The Effects of an Interpersonal Forgiveness Intervention on the Personal and Professional Lives of Clergy

Dr. Preston VanLoon, EdD
forgiveness@drpvl.com
pvanloon@iwc.edu

This study examined the effects of a forgiveness education intervention on the psychological well-being of clergy and their ability to apply interpersonal forgiveness skills in conflict situations depicted in hypothetical vignettes. A sample of 32 clergy from eleven different denominations was randomly assigned to either an experimental or control group. The experimental group received a four session forgiveness education intervention while the control group was taught human relation skills. Participants in both groups were administered a willingness to forgive measure, a psychological level of forgiveness measure, self-esteem measure, anxiety measure, anger measure, and a hope scale. Participants also responded to four hypothetical vignettes that presented interpersonal conflict situations using three different scales: 1. forgiveness suggested as a possible solution to the interpersonal conflict situation; 2. the number of core forgiveness components suggested that were presented in the forgiveness process model used in the intervention; and 3. the total number of forgiveness components suggested when applied to the hypothetical vignettes. Statistically significant results were found between the experimental and control groups in regards to the participants willingness to forgive and the use of forgiveness strategies for resolving the interpersonal conflict situations. These findings indicate the validity of forgiveness education for helping clergy to increase their willingness to forgive and use interpersonal forgiveness strategies for resolving interpersonal conflicts. In addition, interpersonal forgiveness education needs to be integrated more with the theological education clergy receive to increase their understanding and use of forgiveness strategies for resolving interpersonal hurt and pain.