

# Self-Forgetfulness and Psychological Well-Being: Validation of The Self-Forgetfulness Scale (SFS-12)

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## Keywords

Self-forgetfulness; self-focused attention; self-referential processing; psychological well-being; social connectedness; metacognition; scale development

## Abstract

Self-forgetfulness refers to a psychological state characterized by reduced self-referential thinking and self-focused attention, yet its empirical structure remains underexplored. This study introduces the Self-Forgetfulness Scale (SFS-12) and examines its association with psychological well-being (WHO-5) in a Danish cross-sectional sample ( $n = 80$ ). Total self-forgetfulness was moderately to strongly associated with well-being ( $r = .50, p < .001$ ). Domain-level analyses showed that relational and existential self-forgetfulness were strongly associated with well-being, whereas functional self-forgetfulness was weakly and non-significantly related. Formal comparison tests confirmed that relational and existential domains were more strongly associated with well-being than the functional domain. These findings support a multidimensional model of self-forgetfulness and suggest that reductions in self-referential processing in relational and existential contexts may be particularly relevant for psychological well-being.

## Introduction

Excessive self-focused attention and self-referential processing are central features of many contemporary models of psychological distress. Conversely, reduced self-focus has been described as a marker of adaptive psychological functioning. Constructs such as flow, absorption, and mindfulness address aspects of reduced self-focus, yet they often emphasize attentional engagement or regulation rather than the attenuation of self-referential processing itself.

The construct of self-forgetfulness refers to a temporary reduction in self-focused attention, allowing engagement with activities, relationships, or experiences without persistent self-evaluation. The present study proposes that self-forgetfulness is not a unitary phenomenon, but rather comprises multiple domains that may differ in their relevance for psychological well-being. Specifically, three domains are distinguished: functional self-forgetfulness (reduced self-focus during task engagement), relational self-forgetfulness (reduced self-monitoring in interpersonal

contexts), and existential self-forgetfulness (a diminished sense of separation between self and world).

The primary aim of this preliminary study was to examine whether these domains show differential associations with psychological well-being.

## **Aims**

The primary objective was to examine the association between self-forgetfulness and psychological well-being, and to evaluate whether self-forgetfulness can be meaningfully differentiated into functional, relational, and existential domains with distinct associations to well-being.

Specifically, the study pursued the following aims:

1. To examine whether total self-forgetfulness, as measured by the SFS-12, is positively associated with psychological well-being as measured by the WHO-5 Well-Being Index.
2. To investigate whether the three theoretically derived domains of self-forgetfulness—functional, relational, and existential—are differentially associated with psychological well-being.
3. To assess the internal consistency of the three SFS-12 domains as part of an initial psychometric evaluation.

Based on the theoretical distinction between task-related absorption and reductions in self-referential processing within relational and existential contexts, the following hypotheses were specified:

## **Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1:

Higher total self-forgetfulness will be positively associated with higher psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 2:

Relational and existential self-forgetfulness will show stronger positive associations with psychological well-being than functional self-forgetfulness.

Hypothesis 3:

When examined simultaneously in a multivariate model, relational and existential self-forgetfulness will account for unique variance in psychological well-being, whereas functional self-forgetfulness will show a weaker or non-significant independent association.

These hypotheses were tested using correlational, comparative, and regression-based analyses. Given the preliminary nature of the study, all analyses were interpreted with an emphasis on effect sizes and theoretical coherence rather than statistical significance alone.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and procedure**

Data were collected via an anonymous online survey. 37 participations received some kind of support for their mental health - 43 participants did not ( $n = 80$ ). Participation was voluntary and uncompensated; one participant received a small monetary gift through a raffle.

### **Measures**

Self-Forgetfulness Scale (SFS-12, Danish version)

The SFS-12 consists of 12 items rated on a 1–5 Likert scale. Items are evenly distributed across three theoretically defined domains (functional, relational, existential). Three items were reverse-coded prior to analysis. Higher scores indicate greater self-forgetfulness.

WHO-5 Well-Being Index.

The WHO-5 is a five-item measure of subjective psychological well-being rated from 0 (“at no time”) to 5 (“all of the time”), yielding a total score ranging from 0 to 25.

### **Analysis**

Pearson correlations were used to examine associations between SFS scores and WHO-5.

Differences between dependent correlations were tested using Steiger/Williams tests. A multiple linear regression model was estimated with WHO-5 as the dependent variable and the three SFS domains as predictors. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha.

### **Results**

Total SFS-12 score showed a moderate-to-strong positive association with WHO-5 well-being ( $r = .50, p < .001$ ).

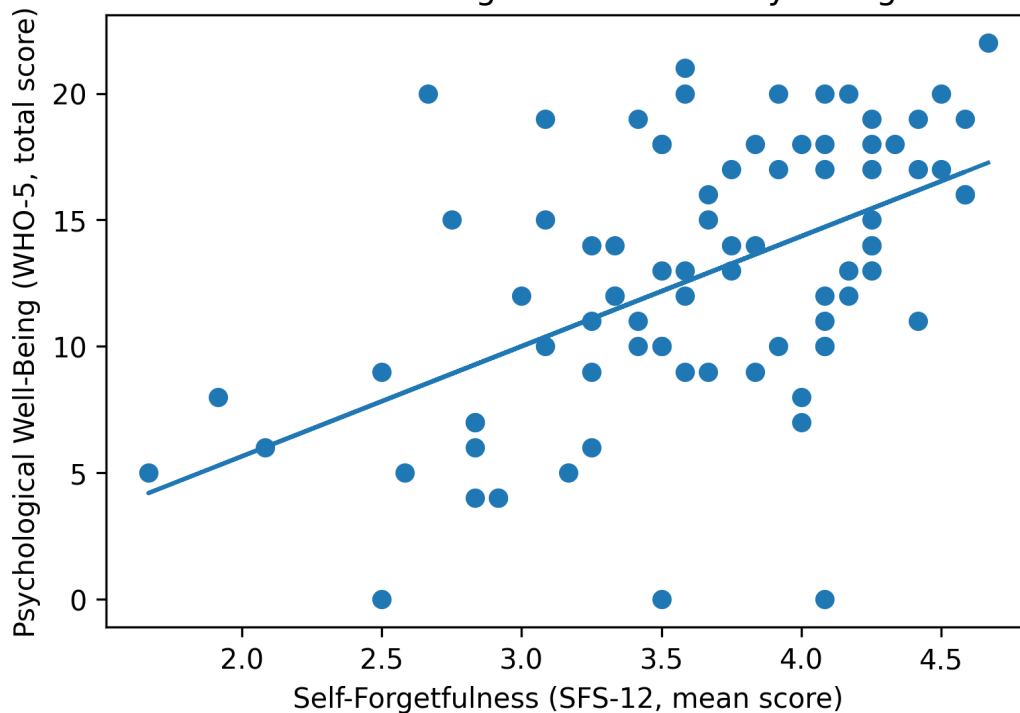
Domain-specific correlations differed substantially. Functional self-forgetfulness was weakly and non-significantly related to well-being ( $r = .18, p = .11$ ), whereas relational ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ) and existential ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ) self-forgetfulness showed strong positive associations. Formal

comparison tests indicated that both relational and existential self-forgetfulness were significantly more strongly associated with well-being than functional self-forgetfulness.

A multiple regression model including all three domains explained 32% of the variance in well-being ( $R^2 = .32$ ). Relational and existential self-forgetfulness emerged as substantial positive predictors, whereas functional self-forgetfulness did not contribute independently when the other domains were controlled.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were modest (.53 for functional, .54 for relational, and .57 for existential self-forgetfulness).

Association Between Self-Forgetfulness and Psychological Well-Being



## Discussion

The present study provides preliminary evidence that self-forgetfulness is meaningfully associated with psychological well-being and that this association is domain-specific rather than uniform. While overall self-forgetfulness showed a moderate-to-strong relationship with well-being, this

association was primarily driven by relational and existential self-forgetfulness. Functional self-forgetfulness, by contrast, demonstrated limited relevance.

This differentiation is theoretically informative. Functional self-forgetfulness, defined as reduced self-focus during task engagement, overlaps conceptually with constructs such as flow and absorption. However, the weak association between functional self-forgetfulness and well-being suggests that task-related reductions in self-focus may be insufficient to account for well-being, particularly when relational and existential dimensions are considered simultaneously. Consistent with this interpretation, functional self-forgetfulness did not contribute independently in multivariate analyses, indicating that its relationship with well-being may be indirect or contingent upon broader contextual processes.

In contrast, relational self-forgetfulness—characterized by reduced self-monitoring in interpersonal contexts—emerged as the strongest correlate of well-being. This finding aligns with theoretical models that emphasize excessive self-preoccupation and social evaluative concern as central mechanisms in psychological distress. Reduced self-focus in social interactions may allow for greater interpersonal engagement, perceived connectedness, and emotional attunement, all of which are robustly linked to well-being. The persistence of this association in multivariate models suggests that relational self-forgetfulness represents a distinct and substantive dimension, rather than a byproduct of general absorption or attentional engagement.

Existential self-forgetfulness, operationalized as a diminished sense of separation between self and world, was similarly strongly associated with well-being. This domain may capture experiential states in which the self becomes less central as a reference point for meaning, evaluation, and control. Although such experiences have been described in existential, phenomenological, and contemplative traditions, they have received limited empirical attention. The present findings suggest that existential self-forgetfulness may constitute an important correlate of subjective well-being.

## **Clinical Implications**

From a clinical perspective, these results tentatively indicate that facilitating task absorption alone may be insufficient in relation to mental health. Differentiating between functional, relational, and existential self-forgetfulness may therefore help explain why improvements in functioning do not necessarily translate into improvements in well-being. Interventions that target reductions in self-preoccupation, increased relational presence, and experiential openness may be particularly relevant, although this interpretation requires direct clinical testing.

Finally, the findings contribute to the theoretical positioning of self-forgetfulness relative to related constructs. While self-forgetfulness overlaps with concepts such as absorption, flow, mindfulness, self-referential processing, it is not reducible to any of these. Flow primarily emphasizes activity-centered absorption, mindfulness emphasizes attentional awareness and regulation, whereas self-forgetfulness as operationalized here emphasizes attenuation of self-referential processing. The observed domain-specific associations support the view that the context in which the self recedes—relational or existential—matters for well-being, rather than reduced self-focus per se.

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. It remains unclear whether self-forgetfulness contributes to well-being, whether well-being facilitates self-forgetfulness, or whether both are influenced by shared underlying processes. Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to clarify temporal and causal relationships.

Second, internal consistency estimates, while acceptable for short exploratory subscales, indicate room for psychometric refinement. Future research should examine the factor structure of the SFS-12, evaluate test-retest reliability, and consider item revision or expansion to improve reliability.

Third, the sample size and composition limit generalizability. Replication in larger and more diverse samples is necessary. Future studies should also examine whether relational and existential self-forgetfulness mediate treatment outcomes across therapeutic modalities.

## **Conclusion**

The present study provides preliminary support for the construct validity of the SFS-12 and suggests that self-forgetfulness is a multidimensional phenomenon with clear relevance for psychological well-being. Reductions in self-referential processing within relational and existential contexts appear more strongly associated with well-being than task-related absorption alone. These findings warrant further investigation of self-forgetfulness as a theoretically and clinically meaningful construct.