigated. Additional sociodemographic variables could be included and, given the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of significant life events could also be explored in relation to forgiveness. Finally, school-based intervention programs could be developed that would focus on social and emotional skills related to the personality factors that seem to contribute significantly to dispositional forgiveness and enhance a more forgiving school context, with fewer incidents of conflicts or bullying. Finally, the field of forgiveness education is receiving increasing attention, therefore the findings of this study could be taken into consideration when designing such interventions that could add to school psychologists' efforts to promote well-being in the school community.

### ***Practical and educational implications***

In this study, an effort was made to investigate the association and the predictive role of important variables in adolescents' lives in relation to dispositional forgiveness from an ecosystem perspective. Although forgiveness literature is gradually growing with regard to adolescence, it is still an area that needs further research. The findings of this study highlight the important role of personality factors and, thus, provide further support for the significance of almost all Big 5 personality factors in predicting dispositional forgiveness. Family relationships did not seem to play a significant role. However, in-depth research is required with the aim of uncovering the possibly complex associations of family relationships with dispositional forgiveness.

Finally, another important finding of this study, with possible implications for intervention, is the one concerning school climate. The importance of school climate and relationships in the school are well documented in the literature for various domains (La Salle et al., 2018). The findings of this study imply the importance of primary prevention interventions in the school community.

The findings regarding school factors are even more important nowadays. With the extended impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on multiple levels, the notion of forgiveness seems more and more significant. During the pandemic, people tended to blame each other, and stigmatization and discrimination were highly prevalent phenomena (Kumar & Nayar, 2020; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Further, in a research with Greek adults aged 19 to 75, it was found that forgiveness is negatively related to the experience of negative emotions during the lockdown period, a finding that highlights the beneficial role of forgiveness during times of adversity (Tilkeridou et al., 2021).

On the other hand, stronger connections within communities and trust - factors that are related to dispositional forgiveness - are found to provide better well-being (Poulios et al., 2021). Within this perspective, dispositional forgiveness may be significant in reducing people's negative reactions towards others (or self) and may play a key role in promoting people's mental health, especially during unsettling times within school communities.

### ***Declaration of competing interest***

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

# Προσωπικότητα, σχέσεις στην οικογένεια και διαστάσεις του σχολικού κλίματος ως προβλεπτικοί παράγοντες της συγχώρεσης στην εφηβεία

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ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
<p>Συγχωρητικότητα, Προσωπικότητα, Σχέσεις στην οικογένεια, Σχολικό κλίμα, Εφηβεία</p>	<p>Η συγχώρεση στην εφηβική ηλικία έχει προκαλέσει το αυξανόμενο ενδιαφέρον των ερευνητών διεθνώς, γεγονός που αναδεικνύει την ανάγκη να κατανοηθεί σε μεγαλύτερο βάθος ο ρόλος της στην ευεξία των νέων. Στην παρούσα έρευνα μελετάται η έννοια της συγχώρεσης σε Έλληνες εφήβους και ειδικότερα ο προβλεπτικός ρόλος βασικών διαστάσεων σε ατομικό και συστημικό επίπεδο. Ειδικότερα, ερευνήθηκε κατά πόσο οι παράγοντες της προσωπικότητας με βάση το μοντέλο των 5 Παραγόντων (ατομικό επίπεδο), καθώς και οι σχέσεις στην οικογένεια και το σχολείο (συστημικό επίπεδο) μπορούν να προβλέψουν την τάση των εφήβων να συγχωρούν. Επίσης, μελετήθηκαν κοινωνικοδημογραφικές μεταβλητές όπως το φύλο, η ηλικία, το κοινωνικοοικονομικό και μορφωτικό επίπεδο των γονέων. Στην έρευνα συμμετείχαν 1.378 έφηβοι που φοιτούσαν σε Γυμνάσια και Λύκεια της Αττικής, τα οποία επιλέχθηκαν τυχαία. Τα ευρήματα έδειξαν ότι η νεότερη ηλικία, τα χαμηλότερα επίπεδα νευρωτισμού, τα υψηλότερα επίπεδα εξωστρέφειας και προσήνειας και η υψηλότερη ποιοτική επικοινωνία με τη μητέρα προέβλεπαν υψηλότερη συγχώρεση του εαυτού. Υψηλότερα επίπεδα δεκτικότητας σε εμπειρίες προσήνειας, ποιοτικής επικοινωνίας με τον πατέρα, θετικής συμπεριφοράς και θετικής στάσης στο σχολείο και χαμηλά επίπεδα έλλειψης σεβασμού προέβλεπαν μεγαλύτερη συγχώρεση των άλλων. Τέλος, χαμηλότερα επίπεδα νευρωτισμού και υψηλότερα επίπεδα εξωστρέφειας, ευσυνειδησίας, θετικής συμπεριφοράς στο σχολείο προέβλεπαν υψηλότερα επίπεδα συγχώρεσης καταστάσεων. Τα ευρήματα υπογραμμίζουν τον σημαντικό ρόλο των παραγόντων της προσωπικότητας και τονίζουν τη σημασία των παρεμβάσεων πρωτογενούς πρόληψης στη σχολική κοινότητα όσον αφορά στο σχολικό κλίμα, οι οποίες θα μπορούσαν να συμβάλουν γενικότερα στην προαγωγή της συγχώρεσης και της ευεξίας των εφήβων.</p>
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