

## Self-Forgiveness in Individuals with Suicide Attempt

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### ABSTRACT

Suicide attempt defined as potential self-harm behavior, devoted to oneself, followed by a desire to die as a result with non-fatal consequences. Individuals with attempted suicide who did not experience death felt a conflict within themselves. This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and aims to examine self-forgiveness of individuals who attempted suicide. This research was conducted with qualitative method using a case study approach and data analysis by Miles-Huberman. The research sample was taken using purposive sampling with several criteria, namely individuals aged 15 to 29 years old, college students, and had attempted suicide. The participants of this study were three people who were researched by deep interview and document study. The results of this study indicate that the three participants can forgive themselves after committing suicide attempts. From the results of the interview, it was also known that the three participants had difficulty returning to forgive themselves in certain situations, especially when relapses of the three participants. The results also showed that self-forgiveness that was carried out did not necessarily eliminate the thoughts of suicide experienced by the three participants.

**Keywords:** Self-forgiveness; suicide attempt; Covid-19

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### INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a burden for countries across the world. The data from World Health Organization (WHO) shows that 800,000 people died due to suicide, this fact can be aligned with findings stating that the global burden of suicide reaches 78% where the biggest cause of suicide is depression (WHO, 2019). Suicide is the second source of death for people aged 15-29 years, in addition 79% of the suicides occurred in low-income countries, including Indonesia (Kemenkes, 2019). The survey from Databoks shows that the number of suicides in 2017 was 8.09 per 100 thousand population, this figure is likely to be higher because it is considered that the existing data does not cover the whole number of suicides in Indonesia (Databoks, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on mental health. The study found that 53.8% of people experienced moderate to severe psychological impact due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, 16.5% had moderate to severe depression, and 28.8% had moderate to severe anxiety (Wang, et al., 2020). The increase of mental health disorders due to Covid-19 is also accompanied by the increase of suicide risks due to anxiety, economic uncertainty, grief, and suicide risk of individuals who have had previous mental disorders (Sher, 2020). From this study it can be concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the risk of suicide in the community.

Suicide is defined as a deliberate act that is meant to cause death to oneself. Meanwhile, non-fatal suicidal behaviors and thoughts are classified separately into several terms which are part of suicide

behaviors. The term is divided into suicide ideation which refers to thoughts of ending one's life. Furthermore, the suicide plan is a specific method formulation aimed at killing oneself. The last one is suicide attempt, which is defined as self-injurious behavior with the aim of ending life, but the impact is not fatal or does not cause death to individuals (Nock, et al., 2008).

Individuals with suicide attempt experienced intrapersonal conflict after trying to kill themselves. This of course has an impact on the individual's life after failing suicide attempt. There are cognitive distortions experienced by individuals after the failure of suicide attempt due to adverse social life, physical illness, and psychiatric illness, which can change after a suicide attempt. There is circumstantial evidence that cognitive distortions cause individuals to feel guilty and feel that their suicide attempt was preventable (Ram, Darshan, Rao, & Honagodu, 2012).

Research examining how individuals survive a suicide attempt has found that those who survive attempted suicide feel disconnected from the social environment and feel intense suffering. However, from this emotional state there is a balance where the individual continues to sustain intense suffering, commit further suicide, or endure for a better future (Maple, McKay, & Sanford, 2019).

Self-forgiveness is one of the protective factors for suicide attempts. Based on research self-forgiveness is proven to be an essential factor that helps individuals recover from depression thus preventing the act of killing oneself (Jung, et al., 2019). The concept of self-forgiveness has been shown in several studies to be an essential factor in reducing suicidal tendencies. There are research results showing that self-forgiveness is associated with a low risk of suicide, self-forgiveness interacts with risk factors to reduce the adverse effects of suicide. Meanwhile, the indirect impact caused by self-forgiveness is being able to nourish mood and social function, thereby reducing the risk of suicide (Hirsch, Webb, & Toussaint, 2017). Another study has found that higher levels of attachment are associated with suicidal behavior whereas self-forgiveness and resilience have been shown to be protective factors against suicidal ideation (Nagra, Lin, & Upthegrove, 2016).

The psychological definition of self-forgiveness was first introduced by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1996) as an image where the individuals stop hating themselves for their mistakes and develop compassion, generosity, and self-love. Individuals who punish themselves for their wrongdoings try to rid themselves from negative emotions and cognition. This process is accompanied by an intention to repair the spiritual, social and psychological damage (Woodyatt, Worthington, Wenzel, & Griffin, 2017). To examine more deeply about these problems, researchers conducted research to further investigate self-forgiveness in individuals with suicide attempt.

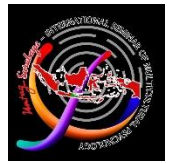
## METHOD

This study used qualitative research method because it helped researchers carry out an in-depth analysis of self-forgiveness in individuals with suicide attempts. In this study, the qualitative method is expected to provide an understanding of how individuals who attempt suicide can forgive themselves after failing to die. Researchers examined several aspects including stages of self-forgiveness, determination models of self-forgiveness, and dimensions of self-forgiveness.

### Research Design

The research design used by researchers in this study is a case study approach. Case study is a research design that focuses on a specific unit, namely individuals, communities, and community organizations. Case study is a suitable model for clinical cases because they use an interpretive and qualitative narrative approach to support case research (Krampen & Krampen, 2016). In this study, the

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case study model used is one that focuses on individuals to examine self-forgiveness in individuals with suicide attempts.

### Participants

Three students in the age range 15 to 29 years were recruited using purposive sampling as the primary subjects in this study. Participants met the criteria, namely having attempted suicide. The participants' suicide attempts were caused by family, friendship, and relationship problems. Two female and one male participant were interviewed in-depth to find out the self-forgiveness process carried out by participants after committing suicide attempts.

Table 1

#### *Demographic Characteristics*

Name	Gender	Age	Education
MI	Female	22	College
HM	Male	21	College
RM	Female	21	College

### Instrument

Questions are given to participants in accordance with the guidelines formed from the aspects of self-forgiveness. The interview guide questions used in this study consisted of several aspects of self-forgiveness, namely the four phases of self-forgiveness (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996), the determination models of self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005), and dimensions of self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). These three aspects of self-forgiveness are used to compile interview questions as part of the participant data mining process.

### Research Procedure

Informed consent was given to participants before the interview was conducted. In-depth interviews are used to explore data about the self-forgiveness experienced by participants. Interviews were conducted by researchers according to guideline related to aspects of self-forgiveness. The in-depth interview process was carried out by researchers online during the Covid-19 pandemic. After the interview process, the researcher also conducted documentation study on the participants where participants voluntarily submitted documents in the form of diaries, recorded conversations via social media owned by the participants to support this study.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Interview data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis techniques. Miles and Huberman (1992) explain that the data in qualitative research is in the form of words not numbers where the data is obtained through interviews, observations and other methods which are then processed by recording and analyzing. The process of data analysis includes data reduction, data display, and verification.

## RESULT

### **Suicide Attempt**

The result of the in-depth interviews and document studies from all of the participants, researchers found out that the three participants have attempted suicide more than once. These suicide attempts were triggered by family problems, friendships, and relationship problems. The participants suffered injuries after attempting suicide, but unfortunately their desires to die did not happen and they survived. After surviving suicide, the three participants experienced intrapersonal conflicts that demanded them to forgive themselves. Furthermore, this study found out that after forgiving themselves, the suicidal tendencies possessed by the participants did not disappear. Even though, the participants have forgiven themselves they still have the desire to die.

### **The Four Phase of Self-forgiveness**

All of the participants went through the self-forgiveness stages to the deepening phase. Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1996) explain that there are four self-forgiveness stages. They are uncovering phase, decision phase, work phase, and the last is deepening phase. The three participants found meaning after failing to die during suicide attempts which is included in the deepening phase. The meaning found by the three participants was almost the same, namely feelings of empathy. The three participants feel empathy for other people who experienced the same thing about the desire to commit suicide attempts. From the interviews, the researches found that they show their empathetic feelings by helping others.

### **Determination Models of Self-forgiveness**

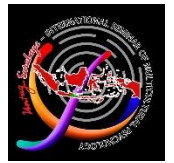
The application of the self-forgiveness determination model to the three participants also obtained similar information. The three participants applied Social-cognitive Determinants of Self-forgiveness. That is, the three participants felt that the people around them were contributors to the suicide attempts which were carried out both as a stimulant and to prevent participants in the suicide attempt.

### **Dimensions of Self-forgiveness**

The results of the analysis regarding the dimensions of self-forgiveness of the three subjects have differences. Two participants applied Pseudo Self-forgiveness, namely blaming other people for the suicide attempts that had been done. Meanwhile, one participant applied Self-punitiveness, where the participant felt guilty and deserved to be punished for having attempted suicide.

## DISCUSSION

The problems that triggered participants to commit suicide attempts come from the same source, one of which is family problem. Family problems are the risk factor for attempted suicide, this is consistent with research which states that family life that triggers stress is associated with an increase in suicide attempts (Xing, et al., 2010). It was found that suicide-related forgiveness poses including self-forgiveness is one of the factors to improve individual psychological well-being (Lee, Enright, & Kim, 2015). Participants managed to find meaning after suicide attempts which was in the deepening phase. This new meaning is the feeling of empathy that helps them improve their compassion by helping others.



Moreover, the three participants applied the social-cognitive determinants of self-forgiveness. This is consistent with a meta-analysis study which found that social factors in the form of family, friendships, and life events can be both risk and protective factors for suicidal behavior (Franklin, et al., 2015). Based on the research, there is information that the application of self-forgiveness can reduce the risk of suicidal behavior. Self-forgiveness increases adaptive problem solving and good emotional regulation skills, thereby reducing the risk of suicide attempts (Hirsch, Webb, & Toussaint, 2017). Self-forgiveness is proven to be a tool to help individuals recover from the consequences of mistakes made by individuals through limiting punishment, self-punishment, and otherwise increasing self-righteousness. Consistent with this evidence, self-forgiveness is proven to be able to restore value affirmation and self-acceptance to individuals (Pierro, Pica, Giannini, Higgins, & Kruglanski, 2018).

Result of this study also shows that self-forgiveness did not eliminate the thought of suicide experienced by three subjects. Researchers found out that the three subjects do not try to kill themselves after forgiving their mistakes, this finding proves that self-forgiveness can reduce desire of suicide attempt but also researchers found out that even the three subjects can forgive themselves they are still having the thought of suicide. This finding can be suggestion for the next research because there is the lack of exploration about why is individual still experiencing suicide thought although they forgave their mistakes after fail to death. However, there are a lot of findings that self-forgiveness can be protective factors of suicide attempt (Maple, McKay, & Sanford, 2019).

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