Workplace Forgiveness and Meaningful Work Experience in Islamic Context: Insights from a Mixed-Methods Study of Muslim Professionals

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Abstract

The present study implied mixed method approach to investigate the relationship between forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals in Pakistan. In quantitative phase, data were collected from a purposive sample comprised of teachers and doctors (N=200) working in different private and public sectors of institutions. Two standardized scales including Heartland Forgiveness Scale and, and The Work and Meaning Inventory were used for data collection. Results revealed a significant positive relationship between meaningful work experience and forgiveness. Furthermore, professionals from upper middle class experienced more meaningful work and they were more forgiver as compared to the middle class. Particularly, doctors demonstrated significantly greater experiences of meaningful work and higher levels of forgiveness than teachers. These findings underscore the potential role of forgiveness in fostering

meaningful workplace experiences, particularly in the face of professional challenges. In the qualitative part of the study, six semi structured interviews were using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture the depth and complexity of their lived experiences. Major themes were forgiveness as a path to emotional relief and workplace balance, reconnecting with purpose, perceiving work as a spiritual obligation, meaningful work experiences and personal well-being. The findings have practical implications for organizations, managers, and professionals aiming to enhance workplace well-being and career fulfillment. Moreover, the study offers valuable insights for organizational psychologists and practitioners in developing interventions that cultivate forgiveness to promote meaningful work experiences.

Keywords: Forgiveness, Meaningful Work Experience, Well-being, Workplace Balance, Purpose, Spiritual Obligation

1 Introduction

In today's fast-paced and competitive world, where ambition intersects human experience, qualities such as forgiveness, gratitude, and the pursuit of meaningful work have become increasingly significant in shaping our professional lives. The current study investigates the complex relationship between professional forgiveness and the experience of meaningful work. For professionals striving for growth and fulfillment, understanding how forgiveness contributes to workplace meaning is vital. Building on established theories of forgiveness and meaningful work this study seeks to demonstrate how these psychological resources contribute to improving overall well-being, professional engagement, and job satisfaction (Cao, van der Wal, & Taris, 2021).

Modern workplaces, often marked by high pressure and interpersonal conflict, can become fertile ground for resentment and strained relationships. Forgiveness, widely explored in psychological research, has been shown to enhance both relational dynamics and individual well-being (Dahiya, 2022). According to *Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (2001)*, forgiving others fosters positive emotions such as empathy and compassion, which expand an individual's ability to cope and build long-term psychological and social resources. Similarly, ***Social Exchange Theory by*** Blau (1964) highlights that forgiveness can strengthen mutual trust and reciprocity among colleagues, reducing conflict and promoting a more cooperative and satisfying work environment. Across various cultures and religious traditions, including Islam, forgiveness is regarded as both a moral virtue and a duty (Chenji & Sode, 2024). Empirical research has consistently shown that forgiveness can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and anger, while simultaneously increasing optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Yildirim, Dilekçi, & Manap, 2024). It also plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds and improving conflict resolution (Yamuna & Phillips, 2024). However, forgiveness is not always straightforward or desirable, depending on various factors such as the

relationship with the offender, the severity of the wrongdoing, and the offender's

remorse (Brady, Saldanha, & Barclay, 2023). Forgiveness involves releasing

negative thoughts and feelings toward a transgressor, reducing anger and the

desire for revenge. Studies suggest that this emotional release is associated with

greater life satisfaction and improved mental health (Khan, Elahi, & Abid, 2021).

In organizational contexts, forgiveness has been shown to enhance the experience

of meaningful work. Letting go of past grievances allows individuals to engage

more fully in the present, increasing their perception of purpose in their work

(Haselhuhn & Ormiston, 2024). Forgiveness contributes to a more positive work

environment, which in turn promotes a deeper sense of meaningful labor.

Understanding the nature and impact of meaningful work is essential, as it plays a

significant role in psychological well-being and professional satisfaction.

Meaningful work has been linked to higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement,

and performance, along with reduced burnout, absenteeism, and turnover (Wang

& Wang, 2023). It enhances one's sense of identity, autonomy, and purpose,

improving overall happiness and life quality (Lee & Park, 2023). However, the

experience of meaningful work is neither fixed nor universal. It is a subjective and

evolving phenomenon that varies across individuals, contexts, and time (Nguyen & Tran, 2023). Understanding the factors that influence one's sense of meaning in work is crucial for fostering long-term engagement and professional development. By exploring these psychological mechanisms, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how inner resources can foster professional well-being and fulfillment in the workplace.

The relationship between forgiveness and meaningful work is crucial for understanding the well-being and job satisfaction of Pakistani professionals, particularly doctors and teachers, who face high levels of stress and pressure in their professions. Doctors deal with long hours, emotional tolls from patient care, and the demand for high-quality services, leading to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2023). Similarly, teachers face stress from classroom management, heavy workloads, and high expectations from parents and authorities (Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2021). Forgiveness can reduce stress and interpersonal conflict, potentially enhancing job satisfaction and the sense of meaningful work (Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015).

Given the unique socio-cultural context of Pakistan, where workplace dynamics and stressors differ from Western settings, examining these relationships among Pakistani professionals is particularly relevant (Rashid, Khan, & Raza, 2017). The study aims to fill this gap by exploring how forgiveness influences meaningful work. Understanding these dynamics can lead to culturally tailored interventions that improve professionals' psychological well-being in Pakistan.

This study will contribute to the existing literature on occupational health psychology by providing insights into how forgiveness can foster a supportive and fulfilling work environment for doctors and teachers in Pakistan. It will also offer practical strategies to improve emotional resilience and job satisfaction, addressing the specific needs of professionals in these demanding fields.

2. Method

Pattern of Research

2.1 Research Design

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A mixed method approach has been used to explore the association between forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals.

A. *Pattern of Qualitative Research*

The objective of the qualitative part was to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the subject of study ([Yin 2017](#)). Key questions were how forgiveness help in meaningful work experience and explore the significance of forgiveness with reference to Islamic perspective. Semi structured interviews were conducted with six participants: four medical doctors and four college teachers, selected through purposive sampling. All participants had a minimum of five years of professional experience and identified as practicing Muslims. In this research, maximum diversity in the sample such as types of courses teacher taught, wards in hospitals, working hours and ages of the professionals was utilized to ascertain the composition of the study group. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to capture the depth and complexity of their lived experiences. The identities of the participants were kept confidential, and they were labelled as T1, T2 to T8. The demographic characteristics of the study group are as follows (See Table 1):

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Table 1 . The study group of the qualitative research.

| Name Codes	Gender	Profession	Experience (Years)	Age (Years)	Location
T1	Male	Teacher	5	33	Islamabad
T2	Male	Teacher	7	38	Islamabad
T3	Female	Teacher	6	35	Rawalpindi
T4	Female	Teacher	10	40	Rawalpindi
T5	Female	Doctor	5	37	Rawalpindi
T6	Female	Doctor	5	36	Islamabad
T7	Male	Doctor	6	40	Rawalpindi
T8	Male	Doctor	8	44	Islamabad

a. **Findings and Discussion**

To explore how forgiveness influences the experience of meaningful work among professionals, semi structured interviews were conducted and analyzed by using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to capture the depth and complexity of their lived experiences. Major themes were forgiveness as a path to emotional relief and workplace balance, reconnecting with purpose, perceiving

work as a spiritual obligation, meaningful work experiences and inner satisfaction

(see figure 1)
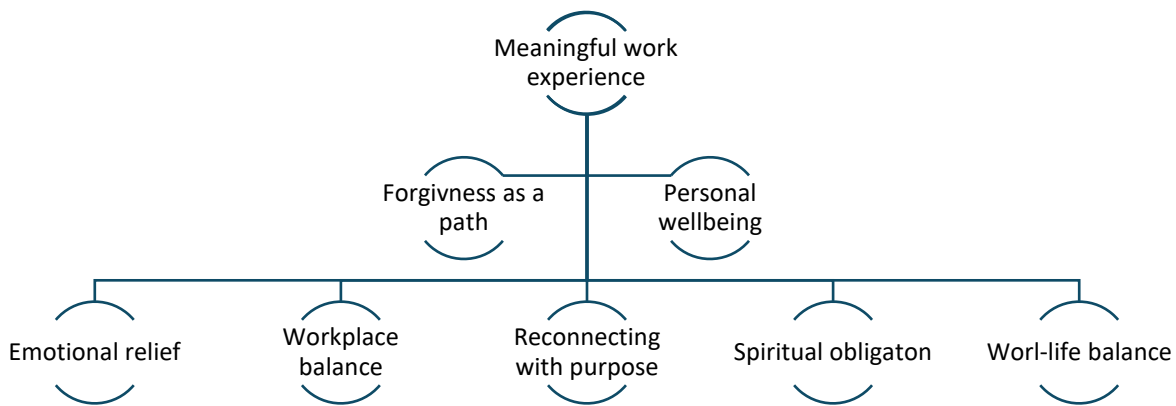
Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Major Themes

1. Meaningful Work Experience

One of the prominent them was meaningful work experience which is a

powerful source of personal contentment and

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continual inspiration. Professionals especially those who served humanity directly like doctors, nurses, and teachers frequently described their roles not merely as jobs, but as a meaningful life experience that provided a sense of purpose and identity. One doctor shared, "*Even on the toughest days, knowing I make a difference in someone's life keeps me going.*" Similarly, a schoolteacher stated, "*When students approached me and says I helped shape their future or helped them in any way, it makes all the challenges worthwhile.*"

A female physician reflected, "*There are many frustrated and stressful situations at workplace, but the moment a patient thanks me with genuine relief in their eyes that's when I remember why I chose this path and feel purpose in my career.*" Participants emphasized that their work became more meaningful when it reflects their core values and when they witnessed tangible upshots of their efforts directly in the lives of others.

This theme aligns with present-day psychological researches, suggesting that meaningful work is associated with purposeful life, job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and overall well-being (Allan et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019).

Similarly, studies show that those who perceive their work as meaningful are more resilient and stronger commitment to their organizations (Martela & Riekki, 2020). In this study, participants' narratives indicated that meaningful work acted as a psychological safeguard and help them to maintain a positive sense of professional identity.

2. *Forgiveness as a path to emotional relief and workplace balance*

The first theme showing that participants described forgiveness as a psychological release from the burden of interpersonal conflict, especially in high-stress work environments. As one of the doctor reported that forgiving colleagues or administrative staff after conflicts allowed him to maintain focus on patient care, while teachers mentioned that forgiving students or peers helped to reduce emotional exhaustion. One teacher expressed, *"Holding on to resentment only drained my energy. When I forgave, I could teach with more peace and clarity."* One lady doctor reported that "*when I learned the power of forgiveness for anyone who hearts me or creates hurdles, it saves my energy and started to focus more on my career. I feel very relaxed now*". Participants also linked

forgiveness with enhanced professional performance, suggesting that emotional well-being directly contributed to their productivity and commitment.

The first theme resonates with existing psychological literature, which emphasizes that forgiveness supports emotional regulation, alleviates stress, and strengthens interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Worthington et al., 2007). Participants in this study frequently portrayed forgiveness as essential for maintaining mental health and sustaining productivity. By releasing interpersonal grievances, they were able to stay emotionally present and focused on their tasks. This underscores the idea that emotional recovery through forgiveness directly enhances both professional performance and psychological resilience

1. *Personal Well being*

The third theme highlighted that participants gave more weightage to their well-well-being at work place and they consistently connect this with their capacity to work effectively and productively. One schoolteacher stated, "*When I started prioritizing my overall wellbeing, I noticed I was more patient with my students and less reactive.*" A male doctor shared, *"I used to ignore my stress and*

continued my overtime, that made me more frustrated and my even personal life getting disturbed. But once I began daily walks and brief meditations, I felt more in control and less pressure at work."

Participants talk reflected that their small steps towards wellbeing, positively effects their relationship, increase their energy level and they feel more connected to their work and find purpose in their lives. As one female doctor remarked, "*I realized that taking care of my well-being is not selfish, this is actually important for me. So started to forgive every person every situation that has hindered previously for my own peace of mind. This further gave me motivation and energy to help other genuinely.*"

This theme resonates strongly with recent psychological literature, which emphasizes the critical role of personal well-being in reducing occupational stress and enhancing job performance (Hu et al., 2021; Grant, 2021). Research demonstrates that emotional self-awareness, rest, and boundary-setting are key strategies for maintaining well-being, especially in caregiving and educational professions (Kinnunen et al., 2020). The narratives in this study support the view

that sustained professional success and psychological resilience depend on maintaining one's personal well-being. Participants described well-being not only as a personal goal but as a professional necessity that allowed them to remain empathetic, focused, and effective in high-stress environments.

2. *Reconnecting with Purpose*

A recurring theme was reconnecting with purpose. Professionals felt that forgiveness helped them look beyond personal grievances and realign with their core values. This process often led to increased compassion, patience, and a renewed sense of purpose in serving others. One doctor reflected, *"Forgiveness reminded me why I entered this profession to help, not to compete or hold grudges."*

This second theme illustrates how forgiveness serves as a catalyst for reconnecting with one's professional purpose. This aligns with research on meaningful work, which suggests that individuals experience greater job satisfaction when their roles reflect personal values and contribute to the greater good (Steger et al., 2012). Through forgiveness, participants moved beyond ego-

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driven responses and re-engaged with the deeper significance of their roles as

healers, educators, and agents of change. This reorientation toward purpose is

vital for sustaining motivation and long-term commitment in the workplace.

3. *Work as a Spiritual Obligation*

All participants highlighted the Islamic principles that guide their attitudes

toward forgiveness and meaningful work. Verses from the Qur'an (e.g., Surah

Ash-Shura 42:40 – *"The reward of an evil deed is its equivalent. But whoever*

pardons and makes reconciliation, his reward is [due] from Allah.") cited as

motivating factors. Participants described their work as a form of ibadah

(worship) and saw forgiveness as essential to upholding Islamic ethics. They also

associated their professions with contributing to the collective good, whether

through healing, educating, or mentoring, which reinforced their sense of spiritual

purpose. This one of the most profound theme, perhaps emerged from the

participants' Islamic worldview, wherein forgiveness is not only a moral

obligation but also a path to spiritual growth. The Qur'an consistently extols the

virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation (e.g., Surah Al-Imran 3:134; Surah Ash-

Shura 42:40), framing it as both a divine imperative and a source of inner

tranquillity. Participants' understanding of work as *ibadah* (worship) infused their professional responsibilities with sacred meaning, encouraging humility, service, and social harmony. This spiritual dimension deepened their experience of meaningful work and shaped their ethical approach to workplace challenges.

4. Work-life Balance: Navigating Between Job Responsibilities and Personal Wellbeing

A key theme that emerged from the discussions was the importance of maintaining balance in the workplace. Professionals highlighted how forgiveness played a crucial role in reducing emotional tension and restoring equilibrium between work and personal life. By letting go of past grievances and resentments, employees were able to manage stress more effectively, leading to better mental and emotional health. This sense of balance allowed them to approach their work with a clearer mind and a healthier attitude. One of them noted, "Forgiving others at work helps me keep my perspective, making it easier to focus on the bigger picture and stay calm under pressure." This aligns with research on work-life balance, which suggests that when employees feel emotionally at peace, they are better equipped to perform their tasks, engage with colleagues, and maintain a

sustainable professional life (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Through forgiveness, professionals were able to foster a work environment that supported both their well-being and their productivity, striking a necessary balance between personal fulfillment and career success. The qualitative findings reveal that forgiveness serves as a critical process through which professionals reclaim emotional stability, deepen their sense of purpose, and align their daily work with Islamic values and social contribution.

B. **Pattern of Quantitative Research**

Main objective of the quantitative study was to investigate the relationship between forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals (Teachers and Doctors). Furthermore, it was aimed to explore demographic differences in terms of the study variables.

b. Hypotheses:

To achieve the objectives presented above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There would be a significant positive relationship between forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals (Teachers and Doctors).

2. There would be a significant socioeconomic differences in terms of forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals (Teachers and Doctors).

3. Significant professional differences would be found in terms of forgiveness and experiencing meaningful work among professionals (Teachers and Doctors).

c. *Participants*

A purposive sample consisted of 200 professionals, including teachers (n=100) and doctors (n=100), working in different educational and healthcare sectors, mainly from Islamabad and Rawalpindi district. Only those participants with at least one year of work experience in the same organization were included. The age range of the participants was 25-50 (*M*=33.6, *SD*=7.2)

d. *Instruments*

Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Thompson et al., 2005)

Forgiveness was measured using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale. It is an 18-item self-report inventory that measures an individual's general predisposition to forgive. It includes a total Forgiveness Score and three subscale scores (Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations). Each subscale is made up of 6 items with a 7-point Likert scale where 1 mean "Almost always false of me" and 7 means "Almost always true of me". Scores are calculated by adding across appropriate items. Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17 are reverse scored. The Total Forgiveness score ranges from 18 to 126, and each subscale score ranges from 6 to 42. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale has high acceptable

reliability (α = .72, .87) and has shown convergent and discriminant validity with relevant constructs such as other measures of forgiveness, mental health, and beliefs. Higher the score on this scale showed high level of forgiveness while low level of score indicated low level of forgiveness.

Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012)

Experiencing meaningful work was measured using the Work and Meaning Inventory. It is a self-report inventory that assesses the experiencing meaningfulness of work. The scale consists of 10 items that measure three dimensions: positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivations. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means 'Strongly disagree' and 5 means 'Strongly agree.' Scores are calculated by adding across appropriate items. Higher scores indicate a higher perception of meaningful work. The scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values typically reported around .90.

e. *Procedure*

After getting approval from research and ethical committee, respective educational institutes and hospitals were short-listed for data collection as sample inclusion criteria were teachers and doctors. Data was collected from both the private and government sectors. Confidentiality and privacy of the data and participants were assured. Informed consent was obtained from participants, ensuring their voluntary participation. Participants were informed about their right to participate and withdraw from the research at any time. They were assured that their information would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the participants, and 260 questioners were received back. After screening the data, 60 questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete and missing data, and the final 200 questionnaires were retained in the study.

2) Results

Major aim of the quantitative phase was to investigate the relationship between forgiveness and meaningful work experience among professionals in Pakistan. To meet the objectives of the current study, psychometric properties of

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the scales were checked and data was screened through different statistical

techniques. Details of all analysis and descriptions is as following:

Table 2

Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample (N=200)

Demographic Variables		f	%	M	SD
Age			43	33.6	7.2
Gender	Male	96	48%		
	Female	104	52%		
Socio-Economic status	Middle	120	60%		
	Upper middle	80	40%		
Profession	Teachers	100	50%		
	Doctors	100	50%		

Table 2 indicated demographic detail of the sample including age, gender,

socioeconomic status and profession.

Table 3

Correlation in Relation Between Forgiveness and Meaningful Work Experience(N=200)

Variable	1	2
1. Forgiveness	-	.88**
2. Meaningful Work	-	-

*Note: **p < .01*

Results in Table 3 indicated significant and positive correlation between forgiveness and meaningful work experience ($r = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation and T-Test Across Socioeconomic Status (N=200)

Variables	Middle SES		Upper Middle SES				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*Cohen's d*
Forgiveness	41.43	6.62	44.8	6.74	-2.7	.01	0.50
Meaningful Work Experience	41.43	6.62	43.8	6.1	-1.90	.05	0.37

Note. SES= socioeconomic status, *M*= mean, *SD*= Standard Deviations

Results found significant socioeconomic differences and revealed that upper middle class showed more level of forgiveness and meaningful work experience as compared to the middle class. These differences are evident and meaningful as effect size is larger for upper middle-class scores.

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t- test Across Professionals (N=200)

Variables	Teachers		Doctors					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*Cohen's*	*d*
Forgiveness	40.10	6.00	47.80	6.50	-4.86	.01	1.22	
Meaningful Work Experience	39.50	5.80	48.20	6.10	-5.76	.05	1.40	

Note. *M*= mean, *SD*= Standard Deviations

Results in table 5 showed that on forgiveness, doctors ($M = 47.80$, $SD = 6.62$) scored significantly higher than the teachers ($M = 40.10$, $SD = 6.00$), $t(198) = -4.86$, $p = .01$, with a larger effect size (Cohen's d = 1.22).

Furthermore, results also indicated higher level of meaningful work experience among doctors ($M = 48.20$, $SD = 6.61$) as compared to teachers ($M = 39.50$, $SD = 6.10$) with larger effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.40$).

3) Discussion and Conclusion

Finding of the present study revealed a positive and significant relationship between experiencing meaningful work and forgiveness among professionals (teachers and doctors). Previous literature indicated similar results by revealing that those who forgive are more likely to experience job satisfaction and value at their workplace (Toussaint & Friedman, 2009). In Pakistani culture, where interpersonal relationships and social harmony are highly valued, the ability to forgive is likely to enhance job satisfaction and meaningful work experience and further contribute to positive work culture. (Javed et al., 2022; Faridi et al., 2021). The results suggest that incorporating forgiveness can enhance employees' perceptions of experiencing meaningful work, in line with the cultural values of emotional resilience and interpersonal harmony (Javed et al., 2022).

Different theories have also emphases the importance of positive emotions like forgiveness at personal and professional level which resonates with findings

of the present study. According to Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions such as forgiveness can broaden one's perspective, leading to a greater sense of meaning in work and improved interpersonal relationships.

Results found that upper middle-class experience more meaningful work experience and they forgive more. This is might be because they enjoy higher socioeconomic security, independence, relatively economic stability and exposure to personal development opportunities. These findings are aligned with previous studies showing that usually upper-middle class typically occupies more stable and significant positions in academia, business, and medicine especially which strengthens their personal worth and they find their career more meaningful (Steger et al., 2012). In Pakistan, the middle class often engages in jobs with limited control, routine work, and job insecurity, which restrict the development of meaning and personal growth. In Pakistani society, where status and financial stability heavily influence social identity, the upper-middle class is also more likely to participate and focus on their career by leaving all negative things behind for their personal and professional growth.

Results revealed that medical doctors were more forgivers and were experiencing more meaningful work than teachers. This might be because doctors often engage directly in life-saving or life-enhancing actions, which immediately reflect the value and impact of their work. This tangible difference in people's lives reinforces a deep sense of purpose and meaning (Wood et al., 2010). In Pakistani culture, doctors generally enjoy high social prestige and public respect, which reinforces their professional identity and sense of contribution. This external validation contributes to greater perceived work significance. On other hand, teachers often receive low salaries and minimal societal recognition, which negatively influence their professional worth and purpose at workplace. While Pakistani teachers are the backbone of the society, they often experience low motivation, fewer rewards, no facilitation and limited emotional fulfillment, burdens for irrelevant activities all of which impact their ability to experience meaningful work and practice forgiveness.

The findings have practical implications for organizations, managers, and professionals aiming to reduce burnout, improve workplace environment, enhance workplace well-being and career fulfillment. However, the study has shortcoming related to the use of self-reported measures,

generalizability due to the specificity of the sample (teachers and doctors).

Diverse organizational culture also may limit the generalizability across different

professions. However, the study offers valuable insights for organizational

psychologists and practitioners in developing interventions that cultivate

forgiveness to promote meaningful work experiences. It is recommended to

conduct longitudinal research to monitor the evolution of attitudes toward

meaningful work experiences, forgiveness, and other positive behaviors over

time.

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