



Understanding the Dynamics of Divine Forgiveness to resolve Interpersonal Transgressions: An Islamic Perspective

Sadaf Saleem¹, Aisha Sitwat²

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Centre for Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: saleem.sadaf07@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor (Retd.), Centre for Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: sitwata786@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Forgiveness is a central moral virtue in Islam, deeply rooted in the Quran and Hadith. This qualitative study explores the concept of Divine Forgiveness (DF) and its application in addressing interpersonal transgressions. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 religious scholars (8 men and 8 women) with minimum five years of experience, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Three core themes emerged: Definition of DF, Benefits of DF, and Process of DF. Within the Definition of DF, participants highlighted the divine attributes of Allah Almighty as Al-Ghaffar, Al-Afuww, Al-Raheem, Al-Rehman, and Al-Tawa'ab, emphasizing repentance (Tawbah) as a means to communicate with Allah. They also dispelled myths by clarifying the roles of Al-Qahhar (the Subduer) and Al-Muntaqim (the Avenger) in the broader context of mercy. Key Benefits of DF included accepting human fallibility, resolving unhealthy negative emotions stemming from sin, facilitating blessings and prosperity, and strengthening faith. Scholars illustrated how sincere repentance not only alleviates guilt and anxiety but also fosters humility and emotional well-being. The Process of DF encompassed the contextualization of minor and major sins, detailed steps of repentance (acknowledgment, remorse, and resolution not to repeat the sin), and expiation or atonement practices (such as charity and additional prayers). Notably, for interpersonal transgressions, seeking forgiveness from the victim is crucial alongside divine pardon. Overall, the study underscores DF as a spiritually transformative process that promotes emotional healing, fosters interpersonal reconciliation, and cultivates a compassionate social ethos. Clinical psychologists, counselors, and researchers may integrate these insights to address mental health concerns and relational conflicts in Islamic context.

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Corresponding Author's Email: saleem.sadaf07@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Forgiveness is a fundamental moral virtue and a universal construct deeply rooted in various religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions that resonates with the inherent human needs of growth and healing (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Choe et al., 2019; McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2005). It has been identified that religion-oriented people have positive attitudes towards forgiveness (Matuszewski & Moroń, 2022), and they are more likely to offer and seek forgiveness (Toussaint et al., 2008), as believing in divine forgiveness leads to the forgiveness of others and self (Escher, 2013). It has been greatly researched that human beings are prone to make mistakes and are fallible, and this fallibility is the hardest thing for them to grasp (Crowe, 2017). However, the inherent capacity of human beings to turn back to a higher or divine power is demonstrated by accepting one's faults and repentance (Berry & Worthington, 2001). These psychological insights into human vulnerability and the subsequent pursuit of healing naturally extend into religious frameworks. Many traditions not only recognize the importance of personal forgiveness but also prescribe divine forgiveness as a means to achieve emotional and spiritual

well-being (Choe et al., 2019). In particular, Islamic theology presents a nuanced perspective that intertwines individual psychological healing with a broader, communal, and spiritual mandate for forgiveness (Firdous et al., 2024).

Divine forgiveness is a central theme in many religious traditions, often described as an act of mercy and grace from the divine being towards humanity (Fincham & May, 2023). In Islam, it is considered one of Allah's most emphasized attributes, as seen in His names Al-Ghaffar (The Forgiving) and Ar-Rahman (The Most Merciful). The Quran frequently encourages believers to seek forgiveness from Allah, highlighting His readiness to pardon those who sincerely repent (Firdous et al., 2024). However, divine forgiveness is conditional upon genuine repentance and the rectification of wrongful actions, reflecting both Allah's mercy and justice (Kamali, 2008). Within the Islamic framework, forgiveness is central to the human-divine relationship, emphasizing the boundless mercy of Allah and the significance of repentance and reconciliation in human interactions (Zweig, 2023). The Quran and Hadith repeatedly highlight forgiveness as a virtue that not only restores broken relationships but also nurtures inner peace, spiritual growth and emotional well-being (Firdous et al., 2024). Islam places significant emphasis on the dual accountability of believers: to Allah and to fellow human beings. Divine forgiveness for interpersonal transgressions requires the aggrieved party's forgiveness before Allah's pardon can be sought (Huda, 2022). This dual requirement underscores the importance of reconciliation and restitution in Islamic ethics. While theological literature has extensively explored the attributes of Allah related to forgiveness, limited empirical studies investigate how these concepts influence human behavior, particularly in the context of interpersonal relationships.

In Islamic theology, sins are often classified into "minor" (*saghā'ir*) and "major" (*kabā'ir*), reflecting varying degrees of severity and moral weight (Kamali, 2008). Typically, *minor sins* can be forgiven through consistent acts of worship and sincere repentance, whereas *major sins* necessitate more deliberate efforts, including seeking restitution and demonstrating genuine remorse. Additionally, the concepts of *expiation* and *atonement* are vital to the understanding of divine forgiveness. *Expiation* involves specific religious practices (e.g., extra prayers, fasting, or giving charity) to compensate for wrongdoing, while *atonement* emphasizes making amends to those harmed, thereby reinforcing personal and communal responsibility in seeking Allah's mercy (Huda, 2022).

2. Literature Review

Divine forgiveness in Islamic teachings is influenced by several factors, including the nature of the transgression, the sincerity of repentance, and efforts to compensate for any harm caused (Sayilgan, 2023). The Quran distinguishes between minor sins, which may be forgiven through good deeds, and major sins, which require explicit repentance (Reynolds & Moghadam, 2021). Moreover, acts of worship, charity, and seeking forgiveness during sacred times, such as Ramadan, are considered pathways to divine pardon (Shabana, 2024). Forgiveness is widely recognized as a therapeutic tool for improving mental health, reducing stress, and enhancing overall well-being (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). In Islam, seeking and granting forgiveness are acts of spiritual purification, alleviating guilt, resentment, and anger. Studies suggest that individuals who perceive a forgiving God are more likely to experience psychological benefits, including reduced anxiety and depression (Toussaint, Owen, & Cheadle, 2012). Psychological Models such as Worthington's REACH model (Worthington & Scherer, 2004) and Enright's Process model of forgiveness offer a structured framework for understanding the process of forgiveness. These models delineates a series of steps like uncovering and recalling the hurt, empathizing with the offender, altruistic giving, developing compassion, committing to forgive, and holding onto forgiveness. This approach not only facilitates emotional healing but also complements the Islamic perspective, wherein forgiveness functions as both a divine mandate and a practical strategy for alleviating negative emotions such as guilt, anger, and depression (Toussaint, Owen, & Cheadle, 2012). Existing literature has extensively examined forgiveness from psychological, theological, and sociocultural perspectives (Cowden, 2024). Research in psychology has underscored the therapeutic benefits of forgiveness in reducing anger, fostering emotional health, and repairing relationships (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Within Islamic studies, discussions have focused on the attributes of Allah as the Most Forgiving and the conditions under which divine mercy is granted (Kamali, 2008).

However, a notable gap exists in understanding how the Islamic conceptualization of divine forgiveness influences Muslims' approach to interpersonal transgressions and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a core virtue in Islam, emphasizing Allah's boundless mercy and the moral obligation to reconcile interpersonal relationships. While existing studies explore forgiveness in psychological and theological contexts, there is limited focus on the Islamic framework, particularly the distinction between divine forgiveness and its implication to resolve interpersonal transgressions. This study addresses this gap by examining the philosophical and practical aspects of forgiveness in Islam through the perspectives of religious scholars in Pakistan. By providing culturally and religiously grounded insights, the research contributes to academic discourse and offers practical applications for fostering reconciliation and culturally sensitive counseling practices in Muslim communities. However, the distinction between divine forgiveness (seeking forgiveness from Allah) and interpersonal forgiveness (forgiveness sought from other individuals) presents a complex interplay that requires exploration within the Islamic context. Despite the theological clarity, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how individuals perceive and practice these pathways to divine forgiveness in their daily lives, especially in diverse cultural contexts like Pakistan.

Psychological research suggests that seeking forgiveness from others and granting forgiveness are associated with improved relationships and emotional well-being (Wu et al., 2022). However, most studies on forgiveness are rooted in Western frameworks, with limited focus on Islamic perspectives that intertwine spiritual and social dimensions. This gap highlights the need for research exploring the practical implications of divine forgiveness in interpersonal relationships, particularly in culturally specific contexts. However, existing research often lacks a contextualized understanding of how divine forgiveness, as conceptualized in Islam, affects mental health outcomes. Exploring this connection in Muslim-majority settings can provide insights into culturally and spiritually sensitive approaches to mental health interventions. In addition to Islamic teachings, both Christian and Jewish traditions offer rich perspectives on divine forgiveness that can enhance interfaith discourse. In Christianity, divine forgiveness is intricately linked to the concept of atonement through Christ's sacrifice, where God's grace manifests as unconditional love and redemption (Lewis, 2001). Similarly, Judaism emphasizes the process of teshuva—a return to God through sincere repentance and restitution—with a strong focus on communal reconciliation, especially during high holy days like Yom Kippur (Neusner, 1997). These interfaith perspectives underscore both the universal significance of forgiveness and the unique doctrinal nuances that each tradition brings to the understanding of divine mercy. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by exploring the construct of divine forgiveness within the Islamic tradition, with specific emphasis on its application to interpersonal forgiveness. Through qualitative research involving interviews with sixteen religious scholars in Pakistan, the study seeks to contextualize the definition and process of divine forgiveness and its role in addressing interpersonal transgressions. The emerging themes; definitions, myths, and processes; provide a nuanced understanding of how divine forgiveness is conceptualized in Islam. By integrating theological and psychological dimensions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of forgiveness as a multifaceted construct in Islamic thought, providing valuable insights for both academic discourse and practical applications.

2.1. Research Questions

- How Divine Forgiveness is conceptualized and contextualized in Islam?
- How can Divine Forgiveness be utilized to forgive interpersonal transgressions in Islamic perspective?

3. Methodology

To explore the understanding of Divine Forgiveness in Islamic context for resolving Interpersonal Transgressions, the following method has been utilized.

3.1. Research Design and Research Paradigm

Qualitative research design employing the constructive paradigm to explore the role of divine forgiveness in dealing interpersonal transgressions was utilized for the current study, as the study aimed to explore the ideas and meanings generated by scholars within the Islamic framework through their interactions and experiences of dealing with Muslims who want to repent and seek divine forgiveness. Constructive research paradigm allowed to explore in-depth understanding and meanings of the divine forgiveness within the Islamic perspective.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

For the current study, Criterion sampling was used as a sampling strategy.

3.3. Participants

16 Islamic Scholars, age-range (35-55 Years), 8 males and 8 females who had a professional education equivalent to at least MS/ M.Phil in Islamic Studies or Alimiyah Course and were teaching in different universities and Madrassahs, and had a professional experience of studying and interpreting Quranic Tafaseers, Hadiths and Fiqh were approached for the current study.

3.4. Inclusion Criteria

- Islamic Scholars working and teaching in Madrassahs, and teachers working and teaching in Islamic Studies Departments of HEC recognized Universities in Lahore
- Islamic Scholars and teachers with at least 5 years of experience in the field
- Islamic scholars and teachers who had experiences of dealing with the transgression related issues of general public

3.5. Exclusion Criteria

Peers, and amils and those who were involved in black magic were excluded from the study

3.6. Data Collection

A detailed interview guide was constructed by the researchers, comprised of main questions and probes, to collect the relevant data regarding the concept of divine forgiveness in Islam.

3.7. Procedure

The study was approved by the ethical review board of the institution. An informed consent was taken from the participants, and they were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. For the current study, the data was collected by designing a brief demographic information sheet to record the demographic information of the participants i.e., age, gender, education, professional experience and area of expertise. A detailed interview guide was constructed to explore the Islamic conceptualization of divine forgiveness and its implementation to deal interpersonal transgressions. A 60 to 90 minutes interview was conducted with the scholars. Each interview was recorded, and then transcribed with all identifiable information, and then data was analyzed in detail by using the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), due to its applicability and flexibility to analyze the transcriptions, identifying patterns and themes and to consolidate the raw data into systematic themes.

3.8. Data Analysis

The researcher followed the steps of thematic analysis given by Braun and Clarke (2019) to analyze the transcriptions and to generate the themes and sub-themes. i.e., listening and reading the transcriptions, familiarizing with the data, and to identify the underline pattern and meaning in the data. The data and codes were then labelled and organized in the meaningful groups, and the redundant or repetitive themes were eliminated. Lastly, a brief concise summary was generated. Moreover, the codes, sub-themes and themes were validated and re-evaluated by the peer review to ensure the inter-rater reliability and validity of the data.

4. Results

16 Islamic Scholars were interviewed to explore the philosophy of Divine Forgiveness in the Islamic perspective. The data was analyzed through Thematic Analysis and following themes were emerged (see Figure 1);

4.1. Definition of Divine Forgiveness

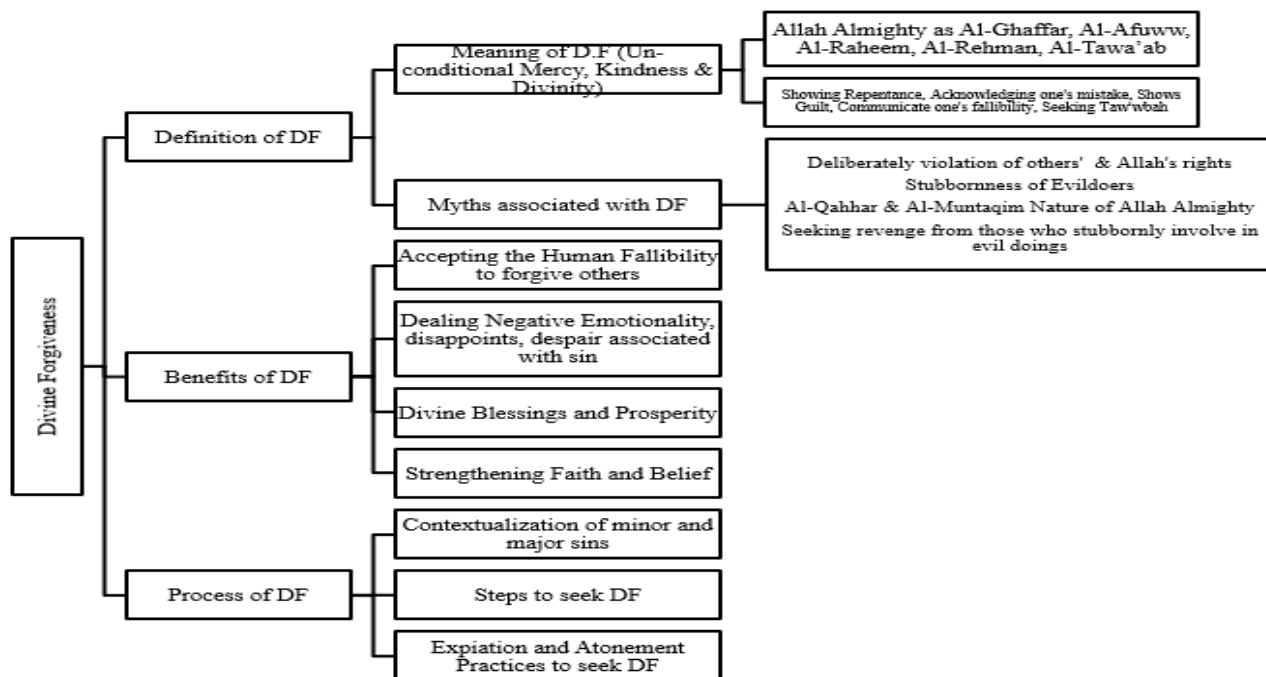
This theme highlights the two sub-themes i.e., definition or meaning of divine forgiveness and myths associated with divine forgiveness.

4.1.1. Meaning of Divine Forgiveness

Islamic scholars explained the meaning of divine forgiveness as a divine virtue and an attribute of Allah Almighty, as described among the 99 names of Allah Almighty (Asma-ul-Husnah). Thematic analysis indicated that "*being forgiving*" is the unconditional and dominant

trait of Allah Almighty and He forgives His servants whoever acknowledges his or her mistakes and makes amends to rectify one’s wrongdoings.

Figure 1: Showing the Themes and Sub-themes of Divine Forgiveness in Islam



• **Allah Almighty as Al-Ghaffar, Al-Afuww, Al-Raheem, Al-Rehman, Al-Tawa’ab**

The sub-theme highlights Allah's unconditional mercy, kindness, and graciousness, as portrayed in the Quran and Hadith. Among the 99 names of Allah (Asma-ul-Husnah), only one name, Al-Muntaqim (The Avenger), refers to His vengeful nature, while 17 names emphasize His mercy, kindness, and forgiveness. Names such as Al-Ghaffar (the All-Forgiving), Al-Raheem (the Bestower of Mercy), Al-Kareem (the Most Generous), Al-Wadood (the Most Loving), and Al-Ghafoor (the Exceedingly Forgiving) reflect His core quality of being merciful and gracious.

Al-Ghazali highlighted Allah’s divine forgiveness through names like Al-Afuww (the Pardoner), and many other names of Allah, like Al-Rehman (the Most Merciful) and Al-Haleem (the Most Forbearing), demonstrate His mercy and compassion. The Quran emphasizes Allah's forgiveness and mercy in Al-A'raf: 156 and An-Nisa: 110, where He promises to forgive those who repent and seek His mercy. Additionally, the Tasmiah (Bismillah) at the beginning of every surah, except Surah-e-Tawbah, reinforces Allah's infinite compassion.

Hadiths further illustrate Allah's mercy. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) narrated that Allah’s mercy prevails over His wrath, even in cases of major sins, provided the individual seeks genuine forgiveness. In a famous Hadith-e-Qudsi (At-Tirmidhi: 3540), Allah assures that as long as people seek His forgiveness, even if their sins reach the skies, He will forgive them as long as they do not associate partners with Him. This shows that Allah’s mercy and forgiveness are boundless, extending far beyond human comprehension.

• **Repentance (Tawbah) is a way to Communicate with Allah Almighty**

Islamic scholars recognize divine forgiveness as a means of establishing communication with Allah. P1 and P3 explained that when a Muslim sins, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they can seek forgiveness by communicating with Allah and fulfilling the conditions for repentance (Tawbah). This process helps in building a relationship with Allah, as Allah loves those who repent and purify themselves, as stated in Al-Baqarah (222). Similarly, in Al-Ma'idah (74), Allah invites His believers to turn to Him in repentance, for He is all-Forgiving and merciful. P4 and P5 highlighted that Allah cherishes those who seek His forgiveness. In a Hadith (Sahih Muslim: 2749), it is mentioned that if people did not sin, Allah would replace them with others who would sin and seek forgiveness, as this act of repentance pleases Him. This reflects the deep connection between seeking forgiveness and maintaining a strong relationship with Allah.

4.1.2. Myths associated with Divine Forgiveness

Thematic analysis revealed that there are certain myths associated with the unconditional mercy and compassion of Allah Almighty. As it has already been mentioned that Allah Almighty is all-Forgiving and the pardoner of all sins, but it doesn't mean that He doesn't punish the wrongdoers. This sub-themes discusses the myths associated with divine forgiveness.

- **Allah Almighty as Al-Qahhar (the Subduer, the Ever-Dominating) and Al-Muntaqim (The Avenger)**

P5 and P7 mentioned that while Allah is All-Forgiving and Most Merciful, He is also Al-Qahhar (the Subduer) and Al-Muntaqim (the Avenger), ensuring that evil does not prevail, either in this world or the Hereafter. Even if the followers of evil appear to succeed in this world, Allah will avenge them in the Hereafter.

P1, P2, and P4 addressed the misconception that one can freely sin and later seek forgiveness. This myth can lead to an increase in sins and crimes. Allah dislikes those who repeatedly sin with the intention of seeking forgiveness afterward. It is prohibited to continue committing sins with the expectation of mercy.

P14 emphasized that Allah's mercy is for those who repent and forgive others, but His punishment is severe for those who take pride in their evil deeds. He warns wrongdoers about the torment of Hell and retribution on the Day of Resurrection (Al-Hijr: 49-50; Az-Zukhruf: 41). P7 added that Allah's attributes of forgiveness and mercy do not give transgressors the right to take advantage of His justice. Allah is both All-Forgiving and All-Just, and those who disobey are warned of severe punishment (Aal-e-Imran: 3-4).

4.2. Benefits of Divine Forgiveness

Understanding the Divine forgiveness will give an insight about the benefits of divine forgiveness, and helps Muslims to accept the inherent nature of human fallibility, and helping them to resolve the unhealthy negative emotions associated with their intentional or unintentional sins.

4.2.1. Accepting the Human Fallibility

P4 and P6 explained that seeking forgiveness from Allah acknowledges human fallibility and the understanding that only Allah, the perfect being, can grant forgiveness. This perspective also encourages humans to forgive each other. Allah's forgiveness is exemplified in the story of Adam (A.S) and his wife. After Iblis deceived them into disobeying Allah, they were sent to Earth. However, Adam (A.S) accepted his mistake, sought forgiveness by reciting the verse from Al-A'raf (23), and Allah accepted their repentance, as mentioned in Al-Baqarah (35-37).

4.2.2. Resolving Unhealthy Negative Emotions associated with Sin

Seeking divine forgiveness helps Muslims release negative emotions like depression, despair, and guilt, fostering hope and faith in Allah. P1, P3, and P5 explained that the Quran assures those who have transgressed not to lose hope, as Allah is all-Forgiving and Most Merciful (Az-Zumar: 53). Abdullah Ibn Umar (R.A) emphasized this verse as a strong message of hope, showing that sincere repentance leads to forgiveness, regardless of the sin. Ibn-e-Abbas (R.A) also highlighted a hopeful message in Ar-Ra'd (6) for those who repent. P2, P5, and P7 further explained that regardless of the magnitude of the sin, repentance leads to Allah's forgiveness. The Quran (An-Nisa: 110) emphasizes that anyone who wrongs themselves and seeks forgiveness will find Allah all-Forgiving and Most Merciful. P4, P6, and P8 mentioned that genuine repentance allows Muslims to let go of guilt and move forward in life. Without repentance, guilt can hinder progress, as individuals may get stuck in a cycle of regret, preventing them from seeking forgiveness and growing spiritually. This will also help the Muslims to understand that their fellow beings also experience emotions like depression, despair, and guilt. This understanding will eventually enhances one's empathy and will facilitate interpersonal forgiveness.

4.2.3. Provision of Blessings and Prosperity

Seeking divine forgiveness also leads to the abundance of worldly resources and blessings. P3, P4 and P5 quoted, "Allah commanded Muslims to seek His forgiver, as He is a perpetual forgiver, and resultantly He will send abundant rain, and will bless them with wealth and children

(Nuh: 10-12). Similarly Ibn-e-Abbas narrated that Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) described that if anyone constantly seeks pardon from Allah Almighty then Allah provides him a way out of every distress and a relief from every anxiety, and blesses him with sustenance from where he never expected (Abu-Dawood, 1873). *It was also mentioned in another Hadith by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W) that verily the Almighty is generous and shy. If His servant raises his hands to Him (in supplication) He becomes shy to return them empty.*" (Tirmidhi, 3556)."

4.2.4. Strengthening Faith and Belief

A significant benefits of divine forgiveness is that it erases past sins for those who repent sincerely, as noted by P6, P7, and P8. It strengthens the faith of Muslims and brings them closer to Allah, as P1, P2, and P6 quoted: "Whoever repents and does good deeds, Allah transforms their evil deeds into good deeds" (Al-Furqan: 70). P14 and P15 reported a Hadith that Allah is pleased with the repentance of His servant just like to the joy of finding a lost camel in a desert (Sahih Muslim: 2747a; 2747b). Besides strengthening faith, seeking forgiveness also leads to the rewards of heaven, as mentioned in Al-e-Imran (133).

4.3. Process of divine forgiveness

This theme explains the significance of divine forgiveness within the context of minor and major sins in Islam, interpersonal transgressions, and expiation or atonement practices.

4.3.1. Contextualization of minor and major sins

P4 and P5 reported, "As human beings are inherently fallible beings however, in Islam there is a difference among minor sins (Sagheera) and major sins (Kabeerah), even then Allah Almighty forgives all kinds of sins, if a Muslim seeks sincere repentance, as Almighty declared in An-Najm (32) that He reward the evildoers according to their actions, and reward the virtuous ones with the finest rewards i.e., those who avoid major sins and immoralities, while stumbling upon minor ones, as He is the epitome of the vast forgiveness. Moreover, Allah only accepts the repentance of those who commit evil ignorantly or recklessly then repent soon after Allah will pardon them. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. However, repentance is not accepted from those who knowingly persist in sin until they start dying, and then cry, "Now I repent!" nor those who die as disbelievers. For them We (Allah) have prepared a painful punishment (An-Nisa: 17-18)."

4.3.2. Steps of divine forgiveness

Seeking forgiveness from Almighty is a life-long opportunity until one faces death. P2, P6, P7 and P8 described the steps of seeking divine forgiveness and reported, "Allah the exalted communicated multiple times in Quran that He will forgive all kinds of sins (including shirk and other Major sins) with four conditions i.e., (i) Acknowledge and accept one's sin, (ii) shows regret, remorse over one's sinful act, (iii) seeking repentance from Allah Almighty and from people in case of interpersonal offense, (iv) firm intention not to repeat the sin, (v) rectify the harm where necessary by apologizing or paying atonement, and (vi) involving in supplication, Istighfaar and doing charity. This has been mentioned by Almighty in Al-e-Imran (135) that those who commit sins or evil deeds, attempts to remember Allah and seek His forgiveness, and they don't knowingly persist in wrongdoings."

4.3.3. Expiation and Atonement Practices to seek Divine Forgiveness

P4, P5, P7, and P16 explained that while Allah forgives all sins, major sins require specific expiation practices to maintain justice and the rule of law. These include: (i) for breaking an oath, the person must feed ten poor people, provide them clothing, or free a slave, or fast for three days if unable to do so (Al-Ma'idah: 89); (ii) for deliberately missing Ramadan fasts, the expiation is to fast for 60 consecutive days or to feed 60 poor people (Sahih Muslim, 1111); (iii) for murder, the punishment may involve blood money or expiation (An-Nisa: 92); and (iv) for adultery, the punishment is lashes or stoning, depending on marital status (An-Nur: 2; Sahih Muslim, 1690), with additional punishment for false accusations of adultery (An-Nur: 4). These rulings show that serious offenses that disrupt the peace in society require more than verbal apologies and cannot be ignored.

5. Discussion

This study explored the concept of divine forgiveness from an Islamic perspective and its implications for addressing interpersonal transgressions. Thematic analysis of the data revealed three main themes: (i) Definition of Divine Forgiveness, (ii) Benefits of Divine Forgiveness, and (iii) Process of Divine Forgiveness. The definition includes the meaning of divine forgiveness and

myths surrounding it. The benefits highlight accepting human fallibility, resolving unhealthy emotions tied to sin, receiving blessings and prosperity, and strengthening faith. The process encompasses forgiveness of minor and major offenses, steps for seeking divine forgiveness, and expiation and atonement practices. The findings were discussed in light of contemporary psychological and theoretical literature.

5.1. Meaning of Divine Forgiveness

This theme explored the definition of divine forgiveness and associated myths from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing Allah's unconditional mercy, kindness, and graciousness. Allah, as reflected in His 99 names (Asma-ul-Husna), is the Most Forgiving and Merciful, forgiving all sins upon sincere repentance (Davary, 2004; Firdous et al., 2024). Fincham (2022) highlighted divine forgiveness as unique, impacting both temporal and eternal life, nullifying wrongdoing, and purifying the soul. Participants identified repentance as essential for divine forgiveness, aligning with Haleem and Haleem (2010), who noted its strong encouragement in the Qur'an, even for major sins. However, myths emerged, such as believing Allah will forgive regardless of repeated serious sins or relying on forgiveness to justify sinning. While Allah's mercy surpasses His wrath (Davary, 2004), He is also Al-Qahhar (The Subduer) and Al-Muntaqim (The Avenger), punishing persistent sinners. Uthman (2023) warned against hypocritical repentance and reliance on master prayers like sayyidul-Istighfar. These findings align with the broader philosophical notion that "to err is human, to forgive divine". Benefits of Divine Forgiveness. The study identified significant benefits of divine forgiveness, including accepting human fallibility, resolving negative emotions, receiving divine blessings, and strengthening faith. Understanding Allah's mercy helps Muslims recognize the need to forgive others, fostering unconditional forgiveness and improved mental health (Long et al., 2020; Uecker et al., 2016). Seeking divine forgiveness encourages self-awareness, spiritual closeness, and soul purification (Firdous et al., 2024). It also alleviates negative emotions, enhances well-being, and reduces distress, as studied by Maranges and Fincham (2024) and others (Fincham, 2022; Kim, Payne, & Tracy, 2022). Forgiveness improves psychosocial health, reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, and fosters psychological adjustment (Fincham, 2022; Krause, 2015). Repentance practices, such as Tawbah and Istighfaar, enhance problem-solving, patience, and overall well-being (Uyun, Kurniawan, & Jaufalaily, 2019). Divine forgiveness also brings blessings, prosperity, and stronger faith, improving relationships with Allah and instilling purpose, happiness, and diligence in prayers (Bradshaw, Ellison, & Marcum, 2010; Lyons et al., 2011). These findings align with studies linking forgiveness to improved perceptions of God, reduced distress, and healthy aging (Krause, 2015; Lawler-Row, 2010).

5.2. Process of Divine Forgiveness

The process of divine forgiveness in Islam involves understanding the nature, intensity, and context of minor (Sagheera) and major (Kabeerah) sins, as well as following the prescribed steps of repentance outlined in the Quran and Sunnah. Sincere repentance, acknowledging wrongdoing, and seeking Allah's mercy are essential for forgiveness of both categories (Fincham & May, 2023; Firdous et al., 2024). The study highlighted specific steps, including acknowledging sins, expressing genuine remorse, resolving not to repeat the sin, rectifying harm, seeking forgiveness from affected individuals, and performing supplication, istighfaar, and charitable acts (Alam, Aunuh, & Fajrin, 2024). For severe offenses like murder or adultery, designated punishments, expiation, and atonement practices maintain societal peace and justice, reinforcing restorative justice (Absar, 2020). Scholars emphasize that Islamic law integrates restorative justice with forgiveness, ensuring societal harmony while stressing sincere repentance as the key to divine mercy (Azhari & Mokhtar, 2019; Muhammad, 2020). This process not only restores the relationship with Allah but also fosters interpersonal harmony and a just, compassionate society (Sahin, 2022).

While explaining the various interpretations of divine forgiveness, its benefits and process of seeking it, the research participants quoted the opinions of classical and contemporary religious scholars, like Al-Jawziyya commented that turning to God in repentance is the summit of every believer. Hence, Allah has declared repentance as the ultimate objective of every believing man and woman. Al-Tabari described divine forgiveness as the willingness of the Allah Almighty to overlook one's sins, if he or she repents sincerely. Al-Tabari commented that divine forgiveness is quite vast, as Allah can forgive all sins except Shirk unless one leaves it and turns to Allah and seek sincere repentance. Al-Qurtubi recognized divine forgiveness as the attribute

of Almighty which entails His mercy as well as justice. He claimed that divine forgiveness is granted to those who seek sincere repentance and adhere to Allah's commandments, and then attempts to rectify their wrongdoings. Ibn-e-Kathir explained that Allah replaces the sins of repentant person with good deeds and grant them divine rewards. Imam Ghazali described that seeking divine forgiveness is a means to achieve spiritual purification and a path to attain divine rewards in this world and the world hereafter. Syed Abul A'la Maududi and dr. Israr Ahmed described the divine forgiveness as the unconditional attribute of Almighty and recognized it as "Rahma --- the mercy of God" and a hope for those who have wronged themselves. The results of the current study not only highlights the meaning, benefits and process of divine forgiveness within the Islamic framework but also provides a harmonious outline to seek divine forgiveness as mentioned by Worthington's REACH model (Worthington & Scherer, 2004) and Enright's Process model of forgiveness (Enright, 2001). These psychological models described how forgiveness helps the clients to let go of unhealthy negative emotions and enhanced their overall wellbeing.

6. Conclusion

From the results of the current study, it has been concluded that forgiveness, a key value in the Quran, is both a spiritual and transformative process with profound benefits for individuals and society. However, a comparative study on forgiveness across various divine and worldly religions reveals the almost similar results about repentance and reconciliation. In Judaism, reconciliation isn't necessary, and murder is an unforgivable offense. And the Jews were commanded to fast and pray to seek God's forgiveness on Yom Kippur Day. While in Christianity, to embrace forgiveness, it is necessary to repent and then reconcile, and it is allowed to forgive the repeated offence, as Jesus has promised them unconditional forgiveness of God, as an eternal redemption. In Confucianism, it is mandatory to assess the reciprocity of kindness and injury while forgiving the offender. In Zoroastrianism, it is required to seek forgiveness from the offended ones, while God can't force anyone to forgive. In Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, the pathway of hatred and revenge is immortal, while forgiveness breaks the cycle of hate and resentment, and leads to the pathway of liberation (Hunter, 2007; Pragya, 2017). The current study revealed that in Islamic scriptures, the meaning and process of forgiveness includes accepting one's offense or sin, and then seeking divine forgiveness through recommended ways, depending upon the nature of sin or offense. Seeking divine forgiveness acknowledges human imperfection while fostering faith, humility, and a closer relationship with Allah (SWT), who is infinitely merciful and just. Unlike some traditions, Islam emphasizes justice alongside forgiveness, but encourages believers to forgive as a reflection of virtue. This act alleviates guilt, anxiety, and despair, while promoting emotional healing, empathy, and self-awareness. Forgiveness strengthens relationships by fostering trust, reconciliation, and harmony, resolving conflicts, and healing emotional wounds. On a societal level, it nurtures a culture of compassion, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence, contributing to justice and preventing harm. Ultimately, divine forgiveness in all religions, uplifts individuals, heals relationships, and builds a more harmonious and compassionate world.

6.1. Limitations and Suggestions

The current study focused on the conceptualization of divine forgiveness with reference to Islamic theology including the narrative, perspectives, experiences and opinions of the Islamic scholars only in Pakistan, however, it is suggested to include the experiences and perspectives of general Muslim population who attempt to seek divine forgiveness to enhance the generalizability of the construct. Moreover the emphasis is on the narratives shared by the Islamic scholars, while it is recommended to testify the utility of divine forgiveness, with respect to the varied socio-cultural factors, in dealing the dysfunction experienced by the perpetrators or offenders. As Pakistan follows a collectivist culture, where people form closely knitted relationships (Hofstede, 2015) by developing interpersonal trust, loyalty, obedience to the group, altruism, honor and interdependence (Khayyam, Ullah, & Shah, 2018). Because these values significantly affect the construct of divine forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness, therefore it is recommended to explore it in various cultures and traditions, including individualistic cultures.

6.2. Implications

The current study provides a comprehensive, socio-cultural and religious and scientific framework to mental-health professionals, policy makers, and religious scholars, counsellors, clinicians, forensic and correctional psychologists to help clients understand their guilt, despair, depression, anxiety and PTSD associated with sin or interpersonal transgression. This will provide

an evidence to comprehend their actions with respect to the factual and mythical definition of divine forgiveness. The current study provides implication to incorporate the role of sin, offense and crimes in indigenous psychotherapy models, psychoeducation and management and correctional strategies to accommodate the issues associated with crimes, legal violations and offenses.

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