

REACH Forgiveness Among Participants in Tunisia



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Acknowledgments

About Salam Institute for Peace and Justice

Founded nearly twenty years ago, Salam Institute is dedicated to advancing peacebuilding through education, dialogue, and applied research. Operating across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, Salam promotes interfaith dialogue and nonviolent conflict resolution. Its mission is to empower educators, youth, and community leaders to engage critically and compassionately with their societies, guided by values of justice, inclusivity, nonviolence, and equality. Salam Institute is widely recognized for its innovative work on forgiveness education in the Arab region. It has developed localized, research-based curricula that address both the interpersonal and social dimensions of forgiveness, making it one of the few organizations that successfully bridges academic research and field-based practice. Through this integration, Salam sustains long-term impact and fosters resilient, peaceful communities.

Salam's unique approach: Salam Institute's work in forgiveness education is distinguished by three main strengths:

1. **Authentic, culturally rooted knowledge:** Salam develops educational resources based on Arab cultural contexts and expertise. Materials on interpersonal and social forgiveness serve diverse age groups—children, youth, and adults—ensuring that forgiveness becomes a life skill nurtured across generations.
2. **Evidence-based programming:** Salam's interventions are not limited to value promotion but are grounded in academic and field research, ensuring responsiveness to community needs and long-term relevance.
3. **Regional networks and partnerships:** Salam has cultivated a strong network of local organizations, faith leaders, and experts from 11 Arab countries, primarily through the Regional Network for Forgiveness and Reconciliation, enhancing regional learning and collaboration. Salam encourages collaboration with community-based organizations and advocates for collective capacity to embed forgiveness and reconciliation as social norms across the Arab region and across all areas of life.

Funder Acknowledgment

This study was supported by a grant from the Templeton World Charity Foundation (#TWCF2023-32554).

Key Findings

Demographics and Socioeconomic Profile

- Sample predominantly female (72%) and young (majority 21–29 years).
- Over half were single (56%) and most identified as Muslim (99.8%).
- Socioeconomic status was evenly distributed across categories.
- Education relatively advanced: 44% higher education, 14% postgraduate.
- About 20% were university students, mostly in graduate school; many not employed or not affiliated with educational institutions.
- Work experience was dominated by 1–3 years and >10 years categories.
- Religiosity very high: 94% rated religion, 93% rated prayer, and 97% rated personal values as very important.

Forgiveness Measures

- Decision to Forgive: Treatment group increased from pre- to posttest on decisional items.
- Emotional Forgiveness: Treatment group showed substantial gains posttest in caring, sympathy, and positive emotions toward offender; control group generally had lowest means.
- Trait Forgivingness: Modest improvements in treatment group.
- TRIM-Revenge and Avoidance: Treatment group decreased posttest on all items, including revenge, distance, and avoidance behaviors.
- TRIM-Benevolence: Treatment group increased posttest, reflecting greater goodwill and relational intentions.

Non-Forgiveness Measures

- Forbearance: Treatment group decreased posttest on most items.
 - Depression and Anxiety (BSI-12): After exposure, treatment group showed a mixed trend on depression items but consistent decrease on anxiety items.
 - State Hope: Scores decreased over time in the treatment group. Only one item showed gain posttest.
 - Wellbeing (SFI): Treatment group increased in some dimensions such as life satisfaction, happiness, and physical and mental health, but decreased in others such as acting to promote good and the ability to defer current happiness to the future.
-

Country Background: Tunisia

The Republic of Tunisia is a North African country located at the northernmost point of the continent, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and east, and bordering Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. With a total land area of approximately 164,000 square kilometers, Tunisia is one of the smaller countries in Africa but has a population of over 12 million, with a median age of about 33, reflecting a relatively youthful population compared to Europe and the United States but older than some North African countries such as Egypt. A majority of Tunisians live in the northern and eastern coastal regions, where fertile plains support most of the country's agriculture and urban centers. The capital city of Tunis is the largest metropolitan area and serves as the political, cultural, and economic hub of the country. Other major cities include Sfax, a major industrial port city, and Sousse, known for tourism. The dominant religion is Sunni Islam, with a small minority of Christians and Jews.

Tunisia has a rich historical and cultural heritage, dating back to ancient Carthage and the Roman Empire. The country is known for archaeological sites such as the Punic city of Carthage, the Roman city of Dougga, and El Djem amphitheater, which attract significant tourism each year. Following independence from French colonial rule in 1956, Tunisia transitioned from a monarchy to a republic, and has experienced periods of political reform and social change, including the 2011 revolution that led to a democratic transition. The current government is a unitary presidential republic, with a president, a prime minister, and a bicameral legislature.

Tunisia's economy is diversified, with key sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, mining (notably phosphate), tourism, and energy. Its strategic location along the Mediterranean has historically made it an important trading hub. In recent decades, the government has implemented economic reforms to encourage foreign investment by reducing bureaucratic requirements; modernizing infrastructure, especially road networks; and promoting renewable energy, particularly solar power. Despite these efforts, Tunisia faces economic challenges such as high youth unemployment, persistent inflation, brain drain, and high public debt. Education and literacy rates are relatively high in the region, although significant disparities exist between urban and rural areas.

Tunisia maintains diplomatic and economic relations with the European Union, the United States, and neighboring North African and Arab countries, and is a member of both the Arab League and the African Union. While facing challenges related to economic development, political stability, and environmental issues including water scarcity and climate change vulnerability along its coastal and interior regions, Tunisia continues to play an important role in North African and Mediterranean affairs, balancing modernization with preservation of its cultural and historical heritage.

The REACH Study

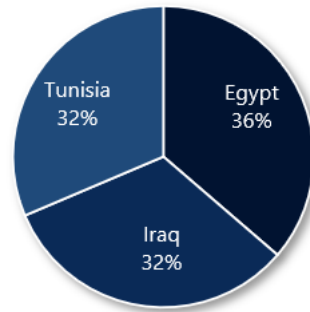
The aim of this project was to highlight the importance of forgiveness in Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It did so by expanding the application of the REACH program to Arabic-speaking communities. The REACH five-step forgiveness program has been tested in various regions worldwide, but not in the MENA region. This implementation study focused on three Arab countries—Tunisia, Egypt, and Iraq—all of which are post-conflict and/or have undergone political changes while experiencing rising levels of community violence in recent years. The REACH interpersonal forgiveness program which was developed by Worthington and colleagues (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014) has shown promising results in other countries, and has proven to be both cost-effective and impactful when compared with control groups. With a population exceeding 300 million in the MENA region, developing and implementing contextually relevant workbooks provides a valuable opportunity to emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation at the individual level, while also generating new knowledge on the feasibility of the REACH model as an intervention in the region.

Given the ongoing challenge of moving from deeply divided societies (ethnic, sectarian, and politically polarized etc.) toward social cohesion and stability, it is important to introduce frameworks for reconciliation and forgiveness in these three countries. Such transitions, through the rule of law, economic development, and transitional justice, can be best cemented at the interpersonal level and through education, building new models to address individual- and community-level conflicts. We hypothesized that, once adapted, the REACH program would have a higher impact in the intervention group as compared to the control group. Our study both addresses a current gap in interpersonal and community forgiveness literature and in the process offers a practical tool that can be implemented at the individual level.

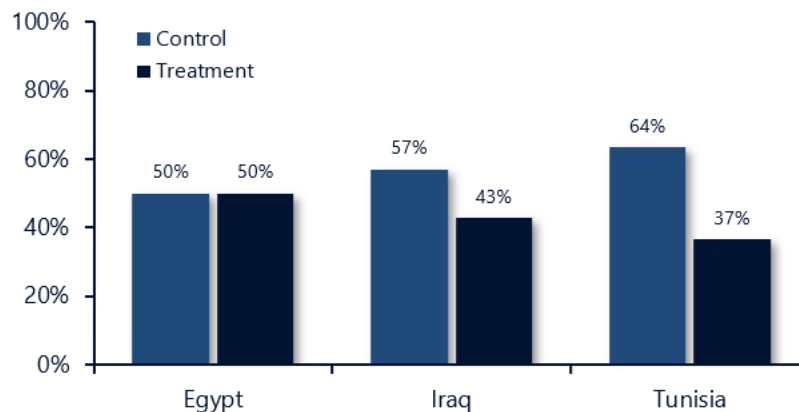
The REACH workbook was carefully reviewed, translated, and validated by Arabic-speaking academic experts in each of the three participating countries. The scales used in the international study were similarly translated and validated. From among the nine scales used that were used in the global study, the MENA validation panel selected the most appropriate ones to ensure sensitivity to local social, political, and cultural conditions. Once translation and validation were completed a sample of 600 participants was recruited in each country. This included teachers, counselors, students, and social workers. The study employed both a pre-post design and a control versus intervention comparison to evaluate the effectiveness of the REACH program.

Methodology

The study targeted school teachers, school counselors, and university students in Egypt, Iraq, and Tunisia, but due to budgetary and logistical constraints, as well as field personnel access to local education authorities, data collection was limited to areas accessible to the teams. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling, and (1) had to be at least 18 years old and (2) had to have prior experience of a personal hurt or harm that requires forgiveness. Data was collected in two stages: Wave 1 used an online questionnaire to capture demographic information and responses on forgiveness-related measures. Wave 2, administered after a gap of two weeks, included the REACH workbook intervention and post-intervention responses on the same measures. Surveys were deployed in Arabic between April and October 2025. The final sample consisted of 1,972 participants (Egypt 716; Iraq 637; Tunisia 619), with 1,115 completing only Wave 1 (control group) and 857 completing both waves (treatment group). Since this report focusses only on Tunisia, full sample statistics have been confined to an appendix at the end of this document.



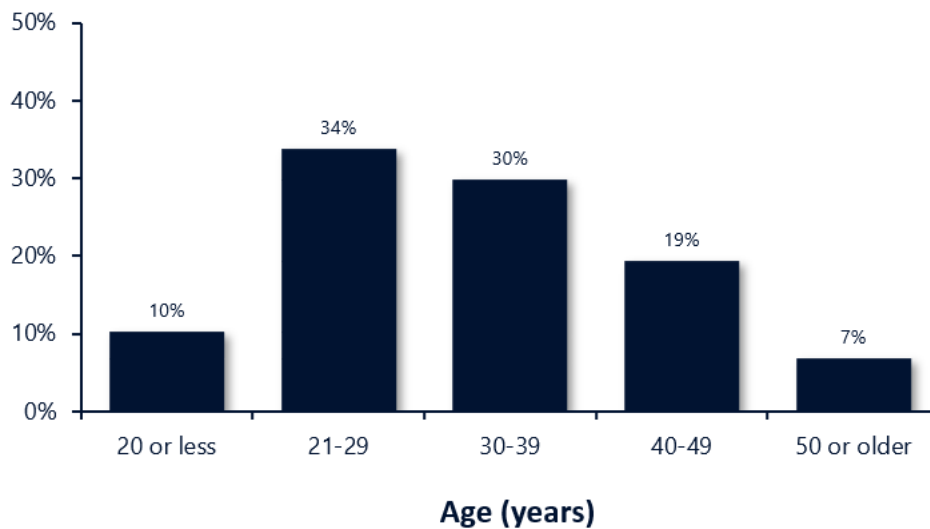
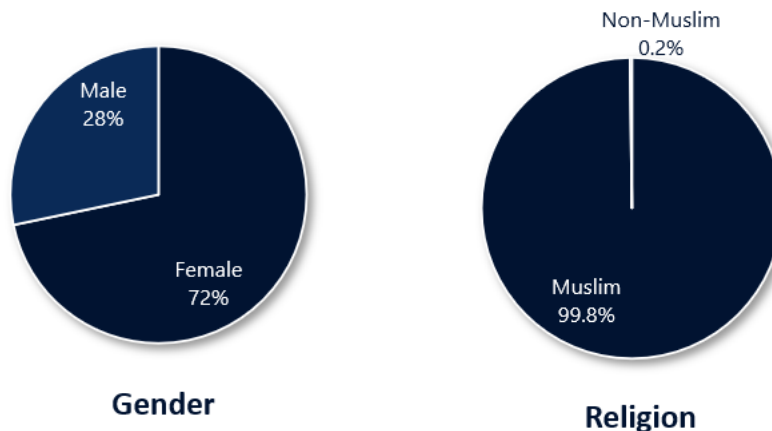
Country

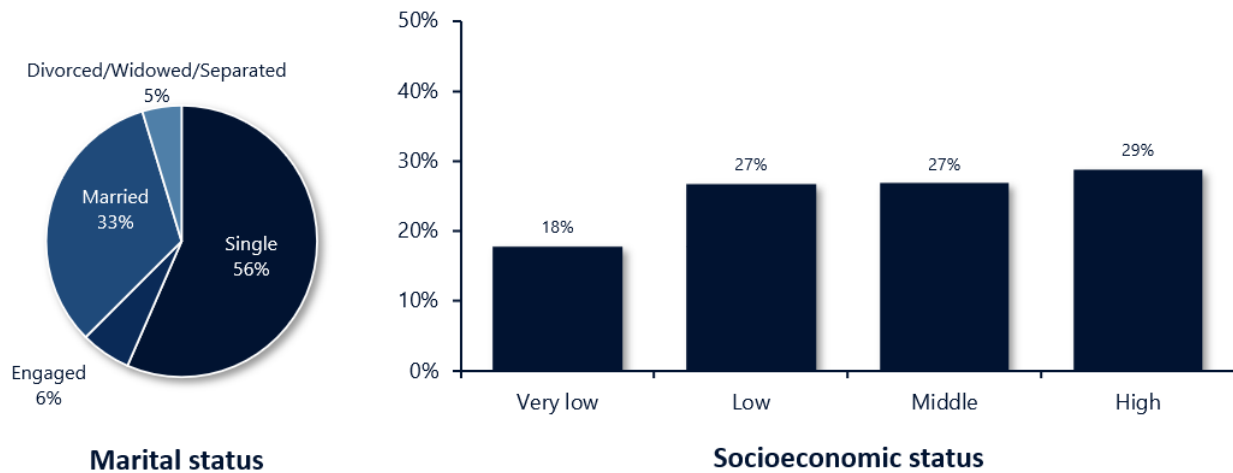


Study group by country

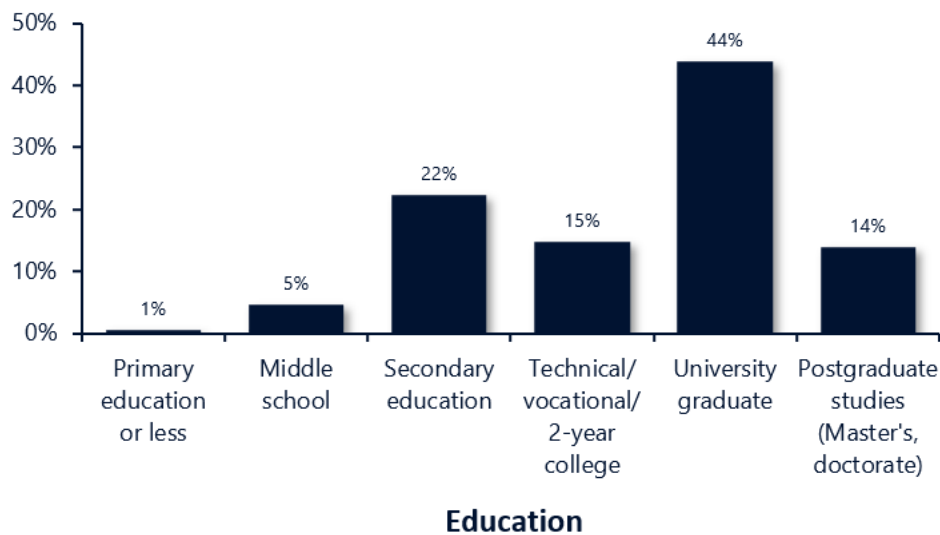
Demographics

For the 619 participants from Tunisia in the control and treatment groups, the majority were female, accounting for 72% of the sample. The age distribution was skewed towards younger adults, with the largest group aged 21–29 (33.8%), followed by those aged 30–39 (29.9%), and then by those aged 40–49 (19.4%), with smaller proportions in the 20 or less (10.2%) and 50 or older (6.8%) brackets. Most participants were married (56.5%), followed by married individuals (32.8%), with smaller percentages for engaged (6.0%) and for divorced, widowed, or separated (4.7%). The sample was predominantly Muslim (99.8%). Overall, the demographic profile indicates a young, largely female, and mostly single Muslim population.



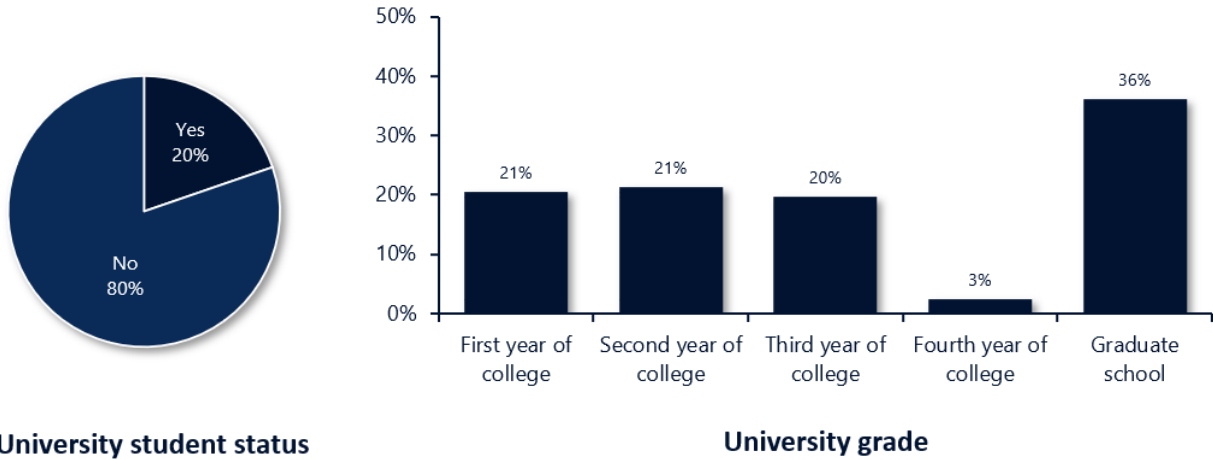


SES was based on a modified version of the scale developed by El-Gilany et al. (2012). In the Tunisian sample, socioeconomic status was approximately uniformly distributed, with 27–29% participants in each of low, medium, and high categories, and with relatively fewer individuals in the very low category (17.8%). Education level was high, with 43.8% of the participants having completed a university degree; another 28.6% with either a postgraduate degree or a 2-year college degree (or equivalent); 22.3% had completed secondary education; and only 5.3% had middle school or lower education. These figures suggest participant concentration in low to high SES and higher education levels.

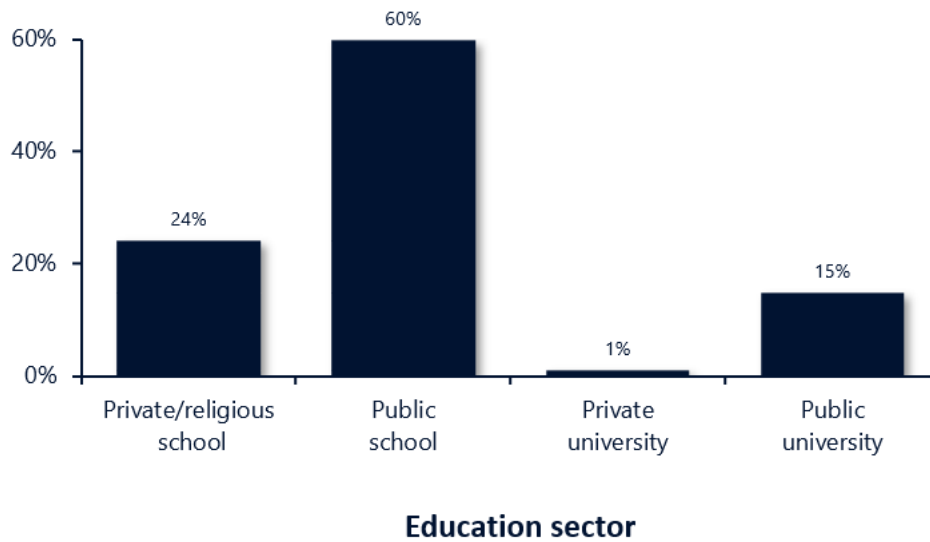


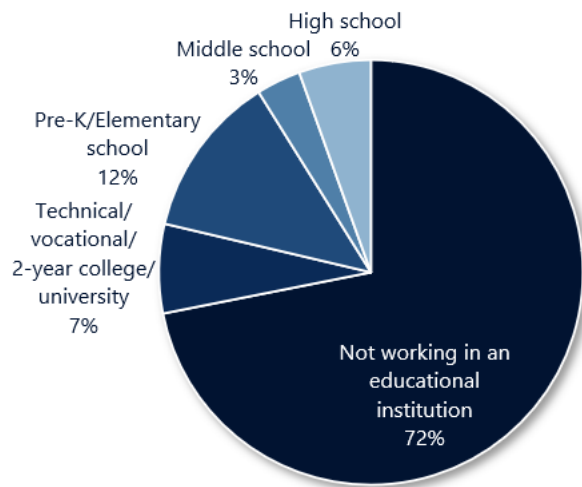
A majority of participants were not university students, with 80.3% reporting that they were not enrolled and 19.7% indicating they were currently attending university. Among those enrolled, the largest group was graduate students (36.1% of all university students) and the smallest group was fourth year students (2.5%), with the rest

evenly distributed (20–21%) in first year, second year, and third year of college. Information on this variable was collected only from those participants who had previously identified themselves as university students.

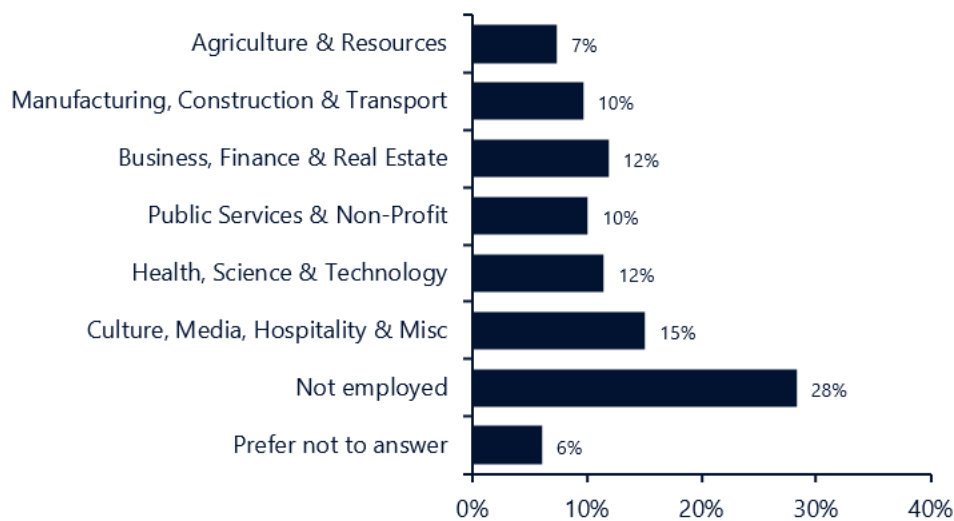


Among participants, information on educational sector was available for 174 individuals who worked in this sector (445 or 71.9% of the participants worked in other sectors). Of these 104 (59.8%) were associated with public schools, 24.1% with private/religious schools, 14.9% with public universities, and 1.1% with private universities. Regarding the type of educational institution where participants worked, 6.8% had technical, vocational, 2-year college, or university affiliation; 12.4% were affiliated with pre-K or elementary schools; 3.4% with middle schools; and 5.5% with high schools.





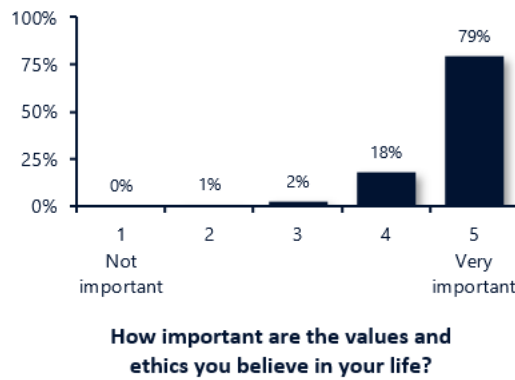
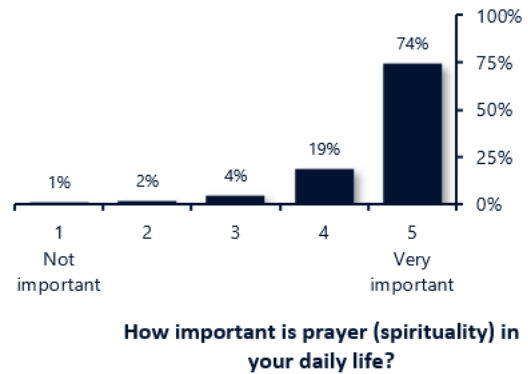
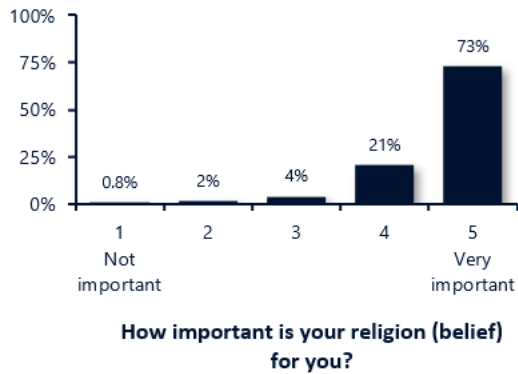
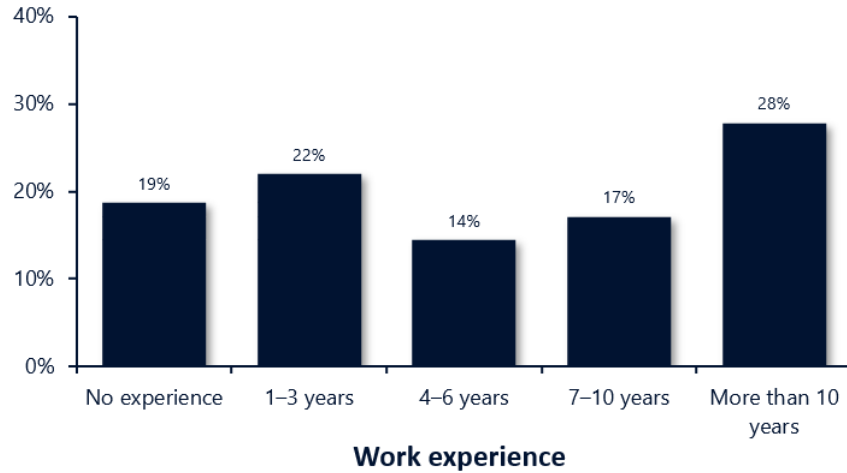
Type of educational institution



Non-educator industry classification

Information on industry was collected from the 445 participants who did not work in the education sector. Among these, the largest group was not employed (28.3%); followed by those working in culture, media, hospitality, and miscellaneous sector (15.1%); business, finance, and real estate (11.9%); health, science, and technology (11.5%); public services and non-profit (10.1%); manufacturing, construction, and transport (9.7%); and agriculture and resources (7.4%). A small proportion (6.1%) preferred not to answer this question. Work experience varied across the full sample, with 22.0% reporting 1–3 years, 14.4% 4–6 years, 17.1% 7–10 years, 27.8% more than 10 years, and 18.7% reporting no experience. Participants reported very high levels of religiosity. When asked how important their religion or belief was in their life, 94% rated it as important or very important. Similarly, when asked about the importance of prayer or spirituality in daily life, 93% rated it as

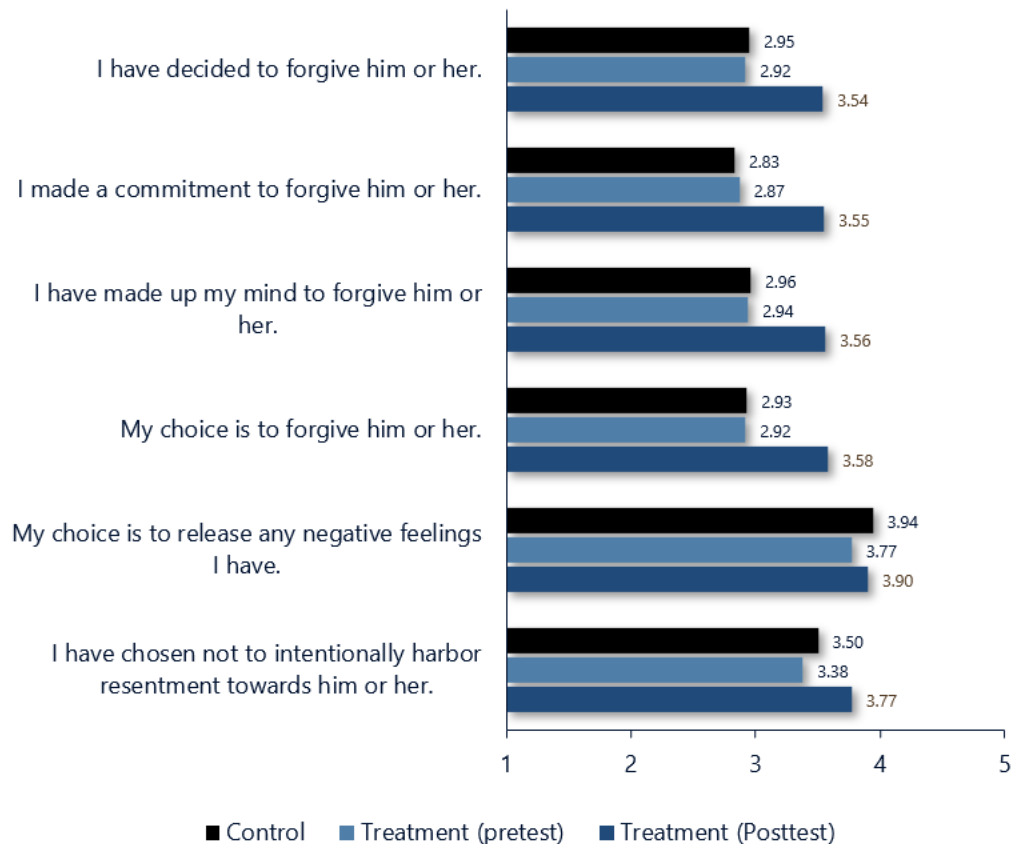
important or very important. Participants also placed strong emphasis on their values and ethics with 97% rating them as important or very important. Overall, a large majority of participants considered religion, spirituality, and personal values to be important in their lives.



Religiosity

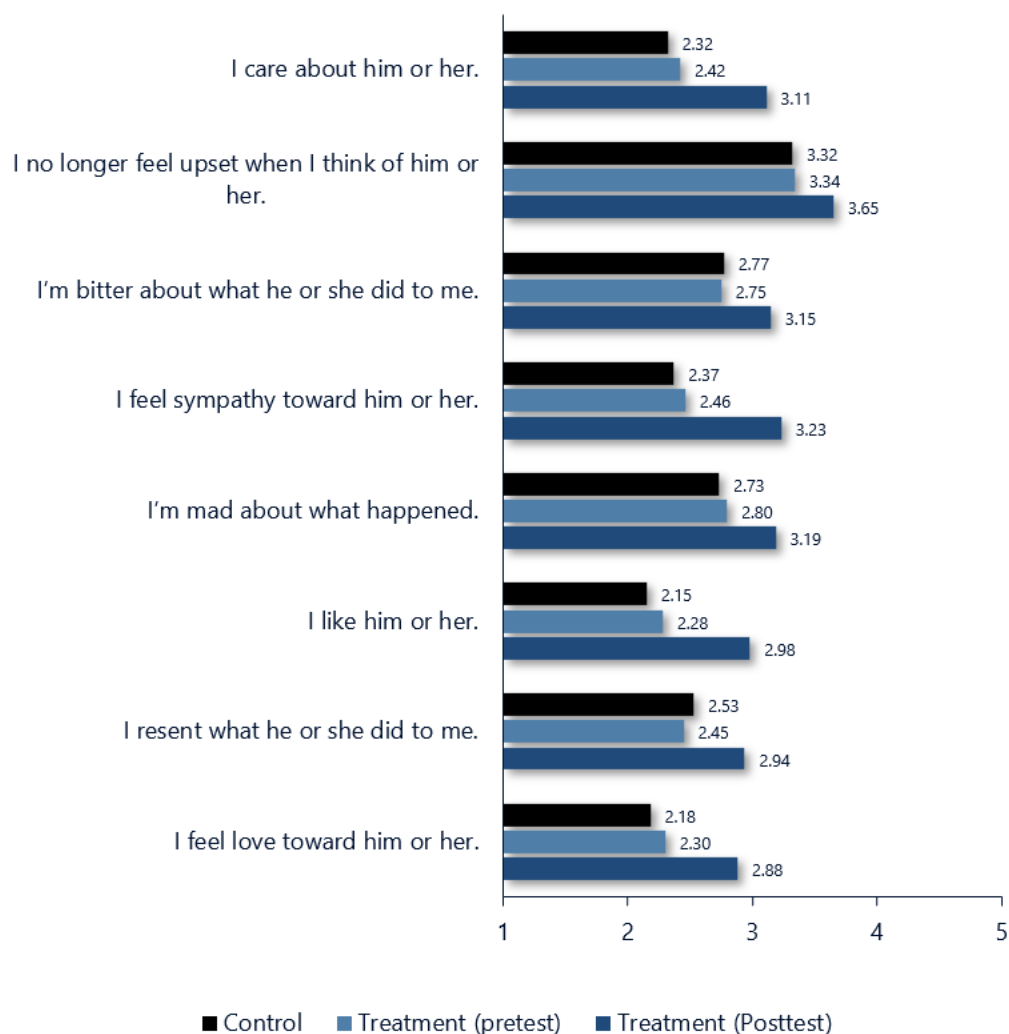
Forgiveness Measures

On the Decision to Forgive Scale, control group participants in Tunisia reported moderate levels of forgiveness, with means ranging from 2.83 to 3.94 across the six individual items. The treatment group showed comparable scores at pretest, ranging from 2.87 to 3.77, indicating no systematic initial advantage over the control group. At posttest, the treatment group's scores increased noticeably on most items, reflecting commitment and intention to forgive, with means ranging from 3.54 to 3.90. Only the two items focused on choosing not to harbor resentment or releasing negative feelings increased relatively modestly at posttest. Overall, the treatment group demonstrated clear gains in the decisional aspects of forgiveness between pretest and posttest.



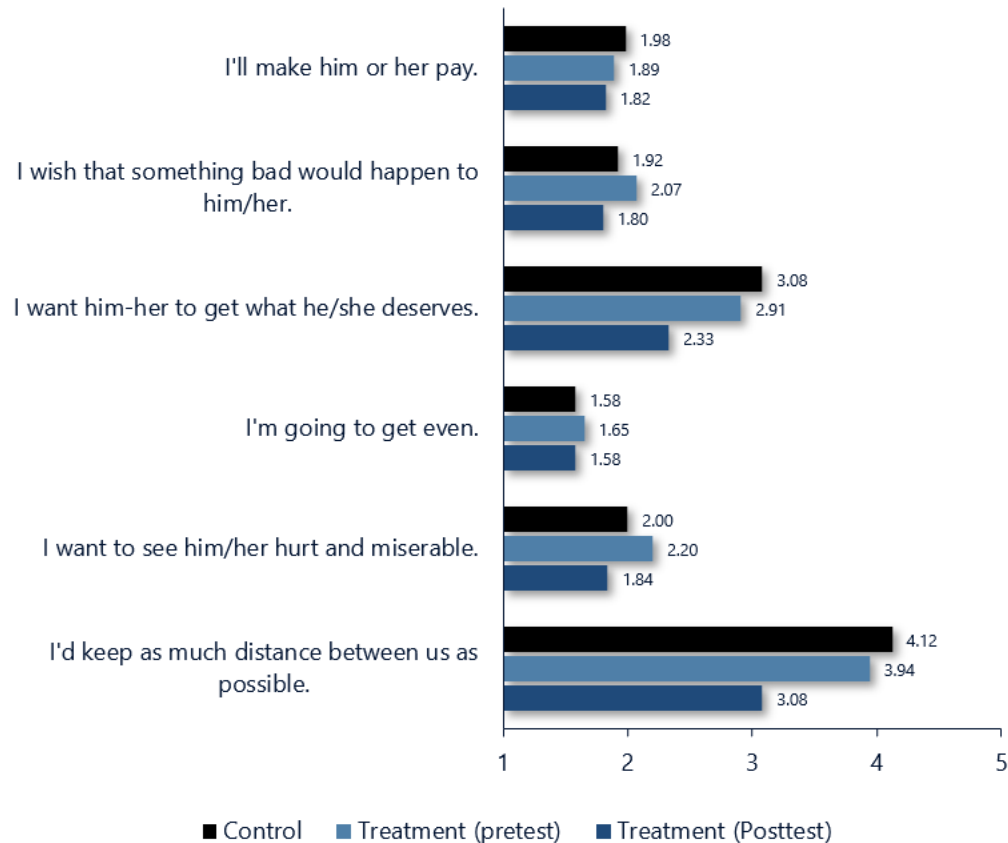
Decision to forgive scale (DTFS)

On the Emotional Forgiveness Scale, the control group participants reported relatively low to moderate levels of positive feelings toward the offender, with means ranging from 2.15 to 3.32 across the eight individual items. It should be noted that negatively worded items on this scale were reverse coded, therefore higher values on an item are indicative of higher forgiveness. The treatment group in general showed slightly higher pretest scores, ranging from 2.28 to 3.34, suggesting only a small initial difference with control. By posttest, the treatment group exhibited substantial increases across all items, particularly on measures of caring, sympathy, and positive emotions such as liking or feeling love, with item means rising to between 2.88 and 3.65. Negative emotions such as bitterness, resentment, and anger decreased modestly but were still near or above the midrange. Overall, the treatment appears to have strengthened positive emotional responses toward the offender, reflecting meaningful gains in emotional forgiveness.



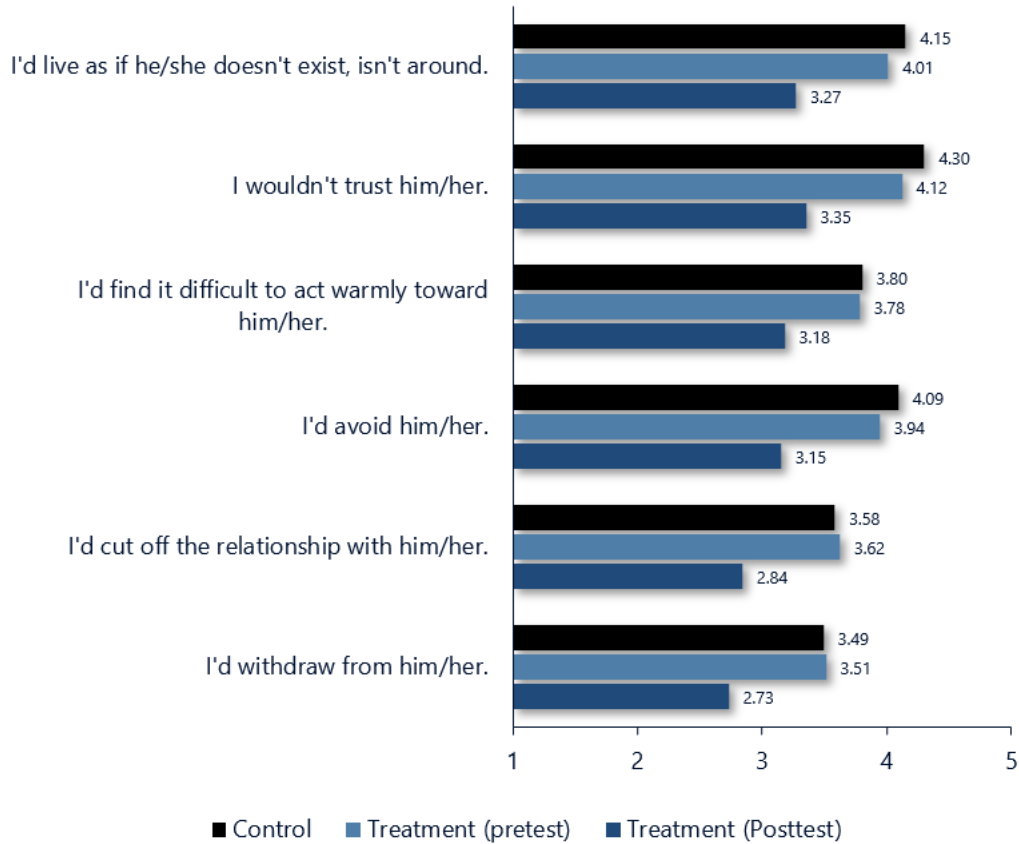
Emotional forgiveness scale (EFS)

On the Revenge subscale of Unforgiveness Outcome Scale, the control group participants reported mixed levels of vengeful intentions, with means ranging from 1.58 to 4.12. The treatment group at pretest showed comparable mean scores, from 1.65 to 3.94, suggesting no systematic initial difference. By posttest, the treatment group's scores decreased across all six items, most notably on keeping distance from the offender (from 3.94 to 3.08) and on wanting the offender to get what they deserve (from 2.91 to 2.33), reflecting a reduction in vengeful tendencies. Items involving direct revenge, such as making the offender pay or getting even, were low at all time points as well as in the control group.



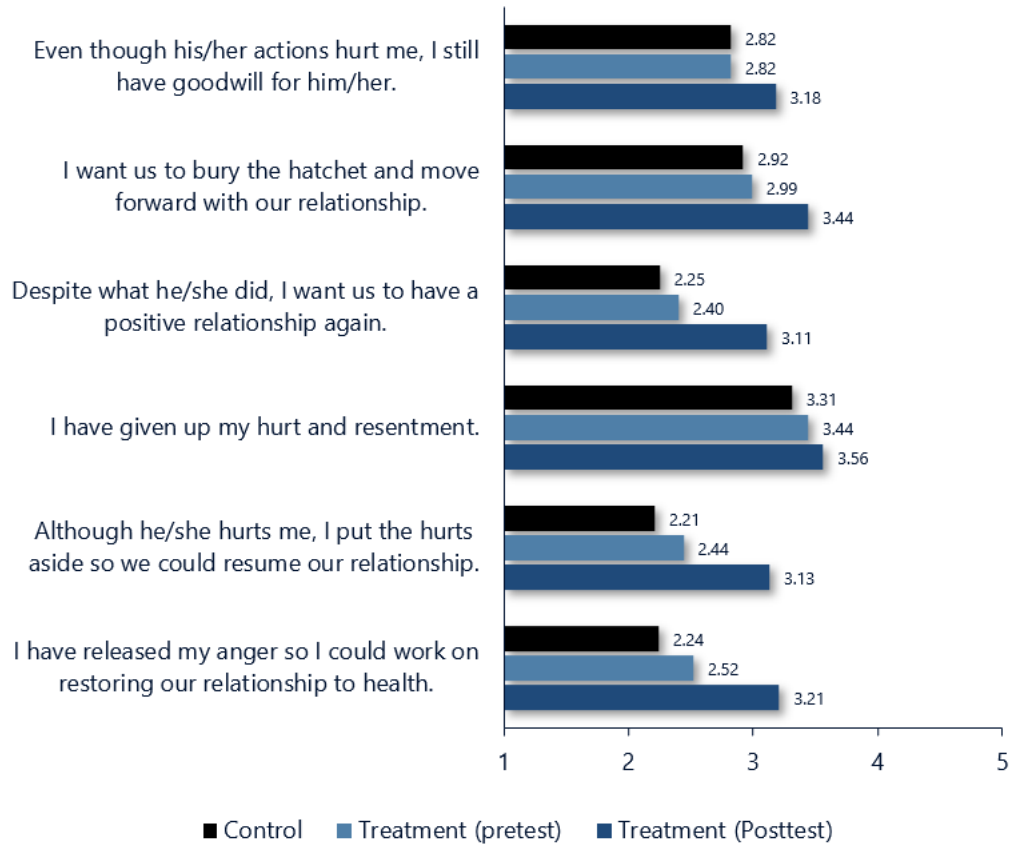
Unforgiveness outcome: Revenge (TRIM-R)

On the Avoidance subscale, control group scores were high, ranging from 3.49 to 4.30, with the treatment group at pretest somewhat comparable from 3.51 to 4.12. Posttest scores for the treatment group decreased substantially on all six items, including avoiding the offender (from 3.94 down to 3.15), cutting off relationship with the offender (from 3.62 down to 2.84), and withdrawing from the offender (from 3.51 down to 2.73) indicating reduced avoidance behavior.



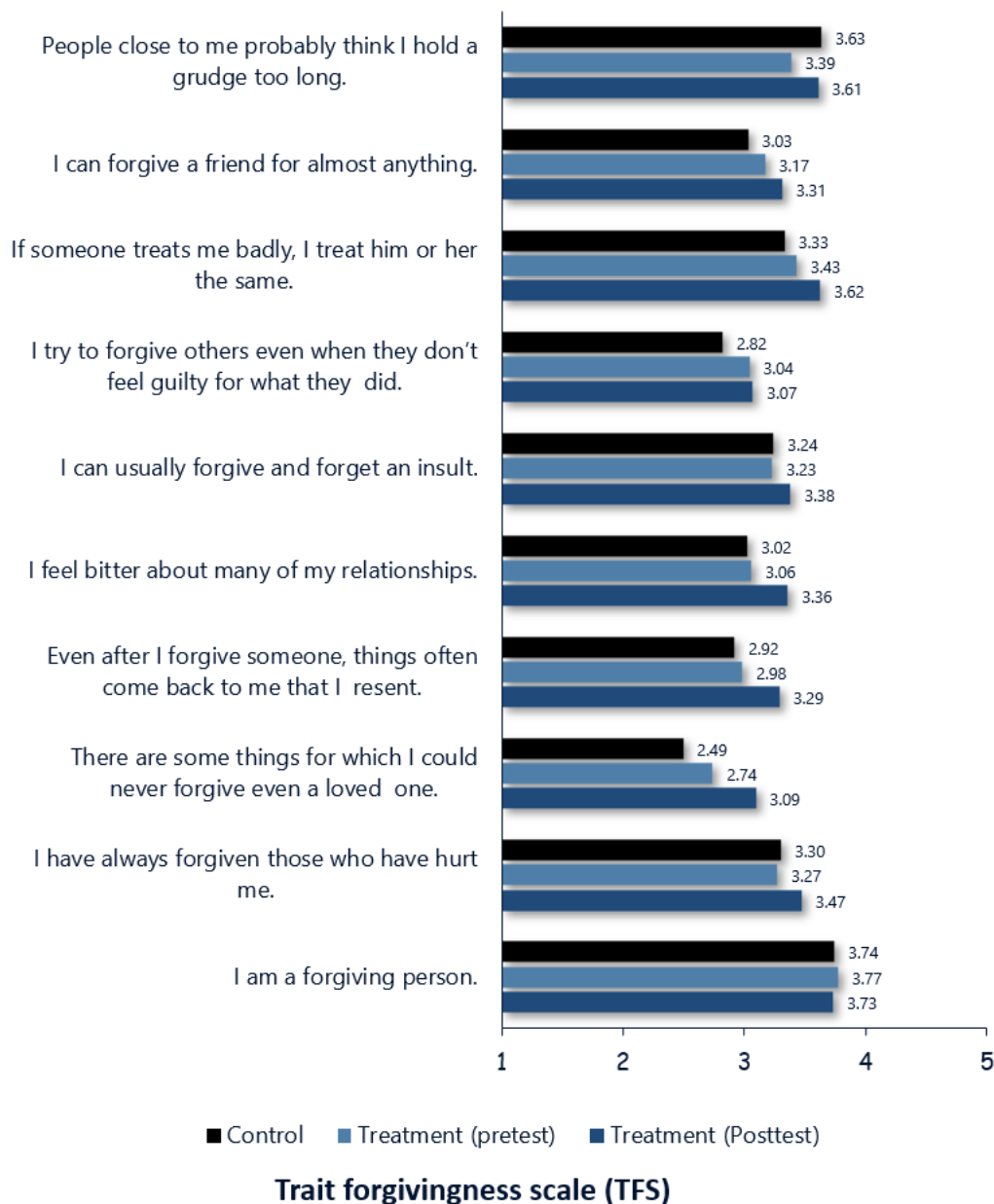
Unforgiveness outcome: Avoidance (TRIM-A)

On the Benevolence subscale, control group scores ranged from 2.21 to 3.31, while treatment pretest scores were slightly higher, from 2.40 to 3.44. By posttest, the treatment group showed increases on all six items, rising to between 3.11 and 3.56 and reflecting stronger goodwill and willingness to restore positive relationships with the offender. Overall, the posttest results for the Unforgiveness Outcome Scale suggest that the treatment effectively reduced revenge and avoidance while enhancing benevolence.



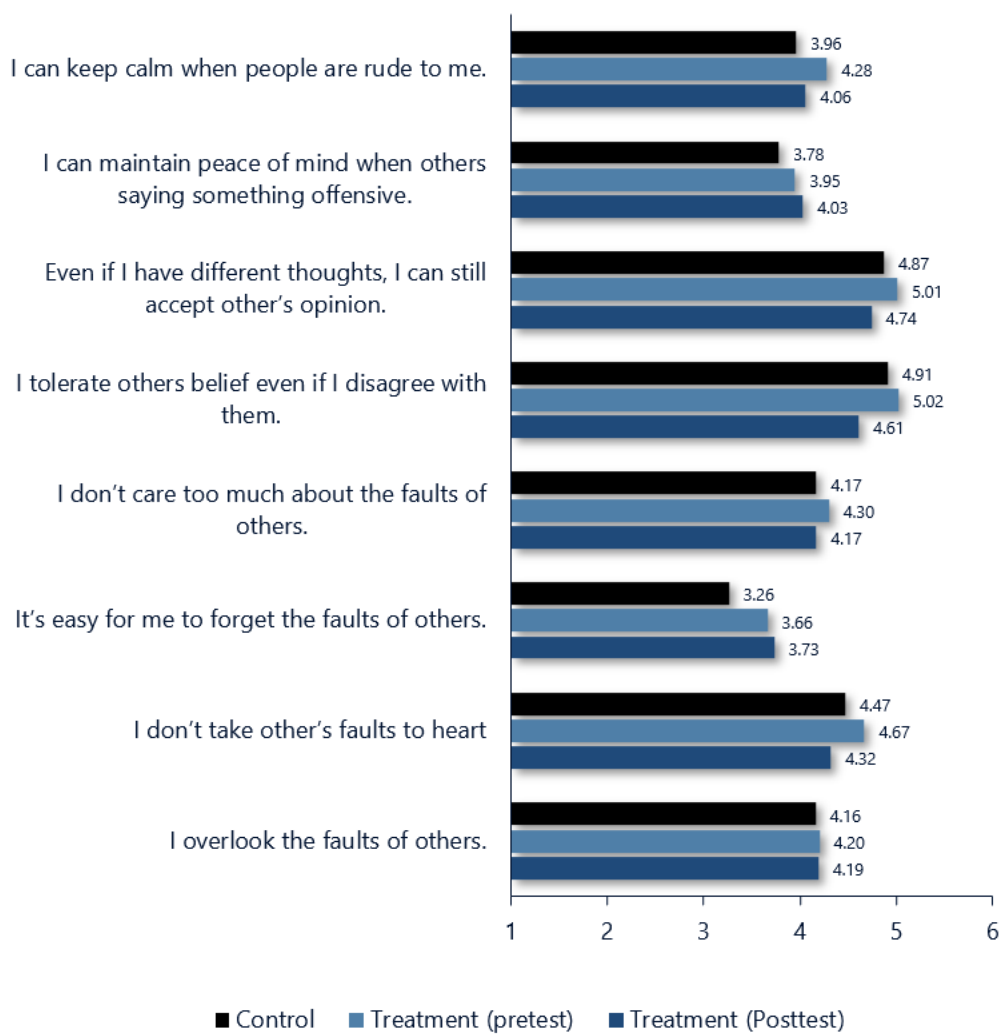
Unforgiveness outcome: Benevolence (TRIM-B)

On the Trait Forgiveness Scale, control group participants reported moderate levels of general forgiveness, with means ranging from 2.49 to 3.74 across ten items. It should be noted that negatively worded items on this scale were reverse coded, therefore higher values on an item are indicative of higher forgiveness. At pretest the treatment group had, on average, slightly higher scores to control on most items, with means ranging from 2.74 to 3.77. After exposure to the treatment, the largest improvements were observed in the sentiments, “I have always forgiven those who hurt me” and “There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.” By posttest, the treatment group’s scores increased on nine out of ten items, with a slight decrease observed in the sentiment that “I am a forgiving person.” Overall, the treatment group demonstrated an improvement in mean forgiveness between pretest and posttest.



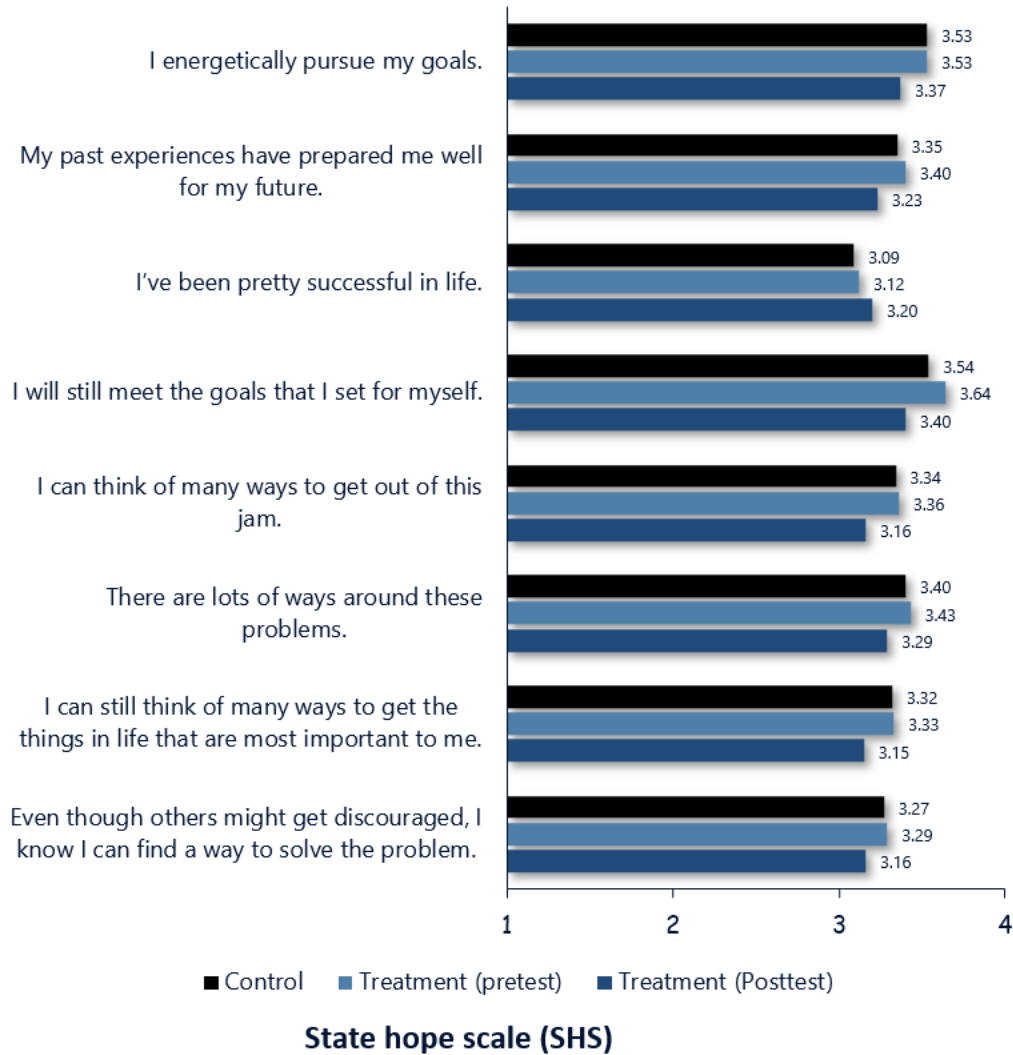
Non-Forgiveness Measures

On the Forbearance Scale, the control group reported moderate to high levels of patience and tolerance, with means ranging from 3.26 to 4.91 across eight items. By comparison, the treatment group at pretest showed higher scores, with means ranging from 3.66 to 5.02. By posttest, the treatment group's scores decreased on most items such as "I don't take other's faults to heart" (from 4.67 down to 4.32) and "I tolerate others belief even if I disagree with them" (from 5.02 down to 4.61). These results suggest that, in general, after exposure to the treatment participants reported lower forbearance. However, it should be noted that items that showed a decrease at posttest had means that were still generally high (>4) and remained comparable with the control group.



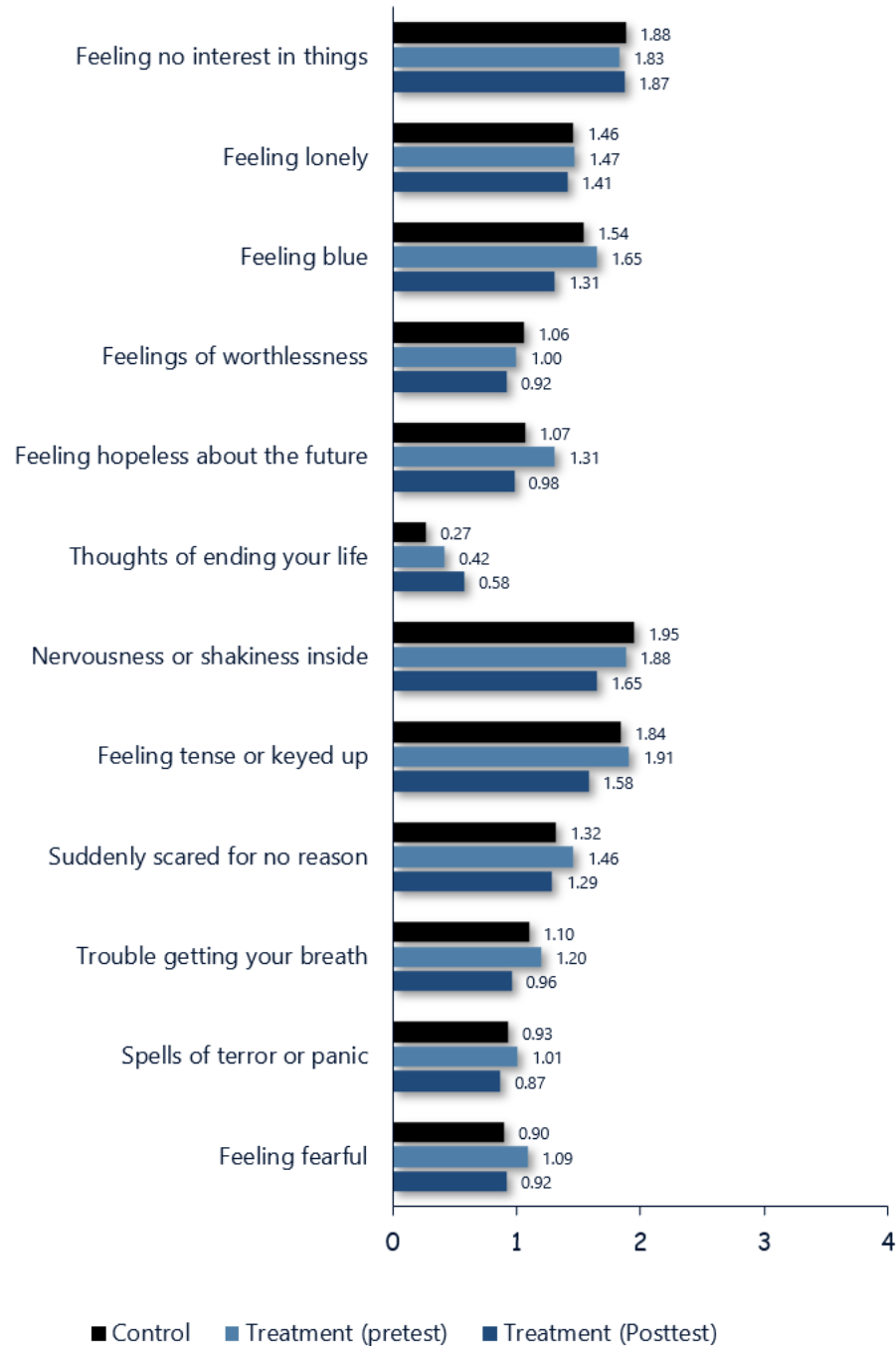
Forbearance scale (FS8)

On the State Hope Scale, control group participants reported above average levels of hope, with means ranging from 3.09 to 3.54 across items. The treatment group at pretest showed similar levels, ranging from 3.12 to 3.64, indicating little initial difference. By posttest, the treatment group’s scores were either stable or showed slight decreases, with means ranging from 3.15 to 3.40, suggesting that hope remained above average but in general did not increase with the intervention. The only increase was observed for the item, “I’ve been pretty successful in life.” Overall, participants showed small decreases in their perceptions of agency for solving problems and pathways to achieve goals.



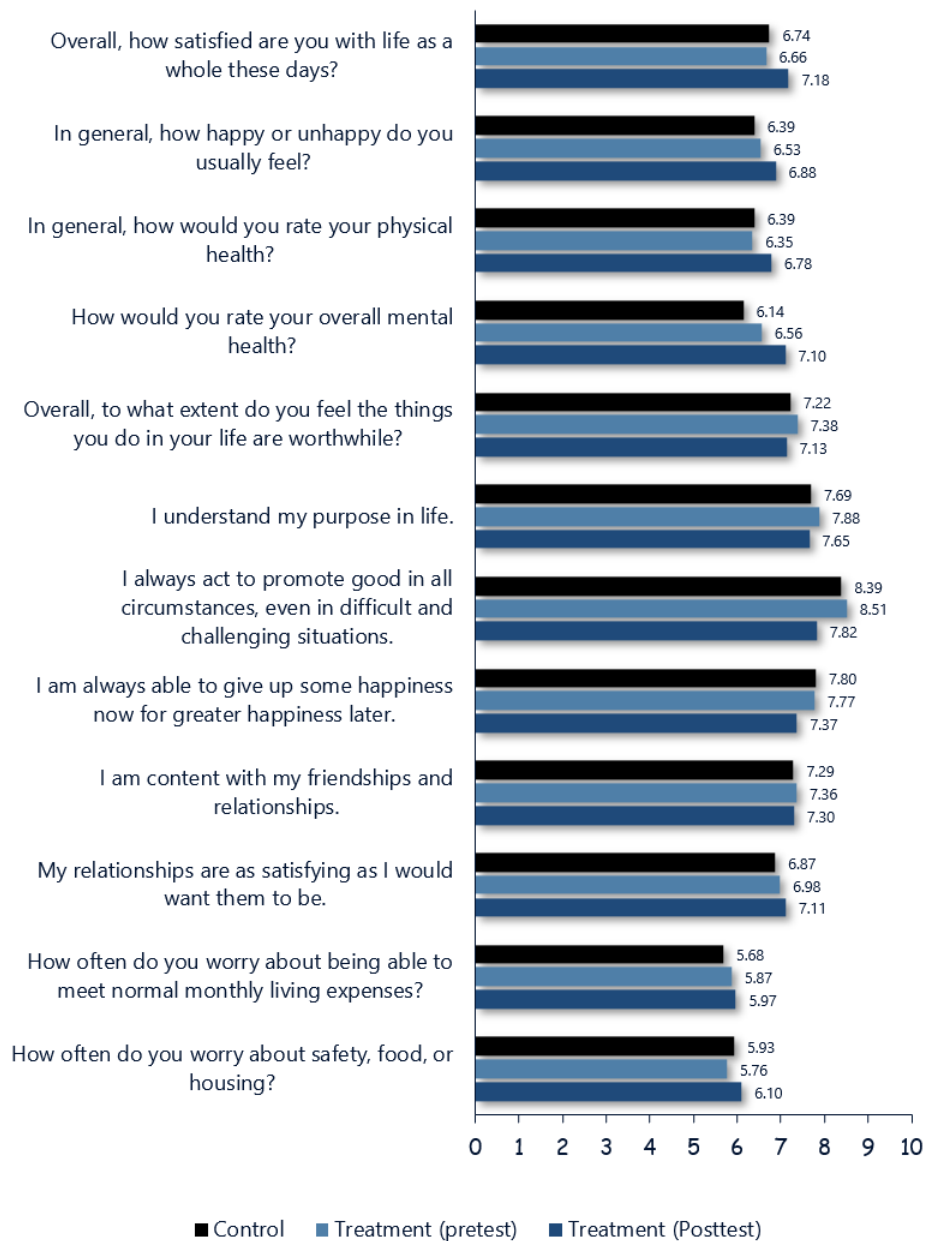
On the depression items of the BSI-12, control group reported generally low to moderate levels of depressive symptoms (first six items), with means ranging from 0.27 to 1.88. The treatment group at pretest showed similar scores, slightly higher on some items such as feeling hopeless about the future (treatment, 1.31; control, 1.07). By posttest, the treatment group’s scores improved slightly on most items, including feeling blue (decrease from 1.65 to 1.31), and feeling hopeless about the future (decrease from 1.31 to 0.98), while an increase was observed for thoughts of ending one’s life (increase from 0.42 to 0.58) and feeling no interest in things (increase from 1.83 to 1.87). On the anxiety items (last six items), control participants reported low to moderate anxiety, with

means ranging from 0.90 to 1.95. The treatment group at pretest had comparable scores with means ranging between 1.01 and 1.91. By posttest, anxiety scores in the treatment group decreased across all six items, with notable reductions in nervousness (from 1.88 down to 1.65), feeling tense (from 1.91 down to 1.58), and trouble getting breath (from 1.20 down to 0.96). Overall, the treatment appears to have modestly reduced both depression and anxiety symptoms among participants over time.



Depression and anxiety (BSI-12)

On the Secure Flourish Index measuring wellbeing, control group participants reported generally above average levels across life satisfaction, happiness, health, purpose, relationships, and long-term perspective, with means ranging from 5.68 to 8.39. The treatment group at pretest showed comparable levels, with minor differences, ranging from 5.76 to 8.51. By posttest, the treatment group showed a mixed trend with increases in dimensions such as life satisfaction, happiness, and physical and mental health, but decreases in others such as acting to promote good and the ability to defer current happiness to the future.



Wellbeing (Secure flourish index – SFI)

Conclusion

The Tunisian sample was predominantly female (72%) and young, with most participants aged 21–29. Over half were single (56%), almost all were Muslim (99.8%), spread evenly across socioeconomic status categories, and educational attainment was relatively high, with 58% holding university or postgraduate degrees. About 20% were university students, mostly in graduate school, and a large proportion were not employed at or affiliated with an educational institution. Work experience was diverse, and participants reported very high religiosity, with over 90% rating religion, prayer, and personal values as important.

Forgiveness-related outcomes showed clear differences between control and treatment groups. On the Decision to Forgive and Emotional Forgiveness scales, the treatment group increased noticeably from pretest to posttest in decisional commitment and positive emotional responses toward the offender. In comparison, trait forgivingness improved modestly in the treatment group over time. Unforgiveness measures, including revenge and avoidance, decreased in the treatment group posttest, whereas benevolence increased, indicating enhanced goodwill and relational intentions. Related psychosocial measures reflected mixed trends: forbearance and hope decreased post-intervention, change in depression and wellbeing was ambiguous, and anxiety decreased. Overall, these patterns suggest that the treatment intervention had positive effects on forgiveness but mixed effects on broader emotional and psychosocial functioning among Tunisian participants.

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Appendix

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents by Study Group in the Full Sample

Demographic characteristic—categorical	Control group <i>n</i> = 1115		Treatment group <i>n</i> = 857	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Country				
Egypt	358	32.1	358	41.8
Iraq	364	32.6	273	31.9
Tunisia	393	35.2	226	26.4
Gender				
Female	705	63.2	536	62.5
Male	410	36.8	321	37.5
Age				
20 or less	179	16.0	105	12.3
21-29	449	40.3	322	37.6
30-39	283	25.4	254	29.6
40-49	154	13.8	126	14.7
50 or older	50	4.5	50	5.8
Marital status				
Single	615	55.2	420	49.0
Engaged	50	4.5	42	4.9
Married	398	35.7	348	40.6
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	52	4.6	47	5.5
Are you currently a university student?				
Yes	306	27.4	209	24.4
No	809	72.6	648	75.6
Current year in college (university students)				
First year	43	3.9	36	4.2
Second year	90	8.1	45	5.3
Third year	78	7.0	54	6.3
Fourth year	42	3.8	32	3.7
Graduate school (Masters or doctoral program)	53	4.8	42	4.9
Highest level of education completed (not university students)				
Primary education or less	58	5.2	33	3.8
Middle school	63	5.7	35	4.1
Secondary education	79	7.1	58	6.8
Technical/vocational/2-year college	82	7.3	41	4.8
Higher education (college or university)	395	35.4	350	40.8
Postgraduate studies (master's or doctorate)	132	11.8	131	15.3
Religion				
Muslim	1035	92.8	789	92.1
Non-Muslim	80	7.2	68	7.9

Type of educational institution				
Pre-K/Elementary school	99	8.9	85	10.0
Middle school	44	3.9	48	5.6
High school	51	4.6	37	4.3
Technical/vocational/2-year college/university	188	16.8	167	19.5
Not working in an educational institution	733	65.7	520	60.7
Education sector: educators only				
Private/religious school	57	5.1	54	6.3
Public school	151	13.5	128	14.9
Private university	72	6.5	77	9.0
Public university	102	9.1	78	9.1
Industry classification: non-educators only				
Agriculture & resources	28	2.5	24	2.8
Manufacturing, construction and transport	38	3.4	24	2.8
Business, finance and real estate	76	6.8	65	7.6
Public services and non-profit	93	8.3	58	6.8
Health, science and technology	84	7.5	46	5.4
Culture, media, hospitality and miscellaneous	164	14.7	115	13.4
Unemployed	212	19.0	151	17.6
Skipped	38	3.4	37	4.3
Socioeconomic status (SES): based on numeric SES quartiles				
Very low	295	26.5	194	22.6
Low	256	23.0	218	25.4
Middle	250	22.4	198	23.1
High	314	28.2	247	28.8
Demographic characteristic–numeric	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Religiosity: How important is/are				
1. your religion (belief) for you?	4.54	0.85	4.56	0.81
2. prayer (spirituality) in your daily life?	4.59	0.85	4.63	0.77
3. the values and ethics you believe in your life?	4.72	0.59	4.73	0.56
Work experience				
Current and past jobs	7.46	7.63	8.17	8.02
Current job only	4.90	6.04	5.79	6.82
Socioeconomic status (SES)				
Raw: 0–46	27.52	6.32	28.10	6.04
Scaled: 0–100	59.82	13.73	61.08	13.13

Note. $N = 1972$. Percentages may not add to exactly 100% because of rounding. M = mean. SD = standard deviation.



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